

Statement by Ireland at UNICEF Executive Board Annual Session June 2014

Mr President, Executive Director, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, let me express thanks to Executive Director Tony Lake for his leadership, for his forward-looking statement this morning, and for his commitment to regular, comprehensive and frank dialogue with the Executive Board. Today's special focus session is a stark reminder of how uneven progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals has been, particularly for children in Africa.

We fully agree that despite progress on certain indicators, global averages can mask growing inequalities - between the richest and the poorest, between the privileged and the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. As we seek to shape the post-2015 development agenda, UNICEF can count on Ireland's full support in ensuring that we address the rights and needs of the most vulnerable children and their communities.

HIV

We share UNICEF's alarm that despite a 30% reduction in the number of global AIDS-related deaths for all age groups, approximately two thirds of new HIV infections in adolescents were among girls, and more than 80 per cent of them were in sub-Saharan Africa. Equally unacceptable is the low coverage of anti-retroviral treatment (ART) for children and the low coverage of virologic testing for children in Least Developed Countries in particular.

We would like to thank UNICEF for your continued leadership in the fight against HIV and AIDS, particularly in relation to the global strategy to eliminate mother to child transmission of HIV (eMTCT), as well as your emphasis on integrating HIV and AIDS into other health services. The Double Dividend initiative for child survival in sub-Saharan Africa, of which UNICEF is a partner, provides important opportunities to integrate HIV and services into the broader integrated management of childhood illnesses (IMCI).

Multi-Sectoral Approach

We have seen UNICEF's integrated and multi-sectoral approach paying dividends, not only in the fight against HIV and AIDs, but also in tackling vulnerabilities that place children and adolescents at risk. We are working alongside UNICEF in a number of our partner countries in Africa to promote learning environments that are safe and free from violence. UNICEF's child-friendly schools, in particular, are an excellent model for creating key service delivery points for integrated interventions not only to promote learning but also to address nutrition and health issues. As highlighted this morning by Commissioner Kaloko, this is particularly relevant when considering that stunting affects one in three children in Africa. We know that ensuring good water and sanitation facilities not only contribute to reducing disease burdens and impact positively on nutrition outcomes but also, in schools, correspond to lower dropout rates for adolescent girls. It is important that we recognise the interlinkages between these different thematic areas in order to appreciate the extent to which much of UNICEF's activities are mutually reinforcing.

Gender

I would like to thank UNICEF for the consultative manner in which the gender action plan has been elaborated, resulting in an important framework for UNICEF's targeted and mainstreaming initiatives over the period of the Strategic Plan. The key issues identified in the gender action plan: girls' secondary education; child marriage; gender and adolescent health; and GBV in emergencies are critical areas for advancement, particularly in the context of the post-2015 development agenda.

It is highly relevant that UNICEF is applying a social norms perspective to tackling inequality, discrimination and harmful practices. Its aim is the sustainable transformation of gender relations and development outcomes not only for women and girls but also men and boys. The successes of this approach are already apparent in the results of the first phase of the UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation, and Ireland is pleased to be supporting the next phase of this important work

Monitoring Data and Results

As highlighted today, half of the world's out-of-school children live in Africa, which is a reminder, particularly in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, that we must count not only those children who are present and participating, but also those who are excluded and unrepresented. In this regard, we commend UNICEF for its work in improving the measurement of child poverty, promoting birth registration systems for under-fives and strengthening national statistical offices. These initiatives, accompanied by the common monitoring and reporting framework of the QCPR, the strengthening of results-based management and the expansion of MoRes (Monitoring Results for equity system), are important means of ensuring comprehensive data collection across the UN system and within and across communities and countries. Furthermore, innovative and inclusive monitoring mechanisms, including the use of mobile technology, are providing critical opportunities for the voice and participation of young people. The emphasis on “innovation” matters both for the equity agenda and more generally and we welcome UNICEF’s commitment to innovating, adapting and further improving its performance.

Coherence

We also encourage wholehearted commitment to all initiatives which promote more joined-up UN responses – such as “Delivering as One”. And we would like to see UNICEF play an active role in promoting UN coherence. An encouraging example in this respect is the work UNICEF is doing with UNHCR to standardise field level collaboration guidance. Given the unprecedented scale and demand of humanitarian emergencies in recent years, these forms of interagency partnerships and approaches are essential to ensuring a coherent response. They will also help to ensure that the UN development system remains the key strategic responder to global challenges, as well as an essential partner in supporting countries in their development efforts.

Let me reiterate that, as UNICEF gears up to meet these formidable challenges and prepares for its responsibilities within the post-2015 framework, it can count on Ireland’s unwavering support.

Thank You