Mr President, honorable members of the Executive Board, observers, colleagues,
Once again, it is a pleasure to speak to you all.
We meet at a unique point in history - marked by multiple crises -and a need for urgent, collective action.

As the Secretary-General has stated, at the halfway point in the 2030 Agenda, it's clear that if we don't accelerate progress, we risk leaving half of humanity behind.

The weeks and months ahead are crucial for accelerating this progress.

The SDG Summit provides renewed ambition, and the upcoming COP28 summit offers another opportunity to mobilize and tackle the climate emergency.

As I had mentioned in previous occasions, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change face not only a finance and policy gap but also a capacity for implementation gap. Simply put, to accelerate progress means urgent and immediate action on operations.

--It means implementation.

--It means a practical focus, on delivering peace and prosperity for people and the planet.

Leading part of the UN tasked to deliver action on the ground, I can report that despite challenges, I am increasingly optimistic about the positive direction UNOPS is taking.

My statement today will expand on why that is the case. I will share details on our ongoing reforms, our strategic focus, operational updates, and budgeting. In addition, I will also present the 2022 UN statistical report on procurement, gathered by UNOPS on behalf of the wider UN family.
Management reforms

Allow me to start with an update on our journey of reform - which is progressing well. We are making steady headway with our Comprehensive Response Plan. As of today, more than half of the actions in this plan are complete. By the end of this year, we hope to conclude the majority of those outstanding.

Remaining items, notably those of a transformational nature, are naturally of a longer term nature.

For example, our business transformation and digitalisation programme, is a key aspect of governance and management structures. This work is intended to fundamentally change the way UNOPS operates, to allow us to work smarter, and deliver better for our partners. Informed by field offices to ensure systems that are fit-for-purpose, we envisage this as a multi-year programme, impacting the entire organization.

Another inherently long term endeavor is cultural change. Currently, a third party culture assessment is ongoing. This will form the baseline for further consultations with UNOPS people, and the development of new practices to support a renewed culture across the organization. This assessment is nearing completion, and I look forward to sharing the results with the Board in a forthcoming briefing.

Moving forward and under your guidance, we propose these longer term changes be mainstreamed within the implementation timeframe of our renewed Strategic Plan, and prioritized as key initiatives across UNOPS.

I can also confirm we will conclude the phase-out of our S3i workstream in Helsinki, Finland, and close the former S3i office by the end of the year.

I take this opportunity to thank you once again for your dedication and commitment in support of UNOPS reforms in my tenure to date. I recognise and acknowledge the trust placed in me to continue this journey. Equally, I recognise and appreciate the trust we are increasingly seeing from partners, as we seek to respond to the immense needs of today’s world. We won’t take this trust for granted.

Strategic plan

Distinguished members of the Board,

I will now turn to the topic of the UNOPS Strategic Plan, endorsed at the last session of the Board.
We are now focused on actions we must take to realize the ambitions of this plan. Internal coordination will be key to its successful deployment. In a few weeks, I will convene senior leaders from across UNOPS. Given the central role managers play in shaping the future of UNOPS, this will be a critical step. Among our first tasks, will be plans to measure the impact of the services UNOPS provides differently, through our Expanded Results Framework.

I can also report that a renewed focus on our internal structures is a broader theme of focus. In recent weeks I have established dedicated structures at the highest level in the organization, in order to drive system-wide priorities on a number of issues, including the triple planetary crisis, energy transition, resilience and sustainability in the SIDS, access to quality healthcare, just digital transformation, social protection, equality and jobs, and the synergies between humanitarian, development and peace efforts.

These newly created “Mission Knowledge Hubs”, aim to focus where we should bring our expertise and that of UNOPS to the fore, in contribution to the wider objectives of the UN system, under the SDGs, and across UNOPS, so we can better contribute to the 2030 Agenda.

Further to this, in order to continue the enhancement of our internal coordination, I can confirm we are also eagerly awaiting the arrival of our new Deputy Executive Director, Ms Sonja Leighton-Kone in October. Sonja’s solid UN experience will be instrumental in helping us develop and refine our approach further, to better support the SDGs. An announcement seeking candidates for UNOPS second Deputy Executive Director position has also been published - marking another key step to strengthen our organizational structure.

Additionally, we have clarified UNOPS demand side role in enabling financing for development, which will involve no new activities.

Through all these reforms, we are committed to aligning ourselves better with the UN development system and UN country teams under the leadership of resident coordinators, so that we can support the SDGs and national priorities more effectively.

Operational updates

At its core, the purpose of enhancing our organization is ultimately to allow us to deliver better, for our partners and the communities we serve.

In this respect, demand for our support remains strong. Since we last met at the annual session, I can
share that we have agreed 60 new projects, and extended existing agreements in a further 90 projects. These activities will take place in over 60 locations.

More specifically, since July, we have agreed to support 22 new projects in 15 countries and territories.

For example, in Ethiopia, we will help increase access to health services in Tigray, as the devastating impacts of the conflict in the north have left millions without access to basic services.

Here, hospital renovations will help improve access to essential, life-saving quality health services for more than 70,000 people, including internally displaced persons, returnees, host communities, elderly people and people with disabilities.

