

**Statement by Grete Faremo
Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director UNOPS
to UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board Annual Session, 7-11 June 2021**

Introduction

Madam President, honourable members, it is a pleasure to speak to you once again. In this session I will present UNOPS 2020 annual report, and an outline of our future strategy.

COVID-19

As we all know, 2020 will forever be known as a year of pandemic - affecting our entire world.

Our challenges were and remain immense. But 2020 was also a time of resilience, a time of unity, a time to find solutions and respond together to shared challenges.

At UNOPS we were quick to adapt to this new reality. As was the case in Argentina, where we built 11 modular hospitals using state of the art technology, in 60 days, I have shared many updates on our work to respond and recover.

This was one case of many. Suffice to say: as our pandemic battle continues, UNOPS stand ready to support with the efficient procurement of medical supplies and equipment, to strengthen the infrastructure of health systems, to assist in vaccination roll-out programmes, and on the crucial and collective task to put us back on track towards the SDGs.

There is no doubt that the pandemic has made it harder to achieve the SDGs. There is more at stake now: we simply need to do more with our limited resources. UNOPS stands ready to bring our efficient and effective practices to support our partners in this crucial journey towards the SDGs.

Annual results

In 2020, our successful pandemic response reflects broader achievements as an organization.

Last year, UNOPS delivery of projects around the world exceeded \$2.2 billion. Considering the severe obstacles and restrictions that our implementation work faced, to be so close to our previous year's record is a major achievement. Almost \$900 million dollars worth of new agreements were signed to combat COVID-19.

Yet sadly, we lost lives.

Over this year, more so than any others in my time at UNOPS, I pay tribute to all UNOPS personnel, many of whom are based in the most challenging places in the world, for delivering on our promises to our partners, and the people they represent.

This work has improved people's lives in tangible ways. In 2020, UNOPS-supported projects created 3.4 million days of paid work for local people. Our infrastructure activities included work on more than 2,300 kilometres of roads and 114 schools. We procured \$1.3 billion dollars worth of goods and services for our partners, and almost \$600 million of procurement spending went to local suppliers, supporting local and national economies.

Within these achievements, I will highlight just three projects.

- In Yemen, where last year over 80 per cent of the population were in need of humanitarian assistance, our work continued to restore basic services. With a \$50 million grant from the World Bank, we worked to restore electricity to 1.3 million Yemenis, including 200,000 households, 220 health facilities and 280 schools.
- With funding from the European Union, we have been supporting the Intergovernmental Authority on Development across Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda, to mitigate the health and socio-economic impact of COVID-19. We are procuring medical supplies, building health facilities, and quarantine and isolation centres in prioritized areas across these nations.
- And in Zimbabwe, together with FAO, IOM, UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO, and in the aftermath of the 2019 cyclone, UNOPS is honoured to manage co-ordinated efforts to address food security,

livelihoods, health, education, and water and sanitation needs, funded by a \$72 million dollar grant from the World Bank.

Across these examples, we are laying foundations for long-term resilience and recovery. Across all, we are furthering national efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Strategic plan 2018-2021

Distinguished members,

I want to **place our achievements of last year in the broader context of our current strategic plan**. Our plan set ambitions to help partners achieve sustainable development and more peaceful, just and equitable societies.

From 2018-2021, we have spent considerable time and energy focusing on how we could add more value to Agenda 2030, through effective, cost-efficient solutions, through building new, and strategic partnerships, by better understanding our partners' needs, and by accessing and bringing new funding sources to address our mutual challenges.

Throughout our work, we focus on enhancing the quality of what we deliver, and on providing value for money for our partners. Over this period, our fees have consistently been below 5 per cent.

Your continuous support has been vital. Thanks to your guidance and direction, the demand for UNOPS services has never been greater.

Last year, new agreements signed with our partners exceeded 10 billion dollars. This is an unprecedented 300 per cent growth, compared with the annual average of the previous 4 years. It represents \$7.3 billion with funding from non-OECD countries, and more than \$450 million with funding from OECD countries. And nearly 80 per cent of the total is related to health - with a significant proportion related to our support to the Government of Mexico.

In sum, this represents a step-change to our organization. It reflects the trust and confidence that partners have in UNOPS' capacity to deliver quality, even under extraordinary circumstances.

Strategic plan 2022-2025

As we look to our new Strategic Plan, we want to build on our achievements. We want to build **a better future, supporting our partners to achieve the SDGs** through our mandate and expertise.

The nature of our support remains demand-driven: Across the three pillars of the UN Charter, across all of the SDGs, and in even the most challenging operational contexts.

Allow me to start with our vision of **what** we want to do over our next strategic plan.

In short, guided by the Agenda 2030, we will support countries in developing their capacity and their resource base. Our priorities are: (1) quality infrastructure, (2) improved public procurement and (3) our Sustainable Investments in Infrastructure and Innovation (S3I) initiative.

We will enable partners to ‘do more with less’ through efficient project services, mostly delivered locally.

And we will place particular attention on sustainable implementation - in economic, social and environmental terms. To elaborate:

Infrastructure

As a planet, we will not reach our global climate ambitions without a significant focus on infrastructure. Ninety-two per cent of all SDGs are reliant on infrastructure in order to be achieved.

We have a central mandate in infrastructure - which is at the heart of sustainable development. Infrastructure is core to efforts to address climate change, and a critical foundation to mitigation and adaptation efforts.

We will continue our pioneering work on more inclusive, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, connecting stakeholders from academia and practitioners, to governments at all levels, and international organizations, supporting efforts to mobilize the trillions of dollars needed to finance sustainable infrastructure.

And we will continue directly working with countries to improve national infrastructure planning, so that infrastructure works for the needs of today - and tomorrow.

