

**VICE PRESIDENT OF ECOSOC AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
KINGDOM OF MOROCCO, H.E. MR. OMAR HILALE**

**PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT
on the occasion of the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment
11 June 2020**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have reached the conclusion of the formal part of the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment for 2020 under the theme of “Reinforcing humanitarian assistance in the context of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations: taking action for people-centered solutions, strengthening effectiveness, respecting international humanitarian law and promoting the humanitarian principles”.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your valuable contributions to the deliberations during the high-level panels and events of the HAS. We also had excellent side events convened by humanitarian partners the last few days - and still several side events are ahead of us tomorrow -- which amplify many of the themes and issues discussed in the HAS.

Despite the challenges this year due to COVID-19, we found innovative ways to convene the HAS and to bring in more voices and partners to our deliberations. This underlines not only the important role of the HAS, but also our collective resolve to work together to overcome obstacles in the spirit of doing more to improve the lives of those already affected by humanitarian crises, to reduce the potentially catastrophic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to act to prevent and mitigate more suffering in the future. This is the spirit that has animated my Chairing of the HAS.

As we face the unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and how it compounds existing humanitarian needs, we heard about the unprecedented response needed. We heard how the humanitarian community is urgently stepping up its work to fight this pandemic; and what more needs to be done. Ultimately, no-one can be safe from COVID-19 until we are all safe from COVID. The Call to Action in support of humanitarian response in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic addresses our determination and the urgency to act now.

As we prepare to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations - it is our opportunity and obligation to ensure the United Nations does what it was created to do. To forge multilateral solutions to problems people and communities face. The role of the United Nations, UN agencies and their humanitarian partners - local, regional and international humanitarian organizations and partners - is essential.

I would like to present some key recommendations that emerged throughout the discussions these last few days:

Investing in community engagement is essential and will lead to a more effective humanitarian response. These are the lessons from the fight against Ebola, both in West Africa several years ago and more recently in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The response should be as local as possible, as international as necessary -COVID-19 presents both an opportunity and a clear case study as to why we need to scale up our investment in domestic public health and emergency response systems - including civil society actors at the local and community level, especially women leaders and women responders. This is an opportunity to solidify those partnerships and to actively recognize and invest in local leadership, capacity and delivery.

Anticipation and preparation reduce suffering and costs. The COVID-pandemic serves to underline how anticipatory and early action can save lives. Vigorous control measures, imposed very early, have proven effective in a number of countries. There is a short window of opportunity now to mitigate and prepare for a major outbreak of COVID-19 in those countries with few recorded cases. One critical anticipatory step the entire international community can take right now is to commit to what the UN and the IFRC have described as a “people’s vaccine” to COVID to ensure that no-one is left behind from the vaccine. A “business as usual” approach will not be effective, nor should it be acceptable.

Investing in Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) is increasingly relevant. MHPSS is not only a contributing factor to strengthened response and recovery; it will also be a motor for improved preparedness for new emergencies, including health emergencies.

Humanitarian responses must always be grounded in humanitarian principles and respect for international humanitarian law. Before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, full and effective implementation of international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, is essential. We must enable humanitarian access and remove impediments so that the most vulnerable people receive the assistance and protection they need.

We must prioritize women’s experiences, protection, capacities, and leadership and we must put our funding behind them. We must support local organizations, led by women and focused on women, to take the lead. Sexual and gender-based violence is a scourge. We must ramp up efforts in humanitarian crises to prevent and address sexual violence, early and forced marriage, trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse, and other forms of gender-based violence, especially when family and community protection mechanisms have broken down. COVID-19 is compounding heightens pre-existing inequalities and risks of gender-based violence against women and girls. We will not make progress unless we continue to drive forward to respect women’s rights and achieve gender equality.

The humanitarian system must better harness the transformative potential of new technology and innovation to improve the overall effectiveness of the humanitarian system. At the same time, humanitarians must guard against the risks of the misuse of new technology and data. Technologies must be deployed based on thorough assessment of their impact and with adequately established safeguards.

