

**Statement by Mr. Manuel Fontaine, Director EMOPS, UNICEF**

**ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment General Discussion  
11<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

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*Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We are witnessing an unprecedented global humanitarian crisis. 2020 started with 59 mio children in need of humanitarian assistance. Since then, the direct and indirect impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionally increased vulnerabilities and risks among the weakest, the poorest and the most marginalised, at an unprecedented scale and speed.

While we would expect more humanity and caring behavior towards the most vulnerable in these most trying times, in fact we observe that child rights violations continue unabated. Serious violations are even on the rise in several armed conflict situations, including recruitment and use, detention due to alleged association with armed groups, killing and maiming, rape, abduction, attacks on schools, hospitals and water infrastructure, and denial of humanitarian access. Risk factors of harm to children have significantly worsened in the past few months. What we are seeing today in terms of increase in reported child protection concerns, is only the tip of the iceberg. Boys and girls in all forms of detention (including criminal, immigration, armed conflict or national security) are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 due to confined and overcrowded spaces with inadequate access to nutrition, healthcare and hygiene services. They are also incredibly vulnerable to neglect, abuse and violence. The number of reports of violence and abuse at home through hotlines and helplines has seen significant increase. Stigma, particularly against families of victims of COVID-19, is on the rise. Increase of sexual and gender-based violence has been reported, particularly within the intimate sphere. The toll on mental health of children is very high. This is a wakeup call for much overdue stronger investment in mental health and psychosocial support in humanitarian action for the most vulnerable children and their families, from which we know around 2.6 million children are already in need. Recognizing the essential role of Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence social workers, we also call on enabling them to continue their work exempt from COVID-19 restrictions.

As a result of COVID-19 crisis, UNICEF is particularly concerned with the falling food supplies, children missing vaccinations, meals, and schooling, while women and girls face increased cases of gender-based violence. Critical is the access to safe and sufficient water supply to maintain public health, which is key in preventing the spread of COVID-19, as well as other diseases' proliferation. We urge for the protection of water and sanitation infrastructure and personnel, in particular during armed conflict.

While rising vulnerabilities and needs call upon us to scale up our response, we are globally facing increased violence against humanitarian personnel, health workers and community mobilizers. We also see persisting restrictions on movement of personnel, assets and goods. And we are subject to interference in humanitarian operations by authorities or non-state actors including attempts to influence the selection of beneficiaries, implementing partners, and to coerce humanitarian partners to work under conditions that contradict humanitarian principles, drastically limiting our reach to most needed populations.

Going forward, we need a new contract based on trust and solidarity among the humanitarian community to meet the humanitarian challenges ahead of us, prevent further deterioration of the situation, and build back better for the future. We must work together in reinforcing the localization of our humanitarian response by supporting local actors with means they need, not only to deliver services and support, but to have a say in the co-ordination and decision-making process at the local level. This should be further strengthened by engaging communities and using the information collected from the affected population in informing the humanitarian response and holding ourselves accountable. A new contract should also redefine our mutual understanding of risk sharing, between agencies and donors, and among agencies including towards our civil society partners. This should lead to more quality flexible funding for humanitarian action, reduced donor conditionalities that affect our ability to provide impartial assistance based on needs rather than political considerations, and more transparent reporting on funding and results for the people we serve.

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