Statement by Mrs. Reva Nayyar, Secretary, Department of Women & Child Development, New Delhi, on Agenda Item 4: Report on the mid-term review of the UNICEF Medium-term Strategic Plan (2002-2005) at Second Regular Session of the UNICEF Executive Board on September 13, 2004

Mr. President,

We thank the Executive Director for presenting before us an exhaustive report presenting the major findings of a wide-ranging mid-term review of the MTSP undertaken in the first half of 2004. We have studied the assessment of the organizational performance and the lessons learned in the five priority areas and have gone through the proposed adjustment to the current MTSP and implications for the next one.

Mr. President,

We agree that MTSP should retain its simple structure, flexibility, close linkage with international development frameworks and commitment to programming based on national ownership. The programmes should be country-driven and in line with national priorities. This aspect has also been brought out in the MTR which confirmed that success in promoting an MTSP priority and seeing tangible results is closely related to the importance attributed by national partners and that progress during the MTSP period very often depended on the existence or development of a national policy or investment framework.

We have noted that annual reporting at all levels of UNICEF was restructured in 2002 as a number of indicators included in the plan were previously untested or poorly specified. We have also noted that despite the improvements, weaknesses remain. The development of indicators is a sensitive and serious task. It should be done in consultation with the governments of the participating programme countries.

We have noted that in addition to advocacy work in support of the implementation of the CRC, greater focus on promoting child participation is being considered. We believe that advocacy serves a good purpose in terms of generating awareness, but an excessive focus on the advocacy function may end up being at the expense of performance of the basic tasks and programmes. Formulation of legislation is also within the domain of the national governments and specific advocacy efforts by UNICEF in this regard may be irrelevant or superfluous in most cases. It would be useful
for UNICEF to repose trust in the good intentions and capabilities of the government of individual programme countries and to align its programmes to national policies, programmes and priorities. After all, the Governments of programme countries, especially in democratic societies, are accountable to their people in this regard.

We have noted that UNICEF has invested substantially in rebuilding its human resource capacity for immunization “plus”, but are concerned at the MTR finding that the “plus” side of the priority has been difficult to operationalise. Clearly, a greater emphasis on this would be required and we are, therefore, concerned that the main factor currently affecting progress is inadequate funding.

We have noted that under the MTSP, the level of engagement of UNICEF in the fight against AIDS has increased rapidly and that priority for fighting HIV/AIDS is well focused and conceptually clear for both staff and national partners. We are, therefore, perplexed and concerned to note that HIV/AIDS has also taken a significant toll on the staff of UNICEF and other agencies. It is not clear how UNICEF aims to conduct a fight against AIDS with staff who are themselves perhaps ignorant of the risks and the manner of contracting AIDS. Perhaps the organization needs to devote greater attention and time to training and awareness programmes within the organization.

Mr. President,

We have noted that the application of a human rights-based approach to programming, as envisaged by the MTSP, has been uneven. Our experience in India confirms that the eradication of poverty is an essential prerequisite for the fulfillment of human lives and aspirations. The rights of children and women can be fully advanced by working for the survival, protection and development of children. A strong and sustained development-based approach, we believe, can provide the foundation for the protection of the rights of children and women.

Similarly, an excessive focus on results in the planning process may result in depriving those who are most in need of assistance. While results are important, they should not become the criteria for depriving those who are the most deprived.

Mr. President,

We join UNICEF’s concern at the decline in regular resources relative to other resources. UNICEF is engaged in useful work targeting the most vulnerable sections of any society – children and women. Enhanced, stable and predictable contributions to regular resources would surely enable UNICEF to continue performing its useful functions in a planned and organized manner in the long-term.

Thank you, Mr. President.