

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and
Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock**

**Opening remarks at the Humanitarian Conference on the
Democratic Republic of the Congo**

Geneva, 13 April 2018

As delivered

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for coming. We are talking about problems and challenges today and for that reason, the first point I want to make is a positive point. Progress in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is possible. Over the last 15 years, under the leadership of the Government, infrastructure in many major cities has improved, access to education has increased, child mortality rates have fallen and immunization rates have increased.

Yet, at the same time, humanitarian needs are growing. The current crisis has its roots in ethnic conflict, politics and economics. Ethnic violence has worsened in the east. Parts of the country, previously untouched by armed conflict and disaster, have experienced high levels of violence during the past year. A political transition is creating tensions. And the DRC has been the victim of an external shock, with a vertiginous drop in the price of raw materials affecting the currency and fueling spiraling inflation and pressures on public expenditure, all of which are inflicting hardship on people all over the country.

The total number of people requiring humanitarian assistance in 2018 has doubled from last year to some 13 million. Some 7.7 million people are food insecure. More than 4.6 million children are acutely malnourished, including 2.2 million suffering severe acute malnutrition. The country is also facing epidemics, including the worst outbreak of cholera in fifteen years. Unfortunately, there is also an epidemic of sexual violence, most of it unreported and unaddressed, and much of it against children.

Looking ahead, we know there will be additional challenges. In the Kasais, thousands of farmers have missed three successive agricultural seasons, resulting in a drop in agricultural production. As I speak, the resurgence of an inter-ethnic conflict in Ituri in February is killing many people and leading to internal and cross-border displacement of even more.

In this context, our solidarity with the Congolese people remains vital. So, thank you all for coming to this High-Level Pledging Event, bringing together key donors and stakeholders in supporting the humanitarian response.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Underfunding is the single largest impediment – as the Secretary-General said – to the humanitarian response in the DRC. As you know, we seek almost US\$1.7 billion to assist 10.5 million people who need humanitarian assistance inside the DRC. This is nearly four times more than we secured last year.

We are also seeking some \$504 million to support 807,000 Congolese refugees in neighbouring countries. And to support the more than 540,000 refugees from other countries who are now in the DRC. Filippo [Grandi] will speak to that in a few minutes.

Put together, the Humanitarian Response Plan and the Regional Refugee Response Plan require \$2.2 billion dollars in 2018. That is a lot of money. But it amounts to less than 50 cents a day for each of the people whose lives we are trying to save and protect.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is providing the leadership on this crisis. The United Nations is supporting the Government in playing that key and prominent role vis-à-vis its own people.

The Government and the humanitarian community have strong relationships which focus on solutions. This has been exemplified by the joint launch of the Humanitarian Response Plan in Kinshasa on 18 January, which was led by the Prime Minister and the United Nations.

I would also like to highlight the setting up of the provincial-level *Cadre Provinciale de Concertation Humanitaire* in South Kivu, North Kivu and Tanganyika as well as the re-activation of the *Cadre Nationale de Concertation Humanitaire*, allowing for humanitarian partners to engage in constructive discussions and coordination of humanitarian action with provincial and national authorities.

In addition, when Sigrid Kaag and I were in Tanganyika last month, we witnessed the signing by the Governor and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator of an agreement to facilitate humanitarian access and coordination. We hope this will be replicated in other provinces.

I am also pleased to note that the Government has committed \$100 million over the next 18 to 24 months from its own resources to facilitate the reintegration of Congolese refugees, returnees and internally displaced people.

We will continue to work in close partnership with the Government. We are discussing with them a follow-up event to today's pledging conference, which will happen at a time and a place convenient to the Government.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year, the United Nations and its partners provided life-saving aid and protection to more than 4.2 million people in the DRC.

More than 1.6 million people have obtained food assistance, many through cash. We provided access to basic healthcare to more than 3.4 million women, men and children. Seven million people have received vaccination against measles and 1.7 million more people have access to clean water and basic sanitation.

Given the deteriorating situation, the humanitarian community in the DRC has scaled up significantly and is providing an ever more effective response.

Since October last year, we have deployed strong humanitarian leaders with Kim Bolduc as the UN Humanitarian Coordinator and Julien Harneis as her deputy. Today, more than 150 organizations work together to achieve the objectives in the Humanitarian Response Plan. Hundreds of UN and NGO staff have been deployed to Kasai, Tanganyika and the Kivus. We established four additional field hubs. And cluster coordination has been strengthened.

This has been achieved thanks to the good collaboration between humanitarian partners, the Government and local authorities. We must also thank MONUSCO for creating space for humanitarian delivery and protecting civilians.

But most importantly, our work is possible because many of you contributed and continue to contribute generous resources to save and protect lives in the DRC.

I want to recognize particularly the core, un-earmarked contributions made to humanitarian organizations working in DRC and the region. These resources, including to the humanitarian pooled funds, support the most effective and efficient response to humanitarian needs.

In 2018 already, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has already provided \$47.5 million to the DRC. That is in addition to almost \$27 million CERF provided in October 2017 which allowed humanitarian partners to reach 1.7 million people across the country. Additional funding was provided to support 100,000 Congolese refugees in neighbouring countries.

The DRC Humanitarian Fund has been equally critical to our collective ability to respond with more than \$50 million released, including \$22 million to local front-line responders.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me pay tribute to the courageous aid workers in the DRC. These women and men are performing their duties in what is a very challenging operating environment. Between November 2017 and January this year, 193 security incidents with an impact on humanitarian access have been reported in 148 different places. That has had the effect of limiting access to aid for 810,000 people in need.

The selfless contribution of aid workers to alleviating human suffering in the DRC is an inspiration to us all.

I am sad to say that OCHA lost one of its dedicated long serving national staff last Saturday, Mr. Vicky Prekabo. Vicky has been part of the OCHA family since July 2001 working in Bunia.

I want to highlight the dedication of national staff, like Vicky. They serve as bridge building connections to the community, they know the local culture and coping mechanisms, and they can best articulate the principles that underpin international humanitarian action.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the first ever high-level, intergovernmental humanitarian conference for the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

It is an honour to have Sigrid Kaag, the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, and Christos Stylianides, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management here to co-host this conference with the United Nations.

Both recently travelled to the DRC to meet with Government officials and to talk to people impacted by the humanitarian crisis. I am also delighted that we have two more contributors to our discussion, Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – himself just back from the DRC – and Boniface Nakwagelewi Ata-Deagbo, Executive Secretary of CARITAS who of course is based in the DRC.

The people of the DRC are resilient and resourceful. I am very impressed by the selfless solidarity of many Congolese families. As I said at the beginning, they have opened their homes to over half a million of refugees from neighboring countries, as well as many internally displaced people.

I call on you to match that solidarity today. Your generosity will allow the UN and humanitarian agencies, working alongside the Government and Congolese institutions, to save more lives and protect more women and girls, boys and men.

Thank you.
