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Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS
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Statement of
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Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

Colleagues and friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning! It's a pleasure to be here with you once again for the Annual Session of the Executive Board.

This timing of this year's session is particularly significant, with the mid-term review of UNFPA's Strategic Plan and Integrated Budget (2014-2017) unfolding against the backdrop of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which the global community begins to implement this year.

The midterm review highlights UNFPA's performance against our strategic plan targets over the past two years and examines the Fund's strategic direction, especially in relation to the new development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. The review proposes some relatively minor adjustments for the remaining period of the plan, based on lessons learned in implementation to date, changes in available resources, and to better align it with the 2030 Agenda and better respond to the changing development environment, particularly in the humanitarian sphere.

The midterm review confirms our belief that UNFPA’s strategic direction and our ability to deliver results remain robust, that the Fund is well positioned to deliver the 2030 Agenda and that while this may mean doing things differently – it does not mean doing different things. Our focus on the bull’s-eye and our business model remain relevant.

UNFPA, both individually and together with its UN sister agencies, also continues to make progress in implementing the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) resolution. Notable progress has been made in advancing “Delivering as One”; cost-sharing; improving joint programming; simplifying and harmonizing business practices; and promoting South-South and triangular cooperation.

There is now broad agreement that the UN development system needs transformative reform to break down silos and become ‘fit for purpose’ to deliver the new integrated agenda and support SDG implementation.

UNFPA has fully mainstreamed the QCPR in the current Strategic Plan to ensure coherent implementation, monitoring and reporting, including with our UN sister agencies, facilitated by the common indicators in our Integrated Results Frameworks.

The 2030 Agenda presents a great opportunity to highlight the principles that underpin the ICPD agenda. It offers a chance for UNFPA to demonstrate further our integrated approach to development, as we work in greater partnership to fulfil both the ICPD and 2030 agendas.

A good entry point to the 2030 Agenda that relates to our work and desire to empower women and girls, improve maternal health, engage young people, and explore with countries concepts of development around the demographic dividend is contraception and family planning. There is global consensus around the fact that family planning is the most cost-effective human development intervention there is.

These activities are both perfectly aligned with our vision under the bulls-eye and justify the actions and investments that are needed to take countries forward to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

I was in Rwanda recently for the World Economic Forum on Africa meeting, and during a field visit saw firsthand how our family planning activities through UNFPA Supplies are integrated with other reproductive, maternal and newborn health services – and also how community-based health workers are helping us go the last mile in bringing these services to the women who need them.

Global context

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Changes in the global development landscape over the past two years have created opportunities and challenges for UNFPA.

In 2014, the global ICPD review was successfully concluded, culminating in the Framework of Actions for the follow-up to the Programme of Action of the ICPD Beyond 2014. Evidence from the review facilitated integration of the ICPD agenda, and issues such as the demographic dividend, into the 2030 Agenda, adopted last year.

Last year also saw the adoption of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which provided a roadmap for financing the new Sustainable Development Goals and generating investments, including from domestic resources, to tackle economic, social and environmental challenges. This is critical.

However, official development assistance decreased in 2013 and 2014. Moreover, the proportion of this assistance to population and development activities declined, from almost 8 per cent to 6 per cent. Uneven global economic growth and unfavorable exchange rates contributed to the decrease in resources.

Humanitarian crises

In 2015, humanitarian crises escalated in scope and complexity, stretching response efforts and exerting pressure on dwindling aid resources.

In many places, and often among the poorest populations, climate change is destroying livelihoods, worsening poverty, compelling migration, and compounding the vicious cycle of poverty and vulnerability.

This link between poverty and vulnerability to crises has made the separation of humanitarian and development activities unacceptable. And the adoption, last year, of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and the Paris Agreement on climate change pave the way for greater focus in tackling these issues across the humanitarian-development continuum.

I have just returned from the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, where UNFPA advocated strongly for placing the needs and rights of women, girls and young people at the centre of humanitarian action. This was also a prominent focus of the recent Women Deliver conference in Copenhagen, where speaker after speaker brought home the message that when we invest in women and girls everyone wins.

More than 75 per cent of people affected by crises today are women and children. And three out of five preventable maternal deaths now take place in settings of conflict, displacement or natural disaster.

Adolescents aged 10-19 years make up a significant proportion of the population in many conflict and post-conflict settings.

