Closing remarks by Diego Pary Rodríguez, Permanent Representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, ECOSOC Vice-President and Chair of the Humanitarian Affairs Segment

23 June 2022

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

At the outset, let me thank you for your participation in this year’s ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment.

I also thank Assistant-Secretary-General and Deputy Relief Coordinator, Ms Joyce Msuya, for her closing remarks for this segment.

Our discussions on strengthening humanitarian assistance - focussing on actions and lessons to be drawn from the recovery from the pandemic, conflicts, and compliance with international humanitarian law, and the climate crisis - has been highly relevant and timely.

It is my privilege to share my assessment of this segment, which has been an experience that has turned me into a humanitarian.
As Secretary-General Antonio Guterres outlined, we are dealing with a megacrisis. It becomes even more urgent to ramp up efforts to address the root causes of these multidimensional crises, which are leading to the highest levels of humanitarian need, including record levels of acute food insecurity and displacement.

While we heard throughout the week from Member States, humanitarian partners and affected people on the challenges they face, we also learned of the progresses made towards finding structural solutions to a wide range of problems. And we identified of the further actions that we need to take.

I congratulate and applaud the humanitarian women and men across the world, all of the humanitarian organizations and partners for their commitment and work to saving lives and reducing humanitarian suffering of people caught in the direst of situations. Also I highlight the work of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr Martin Griffiths, Assistant-Secretary-General Msuya, and all their team. Similarly, I recognize the important role of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), with the Emergency Relief Coordinator as its helm.
We heard how current challenges are creating a protection crisis - where women and children are often the most impacted. This includes the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence; lack of access to healthcare, education and learning spaces; and horrendous attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, water systems, agricultural production, in multiple parts of the world.

We heard in each of the panel discussions that people must be at the centre of all humanitarian preparedness and response efforts - especially women and children who those disproportionately impacted in humanitarian crisis and face even greater protection risks as food insecurity and displacement rise, and as climate change increasingly takes a heavy toll on their communities and on their survival.

Distinguished Colleagues, 

As has been mentioned repeatedly this week, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance rose to unprecedented levels in 2021, and this continues to rise in 2022 – straining the humanitarian system and highlighting the need for more effective, systemic solutions.
From this week’s discussion, I especially highlight the humanitarian system’s focus on early action to get ahead of disasters and lessen their impacts, while empowering local actions and non-governmental organizations, and improving access to people in need.

In light of these reflections, I set out a Call to Action for life.

In that sense, distinguished colleagues:

• It is necessary to ensure equitable, affordable and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines for all countries and all people. Two years after the pandemic, it is unacceptable that many of the world’s poorest countries continue to battle the COVID-19 virus unvaccinated while dealing with deepening hunger and poverty. A greater cooperation and solidarity from the international community is needed, so vaccines and vaccination can be declared a global public good.

• It is necessary to strengthen and invest national health-care systems to manage and prevent the next pandemic, but also to be better equipped to address the secondary health impacts of disease outbreaks especially on women and children. And we must strengthen and invest in social
protection systems which are responsive to shocks, reinforce resilience and buffer the most vulnerable people in societies, including women, children, indigenous peoples, older persons and people with disabilities.

- It is necessary to empower women and girls, address gender inequality and promote women’s meaningful participation in humanitarian action, planning and decision-making. Everyone recognized that women’s participation leads to better humanitarian response and outcomes. And we must strengthen and better fund protection response, including to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and sexual violence.

- It is necessary to urgently act to invest in education recovery in countries affected by humanitarian crises and reimagining education in these contexts, especially for vulnerable children. We are facing a learning crisis, with millions of children in need of support to recover lost education and a part of their present and future. We need to reach and retain every child in school, assess learning levels, prioritize teaching the fundamentals, increase catch-up learning and progress beyond what was lost, and develop psychosocial health and wellbeing so every child is ready to continue with their training.
• It is necessary to prioritize mental health and psychosocial support during humanitarian crises. Attention to mental health must be included both as part of our response to address needs and as a core component of aid organizations’ obligation to their staff.

