Mr President, honorable members of the Executive Board,

As always, it is an honour to join you, to update you on our impact, achievements and challenges over the last year and our plans moving forward.

Over a year has passed since I first addressed the Executive Board in my capacity as UNOPS Executive Director.

During this time, our work has continued to grapple with multiple and compounding crises: conflicts, the climate emergency, bleak inequalities, poverty and hunger.

UNOPS focus on operations providing practical solutions has never been more needed.

I have had the opportunity to witness the work of my colleagues working in some of the world’s most challenging and fragile contexts, delivering meaningful actions to improve the lives of those most vulnerable.
Member States have shown a strong interest in knowing more about the impact of our work on the ground. In my statement today, I will reflect on some examples of this work, alongside a focus on our internal reform efforts.

**RESPONDING TO NEEDS**

Last week, I attended the 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Antigua and Barbuda. This is a crucial moment for SIDS to mobilize the support they need to tackle their unique development challenges. From the existential threat of climate crisis, to very real concerns around debt and access to climate finance.

I was there to send a clear message: UNOPS stands by SIDS, in their pursuit of a sustainable, resilient and prosperous future.

We have years of collaboration with SIDS to build on - where we have worked to enhance access to renewable energy, water and waste management, marine protection, and health procurement.

For instance, in the Maldives, we developed integrated water supply networks with solar-powered systems combining rainwater and desalinated seawater.
In Timor-Leste, with UNEP, we have supported the enhancement of early warning systems, to build greater resilience to hydro-meteorological hazards.

In Saint Vincent and Grenadines, we carried out the construction and rehabilitation of flood-damaged bridges, roads and a river defense system.

Additionally, we join the international community in supporting SIDS to address loss and damage, improve national adaptation planning, and drive digital transformation to serve their remote communities better.

I was very glad to sign an MoU on the implementation of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS with the Alliance of Small Island States.

Additionally, following a decision at COP28 last year, we co-host the Santiago Network Secretariat together with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Secretariat helps countries hardest hit by the climate emergency - including SIDS - to access the technical assistance they need to foster resilience, build capacity, and manage loss and damage.

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Around the world, my colleagues are similarly dedicated to responding to needs where they are greatest. Last year, almost two-thirds of our work was in countries in fragile situations.
I recently witnessed an example of this dedication in Afghanistan, one of the most fragile countries in the world, where around 24 million people – more than half of the country’s population – require humanitarian assistance to survive this year. Years of conflict, a fragile economy and recurrent climate-induced disasters, coupled with economic upheavals and severe limits on women’s participation in public life, have led to a drastic rise in urban and rural poverty.

Here, my colleagues work to strengthen community resilience and improve livelihoods, in a project funded by the World Bank. In the last 2 years, this project provided short-term employment opportunities and support to more than 1.3 million households across 10 cities, 29 provinces, 98 rural districts. To generate more livelihood opportunities and income for vulnerable Afghans, the project has already engaged more than 9,000 community councils – composed of approximately 40 per cent women. These councils prioritize projects, identify vulnerable households and manage workers. Local ownership means communities get to prioritize work that matters to them most - and we have seen a preference for projects that mitigate climate risks.

To date, the project has completed more than 3,000 sub-projects that help build climate resilience across Afghanistan – from constructing streets and building protection walls and dams to planting trees - that have benefitted more than 14 million people.

I also had an opportunity to visit Herat, where, following the October 2023 earthquake, UNOPS has supported immediate response and mid-term
recovery needs. This involved rescue, recovery and debris clearance, and immediate cash support to 48,000 affected families.

Turning towards Gaza, UNOPS efforts continue to support the wider UN response. This has included procuring and delivering fuel to enable humanitarian response in critical sectors such as health, food, water, sanitation and hygiene, working together with our colleagues at UNRWA.

UNOPS is also providing operational support to the UN mine action team – enhancing the security of high-risk UN and World Health Organization missions across Gaza, and bringing essential non-food items for distribution to affected communities.

Our work in Gaza also involves providing support to the Office of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, Sigrid Kaag.

In support of the Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator, UNOPS was also requested by the Secretary-General to design, set up, operationalize and manage the establishment of the UN mechanism to facilitate, coordinate, monitor and verify humanitarian relief consignments to Gaza.

This will involve facilitating faster and more effective delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza, through the various land entry points from Israel, as well as land routes from Egypt and Jordan and the maritime corridor from Cyprus. We remain focused on this work - against a challenging
operating environment which requires collaboration from many stakeholders.

In Ukraine, my colleagues continue to work with the UN family, Ukraine’s national and municipal governments and other partners to provide much-needed assistance to vulnerable communities. From procuring essential equipment and supplies, to supporting the rehabilitation and reconstruction of key infrastructure, and helping remove explosive remnants of war scattered throughout the country. UNOPS is supporting the people and the government of Ukraine to respond, recover and build back better.

In Guatemala, UNOPS supports efforts to improve the provision of health services. We supported Guatemala’s Social Security Institute to strengthen the efficiency and transparency of its medicines and medical supplies procurement processes. Through the project, UNOPS designed policies and trained 600 staff in sustainable public procurement and supply chain management, and helped stock 114 health facilities across the country with medicine. The six-year project resulted in an estimated savings of around $250 million, with around 57 per cent savings on the purchase of medicines – improving healthcare for an estimated 3.2 million Guatemalans.

We remain committed to supporting the government in strengthening the national health system in Guatemala. Through a new $900 million agreement with Guatemala’s Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance, UNOPS will over the next four years work closely with the government to enhance the management and administration of health
services, as well as provide necessary medical equipment for 45 hospitals, and procure medication through transparent and efficient procurement practices. By helping strengthen procurement practices - we can help the government bring improved health care to millions of Guatemalans, and reach those most in need.