One of them is 17-year-old Victoria who fled Syria, got married when she was 16, and now cares for her new baby in Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. The camp is home to 80,000 refugees of whom 2,300 are pregnant women and girls.

To get a sense of just how daunting the prospect of pregnancy can be for women and girls caught in crisis, we invite you to walk with and listen to Victoria and 29-year-old Tahany, pregnant with her fifth child, by watching our 7-minute virtual reality film.

UNFPA staff will be available in the third balcony of the ECOSOC chamber during our session breaks and can fit those who are interested with goggles and headphones that will transport you to Zaatari and to the reality faced by thousands of women and girls in the camp.

It will also bring home quite vividly how UNFPA, with committed support from our donors, has been able to help more than 5,000 women to give birth safely in Zaatari.

In response to today's humanitarian challenges, we continue to provide life-saving services to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and provide information, services and supplies for sexual and reproductive health.

When a massive earthquake struck Nepal last year, UNFPA quickly responded. Medical equipment and reproductive health kits were delivered to more than 200 health facilities, benefiting about 150,000 people. Reproductive health and GBV services reached over 100,000 affected people, mostly women and girls.

In Iraq, UNFPA and partners established 19 reproductive health clinics in refugee and IDP camps, 56 primary healthcare centers and 32 referral health facilities in host communities providing nearly 400,000 women with reproductive health services. More than 150,000 women and girls received psychosocial support.

Over 1 million women affected by the Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria have received UNFPA-supported sexual and reproductive health care and more than 63,000 children have been safely delivered. In addition, UNFPA has supported psychosocial counseling for around 28,000 survivors of gender-based violence and medical treatment for nearly 400 survivors of rape.

We are also strengthening our internal capacity to support countries in responding to the challenge posed by the Zika virus.

These are just a few examples of the many ways we are working with partners to reach women, girls and young people in crisis. But the needs are great and so much more needs to be done.

UNFPA welcomes the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit and remains firmly committed to ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, to preventing and responding to gender-based violence in emergencies, and to empowering women and young people as leaders in humanitarian action.

I would like to thank the 13 governments that signed the Joint Statement on Sexual and Reproductive Health in Emergencies. And I encourage other governments to endorse this commitment to saving lives, ensuring safe births, upholding rights and dignity, and leaving no one behind.

I also encourage support for the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, which was endorsed by 30 partners at the Summit to ensure that the priorities and participation of young people are prioritized in the humanitarian system.

Midterm progress and challenges

Mr. President,

Despite this challenging global context, UNFPA has made strong progress in implementing its strategic plan over the past two years.

In 2014-2015:

- An estimated 53 million additional users accessed modern family planning methods.
- 23 million adolescents benefited from integrated sexual and reproductive health services.
- Around 23,600 fistula repair surgeries were supported.
- More than 2,900 communities publicly declared the abandonment of female genital mutilation.
- Over 10.6 million women and girls in humanitarian crises benefited from sexual and reproductive health services and gender-based violence prevention services.

Most important, governments are increasingly incorporating these issues into their own budgets.

The Fund also registered progress in our efforts to improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency:

- Complying fully with International Aid Transparency Initiative standards and providing quarterly programme data releases
- Initiating enterprise risk management
- Obtaining an unqualified audit opinion in 2014 and we expect that the recently completed 2015 audit will also result in an unqualified opinion.

- Systematizing results-based management through the launch of new programming and strategic information systems.
- Establishing an independent evaluation office, and
- Fully embracing United Nations harmonization. 113 UNFPA country offices have at least one common service and 28 have all common services.

Adolescents and youth

Progress was achieved in integrating adolescent and youth priorities into development frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda.

Last year, the Security Council adopted the historic resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security. The resolution recognized the important role young women and men play in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and it compels governments to actively engage them. It also requests the Secretary-General to carry out a study on young people's positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution.

UNFPA is very proud to be leading this study with the UN's Peacebuilding Support Office, and working in close partnership with the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth.

Progress has also been seen in the enactment of laws that enable youth to exercise their rights and fulfil their needs for sexual and reproductive health services, with laws now in 89 countries.

UNFPA continued to provide technical support to countries to design and implement comprehensive sexuality education programmes in accordance with international standards, and 73 countries now have aligned curricula – up from 39 in 2013.

