



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

As delivered

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**Remarks to the Global Forum on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination
in preparation for the World Humanitarian Summit
Singapore, 13 March 2015**

It is a great pleasure for me to join you today at the opening of this Global Forum on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination on behalf of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. I am grateful to the Government and people of Singapore, in particular His Excellency Dr. Ng Eng Hen, Minister of Defence, for co-hosting this important gathering with us, and for your ongoing support for the World Humanitarian Summit, which will be convened by the UN Secretary-General in May 2016 in Istanbul to set the agenda for the future of humanitarian action.

I know we gather at a time of deep mourning for the country at the loss of a great leader, Lee Kuan Yew. Let me express on behalf of the United Nations deep sympathy and condolences.

This meeting is part of a series of regional and thematic consultations that have been taking place in different places around the globe since mid-2014 in the build-up to the Summit next year. It is also a unique part of this ambitious process of inclusive consultations, as it is the only one specifically focused on the topic of coordination between civil and military actors in humanitarian action. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was tasked by the Secretary-General to conduct the summit process. We established a small secretariat to do so, preparing, conducting and follow-up on the various consultations, and now gearing up to synthesize the risk outcomes, which will serve as the basis for the Secretary-General's own report and recommendations that will be presented at the Summit.

Thus, this Global Forum on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination is a unique opportunity for all of us who have travelled from all over the world to be here in Singapore to make some vital contributions to the WHS. Over the next two and half days, we will discuss how to increase the effectiveness of civil-military coordination in natural disaster response operations and humanitarian assistance in complex emergencies. What comes out of our discussions has the potential to contribute to shaping the future of humanitarian action.

Indeed, there is a pressing need to search for ways to make humanitarian action more fit for purpose. There is a pervasive sense among humanitarian actors, old and new, that the tools developed over the past decades are not good enough to meet the present and future challenges.

The UN-led multilateral system, which lies at the centre of the global humanitarian sector, was established nearly 25 years ago, when the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 46/182 on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations. This initiative resulted from world events around that time, including the Gulf War, which demonstrated the need for closer and more systematic coordination among humanitarian organizations to better serve people in crises.

The system established by the landmark resolution is centered around the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) as the top UN official who coordinates international humanitarian action; the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which is the forum where coordination takes place; and a set of established core and guiding principles. Today, in 2015, the landscape of humanitarian action has changed radically with more actors involved in more emergencies occurring with greater intensity and outlasting the traditional solutions that short-term tools can deliver. While the fundamental principles enshrined in General Assembly Resolution 46/182 has continued to guide our work, we must consider how we can create a global, effective, and inclusive community of humanitarians and their partners that together respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

In this region, we continue to see people and communities – whether urban or rural – affected by disasters and conflict. We face seemingly irreversible and unstoppable trends such as rapid and unplanned urbanization, population growth, environmental degradation, climate change, scarcity of resources and conflict arising from combinations of some or all of these factors. By some measures, one quarter of the world's conflicts are taking place in the Asia-Pacific region.

No matter how good our disaster risk reduction efforts may be, we will not be able to prevent all disasters. Disasters will strike, and large-scale disasters will continue to put people and countries in crisis. The Asia-Pacific region is particularly vulnerable to these, which will sometimes exceed the capacity of national actors to respond, and international actors will be called on to play a part.

Together, we need to do more and better to help people who are caught up in these emergencies. We need to work towards a global humanitarian architecture that is more inclusive, effective and responsive, and one that can be linked successfully with other systems, including militaries, regional organizations, and others.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to say that we have made some progress on these issues over the past decade. The 2005 Humanitarian Reform and more recently the IASC Transformative Agenda developed new approaches and tools for humanitarian actors to work together, including the Cluster System and strengthened humanitarian leadership and decision-making on the ground.

But so far, there has never been a global dialogue, an inclusive and collective exercise to take stock of our achievements and shortcomings among various actors involved in

humanitarian work and to commit to a shared vision of reaffirming that shared commitment for the future of humanity and humanitarianism.

It will broaden and deepen our interaction and partnerships on humanitarian action with all our groups of stakeholders, in particular the people affected by crisis.

It will be an opportunity for us to consolidate the progress we are making. It will help us to make sure the international assistance is truly in line with national and regional priorities and capacities. And it should enable us to change and modernize our response mechanisms and procedures where necessary.

Perhaps most importantly, the World Humanitarian Summit will set a bold and forward-looking change agenda that is inclusive and that speaks to everyone engaged in humanitarian action and the larger international community. That includes the military, the police, and others that support humanitarian work according to the context. And at a time of an onslaught of violations and challenges to the fundamental principles and tenets of humanitarianism, it should also be a pivotal moment to revive the humanitarian spirit as the bulwark of our shared humanity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Dr. Ng has already mentioned, the combined capacities of military actors in regions that are prone to natural hazards, including Asia and the Pacific, play a vital role in humanitarian response.

Militaries have standing forces and unique capabilities and assets that can deploy rapidly in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. These are often used to support the initial response while national authorities and humanitarian agencies identify needs and establish longer-term and more structured operations. Civil-military coordination plays a key role in these situations.

In conflict settings, civil-military coordination is equally important and takes on a whole different set of issues. Dialogue and interaction with military actors are essential to de-conflict activities, and to create a safe and secure environment for humanitarian action. This is why civil-military coordination is such an important part of our discussions in the run-up to the World Humanitarian Summit.

Over the next two days, we will discuss two of the four World Humanitarian Summit themes in which civil-military coordination has a key role to play: Humanitarian Effectiveness and Serving the Needs of People in Conflict.

We must take advantage of the opportunity provided by the World Humanitarian Summit to better enable civilians and militaries to engage in constructive and forward looking dialogue.

Please be bold and provocative and go beyond general observations and into a real debate about what can and should be done in the field of humanitarian civil-military coordination, thinking creatively about how we can make it happen.

Your creative ideas and recommendations will help this Global Forum to advance the discussions and contribute to real change on the ground.

I wish you all productive discussions and I look forward to hearing your conclusions.

Thank you.