

**Statement by UNICEF
Ebola High Level Conference
Brussels, Belgium
March 3, 2015**

Your Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I'm delighted to see so many partners and donors here. Thank you for your generous support which enables us to assist the countries and communities on the front lines of this disease.

We've made encouraging progress in the fight against Ebola -- largely thanks to the courage, engagement and leadership of the governments and people of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

This is due, in no small measure, to all of us working together:

- Together with partners, UNICEF has distributed over 6,000 metric tons of Personal Protective Equipment. And supported more than 100 treatment and care centres with water and sanitation;
- We helped communities set up systems for rapid isolation and care;
- We helped mobilize more than 50,000 community volunteers and have worked closely with traditional and religious leaders in the response;
- We provided family tracing and reunification services to nearly 6,000 children and psycho-social support to 35,000 children;

But Ebola is not over. That last 10% is always the hardest to reach.

As we continue to respond to the crisis and plan for the post-crisis recovery, we must put children and equity at the heart of our efforts. Because Ebola continues to stalk the most vulnerable communities. And who is more vulnerable than the children in those communities?

Ebola has halted progress for children made by governments over years of development efforts. In a region with the highest under five mortality rate and still some of the lowest education completion levels in the world, 5 million children have been deprived of school in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia since July last year. 17,000 children have lost one or both parents. Essential health services have severely declined and the provision of life-saving interventions, such as immunisations, have been affected.

So, as we work to reach the last 10% and build more resilient systems, what have we learned from the crisis?

First, we've learned that communities are at the heart of success. Where they took on the disease, the battle against Ebola was won. Religious and traditional leaders, women's and youth groups, in particular, have played a critical role in early detection and isolation of suspect cases, and in encouraging infected people to seek care.

Second, we've witnessed the extraordinary solidarity among communities and families, taking in orphans and other deprived children. We must build stronger social protection mechanisms to allow them to better cope with the shocks.

Third, we've learned how motivated community health workers and teachers can be key to reaching out to the most marginalized areas and rebuilding trust in public services. As we move forward, it will be important that systems are rebuilt in a decentralized manner that are accountable to communities.

All these elements are and will be invaluable assets for the response and recovery.

Together – governments, communities, UN agencies, partners – we must turn these vital lessons into action. UNICEF stands ready to support you and the children of your countries to make it happen.
