

Opening speech by Mr. Willem Muhren

Officer in Charge, Regional UNOCHA Office for Caucasus and Central Asia

Esteemed colleagues, faculty members and future world leaders,

Thank you for this opportunity to address such an important gathering of tomorrow's opinion-makers, pioneers and innovators. As a representative of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, I am particularly happy to be here where so many young minds are going to tackle the world's most pressing issues.

Today, as probably never before, we need young people to drive action and change.

Population growth is on the rise, more and more people choose to live in cities, and cities are exposed to risks of disasters more than ever. Humanitarian crises and conflicts affect lives of millions of people. Entire generations across regions are growing up in refugee camps with hardly any opportunities to break out of the cycle of poverty and reliance on humanitarian aid.

We need new approaches, fresh perspectives, and transformational ideas on how best to overcome these and many other challenges.

That is why the United Nations Secretary General is convening the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul next year. And I am pleased to inform you that the voices of this region – and I mean both Central and South Asian regions – will feed into this global summit.

Over the next three months, we are going to consult as many people and organizations as possible on what needs to be done to ease the human suffering from natural forces and man-made crises.

So I have the honour to invite you to take your voices even further and become part of this process through online consultations. I am aware that I am speaking to a tech-savvy, well-connected group of people so I do not need to provide information on how to find the web platform for these consultations. But let me just reiterate one more time that we want to and need to hear and take into account what you – young people – have to say about the world you will live in. You can influence how we can better prepare for and respond to horrific disasters such as the Nepal earthquake.

Thank you once again for this opportunity and I hope that over the next three days you have productive sessions, inspiring discussions and constructive dialogues that, in the end, will result in solutions to the bleak picture I painted in the beginning of my address.

Thank you.