Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I call to order the twenty-seventh meeting of the Economic and Social Council at the humanitarian affairs segment of its 2022 session.

**COVID-19 mitigation measures**

Before proceeding further, I wish to remind that all meeting participants are encouraged to consider wearing a mask while indoors in closed spaces, including in the ECOSOC Chamber.
Item 9: Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance

High-level panel discussion 2 on ‘Reaching people in need, supporting humanitarian assistance for all in times of conflict and promoting good practices in the application of international humanitarian law’

I invite the Council to continue its consideration of agenda item 9, entitled “Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance”.

I extend a warm welcome to you all to the second high-level panel discussion. This will focus on the topic, “Reaching people in need, supporting humanitarian assistance for all in times of conflict and promoting good practices in the application of international humanitarian law”.

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

At the beginning of this week, we heard during the Meeting on the Transition from Relief to Development the extent to which armed conflict is fueling acute food insecurity and displacement. On Tuesday, yesterday, we thought about how the Covid-19 pandemic has
compounded the complexity and level of humanitarian needs, particularly in conflict-affected countries.

Today, we will discuss ways we can support humanitarian assistance, facilitating humanitarian access and ensuring the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance to reach people in need in times of conflict. This panel will discuss trends, challenges, and good practices related to the delivery of humanitarian assistance in both past and present armed conflicts. It will consider practical ways to strengthen the application of international humanitarian law, as well as ways to facilitate access to people in need and to put into practice fundamental protections which save lives and which reduce humanitarian suffering. This includes ensuring that humanitarian assistance and protection is provided to all affected people based on their humanitarian needs alone, and this, without discrimination and regardless of nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs or political convictions. It is vital to act in accordance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.
As such, we need to ensure humanitarian operations which are timely and efficient. From moving goods and equipment to relocating conflict and disaster-affected people, humanitarian responses need an efficient transport and communications systems in place to reach those in crises and to provide them with the help they need.

Coordination and information management is key to supporting operational decision-making and to improving predictability, timelines and the efficiency of the humanitarian emergency response during the conflict itself.

As set forth in this year’s Secretary-General report on strengthening coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance, the humanitarian operating environment is challenging. It includes restrictions on humanitarian access, interference in humanitarian operations, attacks against humanitarian and medical workers and facilities. All of this has curtailed the ability to deliver aid in a safe and timely manner and increased the costs of humanitarian operations.
However, in spite of all of the above, we have seen how the Organizations and entities of the United Nations system continue to respond with a sense of great commitment to request for emergency assistance within their respective mandates.

This morning, I look forward to hearing about the good practices that will allow us to further reinforce humanitarian assistance and operations, and I look forward to hearing about how the international community can support humanitarians in delivering assistance and protection to people in need in times of conflict.

It is my pleasure to introduce now the distinguished panellists:

- First and foremost I must announce that Mr. Santiago Andrés Cafiero, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Argentina, was not able to come to the session today, currently he submitted his apologies;
• But we will have with us Mr. Janez Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Crisis Management. He will submit a pre-recorded video message;

• We'll also have with us Her Excellency Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations;

• We'll also have with us today Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). He has also submitted a pre-recorded video message;

• We'll have the pleasure of having with us Mr. Manuel Fontaine, Director of the Office of Emergency Programmes at the United Nations Children’s Fund;

• We also have Mr. Julien Schopp, Vice-President for Humanitarian Policy and Practice at InterAction; and

• Finally, our last panellist is Ms. Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, Former Intersectional Legal Director and IHL Senior Advisor, Médecins Sans Frontières. She will be joining us via video-link.
I also wish to welcome our moderator, the Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Ghada Eltahir Mudawi. She will conduct our discussions. I have every faith that we will have an open, constructive and productive exchange of views.

First and foremost we must be thinking of the victims and of those that suffer as a result of conflict and natural disasters.

Ms. Mudawi, now I hand over the floor to you so that you can steer our panel. You have the floor.

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[At about 12:10 p.m., the moderator gives the floor back to the Vice-President.]

Many thanks, indeed, Ms. Mudawi, for guiding us through this vital discussion. I would also like to thank our distinguished panel members for their enriching contributions today.
This morning we heard about issues of concern and we had discussion of the impediments that are being faced by the humanitarian community on the ground and emerging challenges that need to be faced to overcome these challenges.

There are a myriad of challenges being faced. For example, reference was made to the need for independent mechanisms for monitoring of compliance with international humanitarian law. Consequently it's of the utmost importance that we develop independent investigation processes which make it possible to determine the causes for breaches of IHL. Doing so, we will avoid seeing a situation whereby results are misused by some parties to the conflict. We also heard that humanitarian assistance is fettered as a result of bureaucratic obstacles, sanctions and other coercive measures. These severely affect the ability of humanitarian actors to do their work.

Moreover, reality means that we as states must all commit to respecting humanitarian law in all fields. But we must do so as a matter of priority in the humanitarian arena, as was stated by the
distinguished Permanent Observer Mohammed of the African Union. The burden supposed by the provision of humanitarian aid must be shared taking account of the realities of each context, as well as the characteristics of each conflict. And we must also ensure that a synergy is retained between assistance and development so that ultimately, we can guarantee resilience.

I also agree with Mr. Peter Maurer insofar as conflicts are becoming increasingly complex. Humanitarian risks are increasing exponentially with the use of new technologies for belligerent purposes, and this is tied to external military aid and the provision of misinformation, the fostering of hate speech and the waging of media wars both within and outside areas of conflict. There are these and other phenomenon which are increasingly frequent. Humanitarian assistance must be ready to meet future humanitarian needs if we as states don’t ultimately manage to prevent conflicts.

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

Driven by conflict, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people requiring
humanitarian aid increased to unprecedented levels this last year. Now we have an urgent responsibility to take rapid humanitarian action which is effective and efficient, but we must also, as a matter of importance, pay primary attention to conflict prevention.

Panellists, time and time again, as well as states have underscored the importance of respecting international humanitarian law. As such, compliance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence must be placed above strategic military goals and geopolitical goals. States must demonstrate renewed commitment to these fundamental principles precisely when it's most difficult to do so. This is vital because the protection of civilian lives must be a matter of shared responsibility. It must be a responsibility that each and every one of us shares, that particularly must be shared by parties to conflict.

Organization of work

Now coming to the end of the meeting, I'd like to remind delegations about the side events that will take place at the margins of the humanitarian affairs
segment. The schedule of these side events is available on the OCHA website.

The Council will continue its humanitarian affairs segment tomorrow, at 10 a.m., in this Chamber, to hold the third high-level panel discussion on the theme “Humanitarian impacts of the climate crisis: escalating risks, challenges and actions.”

Before concluding, I'd like to express my solidarity with the victims and families of the victims currently suffering in Afghanistan.

The meeting is adjourned.