UNFPA's Action for Adolescent Girls Initiative and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage continued to prioritize and drive progress for marginalized and at-risk adolescent girls.

The Adolescent Girls Initiative achieved several milestones. Ethiopia launched a national alliance to end child marriage; developed a national strategy on harmful traditional practices; and created a national action plan on female genital mutilation, child marriage and abduction in order to halt these practices by 2025.

In Niger, nearly 9,000 girls in communities with a high prevalence of child marriage participated in an eight-month programme to strengthen their health and their social and economic assets. The Initiative reached more than 21,000 girls in India. By 2015, 50 countries had implemented health, social and economic asset-building programmes to help adolescent girls at risk of child marriage.

As small as these numbers may seem, they are significant given that these initiatives are still in their infancy.

This work will continue and we will do more. Young girls, especially the most marginalized, are often ‘invisible’, and not reflected in surveys or statistics. Reaching them will be critical to leaving no one behind.

With regard to gender-based violence and harmful practices, by 2015 all 17 focus countries of the UNFPA-UNICEF joint programme on female genital mutilation/cutting had policies denouncing the practice, and 13 of them have criminalized it.

While policies and laws may change, however, real progress against harmful practices is not possible without changing the norms that perpetuate them.

This point is made painfully clear each time we read a news report of another girl’s life cut short as a result of the practice, even in countries where FGM is illegal. That is why UNFPA continues to work at community level to change attitudes surrounding these practices, engaging men and boys as champions of women and girls’ health and rights.

Our Asia Pacific Regional Office has provided technical support to over fifteen countries to collect prevalence data on violence against women and is now strengthening regional and national capacities for ethical and safe collection, analysis and interpretation of prevalence survey data.

The SDG5 target of eliminating all form of violence against all women and girls provides an opportunity to expand and build on this work worldwide.

Adolescents and youth

The Fund continues to advocate for increased investments in adolescents and youth and has supported 30 countries in conducting demographic dividend analyses. Many of these countries have begun the process of integrating the demographic dividend into their 2030 Agenda-related development frameworks.

The African Union’s decision to make “Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth” its theme for 2017 is a testament to the effectiveness of UNFPA’s advocacy efforts on the dividend at global, regional and country level.

This was also in evidence during the recent 10-year commemoration of the African Youth Charter in Banjul, supported by UNFPA. The demographic dividend figured prominently in the deliberations, which reaffirmed that young people are the continent’s greatest asset and that investments in their education, empowerment, employment and health are key to transforming Africa’s future.

Data

The importance of data in achieving the SDGs and leaving no one behind was highlighted in our discussions during the joint meeting of the Boards on Friday.

This is a key priority for the UN system as a whole and especially for UNFPA, given our longstanding commitment to data-driven development and our partnerships with national statistical authorities.

Over the past two years UNFPA has continued to strengthen the capacity of countries to produce, analyse and disseminate population-related data, including population data in humanitarian emergencies. In 2015, 73 per cent of the countries that experienced humanitarian crises received technical assistance from UNFPA to use population data to support needs assessments.

UNFPA is also adding to the family planning data evidence base, in preparation for the FP2020 midpoint review. Twenty-five country profiles have been developed, capturing national and some of the first subnational displays of modern contraceptive prevalence, showing how UNFPA is moving the family planning agenda forward, but also the wide variation in contraceptive use within countries.

The profiles highlight the achievements in the FP2020 movement to date, while revealing opportunities and challenges for discussion with donors and programme countries in the final push to 2020.

Innovative initiatives

Mr. President,

In the face of growing challenges, UNFPA remains focused on encouraging innovative approaches to advance our work.

In Tanzania and Ethiopia, we are using solar-powered mobile devices to train midwives, and in Lesotho similar devices were used for the most recent census. This was the first fully digital census in the world, and we are convinced that this is the way to go for all censuses.

In Ghana, drone technology is helping us deliver contraceptives and other medical supplies to rural areas. Deliveries that used to take days, now take minutes. The programme is expanding into six other African countries and could revolutionize women's access to health and family planning across the continent. The programme in Ghana has been so successful and cost-efficient — each flight costs only \$15 — that other governments have offered not only to adopt it, but to pay for it themselves.

