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

High-Level Panel 1 on “Humanitarian assistance and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic: working together to ensure children and women are not left behind”

ECOSOC Chamber
New York, 21 June 2022, 15:00-17:30

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Delegations

I would like to welcome each and every one of you to the first high-level roundtable which we are holding on this item. This afternoon, we will be looking at “Humanitarian assistance and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic: working together to ensure children and women are not left behind”

The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance rose to unprecedented levels during the 2020 to 2021, and this only continues to rise in 2022, which is putting our system to the test and highlighting the need for more effective, systemic solutions. In 2021, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had significant effects widening the gap between countries and putting populations in situations of unique vulnerability, worsening their humanitarian crises which were already bad because of all kinds of issue like climate change and other matters.

Today, we will be looking at some of the key drivers of humanitarian needs: the COVID-19 pandemic for example. As the WHO Director-General said last month at the World Health Assembly, the COVID-19 pandemic “is most certainly not over”. As the Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano said, “The world has been turned upside down over the past 2 years”. This, particularly impacts the most vulnerable and further exacerbates inequalities.
Today’s panel will explore lessons learned for the humanitarian system from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and consider what this might mean for future action, particularly through the lens of children and women specifically.

We will hear about COVID’s impact on the most vulnerable people, including for education in emergencies, social protection, child protection, health and well-being, mental health and psychosocial support, and return to school.

We will also consider lessons for preparedness for future pandemics.

In 2021 and 2022, in response to an ever-changing landscape, we had to help those that were in a situation of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic and its effects compounded multiple challenges already facing humanitarian workers including violent conflict, rising hunger and the devastating impacts of climate change.

Women and children are disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises. In that regard, the panel will discuss ways to address these impacts and support the role of women, including women leaders, women’s organizations, and those on the front-line battling the pandemic.

For example, women were on the frontlines of response - especially local women leaders and women’s organizations - yet are disproportionately affected, with a “shadow pandemic” of violence against women and girls, loss of jobs, limited access to services, inadequate inclusion in decision-making, and a stark decline in girls’ education compared to boys.

Colleagues,

It is an honor to welcome the following speakers:

Ms. Catherine M. Russell, Executive Director, United Nations Children’s Fund

Dr. Ibrahima Soce Fall, Assistant Director-General for Emergency Response, World Health Organization
Mr. Arrmanatha Christiawan Nasir, Chair of G20 & Permanent Representative of Indonesia

Mr. Jagan Chapagain, Secretary General, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Mr. Ib Petersen, Assistant Secretary-General, Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund

Ms. Janti Soeripto, President & Chief Executive Officer, Save the Children US

Ms. Yasmine Sherif, Director, Education Cannot Wait

Ms. Uusikyla, I am looking forward to your remarks and guiding us through the session.

Thank you.

CLOSING

Thank you very much, Madame Moderator.

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank each of the participating states and panelists for being a part of this debate which has brought up important matters that we have to reflect on. I also want to thank our excellent moderator for having lead our debate in such a constructive and effective way this afternoon. Below closing this afternoon's session, allow me to share some brief remarks.

It is very clear that the COVID-19 pandemic is still with us. Both with a direct health care impact, but also with its vicious secondary impacts which worsen economic inequality and poverty. We heard we must invest in pandemic preparedness and we should do so based on lessons learned from previous regional and global pandemics or crises. This pandemic has devastated livelihoods around
the globe and extreme poverty is rising. Many times we've needed to quarantine in various parts of the world and that has brought about quite a significant cost for the poorest and the most vulnerable who depend on a daily income to survive.

As Ambassador Nasir of Indonesia said, we must not forget that the informal sector has to stay alive because millions of families depend on that sector even in the midst of humanitarian and health crises.

This pandemic disproportionately affected the most vulnerable people, especially in the area of access to basic public services like education and health, among others. We've heard that our responses must be flexible and adaptable when we invest in education and support children and their communities in readjusting after this pandemic. Education is a transformative force that sets the basis for long lasting, inclusive, sustainable development that will help countries overcome disasters and conflicts.

Another cross-cutting matter is looking at the hidden pandemics that go hand in hand with humanitarian crises as mentioned by Mr. Castellanos of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. In this conflict, disasters and pandemics have real effects on mental health and social dynamics, as each of our panellists explained, especially when there is the inclusion of gender violence amongst other factors.

Lessons shared here have been many and important in different ways, especially when it comes to the use of technology, early alert systems and ID processes help to keep diseases from spreading and these are examples of actions that can strengthen our capacity for prevention, preparation and response.

And we heard clearly today that unless we invest in health systems, education, social protection systems and sustainable development, the negative effects of the pandemic will simply linger longer. This also goes for social protection programmes and sustainable development. We need to bring support to those in particularly vulnerable situations.

Panellists and Member States have shared experiences worthy of highlighting, and these could be turned into a true comprehensive strategy going forward. To face the future pandemics which will be of global scale, we need equity, justice, reciprocity, and we have to bring this about through strong, resistant and more inclusive multilateralism.
I firmly believe that all of the experiences that we've heard today, when brought together, will help us to change lives and allow us to get to know different realities better. Finally, as Ms. Sherif said, the Summit for Education is a new opportunity to bring voices together and define the priorities we have in the areas of education and other areas for the comprehensive transformation of women and men.

In that regard, I thank all delegations for their participation and our panellists as well. Before adjourning our session, I would like to remind delegations that there will be a series of parallel events to the Humanitarian Affairs Segment and the agenda can be seen on the OCHA website. We will continue our session at 10 a.m. in this very same hall tomorrow to hold our high level roundtable number 2 looking at "Reaching people in need, supporting humanitarian assistance for all in times of conflict and promoting good practices in the application of international humanitarian law".

That said, we adjourn the session.