**UNICEF statement for CRPD Committee 25th session, Opening – 16 August 2021**

Distinguished Chair and Committee members,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of UNICEF, I would like to express our gratitude for the opportunity to deliver this statement, and our support to the continued work of the Committee, even more so during these challenging times.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the situation of children with disabilities around the world. Despite this, UNICEF continues to deliver results through integrated programming, with the CRC, CRPD and CEDAW Conventions at the forefront of its mandate.

UNICEF’s new 2022-2025 Strategic Plan will sharpen our efforts to counter the setbacks resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. It reinforces children’s rights as principles underpinning our work, and disability-inclusion as a cross-cutting priority. This will help us foster all the human rights of all children with disabilities in everything we do.

Children with disabilities are 32% less likely to read books or be read to at home, compared to their peers without disabilities. Remote home schooling can be exceptionally challenging, requiring Internet, assistive devices and individualised curricula. In 2020, UNICEF worked to implement inclusive education programmes in 115 countries, providing children with disabilities with individual support for learning at home.

Children with disabilities are 18% less likely to have access to drinking water and sanitation facilities in their households compared with children without disabilities. This situation is aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, since water, sanitation and hygiene interventions are crucial in preventing the spread of the virus. In 2020, UNICEF worked to ensure that these services are inclusive, reaching about 830,000 persons with disabilities globally.

Compared with those without disabilities, children with disabilities are 1.7 times more likely to have acute respiratory infection symptoms. Underlying health conditions place them at higher risk of infection and illnesses as a result of COVID-19. In addition, they exerience barriers in access to inclusive public health information on the subject. In 2020, UNICEF provided children with disabilities and their families with COVID-19 prevention messages delivered in accessible formats across all regions.

Anxiety and depression as a result of extensive lockdowns, along with the exacerbation of pre-existing mental health issues, are taking a heavy toll on children, particularly those with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. Quarantine measures also place children with disabilities at increased risk of violence in their families. In 2020, owing to a COVID-19-related increased demand, UNICEF reached about 53,000 children with disabilities with psychosocial support.

In the effort of ensuring disability-inclusion in UNICEF’s response to the global pandemic, in 2020 we issued a Guidance note on considerations for children and adults with disabilities in the COVID-19 response, and a Guidance note on risk communication & community engagement with children and adults with disabilities for COVID-19.

Finally, under an important partnership with Norway, UNICEF is working with 8 countries in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region to strengthen disability-inclusion in country programming. We believe that this opportunity will strengthen UNICEF’s approach to disability and secure a disability-inclusive response to the challenges presented by the global pandemic.

We stand ready to work closely with the Committee in that respect.

Thank you.