• It is necessary to escalate with urgency and ambition our actions to respond to the climate crisis. There is a moral imperative to support the most vulnerable people, communities and countries to adapt and become more resilient. And those that will have to face losses and damages caused by the climate crisis will be in an even greater need of international solidarity and responsibility. The financial commitments of developed countries must be met with urgency, including the provision of US$100 billion a year in climate funding to developing countries in an equitable manner. Humanitarians can provide humanitarian assistance to support countries, communities and people most affected by climate-related disasters but may be least able to respond to the magnitude and repeated climate shocks, if their resources are not increased as well.
• It is necessary to scale up anticipatory approaches and invest more in as early warning to prevent and mitigate disasters and help communities, societies and economies to adapt as the climate crisis deepens. In the face of escalating food insecurity and looming famine, early funding will help pre-position critical inputs, such as creating seed stocks or strengthening medical supply chains. Now is the time to act on the data by shifting towards anticipatory approaches at the required scale to prevent suffering and minimize loss of lives.

• It is necessary to boost local food production and invest in agriculture in vulnerable countries to strengthen resilience to shocks. Responding to the rising acute food insecurity and famine risk requires a multi-sector approach inclusive of food security, health, nutrition, safe water, sanitation and hygiene, protection, and safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian workers. Otherwise, acute hunger will continue to rise and deepen.

• It is necessary to reinforce and empower local actors, especially women-led organizations, who are at the frontlines of response and central to humanitarian efforts. Supporting locally led organizations to act early will support more sustainable response and resilient
communities. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of meaningful partnerships with local actors and to support and strengthen community engagement and preparedness programmes critical to building and implementing humanitarian responses that meet the needs of the communities affected.

- It is necessary to ensure meaningful engagement and empower affected people and communities, not only providing timely and actionable information to them but to respond most effectively to their specific needs and continuously adapt response so that ensure greater collective accountability to affected people.

- It is necessary to institute systematically community feedback systems must be in place to enable affected people to provide their views on humanitarian action and report any abuse that may occur, including sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud, corruption, racism and all forms of discrimination.

- It is necessary to comply with international humanitarian law is imperative for all parties in all armed conflicts. It ensures the protection of civilians and the infrastructure they rely on, as well as the effective delivery of
humanitarian relief to civilians in need. Conflict remains the main driver of hunger and humanitarian need.

- It is necessary to ensure that humanitarian exemptions in counter-terrorism and sanctions measures become the norm, rather than having to be negotiated in a case-by-case basis.

- It is necessary to ensure accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law, including for attacks directed against humanitarian and medical personnel.

- It is necessary to ensure and facilitate humanitarian access, and strengthen capabilities and efforts on humanitarian negotiations and access so that humanitarians reach the people most in need.

- the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence are essential for humanitarian action.

- work together creatively and with purpose across the humanitarian, development and peace-making communities to find structural solutions and build
resilience

• urgently close the funding gap to meet humanitarian needs, especially through support for the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and humanitarian country-based pooled funds which together deliver to save lives, respond early to emerging and ongoing crises and support underfunded crises.

Distinguished colleagues,

Humanitarian action needs a humanitarian outlook and a humanitarian sentiment. It needs true solidarity, where we share what we have and not what is left over. As more justice, reciprocity and cooperation is much needed, we must unite our efforts and strengthen humanitarian diplomacy with a strong, resilient and more inclusive multilateralism capable of responding to rising humanitarian challenges we face as peoples of the world.

Again, thank you so much for your contributions to this highly successful Humanitarian Affairs Segment - the first in person HAS in New York since 2018.
The panels and high-level events had an inclusive array of experienced panellists; and I thank each and every one of them for contributing their insights and recommendations.

I would like to pay special tribute to the humanitarian community - they work in the most difficult circumstances around the world and put their lives at risk to save the lives of others.

I express sincere gratitude to OCHA and DGACM colleagues for the support provided throughout, and again thank you to the leadership of USG Martin Griffiths and ASG Joyce Msuya and to work of all the humanitarian partners.

We have over the last week examined the best way forward as we respond to crises. Now we need to act.

I hereby declare the 2022 session of the Humanitarian Affairs Segment of ECOSOC closed.