Procurement

Similarly, building on our mandate in procurement, we will continue our work on improving public procurement.

This is based on our belief that there is a huge unrealized potential in using public procurement to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Procurement is a key part of COVID-19 economic recovery packages. This gives it immense potential to drive equality, accelerate the shift to lower-carbon economies, create jobs, tackle corruption and champion a more sustainable and inclusive recovery.

We work with governments to tap into this potential, to deliver on the SDGs, get better value for their money, and improve transparency, ultimately serving their populations better. For example, in Guatemala alone, our work in this area led to savings of \$270 million. In Honduras, this support resulted in savings ranging from 30 to 70 per cent on medicine prices.

And the sheer scale of our support to the Government of Mexico, a \$6 billion project to bring more efficiency, transparency and effectiveness to the procurement of medicines, speaks to our determination to continue this work. Ten months in, by adopting UNOPS processes, estimates suggest savings of more than \$580 million. Projects like these are even more essential during COVID times, when governments have to maximise all their resources to recover from the economic fallout.

S3I

Beyond ODA, we will also continue our quest to broaden resources available to the SDGs. Our Sustainable Investments in Infrastructure and Innovation (S3I) initiative contributes to addressing critical national infrastructure needs, such as affordable housing, renewable energy and health.

Here, S3I helps de-risk projects and embraces innovation as a driving force for Agenda 2030. UNOPS conducts rigorous social due diligence to ensure that projects are suitable for investment.

In 2020, S3I committed to building resilient and affordable homes in Guinea and Nigeria, working with governments, builders and investors. Overall, UNOPS has committed to supporting the construction by 2030 of some 1.3 million homes in Ghana, Guinea, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, and across the Caribbean.

Last year, due to COVID19 lockdowns on construction activities S3I faced considerable challenges. But I am happy to announce that a new high-level S3I Advisory Group on Investments, composed of external experts, has been established and is in place.

In parallel, the S3I innovation approach complements the work of UN agencies on policy and process innovation for governments and public institutions, by focusing on entrepreneurship with the private sector as the main target of interventions, where, in both developed and developing countries, we incubate promising start-ups and help them secure early funding.

Quality

Honourable members, I have provided a brief outline on *what* we intend to focus on. Allow me now to address the key question of *how* we intend to move forward.

We aim for **quality** in everything we do, and will actively refine our services based on best practice standards, as well as on lessons learned, through our implementation activities, and during the pandemic.

Our enhanced focus on **health and safety** will continue. This aims for zero incidents, injuries and illnesses in the workplace, and includes awareness activities, mandatory inspections and reporting and training for all personnel.

In our drive for greater **digitization**, we will continue to simplify, streamline, and scale our processes, developing IT systems to even better enable efficiency, agility and flexibility.

We will continue to place great emphasis on **managing our assets and finances responsibly**.

As requested, a leading independent consulting firm has conducted a detailed operational reserve study. It found that our current model does not fully account for the residual financial risks faced by the

organization. It is our responsibility to reassure our partners that UNOPS can deliver on its commitments, should a worst-case materialize. So at the Second Regular Session of the Board, recommendations to refine how the formula is calculated will be presented, for your guidance and direction.

UN reforms

Turning to the topic of UN reform, we continue to engage in **this system-wide effort**.

Collaboration and coordination with our UN partner agencies is essential - at country-level and beyond. We engage in accordance with our unique non-programmatic implementation mandate, and self-financing business model. This model lends itself to efficient and effective ways of working. In more than 80 countries, including high-risk environments, our multi-country office approach allows us to serve many countries with a limited footprint.

Our successful progression towards gender parity - which I will shortly elaborate on - is also testament to our commitment to UN reforms.

Our determination to nurture a speak-up culture at UNOPS - to communicate our zero-tolerance policy to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment and encourage personnel to report any exploitation or abuse is another indication of our investment in the UN reform.

Our business model lends itself to an efficient and effective way of working: we benefit from sharing and our work is built on partnerships.

And as chair of the HLCM, I am sharing the benefits of our experiences to the wider UN system, and as ever we stand ready to bring UNOPS learnings to support the UN's reform journey.

As part of our commitment to a repositioned UN development system, I can also confirm we have paid on time and in full UNOPS contribution following the cost sharing principles, underpinning the Resident Coordinator system.

Equality

Honourable members,

As is the case across the UN, our commitments to the highest standards of ethics and integrity, will always be at the forefront.

UNOPS has also made great progress in mainstreaming gender in projects, but we need to step up our efforts to help close this gap.

And within our workforce, gender equality will remain a key priority for UNOPS - as we continue to make progress towards being a more equal organization.

UNOPS has now reached gender parity; women currently represent 49 per cent of our workforce. Considering this was 36 per cent just 4 years ago, this again represents a significant achievement. Yet today, at decision making levels, women hold some 43 per cent of senior positions across UNOPS. We will continue to drive for parity at senior levels. But inclusiveness goes beyond gender. Later this year, I look forward to sharing more details with you all as we widen our approach, and strive to ensure a broader, **more diverse, and more inclusive model**, including issues like disability, ethnicity and race, economic status, LGBTQI+ identities and youth.

Conclusion

Distinguished members, I have tried to capture key elements of our vision for 2022-2025.

We have benefitted from engaging with you in informal consultations over recent weeks, and aim to present the strategic plan to the Executive Board in September.

To conclude; we live in a unique time facing a unique set of challenges, from a pandemic with devastating consequences, to the existential threat of a changing climate. Our experience of 2020 shows if we are to survive and thrive, it is important to act together.

We stand ready - under your guidance - to be part of the collective solution to our world's biggest challenges.