

Under-Secretary-General and  
Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos

Opening remarks and brief on the Secretary-General's report to the ECOSOC Humanitarian  
Affairs Segment 2014

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Mr. Vice-President, thank you for your opening remarks and for your facilitation of this year's Humanitarian Affairs Segment of ECOSOC.

It's a pleasure to open this year's Humanitarian Segment. As you mentioned, we have an interesting few days planned.

The panels will be webcast live and featured on OCHA's Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the Vice President mentioned needs and costs are rising far beyond the current capacity of the global humanitarian system to cope.

Between 2004 and 2013, humanitarian funding requests have doubled from \$6 billion to over \$10 billion. The number of people in need during the same period has gone from 30 million to 70 million. And this year in 2014 we are seeking a record \$16.9 billion to help more than fifty million people around the world.

Behind these figures are millions of people whose daily lives are torn apart by conflict and natural disasters, caught in a cycle of vulnerability and need. People like those you saw in the video.

By the end of 2013 the global number of IDPs resulting from armed conflict and violence had increased to a record 33.2 million people. The number of people fleeing their homes across borders increased to 16.7 million, a figure that is likely to increase.

Natural disasters claimed an estimated 23,000 lives last year, affecting nearly 100 million people and causing over \$118 billion in damage.

Behind the humanitarian numbers, there are specific emergencies that continue to test our humanitarian capacity.

The humanitarian situation in Syria deteriorated throughout 2013, with appalling consequences. By the end of the year, 9.3 million people in Syria needed humanitarian aid, including 6.5 million displaced people. Another 2.3 million people had fled to neighboring countries. These figures are higher this year.

In Yemen, sectarian and inter-tribal fighting continued to create displacement and limit returns. The humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the Gaza Strip, continued to deteriorate.

And several conflicts in Africa continued to intensify during 2013. The security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic, Sudan and South Sudan left millions of women, children and men in urgent need of aid and protection. Millions more were displaced throughout the region, including in the Democratic Republic of Congo. And in Somalia, where the number of people in need of life-saving assistance decreased for the first time in five years, 2 million people are still on the verge of food insecurity.

In the Sahel region, people remained food insecure and were affected by floods. Southern Africa experienced several major disasters including floods, drought, cyclones and locust and army worm infestations, leading to food insecurity that affected some 15 million people.

In the Asia-Pacific region, inter-communal tensions and violence spread in Myanmar from Rakhine state to other areas of the country. Fighting between armed groups and violent clan feuds in Mindanao, Philippines, killed several hundred people and displaced hundreds of thousands more. Afghanistan is the source of the largest number of refugees in the world, with more people newly displaced by conflict in 2013.

Asia continued to be the region suffering the greatest impact of natural disasters. More than 6,000 people were killed by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, with 1,700 missing and over 14 million people affected.

And three years after the devastating earthquake in Haiti, the country continues to recover with an estimated 3 million Haitians still in need of humanitarian aid.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Throughout 2013, the international humanitarian community continued to make efforts to meet the needs of people in crisis around the world.

In Syria, humanitarian agencies are reaching some four million people every month with food aid, up from 1.5 million in January 2013 last year, and are supporting the provision of clean water to more than ten million people. In the Central African Republic, there has been a significant scaling up of the humanitarian response. And in the Philippines, humanitarian agencies deployed nearly 1,700 staff to five field locations in support of the Government's aid operations after Typhoon Haiyan.

The United Nations and its partners continued to implement reforms aimed at improving the humanitarian programme cycle through better needs assessments, analysis and strategic planning. Understanding the needs of different groups is crucial to humanitarian response, particularly in the area of protection.

The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors.

We are finding new ways to harness information and technology to improve communications between communities and aid workers, as I saw for myself in the Philippines.

If we turn to funding, we find Member States gave generously in 2013. Ninety-five countries and numerous multi-lateral and regional organizations, private sector organizations and individuals, contributed a total of \$14.4 billion in funding to multi-lateral inter-agency response plans and complementary humanitarian action.

Member States and the private sector also contributed \$474 million to the Central Emergency Response Fund - the highest-ever annual total. Country-based pooled funds received a total of \$419 million. My thanks to all those involved for your generosity and commitment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we enter the second half of 2014, we see a continued rise in the arena throughout the world. The Syria crisis is deteriorating at an alarming rate. The expansion of the crisis into Iraq will further increase needs and complicate delivery. In the Central African Republic, over half the population – 2.5 million women, children and men – urgently need protection and assistance. In South Sudan, some 1.5 million people have been uprooted by violence in the past six months, and the shadow of famine looms over the country.

Crises will continue to proliferate and deepen because of factors beyond our control including population growth, urbanisation, poverty, water scarcity, the impact of climate change, and the chronic vulnerability they bring.

Ladies and Gentleman,

It is becoming clearer that the way we have been doing business is not sustainable.

The international humanitarian system is at a crossroads. The way we work has to change. We need to react first and prevent disasters. And we need to do more to address the underlying drivers of conflict and to protect people in the midst of them.

The post-2015 development agenda, the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, the climate change framework, and the World Humanitarian Summit all provide a chance to address some of the institutional barriers and think through challenges and come up with new ways of working.

This Humanitarian Segment also provides us with opportunities to grapple with these humanitarian questions.

The panel on Effective Humanitarian Assistance will help us to consider why we need to think differently about meeting the needs of people in crisis.

The High-level panel on Serving the Needs of People in Complex Emergencies will focus on how we can assist and protect people affected by conflict,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The discussions during these high level panels and side-events will begin to shape the global humanitarian agenda. The outcomes will feed into the consultation process in the run-up to the World Humanitarian Summit. Your views and active participation are essential.

I look forward to an interesting few days and wish you all a good ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment.