

**Introductory Remarks by the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs  
and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Kyung-wha Kang  
Humanitarian Networks and Partnership Week, Geneva, Switzerland  
1 February 2016**

*Checked against delivery*

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here with you here today at the opening of this Humanitarian Networks and Partnership Week. This event provides a unique forum for a diverse range of emergency responders to share their experiences and best practices and to propose and discuss improvements to enhance the effectiveness and inter-operability of humanitarian action.

Over the coming days there will a variety of workshops and sessions focusing on key aspects of humanitarian preparedness and response, including UNDAC, private sector partnerships, field coordination and humanitarian cash programming. Underlying these discussions will be a recognition of the complex challenges facing the humanitarian community. Allow me to share some thoughts in this regard.

United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners started this year seeking \$20.1 billion to assist some 88 million people in 37 countries. Last year donors gave generously but even so, only 53 per cent of requirements were funded. We ended the year with the largest funding gap ever recorded. Unless something radically different is done, the gap is likely to continue for the coming years.

The vast bulk of these needs were driven by conflict – 80 per cent of humanitarian efforts in recent years have been directed at alleviating human suffering brought on by protracted conflicts and violence which have forcibly displaced a staggering 60 million people by the end of 2014, two thirds internally and one third across borders as refugees.

Urbanization is another challenge. By 2050, two thirds of the world's population are projected to live in towns and cities, meaning conflicts and disasters are increasingly affecting urban populations, shifting the dynamics of vulnerability as well as the response.

Urbanization and increased global inter-connectivity will also increase the risk of global pandemics.

Another factor of course is climate change which is already triggering or exacerbating humanitarian needs, bringing extreme weather conditions, disrupting weather patterns and causing sea level rises. The World Bank estimates that 100 million people will be pushed into extreme poverty as a result of climate change over the next 15 years. Combined with urbanization, by 2030, some 40 per cent of urban areas will be located in high-frequency flood zones, and the number of urban areas exposed to floods and droughts is predicted to more than triple.

Humanitarians are already on the front lines of climate change-related disasters, be it finding solutions for the flood-displaced in Vanuatu or responding to communities hit by the worst drought in thirty years in Ethiopia. In fact, I am just coming from a visit to Ethiopia where I joined the Secretary-General and the Executive Director of the World Food Programme in a joint field visit to communities severely hit by this drought and I still carry some of the dust that we all collected as we were visiting these communities.

Climate change is intensifying the humanitarian risk and impact of El Niño. The current El Niño of 2015-2016 is projected to be as strong if not stronger than the so-called super El Niño of 1997-1998, which claimed 23,000 lives, displaced 100 million people and catalyzed a global humanitarian response. The current El Niño has already exacerbated droughts and drought-like conditions across East and Southern Africa and Central America. Since the beginning of 2015, the number of people in need of food assistance in East Africa has risen from 12 million to 22 million. South Africa is facing its driest year in 112 years, leading to countrywide crop failures, and Madagascar and Mozambique face a heightened risk of cyclones and flooding this rainy season. In the Pacific, where El Niño is affecting as many as 4.7 million people, governments are gearing up to their response, and are already delivering water to 13 per cent of the population in Fiji, and food to 33 per cent of the people in Vanuatu. Humanitarians are at the ready to respond to high-risk countries requesting international humanitarian assistance.

Ladies and Gentleman, while sudden onset natural disasters may take us by surprise, many of the crises that require our attention are predictable. One indication is that 62 of the 64 countries that launched one or more humanitarian appeals over the past 10 years were ranked among the 100 most at-risk countries in risk modeling exercises. That is to say, we knew that they are disaster-prone.

The growing body of evidence should be the catalyst for a more anticipatory approach to crises. Risk management and prevention are far more cost-effective than emergency response. Research in Kenya and Ethiopia has shown that early drought preparedness activities are on average three times more cost-effective than emergency response. In the context of a humanitarian community that is stretched at the seams, preventative responses are vital to make the most of our limited resources.

But while risk analysis is available, it is still woefully under-used in decision-making due to a mixture of institutional and political obstacles. Between 2009 and 2013, just 4.5 per cent of yearly OECD Development Assistance Committee contributions was spent on Disaster Risk Reduction. This neglect has had life or death consequences. Despite timely and accurate early warning, in Somalia from 2010 to April 2012, some 258,000 people died as a result of famine.

