<u>**OPENING REMARKS TO THE 3RD VIENNA HUMANITARIAN CONGRESS**</u>
<u>**"HUMANITARIAN AID UNDER FIRE"**</u>

<u>**ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND**</u>
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Vienna, Austria, 6 March 2015

As delivered

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am truly honoured and delighted to join you for the 3rd Vienna Humanitarian Congress under the theme "Humanitarian Aid Under Fire". I am deeply grateful to the Austrian Red Cross and the NGOs for organising this annual event which I believe is instrumental in enhancing Austria's profile in the humanitarian sector.

I am also very happy to see some key actors from the ground, in particular Bishop Nzapalainga and also the Imam Oumar Kobine Layama from the Central African Republic. I had the honour speaking with the two religious leaders in the Central African Republic which we all know is still in a very protracted conflict-related crisis, and the two religious leaders are doing their utmost to bring back social cohesion to overcome the divisiveness and the sectarian divide that is fuelling this conflict.

Wearing my previous hat in human rights, I had the pleasure of visiting this beautiful city many times to bask in the deep commitment of the leaders and civil society to universal human rights, and as we all know that commitment in 1992 provided fertile grounds for the creation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which is where I served six years plus as the Deputy. The personal transition from human rights to humanitarian work has been immensely inspiring and humbling, invigorating and frustrating at the same time. And I am just very privileged to have been a part of both communities at the global level, particularly at a time when the two are increasingly putting minds and hearts together, as exemplified in the Secretary-General's Rights Up Front initiative for the greater protection and dignity of the people that we are meant to serve.

I am delighted now to return to this city of great beauty and history wearing my current hat in humanitarian affairs and standing here before many delegates and speakers whose professional dedication to the humanitarian enterprise long predates mine. I can only hope that my two years in the office that is tasked to coordinate the multilateral response

to the humanitarian crises of our times have given me some insights and observations that would be worth sharing with all of you today.

The organizers of this conference have chosen a theme that aptly captures the soul-searching among humanitarians these days, "humanitarian aid under fire." Indeed, a climate of existential crisis currently seems to permeate the humanitarian community. Perhaps by nature, the humanitarian work of trying to assist and protect the most vulnerable and downtrodden of our fellow human beings is inherently sobering and could be even apocalyptic. But even so, the sense of being at a critical moment with an uncertain future seems particularly intense these days. There are, I believe, a number of trends that have added up to this collective sense of being under fire and unable to reach victims as much as we want to - and should.

First of all, humanitarian aid is literally "under fire". Humanitarians are no longer safe in undertaking the selfless deed of helping others in need. In the conflict-related protracted emergencies where humanitarians struggle to deliver assistance to the suffering people, aid workers are routinely harassed, attacked, kidnapped, and killed. In 2013 alone, 155 aid workers were killed in the major crises around the world. The UN blue flag no longer provides a shield of protection against terrorists or armed actors, and even the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems cannot ensure sanctuary for the wounded and the sick. Medical facilities and workers have become routine targets for bombing and shelling and violent attacks, for example in Syria, Sudan, and South Sudan.

The growing insecurity of humanitarian work is not a distinct phenomenon, but forms part of a broader trend of rising levels of brutality and casual disregard for human life and dignity that have come to characterize today's armed conflicts. When 1.5 billion people live in conflict-affected and fragile states, when over 75 per cent of these crises that require international humanitarian response are armed conflicts or complex emergencies, we will, unfortunately, have to face more stories in the media about aid workers killed in the line of duty, of atrocities committed against innocent civilians.

This brings me to my second point. Time-honoured humanitarian principles and norms are facing an onslaught of blatant violations, with only the vaguest hope of bringing the perpetrators to account. The principles of distinction between civilians and combatants and the proportionality of means to ends in military operations, as enshrined in international humanitarian law; as well as the inherent dignity and rights of all people, in peacetime as well as in war, as enshrined in international human rights law, have been swept aside in the greatest humanitarian catastrophe of our times, which is taking place inside Syria.

But the protection of civilians is also under threat in many other conflict-related crises, in Sudan, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine, to name just a few. Indeed, it is ironic that after 15 years of Security Council engagement on the issue of protection of civilians, with numerous landmark resolutions and strengthened mandates in many peacekeeping missions, the actual task of protecting civilians in armed conflict on the ground has become more and more onerous,

as the scale and level of brutality and violence committed by armed actors against civilians have continued to rise.

International law is clear: parties to conflict are responsible for protecting and meeting the basic needs of people under their control. Consent for relief operations must never be withheld on arbitrary grounds. And if parties are unable or unwilling to provide adequate assistance, they should allow and facilitate rapid, safe and unimpeded access to people in need, including the immediate free passage of medical supplies. Yet many parties demonstrate complete disregard for their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law. In some case, parties to conflict deliberately withhold basic necessities for military gain, manipulate humanitarian access for political reasons, and target civilians and use tactics designed to cause them the greatest harm, for example through the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, with devastating consequences.

