Opening remarks for H.E. Ambassador Diego Pary Rodríguez, Permanent Representative of Bolivia to the United Nations & Vice-President of ECOSOC responsible for the Humanitarian Affairs Segment

Opening Session of the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment

ECOSOC Chamber

New York, 21 June 2022, 10:00-13:00

I would like to welcome you to this meeting, the beginning of the Humanitarian Affairs Segment, which is being held this year under the overarching theme “Strengthening humanitarian assistance: good practices and mobilizing action in the implementation of international humanitarian law, the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and in response to the climate crisis”. I will now provide some comments on the matter that we are discussing today.

Yesterday, during the Meeting of the ECOSOC on Transition from Relief to Development, we explored specific ways of bringing about resilience and finding durable solutions to the increasing devastating levels of food insecurity and displacement. We heard about the importance of strengthening humanitarian efforts to bring about development, and peace and to take measures to address better the underlying root causes that are leading to increased humanitarian needs and suffering.

Today in the Humanitarian Affairs Segment, we will be reflecting on the current major challenges impacting the humanitarian landscape, to derive lessons and good practices from ongoing adaptations across humanitarian operations and actions in the face of these challenges, and thus unite efforts in large-scale resource mobilization as well as exploring opportunities with the aim of reinforcing and strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance by the UN and partners across the globe. The humanitarian system is strong, but the challenges are increasing.

Hence, this year’s theme, which was adopted on the 28th of April, is "Strengthening humanitarian assistance: good practices and mobilizing action in the implementation of international humanitarian law, the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and in response to the climate crisis".

And that concludes my opening statement. I now would like to invite the Council to begin its consideration of Agenda Item 9 which is entitled Special Economic Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Assistance. The documentation under the item is listed in today's journal and on the website for the Segment.
To set the scene for our important discussion on humanitarian issues, I would like to begin our deliberations by hearing from our keynote speakers.

First, we will hear from H.E. Ambassador Collen Vixen Kelapile, President of the Economic and Social Council. It is an honor to have you here today. The floor is yours.

[H.E. Ambassador Collen Vixen Kelapile speaks]

Thank you, Mr. President for your wise words. Let us now turn to Mr. António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General via a video message.

[Screen to Secretary-General’s pre-recorded remarks]

I thank the Secretary-General for those compelling remarks and for the work of the UN he leads for its essential and considerable humanitarian work.

We now will hear from the President of the General Assembly, H.E. Abdulla Shahid also via video message.

[Screen to President of the General Assembly pre-recorded remarks]

Our last keynote speaker will be Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. It is an honor to have you here today. The floor is yours.

[Mr. Martin Griffiths speaks]

Thank you, Mr. Griffiths for your remarks and for the work of OCHA and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee of humanitarian organizations, which you chair as the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Let me thank all the other keynote speakers for their insights today.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the speakers have underscored, the humanitarian challenges are enormous and global suffering is at levels not seen in generations.

These are dire times. It is on us to support the work of all humanitarian organizations and communities who are making a difference every day for people in need of protection and assistance.

But more importantly, we must show solidarity with affected people and communities. This requires a humanitarian look and feeling so that we understand the challenges faced by affected people and that we hear their voices. I’m thus very pleased that we can now hear at this opening session the voices of people and local humanitarian partners who are at the forefront on the daily
challenges and the responses to them, and who are indeed central to the solutions and to our future. First, we are going to hear from:

Mr. Darío José Mejía Montalvo, Chair, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues who is joining us by videoconferencing. Mr. Mejía Montalvo the floor is yours:

[Mr. Darío José Mejía Montalvo, Chair, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues speaks]

Next, I am pleased to hear from Ms. Emeline Siale Ilolahia, Executive Director, Pacific Islands Association of Non-governmental Organizations (PIANGO) in her recorded message.

[Screen to pre-recorded message from Ms. Emeline Siale Ilolahia, Executive Director, Pacific Islands Association of Non-governmental Organizations]

It is also my pleasure to now bring to this Chamber the voice of Ms. Hawa Coulibaly, a young girl from Mali who works to promote children’s rights as a journalist in the children’s parliament. She lives in Mopti, central Mali, and is in her final year at school.

[Screen to pre-recorded message from Ms. Hawa Coulibaly]

Thank you for these powerful words from all our speakers today. Thank you for your insights, for the important advocacy, and for your work and that of your communities to shed light, mobilize action, improve lives and bring systemic change.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have heard harrowing statistics of global suffering from our speakers already, so I will not repeat those here. We have also heard about the main drivers of humanitarian need: a toxic mix of climate change, conflict, disease and inequity.

Let me add that while the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance rose to unprecedented levels in 2021, unfortunately, this rise only continues in 2022 - straining the humanitarian system and highlighting the need for more effective, systemic solutions. We must prioritize response, recovery and coordination for extreme weather events, conflicts, disease outbreaks and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We must find ways to redouble our efforts to support a strong, flexible, well-resourced humanitarian system that is better equipped to reach those affected and support local, national and regional humanitarian partners.

As we heard today from our speakers, we must also advocate for solutions to the drivers of humanitarian emergencies – conflicts, the climate crisis, and Covid pandemic recovery. We have surely understood that today’s crises have exposed deep and systemic underlying inequalities. They have laid bare the neglect and dishonoring of this earth and so many of our brothers and sisters, children and grandparents who inhabit it. And they have served to remind us that we should respect the fundamental norms that underpin and protect human dignity, including international
humanitarian law.

It is within this context that this year’s Humanitarian Affairs Segment will focus on three strategic challenges facing all of us as we look ahead.

First, this afternoon we will have a High-Level Panel to explore lessons learned for the humanitarian system from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and consider the implications for future action, particularly through the lens of children and women.

A second High-Level Panel – taking place tomorrow morning – is about reaching people in need, supporting humanitarian assistance for all in times of conflict and promoting good practices in the application of international humanitarian law.

Our third and final panel – taking place on Thursday morning – explores the humanitarian impacts of the climate crisis through the lens of escalating risks, challenges and actions.

As we begin the general discussion, I would like to thank the humanitarian partners for their effort, dedication and professionalism in helping those most in need. Often this comes with the highest price. You contribute to our global community in ways that preserve life and reduce suffering.