You may remember that last year UNFPA brought together young innovators and engineers from 17 countries for a hackathon to design mobile health solutions to adolescent sexual and reproductive health challenges.

I'm happy to report that in Uganda these mobile apps are being taken to pilot. One app provides a mobile platform for GBV reporting and linkage to support services. A second app provides support to community health workers to reach young mothers in rural and remote areas.

In Syria, a youth entrepreneurship training programme is helping young people develop plans for their own small businesses and learn the skills to make them succeed. The programme is also helping diverse groups of young people grow accustomed to working together – helping build not only prosperity, but also the basis for lasting peace.

And these are just a few of the new initiatives and ideas UNFPA has begun implementing.

Adapting to the new funding environment

Mr. President,

In 2015, UNFPA and the rest of the UN system witnessed a considerable reduction in the availability of core resources. While overall contribution revenue was USD 972 million, the structure of the funding changed. Contributions to core resources declined by just over USD 79 million, and were outpaced by earmarked contributions – a trend that is likely to continue.

As a result of revised income estimates, we are proposing a reduction of the appropriations for the institutional budget, from \$664.1 million to \$609.9 million, and for global and regional interventions, from \$275 million to \$231.5 million.

Reducing budget appropriations is not an easy path for any organization. In our case, lower appropriations are the result of significant austerity measures to adapt to the new funding reality. These measures included lower country programme ceilings, cuts in the institutional budget and in the global and regional initiatives. These measures have affected the Fund's capacity to deliver some of the expected results set out in the strategic plan for 2014-2017.

In spite of the above challenges, we are pleased to submit to you a proposal that maintains the proportion of resources that are channeled to development activities.

We continue to build on existing partnerships with key donors, reach out to non-traditional donors, forge new partnerships and leverage country and regional-level funding opportunities in our resource mobilization efforts.

In 2015 UNFPA received increased financing of over \$10.5 million from the private sector, with in-kind support contributing an additional \$800,000. Several of these new partnerships supported UNFPA humanitarian work.

We have also steadily reduced the proportion of resources used for management costs, from 13.1 percent in 2013 to 10.9 percent in 2015, exceeding the strategic plan target.

Our business model will not change and remains a pioneer in the UN system for deploying diversified programming approaches. However, based on the lessons learned through the midterm review process, UNFPA will allow greater flexibility in defining the roles, functions and structures of its country offices, including in “pink” quadrant countries, based on country contexts and capacity needed to achieve results. Let me be clear, however, that the Fund remains committed to supporting to these countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Let me add that I was pleased to see that the G7 Outcomes included references to sexual and reproductive health and squarely placed women's and young people's rights and empowerment at the heart of sustainable development and the achievement of the SDGs.

Evaluation, Internal Audit and Oversight

As I have stressed in previous Board sessions, we remain committed to effective oversight. You have before you the Report of the Director of the Office of Audit and Investigation Services on UNFPA internal audit and investigation activities in 2015, as well as the annual reports of both the UNFPA Evaluation Office and the Ethics Office.

In spite of the current resource situation, evaluation activities have expanded, and the Evaluation budget has been reinstated to its original amount. This is a testimony to the Fund's commitment to oversight activities.

The findings of the independent evaluation of UNFPA support to the 2010 census round, while largely positive, revealed greater focus on enhancing the production of census data, than on data use in policy-making. UNFPA is committed to addressing this issue going forward and to exploring opportunities to build on good practice during the 2020 census round and more widely in our work on data for development.

Increased investment is also planned in the Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS), and the Fund is committed to addressing the issue of "unsatisfactory" country office audits.

In a period of reduced resources, finding the fiscal space for these increases has been challenging, but I am pleased to report that we have complied with your mandates.

With regard to the Report of the Ethics Office, I am pleased that increased engagement with staff, particularly in the regions, has resulted in greater awareness of the Ethics Office's mandate and higher expectations of procedural fairness from the system.

I am personally committed to ensuring that policies and guidelines are implemented fairly and with integrity and encourage the Ethics Office's efforts to bring any cases to the contrary to the attention of senior management.

Targeted courses aimed at strengthening the skills of managers, including in conflict resolution, are already in place and UNFPA will focus on further improving those within the limitations of a considerably reduced budget available for staff development.