Inclusiveness is key across the board in humanitarian action, be it in designing humanitarian response or in bringing innovation to scale.

Humanitarians must work coherently to address the complexity of the needs of IDPs. We heard from UN agencies that they are stepping up their action and working together to better support countries and communities in addressing internal displacement. We heard how humanitarian, development and peace actors are increasingly collaborating to overcome protracted humanitarian dependencies so many find themselves in and create the paths to self-sufficiency. We also heard how protection and respect of rights is fundamentally part of the solution.

Innovative tools and techniques are improving humanitarian action. We heard how innovative approaches are pursued on the ground in many ways - from addressing internal displacement – from forecast based financing to preventive evacuations and disaster-preparedness that considers displacement.

We must support strengthening health systems so that they can prepare for future disease outbreaks. We must recognize that even before this pandemic challenge to humanitarian assistance, to humanitarian principles, and **violence against health workers and facilities have eroded health systems and necessary protection - this must stop.**

Protection issues are more important and more complex, than ever. In this context, child protection needs to be at the core of the COVID-response and more needs to be done collectively to help address the unprecedented rise in child protection concerns across the globe. The revised edition of the inter-agency Child Protection Minimum Standards is integral to protecting children from violence during COVID-19, and beyond for children affected by conflict and displacement.

While terrorism is a serious threat to international peace and security that needs to be countered, there is also a need to **ensure that counter-terrorism measures do not impede impartial humanitarian and medical activities.**

We must not lose sight of the need to **get ahead of and prepare for the adverse impacts of climate change** which fuels displacement, compounds vulnerability and increases food insecurity.

During the discussion of the *Joint Informal Event of the Operational Activities and Humanitarian Affairs Segments*, we heard the importance of humanitarian and development actors working collaboratively together to measurably reduce need, risk and vulnerability and contribute towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Central Sahel.

Finally, I have launched the “Call to Action in support of the humanitarian response in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic”, supported by 128 delegations. The Call aims at reinforcing the humanitarian system’s response, calling practical and concrete steps to strengthen that response, fighting this pandemic and preventing it from further escalating to alleviate the suffering of

people in humanitarian crises. It also reaffirms Member States moral, political and financial support for these efforts.

CONCLUSION

Together, we have accomplished a very successful humanitarian affairs segment this year. In these unusual times, it was our first fully virtual Humanitarian Affairs Segment. The physical distance did not detract from the connections and consensus.

Participants represented a wide variety of stakeholders including governments, UN agencies, local, national and international humanitarian actors and organizations, development actors, civil society, academia, the private sector and more.

Amongst our efforts this year, I want to especially acknowledge the women leaders who participated as panelist this year, especially from women led local organizations working with persons of disabilities, who are doing indispensable work and are an inspiration to all of us.

The Panels and high-level events had an inclusive array of experienced panelists that included strong gender, regional and grassroots perspectives, as well as people with disabilities. The side events covered a wide array of diverse topics and discussions were rich and inspiring that reinforced the theme of this year's HAS and provided many provided insights and action points in the fight against COVID-19.

These achievements wouldn't have been possible without the contribution of each one of you. Most of all, I would like to pay a special tribute to the humanitarian community working on the ground, often putting their lives at risk to save other people's lives.

I would like also to express a sincere gratitude to our colleagues in OCHA, from the leadership, USG Mark Lowcock and ASG Ramesh Rajasingham, to the working level in whom, as a Chair, I found reliable partners, professional staff and committed humanitarians. OCHA's Intergovernmental Policy Section and DGACM have done an outstanding job yet again this year. They worked tirelessly to provide me and my team with substantive support and advice. I would like to thank each one of them for their dedication and hard work.

Before closing, I would like to leave you with one thought: All together, we have contributed to a successful Humanitarian Affairs Segment. Our work does not stop here. We need to continue supporting humanitarian workers on the ground and to strengthen the collaboration among all actors. Today more than ever the fight against COVID-19 shows us clearly that we must act in solidarity.

I hereby declare closed the 2020 session of the humanitarian affairs segment of ECOSOC.