Impunity is at the heart of the problem; the lack of accountability for even the most egregious violations that would amount to war crime or crimes against humanity. Indeed, there is nothing more empowering to perpetrators than knowing that they will not be held accountable for their crimes. The root causes of the rise of ISIL in Syria and Iraq with such utter disdain for the minimum requirements of humanity can be debated in many ways. But the complete impunity that has characterized the four-year war in Syria is the milieu in which terrorist groups thrive, wreaking havoc on the lives of civilians. And as the Chair of the Syria Commission of Inquiry has said, terrorism is not the cause but the result of the war in Syria that has raged on with impunity. So defeating ISIL and other violent extremist groups will require not only robust security operations but that should not overshadow the need also for a concerted fight against impunity, to hold all perpetrators accountable including government and other parties in the conflict - and that requires enlightened bold political leadership.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian imperative compels aid workers to stay and deliver, and to deal with all parties to a conflict, including armed groups, even if they are designated terrorists. We must improve our security management and risk mitigation measures so that we can work in areas under the control of terrorists and other armed actors that have little regard for humanitarian principles and norms. But humanitarians are also up against the strident and sweeping security narrative of counter-terrorism initiatives of governments, including many of the most generous donors to global humanitarian appeals. States clearly have a vital responsibility to provide safety and security to their people. But security measures and counter-terrorism operations should not come at the expense of human rights and international humanitarian law including to protect civilians and those *hors de combat*, and fully preserve humanitarian access people in need.

Third, the stress is also coming from the funding side. Humanitarian actors are being asked to do more, for more people, than ever before. The demand for humanitarian assistance has risen to unprecedented levels, with the number of people in need tripling since 2004 to over 100 million, and humanitarian funding requirements increasing by more than six-fold during the same period, reaching a record US$17.9 billion dollars at the end of 2014. This is due to the rising cost of response, the effect of conflicts being

more protracted, especially in displacements, and deepening environmental vulnerability due to the impact of climate change, which is already being felt in some parts of the world. At the same time, the generous funding – $9 billion in 2014, provided by international donors - is not keeping pace with growing needs. Forecasts predict that inequality, vulnerability, marginalisation and need will continue to grow significantly over the next 25 years, setting us on a trajectory that is clearly unsustainable.

The recent surge in needs is largely accounted for by the conflict in Syria which is now going into its fifth year. At the start of the war, we were talking about 1 million people in need. After four years of unrelenting violence and well over 200,000 deaths, 12.2 million people inside the country are now in need, 6.8 million are displaced, and an additional 3.8 million have crossed the border into neighbouring countries as refugees.

As with all armed conflicts triggered by decisions or by the indecisiveness of leaders, it didn't have to happen this way. With enlightened political leadership, the crisis could have been prevented or resolved at a much earlier stage. The failure has meant human suffering and devastation on a colossal scale, as well as a huge toll on global finances. The Syrian appeal has gone from $348 million at the first launch in 2012 to $2.2 billion at the beginning of 2014 and to $2.9 billion for 2015. There are other protracted and complex emergencies that require over 1 billion dollars this year: Iraq at $2.2 billion, South Sudan at $1.2 billion. The 2015 humanitarian appeals for 22 countries spanning 12 major crises total over $15 billion dollars, and this is not including the on-going response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa.

It's not that traditional donors are giving less. In fact, they have given more and more every year. But the growth in needs has simply outpaced their ability to foot the bill. It is clear that the established means of financing humanitarian appeals has reached an impasse. Something bold and innovative has to be done if the multilateral humanitarian system is to avoid chronic underfunding while also finding ways to be more efficient and effective.

It is against this backdrop that the Secretary-General has decided to ask a high-level panel to produce recommendations on how more funding can be mobilized more predictably, and over a longer term, from traditional and innovative funding mechanisms to address the growing gap, and also to address how the humanitarian system can use available resources in a more cost-effective way, including through more robust risk management and preparedness.

The high-level panel on financing will take up its task in the context of a much broader process that the Secretary-General has already launched. In May 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey, he will convene a World Humanitarian Summit to spell out the future vision for humanitarianism. Leading up to this unprecedented gathering of all stakeholders - governments, civil society, humanitarian organizations, private sector, and the affected people – a series of regional consultations is being held to generate inclusive dialogue in different parts of the world, to reach out way beyond the familiar horizon to new actors and partners. There have been five regional consultations so far, the latest in Amman,

Jordan earlier this week for the Middle East region. Three more are planned followed by global consultations in Geneva in November this year, to take stock of all the ideas generated and provide input into the Secretary-General's report that will be submitted to the May 2016 summit. There are other key regional and global events that will feed into the summit process and outcome, most importantly the 32nd international conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in December, and there are online consultations open to everyone with an interest in humanitarian work.

The initial expectation was that the World Humanitarian Summit would be a dialogue among past, present and future humanitarians, among those within the system as we know it and as well as those outside, who are also engaged in humanitarian action. But through the regional consultations in the run-up to the summit, informed by the growing challenges humanitarians face on the ground, which I have briefly described today, it has become clear that the dialogue must also be about an appeal to the larger international community that seems to have lost sight of the very notion of our shared humanity.

Indeed, it is a sad indictment of our world that the number of people needing life-saving assistance and protection from violence continues to grow every year.

Humanitarian aid is under fire because this world needs more of it and can't provide it. In other words, humanity is under fire.

The tide must be turned. We must not lose sight of our goal: to bend the curve so that global humanitarian needs do not go unanswered and in the longer run are reduced.

This is a task not just for humanitarians but for all: for development actors to invest more in reducing risks and protecting gains; and maybe most of all, for political leaders at national, regional and international levels to muster the courage and wisdom to end conflicts and prevent new ones from breaking out.

And all of this must be underpinned by a commitment to resuscitate the notion of our shared humanity which has been left to wither for far too long. And this I believe should be the appeal that we must make at the World Humanitarian Summit and I do hope that all of us will be a part of it.

Thank you.