OCHA is committed to providing systematic support to strengthen risk mitigation, preparedness and recovery capacities that will leave communities more resilient to crises and less dependent on humanitarian aid to survive. The discussions this week will be underpinned by this approach.

The humanitarian community must wise up to these multiple challenges, by working together and working differently with governments, local communities, civil society, private sector, researchers, development actors and donors, as well as the thousands of dedicated volunteers around the world assisting in crises and disasters every day. We need to do so with a more unified sense of purpose to reduce needs, build resilience and to put the most vulnerable at the heart of our efforts. We must recommit to working together across political, cultural, religious and institutional divides and holding ourselves accountable to the people we serve.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships are vital in this regard to achieving our goals and OCHA is working closely with other international organizations, governments, civil society and the private sector on a number of initiatives directed at building resilience at the local level. For example, just recently during the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, announced the "Connecting Business Initiative," in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, to more closely engage the private sector in disaster risk reduction, emergency preparedness, response and recovery. These kinds of initiatives – scaled up globally – will be instrumental to improving our performance.

We must also do a better job of supporting and enabling nationally-led humanitarian assistance, including by local and national NGOs, affected communities, local and national authorities. We must also include as our partners national militaries, diaspora communities and beyond. These groups are often the best-positioned, are highly motivated and in some cases are uniquely mandated, to respond to a crisis.

As the humanitarian challenges we face grow ever-more complex, and the funding gap widens, we will need to broaden and deepen our resource base. The recently released report of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing gives a powerful and frank assessment of the funding challenges we face, presenting a timely case for change. The report calls for a number of improvements to broaden humanitarian resources by establishing transaction taxes, broadening partnerships with the private sector, cutting the transaction fees on remittances, and exploring Islamic social finance mechanisms, among many other recommendations.

The report also stresses the need for donors to embrace flexible financing and support multi-year planning. And it endorses wider calls for humanitarians and development actors to adopt new assistance models that go beyond meeting short-term needs, to reducing and preventing them, emphasizing the role of global political leadership in doing so.

This goal of moving people out of crisis is central to OCHA's recently launched report on humanitarian effectiveness, entitled *Leaving No One Behind: Humanitarian Effectiveness in the Age of the Sustainable Development Goals*. This study sets out five overarching shifts in attitude and practice that aim to improve the transparency and accountability of humanitarian assistance. The changes demand a more outcome-driven approach that increases connectivity among national and international actors and among humanitarian, development and peace actors to reinforce the responsibilities and amplify the capacities of each.

How to measure humanitarian aid effectiveness has long been debated, scrutinized and studied. Changes to our operational dictates, such as the IASC Transformative Agenda, have resulted in a better-aligned system that meets humanitarian priorities in the immediate term. However, there remains a wide gap in understanding the effectiveness of operations from the perspective of the affected people in addressing their needs and meeting their aspiration for safety and dignity. We very much look forward to an in-depth discussion on this fundamental challenge when we launch this report on effectiveness and also our annual report on 2015 World Humanitarian Data and Trends tomorrow and all of you are invited to this session.

Colleagues and Friends, we are at a critical juncture. Looking back upon the last year, in March 2015 the Member States of the United Nations adopted the Sendai framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Then, in September, world leaders adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and committed to leave no one behind. These goals are our common framework to support resilience of the world's most vulnerable people. In December, leaders convened in Paris to agree on the climate change agreement and by doing so, demonstrated the power of leadership to make progress on one of the most challenging issues of our time.

But these goals and agreements will mean little unless they bring about real changes in the lives of the most vulnerable people and communities around the world. That is why the Secretary-General will be convening the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May to bring these agreements and pledges to bear upon the humanitarian imperative. Building on the synthesis report that resulted in nearly two years of regional and thematic consultations in preparations for the Summit, as well as the many other global processes that have characterized his nine years in office, the Secretary-General's report to be submitted to the Summit will set the tone and the aspirations for the Summit and beyond, inviting all of us to be a part of the change endeavor to make humanitarian action fit for the challenges of today and tomorrow.

In conclusion, may I wish you fruitful discussions as you deliberate how your network and partnership should be positioned in the evolving global context and how you may be a part of the shaping of the future of humanitarian action.

Thank you for your kind attention.