

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and
Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien**
**Remarks to the press at the launch of the World Economic Forum's Principles on
Public-Private Cooperation in Humanitarian Payments**

Davos, Switzerland, 19 January 2017

As delivered

With my fellow panelists, we are delighted to be here and to be with you in putting forward the very important Principles on Public-Private Cooperation in Humanitarian Payments as a result of work with the World Economic Forum. We are very glad to have this chance to mark the launch of the Principles.

Meeting growing humanitarian need around the world, and reaching those worst affected by conflict and natural disasters with rapid, effective assistance to save lives and safeguard dignity, is one of the greatest and most all-consuming challenges we face. So large that no one of us can do it alone; we have to harness all the partnerships and collaboration possible.

Rising to this challenge means harnessing all that collective expertise, using all available technologies and approaches, and building on lessons learned from across different fields and industries. Together we must be relentlessly innovative, building on what works and demanding the highest level of response for those most impacted by crisis. For humanitarians, this means reaching out to private sector actors to build strategic partnerships and learning from their great wealth of experience.

I would like to thank the World Economic Forum for their leadership in drafting these Principles on Public-Private Cooperation in Humanitarian Payments. They will enable us to harness the best private sector expertise and the latest technological advances to better serve affected people. They build on existing initiatives to put in place a strong framework for collective action on cash-based assistance.

The specialized agencies, notably the World Food Programme, led by Ertharin Cousin, and UNICEF and UNHCR in particular have led the way in our overall coordinated approach.

Over the past year, through the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain, humanitarian actors committed to deliver more humanitarian assistance in the form of cash and systematically considering cash-based assistance alongside more traditional response modalities and adapting our systems to enable the use of cash wherever appropriate.

The UN Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity recommended that: "Where markets and operational contexts permit, cash-based programming should be the preferred and default method of support."

There is overwhelming evidence for the effectiveness of cash-based assistance when used in the right contexts. In Ethiopia, cash-based assistance was found in one study to be up to 30 per cent more efficient than traditional food aid. In Lebanon, an IRC study found that 80 per cent of affected people preferred cash-based assistance. In Somalia, two and a half times more aid reached beneficiaries through cash versus food.

As cash transfers become an increasingly significant component of humanitarian response, we need to work with those who are experienced in delivering funds rapidly in challenging contexts in a way which empowers and protects the recipient.

Digital payments have the potential to deliver a wide range of benefits including speeding and scaling up implementation, increasing transparency, improving programme cost effectiveness and reducing the potential for fraud and security incidents. They can also link programme participants to a range of financial services as well as to longer-term national-led social safety net systems.

Humanitarian need has never been greater, and as needs grow rapidly, the resources we have to address them cannot keep up. In 2017, the humanitarian system seeks \$22.2 billion to reach more than 93 million people with life-saving assistance. Last year, we received just over half of the resources needed to meet these basic survival needs. It is clear that continuing with business as usual will not work, and that innovation and alternative options are critically required.

Making progress on this front demands that the humanitarian and private sectors speak a common language. These Principles seek to create that common language by laying out a shared set of guidelines – jointly elaborated by humanitarian and private sector actors – to facilitate strategic dialogue, partnership opportunities and joint ways of working. They also make clear that private sector actors are not just service providers, rather they can offer technical expertise, knowledge and experience to help us figure out where people in need are, how best to reach them and how to address their most pressing needs.

Coordination and dialogue between humanitarian actors and private sector payments providers must be more systematic, must begin earlier and result in real improvements for those affected by crisis. The humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and the needs of affected people wherever they are, whoever they are, however their need arose, and whatever their survival and protection needs, they should all guide every single one of our joint endeavors.

These Principles on Public-Private Cooperation will help guide both humanitarian and private sector actors as we scale up principled, effective and innovative partnerships for humanitarian payments. I now call upon the humanitarian community and the private sector to put these principles into action when implementing digital payments programmes so that together our efforts can have the greatest impact on those most in need.