In Haiti, we will help support solutions for oxygen needs, as part of a project to support ongoing efforts to respond to COVID-19. This work is life-saving, in a context where many hospitals are experiencing a shortage of oxygen, which hinders their work to provide critical medical treatment.

In Myanmar, we continue to help strengthen resilience and support the livelihoods of poor households via the LIFT fund. Against a background of worsening humanitarian needs - with almost half of the population estimated to live in poverty - LIFT works to help increase incomes, improve the nutrition of women and children, and decrease vulnerabilities to shocks and adverse trends. This support has already reached around 12.4 million vulnerable people - just under a quarter of the population - across all 14 states and regions.

In Yemen, where years of conflict have left over 21 million - two thirds of the population - in need of humanitarian assistance, and caused widespread damage to urban infrastructure, we continue to support important efforts to improve access to critical urban services.

And in Ukraine, we are working to repair over 70 schools, so that Ukrainian children can have a safe environment to learn and grow. Over the past 18 months, UNOPS has worked closely with partners to provide crucial assistance with a focus on emergency response and early recovery, delivering significant volumes of essential equipment and supplies for vulnerable communities. This work has included crucial support for the winterisation response, and will include the repair of over 20 multi-storey residential buildings, and the provision of infrastructure to ensure access to reliable and affordable energy in households, hospitals and schools.

This is just a snapshot of new and extended agreements.
Ongoing activities, for example, include in Somalia, where last month, we welcomed the country’s first fully functioning national blood bank, working hand in hand with sister agencies in UNFPA and WHO, in a project described by Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre as a major milestone in the government’s efforts.

As you can see, the breadth of this work shows our commitment to respond to the needs of countries in special and fragile situations, and the most vulnerable people, wherever they are.

Budget estimates for the biennium 2024-2025:

Honorable members of the Board,

To be able to best continue operations across the world, and to help our partners deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals, we need a fit-for-purpose UNOPS that is properly resourced.

UNOPS budget estimates for 2024-2025, outline our financial plans for the coming two years.

Guided by the Board, these estimates include the requirements to factor full cost recovery, the projected demand for UNOPS services, and management resources required to deliver these.

In total, we estimate an increase of $65.2 million in management resources over the biennium.

The increase is driven by multiple factors. These include;
- measures to strengthen internal oversight and management structures,
- recommendations of the Board of Auditors,
- the need to harmonize UNOPS cost recovery principles with the wider United Nations system, and;
- the core expenses required to keep UNOPS fit-for-purpose, following Executive Board decisions.

Combined with the reality of inflation, this means that UNOPS fees on average are projected to increase to 5.5%, up from the 4% rate projected for 2022-2023.

Further details on how UNOPS management fees are calculated are publicly available and have been provided to the Board in advance of this session.

While we consider this rate remains modest, it could be reduced, should the Executive Board recommend UNOPS carry forward funds from the Comprehensive Response Plan, in order to support the implementation of longer term actions, such as transformation of our digital landscape.
I appreciate concerns raised by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) on the increase of our budget estimates, but would like to highlight that increases are in response to Board decisions and oversight recommendations. We will closely monitor the implementation of all, and ensure that we are optimizing available resources while continuously improving our efficiency and effectiveness to achieve the intended results.

Annual Statistical Report on UN Procurement

Finally, allow me to present to you the findings of the Annual Statistical Report on UN Procurement, which UNOPS publishes on behalf of the UN system.

These figures represent the key role that procurement plays in enabling the work of the United Nations, and its immense potential to maximize impact for the Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2022 report details how 31 UN organizations spent $30 billion on goods and services last year. Overall, UN procurement remained steady in 2022, compared with the previous year.

Crises in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Ukraine also contributed to notable increases in both the food and transportation procurement sectors. And health was once again the largest procurement category, with 31 reporting UN agencies procured $7.6 billion worth of health-related goods and services.

For the first time, the report provides information about procurement from suppliers in landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States, in addition to least developed countries. Here, UN procurement from LLDCs totalled $3.3 billion, with the largest supplier countries being Afghanistan, Ethiopia and South Sudan. UN organizations procured goods and services from 51 SIDS countries last year, reaching $737 million in total.

The United States was once again the largest supplier country, providing $2.4 billion worth of goods and services to UN organizations. While at the regional level, procurement from Africa rose by 15 per cent overall – or an increase of $671 million worth of goods and services.

A key highlight was that collaborative procurement activities within the UN system emerged as a key trend. With the aim of increasing efficiency, reducing prices and ensuring better services through economies of scale, collaborative procurement across the UN system last year reached a record-high $1.5 billion. Against a background of complex and interconnected crises, these figures demonstrate the UN’s commitment to procuring goods and services as effectively and efficiently as possible, working together to deliver maximum impact.
Conclusion:

Honourable members of the Board,

In a few weeks, we will gather here in New York again, to take stock and mark a new beginning: a new phase in our joint effort to accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

Let me assure you that UNOPS is committed to be a trusted and fit-for-purpose partner in that effort. And our journey of transformation is intended to firmly consolidate us on this path.

With only 7 years left until 2030, we recognize the need for urgent action.

And we are hopeful that we can play our part through our focus on implementation, and through our shared commitment to improve lives for communities around the world.

Thank you