Other efforts to strengthen human resources management continue. The vacancy rate and lead time for staff recruitment have both fallen. Our leadership pool continues to grow, and we have identified 83 new potential managers. In 2015, UNFPA deployed 13 staff members from the humanitarian surge roster, which has grown to 96 members. We are also working both to address underperformance and to recognize the service of long-serving staff members.

Despite the many challenges we face, UNFPA staff continue to deliver with tremendous dedication, many in extremely difficult and increasingly dangerous situations, and I would like to thank all our staff for their commitment and service.

And while I am on the subject of staff recognition, I would like to acknowledge Subhash Gupta, Director for Management Services, who retires at the end of August after nearly 15 years of distinguished service to UNFPA and a total of 25 years within the UN system. Please join me in wishing Subhash well in his future endeavours.

While this is a time of goodbyes for some, we are also welcoming staff to new positions, including Alanna Armitage as Director of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office and Luay Shabaneh as Director of the Arab States Regional Office. Alanna and Luay bring exceptional skills to these new and challenging roles, and we wish them the very best and look forward to working with and supporting them.

Organizational review

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Board is aware, we are currently undertaking a review of the organization's operations to identify changes that will enhance programme effectiveness and cost-efficiency in the current financial landscape and as we begin to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, while also working to accommodate growing humanitarian needs.

The review is being conducted by an independent consultant working with a task team of members from Headquarters, Regional Offices and Country Offices to produce a set of recommendations to be considered as we chart the path ahead.

We do not yet know what the recommendations will be – some may be relatively simple to implement while others may require guidance and input from the Board. We will update the Board further on this as the process advances.

I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank Member States for their continued support, particularly their core contributions, which are so critical to attaining our strategic plan outcomes.

Core resources allow us to plan long-term, respond flexibly to emerging priorities and sustainably support human rights-based programming that improves women and young people's lives. This progress is often achieved over the course of several years, making core resources essential.

Core resources are critical to UNFPA's normative and advocacy work, which lays the foundation for lasting change. They allow UNFPA to rapidly dispatch life-saving services and supplies at the onset of a crisis. And because UNFPA addresses the often overlooked needs and vulnerabilities of women and young people in crises, core resources help us respond to the call to leave no one behind.

Our core and non-core funds speak to and reinforce each other. The Non-Core Funds Management Unit created last year continues to facilitate this integrated approach to the management of all our resources. The unit led the development of a resource allocation system (for non-core resources) that enhances the transparency and accountability of the allocation process and strengthens programme planning and management.

Critical investments in UNFPA Supplies, for example, not only help women and couples plan their families and avoid unintended pregnancies; investments in family planning save lives, contribute to maternal, adolescent and newborn health, enable girls to stay in school and women to seek paid employment, and as a result promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

These life-saving investments compound the investments made in the Maternal Health Trust Fund. And the reverse is also true – with midwives trained through the Trust Fund among our greatest allies in expanding access to family planning.

Efforts to end child marriage and other harmful practices also have a multiplier effect. A girl who is married as a child is one whose potential will not be fulfilled. Interventions that empower girls to delay marriage and pregnancy, stay in school and develop the skills needed to enter the labour market are powerful investments not only in education, health and well-being, but in inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

Multiply these investments across an entire generation, and the ripple effect will be tremendous.

That is why we continue to work with countries to help them identify the investments needed to reap the demographic dividend. This is not a new area of endeavour for UNFPA, but one that brings together our efforts to promote sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, empower women and young people, and help countries develop policies and programmes based on high-quality data and grounded in a firm understanding of population dynamics.

By bringing these pieces of the puzzle together, we believe that this exemplifies the integrated approach to development that the 2030 Agenda seeks to achieve.

UNFPA has a vital role to play in helping countries implement and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, because they cannot be achieved without empowering women, girls and young people to control their bodies and their lives. They cannot be achieved without filling the data gaps so that efforts can be directed towards those furthest behind. They cannot be achieved without keeping human rights up front.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As UNFPA accelerates implementation of its current strategic plan through 2017, we will also begin development, during the second half of 2016, of the next strategic plan.

The new plan will be aligned with and support the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda for Humanity. It will continue to drive transformative change within and outside the organization to expand the possibilities for women and young people everywhere to lead healthy, productive lives and transform our world.

When women and young people, especially adolescent girls, are able to control their bodies and their lives, families are healthier, societies more just, and nations stronger and more prosperous.