**The Government of Japan and UNICEF Support Abovyan Community to Reopen the Child Support Center with New Resources and Capacity**

*The Ambassador of Japan in Armenia and UNICEF Representative mark one year of cooperation in a visit to Abovyan*

**YEREVAN, 22 February 2022** – The Ambassador of Japan to Armenia, Mr Fukushima Masanori and UNICEF Representative in Armenia, Christine Weigand visited Abovyan, marking one year of cooperation for the most vulnerable children in Kotayk, Armavir, Ararat, Vayots Dzor and Syunik.

“On behalf of the Government of Japan, it is a great honor and pleasure for me to visit Abovyan city in the framework of the emergency grant aid, which the Government of Japan decided to provide in response to the humanitarian immediate needs in Armenia in February last year. Since provision of the grant aid, several activities have been carried out by UNICEF,” said Mr Fukushima. “We strongly believe that people and children in need in Armenia will overcome all difficulties, and the Government of Japan will remain by Armenia’s side in the path of recovery and further development of the country.”

Mr Fukushima and Ms Weigand visited Abovyan school #8 where UNICEF provided new furniture and materials to open three new classrooms so that additional students, including from Nagorno-Karabakh, can be enrolled. Students who missed classes in the previous academic year due to the pandemic or the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, also received remedial classes in 2021 to close the learning gap. In addition, UNICEF renovated water, hygiene and sanitation facilities at the school to ensure proper access to clean water and sanitation for students and teachers.

Together with Mayor of Abovyan, Mr. Eduard Babayan, Mr Fukushima and Ms Weigand announced the reopening of the community-based child support center in Abovyan that currently provides services to over 200 children and 185 families, including from Nagorno-Karabakh. While the Abovyan municipality covers the maintenance costs and sustainability of the services, UNICEF renovated and refurbished the center, also suppling new materials for more effective work with children in the community. Working hand in hand with the multidisciplinary team of the Center, UNICEF and FAR Children Support Center Foundation provided psychological first aid, mental health and psychosocial support, and gender-based violence case management services to affected children and their families, supporting over 500 families from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2021.

“Emergency situations, be it the conflict or a global pandemic, put the development and wellbeing of children at risk. Through this partnership with the Government of Japan, regional municipalities and the civil society, UNICEF has aimed to ensure continuity of services in five target regions of Armenia for the most vulnerable children,” said Ms Christine Wiegand, UNICEF Representative in Armenia. “Our efforts have been directed to improving or increasing the existing capacities in the community to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable children.”

Mr Fukushima and Ms Weigand also had a meeting with a group of adolescents who in 2021 completed UNICEF’s coursework on 16 basic life-saving skills, supported by community youth workers and a psychologist. From leadership to communication and conflict management, the 16 skills, identified by the coursework, aid transition from adolescence to adulthood, contribute to making productive life choices, understanding of emotional wellbeing and regulation in children. Through this component of the project, implemented in cooperation by Ayb Foundation, UNICEF has reached and trained 500 adolescents in 5 regions of Armenia and supported 110 youth and social workers with capacity building on provision of basic lifesaving skills.

From 2021 to 2022, with the funding of the Government of Japan, UNICEF has worked in Armavir, Kotayk, Ararat, Vayots Dzor and Syunik to provide essential support to children from Nagorno-Karabakh and the host communities. Through the programme, UNICEF has improved the learning environment and WASH facilities at schools, provided psychological first aid and psychosocial services, trained social workers, youth workers and psychologists, support the improvement of conditions in child support centers, as well as provided medical equipment to regional health facilities, enabling child screening, mobile health team visits to remote communities.