

*Your Excellency Ambassador Dunlop, Deputy Ambassador of the Brazilian Permanent Mission to the UN,
Ms Cecilia Anicama, Programme Specialist the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children, (on behalf of Marta Santos Pais who is sadly indisposed)
Senior Advisor to the Minister of Social Welfare of Indonesia Dr Makmur Sunusi,
Ms Jennifer Davidson of the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland;
Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen*

It is truly pleasing to see so many of you here today, from around the world including Dr Sunusi who has come all the way from Indonesia, representing Governments, Civil Society, and International Organisations, at the launch of 'Moving Forward: Implementing the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children'. This confirms your great interest in protecting the most vulnerable children and shows the depth of support there is for assuring quality care for children.

We are particularly grateful to the Government of Brazil and its Permanent Mission here in New York, represented by Ambassador Regina Dunlop, for sponsoring this event on this very important topic in child protection. UNICEF congratulates the Government of Brazil for its unstinting support in the development of these Guidelines. These are truly a key milestone in the history of child protection.

We are also deeply grateful to the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child's Working Group on Children without Parental Care in Geneva, the NGO Committee on UNICEF Working Group on Children without Parental Care in New York, and the Better Care Network, whose support during the production of the handbook has been unstinting and enthusiastic.

And of course it was the boundless energy and professionalism of the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland, led by Ms Davidson, and working with many stakeholders, that led to the handbook becoming the fine product, and extremely useful tool, that it is today.

We are also working closely together with the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children, who is represented here today by Ms Cecilia Anicama, on reducing instances of violence against children who are some of the most vulnerable population in the world.

The Guidelines have already made an impact since they were welcomed by the United Nations General Assembly in November 2009, on the 20th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is the most signed-up-to Convention of all UN Conventions. This just shows how committed we all are to making the world a better place for children – and if they have good childhood experiences they will pass these on to their own, future children. A good childhood has many multiplier effects, as economists might put it! When children are healthy, well-nourished and feel safe, and good about themselves, they are more likely to make the most of the opportunities that are available to them, in education or in other environments. Surely this is something we all want to, in fact must, aim for.

Essentially the Guidelines are a tool to operationalize the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For example, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its Concluding Observations regularly asks countries to take the Guidelines into account in their legislative, policy and services development relating to Alternative Care, most recently Guinea, Malta, Austria, and Albania, among others. The Guidelines are not just for so-called ‘developing’ countries – they are for all countries! And they are important!

Now you may think that the Guidelines are all about alternative care – which relates to children who cannot live with their mothers and fathers, and therefore grow up in some other care provision, be it with other relatives, in foster care, residential care or another model. Thankfully this is only a minority of children worldwide, though their numbers are still too high.

But in fact the Guidelines cover much more ground than ‘just’ alternative care. They also talk about preventing the need for children to be separated from their families, which can be unsettling, even traumatising for children – and we want to avoid that, if

it is in the best interests of the individual child. And there are many ways of keeping families together!

Don't we all know that bringing up children has its challenges, for all of us? But for some families a child may simply be another mouth to feed – and the family may be subsisting on fewer than three meals a day already. What can be done, how can they support this child and all others? Increasingly countries, including low and middle-income countries, are investing in social protection mechanisms, such as cash transfers which provide regular payments to families defined as poor. In a number of countries these payments are also linked to other services such as health or education support, such as Brazil's Bolsa Familia programme. The Guidelines refer specifically to measures to combat poverty, such as this or employment generating activities. UNICEF is proudly providing technical and other support to 245 social protection programmes worldwide.

Many people have grown up in environments of harsh parenting – and they don't know another way to bring up children. This can lead to toxic stress in the child, which in turn can affect that child's emotional, social and cognitive development – in the most extreme cases children may have to be removed from their family. The Guidelines talk about the need for States to provide family-strengthening programmes, such as positive parenting courses, conflict resolutions approaches, day care and services for parents of children with disabilities. Measures such as these can directly improve the experience of childhood for many children, and prevent family separation unless it is absolutely needed. And this is a key point in the Guidelines!

They stress that a child should only be separated from their family when this is necessary. Children can be separated for all sorts of reasons, including in emergencies and conflict; they may be trafficked or they may migrate, with or without their families. Or the parents may die. If there is no way of keeping the family together, then the most appropriate form of care should be sought, that which most closely matches the needs of the child – we call it 'in the best interests of the child'. Like us adults, all children are different, individually as personalities as well as members of particular societal groups, including religious affiliations, particular ethnic

groups, or having some form of disability. It's the interaction of the child's history and their environment that shape the person that they are – and it is that person's needs that should be met.

At the moment, in many countries the only options available to care for a child no longer living at home are residential care facilities, often also referred to as orphanages. We now have much evidence that long-term residence in such facilities can have a serious impact on children's physical, emotional, social and cognitive development, particularly in the case of very young children. This is why the Guidelines recommend that States should develop a range of options, to address the needs of the individual child. Such options include foster care, small group homes, independent living arrangements, shelters - and a limited provision of residential care, only where this is in the best interests of the child.

After all this you may be asking – where does the handbook come in? By necessity the Guidelines, as a global document, are expressed very generally, to enable them to be relevant in all country and cultural contexts. What the handbook has done is to explain further the thinking behind the different sections in the handbook, and has included many examples of promising practices in a number of countries, from low-income countries to high-income countries, which its users can learn from. But Jennifer will talk about this in much greater detail.

Finally I would like to talk a little about – what next for Child Protection worldwide? Clearly there is much unfinished business: while child survival rates are increasing, children worldwide continue to suffer from a litany of child protection issues: violence at home or in the community, poverty, living in conflict zones – just think of the children of Syria, those who have disabilities that receive insufficient support, or those who are from minority communities and have insufficient access to services enjoyed by other children in the same country – I could go on and on.

In less than 1000 days the Millennium Development Goals are coming to an end, and new goals are being developed. The time has now come to centre the protection of children on the global stage. We want to have a world focused on the protection of the millions of children that we have saved from preventable deaths. This needs a

world where leaders – public and private – are passionate advocates for, and supporters of, child protection efforts, and a world in which the rights of children are realised and supported through having a professional workforce.

I know that you are as passionate about this as I am – this is why you are in this room today.

I count on YOUR support in the discussions on the post 2015 agenda!

And now I hand over to Ambassador Regina Maria Cordeiro Dunlop, to talk about Brazil's engagement with the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children.

Thank you.