Similarly, in Somalia, we remain committed to strengthening the healthcare infrastructure. Here, we supported the government in building the country’s first fully functioning national blood bank, in a context where safe blood supply and transfusion services can be a challenge.

Working with UNFPA and WHO, UNOPS planned, designed and constructed the blood bank as well as procured its equipment – including state-of-the-art technology, which allows the facility to screen, prepare and securely store blood, and blood products. The Somali National Blood Bank can store up to 10,000 units of donated blood. In 2023, the facility was inaugurated by Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre, who described it as a major milestone in Somalia’s efforts to provide safe and reliable blood products to those in need.

These are only a few examples of the many ways in which UNOPS provided a tangible difference to lives around the world in 2023. Through 1,100 projects. Across more than 80 countries. Supporting some 180 partners from the United Nations and beyond, and providing project services amounting to $2.7 billion. Responding to needs now, while paving the foundations for an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future.
RESTORING TRUST

All of this speaks to our success in rebuilding trust - with our partners and the communities we serve.

Our work is in demand: Last year, we signed more than $3 billion in agreements with partners, including 300 new engagements.

But we know that the building - and rebuilding - of trust is a process. One that we take very seriously.

The last two years have shown our absolute commitment in this regard. We have made significant progress in our management reforms - both driven by the Comprehensive Response Plan and what we are doing beyond.

Out of 43 recommendations in the Comprehensive Response Plan, we have completed 36. Of the four outstanding recommendations led by UNOPS, three will be completed in 2024 and one will continue until 2027, because it is a multi-year initiative on process innovation and digitalization. For the remaining three recommendations, the United Nations Office for Legal Affairs leads on efforts to recover funds, and two actions are no longer applicable, due to the closure of the former S3i office.

Over 2023, we increased resourcing for oversight functions, internal controls, risk management and organizational culture.
This has been crucial in our development of a One UNOPS approach to assurance and internal control. We are reframing our projects with appropriate levels of risk management, and have now made risk management an integral part of all important decision-making processes.

We have ensured the independence and sufficient capacity of our oversight functions, especially internal audit and investigation, and ethics functions.

Just this month, we completed a review of our whistleblowing processes. This project will now move to the planning and implementation phase from July 2024 onward and is included as part of efforts to reshape UNOPS organizational culture.

We continue our work to reshape our organizational culture, to make us a stronger, more agile and responsive partner, in the service of the Sustainable Development Goals. My colleagues will present more details on the progress of this initiative today, which includes not just changes to our systems but also behaviors to support our strategic ambition and the broader UN mission. We know this is going to be a long journey - but let me assure you that our commitment to change is steadfast.

At the same time, our work is on track to enhance our outcome reporting and revise our financial regulations and rules.

We remain committed to net-zero revenue - which means we undergo rounds of iterative planning, and we monitor changes closely. We are learning as we explore this new way of working. We are committed to
strengthening our longer-term planning and forecasting, and assessing our performance through quarterly and annual reviews.

UNOPS is also continuing with the settlement of the excess reserves as of 31 December 2021.

As of 27 May 2024, the overall refunded amount stood at USD 115.3 million (92 per cent of the total). With an outstanding amount of USD 8.5m to be refunded to 50 partners, UNOPS is following up with each partner.

And finally, we are also adapting our processes to instil environmental sustainability into all of our work.

Last year at COP28, we renewed our commitment to climate action within our own operations and through the projects we implement with partners. Here, we have pledged to reduce corporate emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 and to reach net zero before 2050. But crucially, we are also exploring the effect of scope three emissions in our supply chains, to support suppliers in their efforts to reduce emissions and to enable our partners to choose alternatives. Additionally, we are working towards reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and driving climate-resilient development through our projects in partnership with our partners.

We have made great progress on the implementation of the Comprehensive Response Plan. But the reform agenda does not stop here. We are committed to going beyond the reform agenda through a series of transformation initiatives.
As always, we truly value our ongoing communication with our partners - and their helpful feedback. One vehicle for receiving such feedback is through our Partner Survey. This is an exercise we conduct every other year, to understand how well we meet our partner’s expectations and how we can better serve their needs. Our 2024 partner survey, which will be launched later this month, serves not only to gauge our progress with partners since the end of 2022 but will also inform our thinking as we prepare for our 2026-29 Strategic Plan.

Excellencies,

I have highlighted the great work that we do at UNOPS. But allow me to also briefly mention what we do not do.

When I joined UNOPS, 14 months ago, I reassured you that being non-programmatic doesn’t mean we are agnostic. And being demand-driven does not mean that we accept all the demands. Our mandate requires us to deliver projects across a wide set of areas and in highly fragile contexts. But we go to great lengths to ensure that our portfolio remains within our mandate, rooted in the SDGs and in line with non-negotiable United Nations standards for ethics, safety and security, and sustainability considerations. In 2023, UNOPS declined over 30 engagement opportunities worth approximately USD 250 million.

CONCLUSION
Esteemed members,

As we edge closer to 2030, our world remains woefully off track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. I have maintained for a long time that the work to catch up on the SDGs requires more than financial resources and an enabling policy environment. Time and time again, we are faced with the reality that there is a glaring implementation gap between national and international climate and sustainable development ambitions, and action on the ground.

At UNOPS, we are committed to working with our partners to bridge that implementation gap, so we can help countries deliver on the SDGs and advance their climate ambitions. In the face of a world of polycrisis, we keep our focus on practical solutions, to help countries address needs now - while building a sustainable and peaceful future for their people.

And we do this alongside our ongoing efforts to deliver on our reforms, so that we are a more effective, and fit-for-purpose partner, to support the joint effort to respond to our biggest global challenges.

I thank you - our Executive Board - once again, for your ongoing guidance, in all these efforts.

Thank you.