**UNICEF and Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium discuss COVID-19 vaccine roll-out in Armenia**

*UNICEF and Ministry of Health of Armenia thank Belgium for donating COVID-19 vaccine doses*

**14 September 2021** - UNICEF hosted the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium in the Russian Federation, H.E. Mr. Marc Michielsen today who met with Ms. Silvia Mestroni, Acting UNICEF Representative in Armenia, followed by a visit to a local polyclinic in Yerevan where the Ambassador observed the COVID-19 vaccination process.

Earlier on 5 September, UNICEF delivered the first 187,200 doses of the AstraZeneca (AZ) vaccine to Armenia from a pledge of 4 million doses to be donated to COVAX by The Belgian Development Cooperation. This donation by Belgium means that more people will be able to access vaccines now, at a time when variants are a major threat to global health.

“I am very glad that the first doses donated by Belgium have arrived in Armenia. International cooperation is the only way to beat this pandemic. Belgium considers COVAX the best mechanism to ensure international solidarity on vaccines. It is our preferred route for vaccine sharing with third countries. Before the end of this year Belgium will share 4 million doses via COVAX, because no one is safe, until everyone is safe.  Belgium plays a crucial role in the production and distribution of hundreds of millions of Covid-19 vaccines thanks to our leading role in the pharmaceutical and biotech industries. This ecosystem of large and small, local and international companies proved to be very agile during the Covid-19 crisis and makes us a true vaccine powerhouse,” said Mr. Marc Michielsen, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium in the Russian Federation.

Armenia launched the national COVID-19 vaccination process in April 2021, after UNICEF delivered the first ever doses (24,000) of COVID-19 vaccine (AstraZeneca) through COVAX to Armenia at the close of the World Immunization Week on 28 March. Since then, UNICEF has delivered the second shipment of 50,400 COVID-19 vaccine doses, 70,400 doses in total, to Armenia through COVAX. To date, 303,325 doses have already been administered in Armenia free of charge to local and foreign citizens.

“As a key COVAX partner, UNICEF is leading the procurement and delivery of vaccines and immunisation supplies to 92 countries, including Armenia, building on our experience as the world’s largest single buyer of vaccines in the world,” noted Ms Silvia Mestroni, Acting UNICEF Representative in Armenia. “We need to work together to end the pandemic. In this race against time, it is critical that as many safe and effective vaccines as possible are available to as many people as possible as quickly as possible.”

Ensuring equitable and fair access to safe and affordable COVID-19 vaccines for all low- and middle-income countries, priority groups, and vulnerable populations in 2021 is the priority goal for UNICEF. In Armenia, UNICEF works with the Ministry of Health to strengthen the cold chain, train health workers in the quality provision and continuation of health services for children and caregivers, build trust in vaccines and address misinformation and other barriers.

[photos from the airport of the Belgian arrival, photo from the meeting]