Statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States

Delivered by

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for

Humanitarian Affairs Segment of ECOSOC

United Nations

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- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY –
Mister President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Candidate Countries the Republic of North Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Serbia* and Albania*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

Mister President,

Let me start by expressing our full support to Switzerland as the chair of this Humanitarian Affairs Segment of the ECOSOC. This year’s edition of ECOSOC HAS takes place at a pivotal time for the principled delivery of humanitarian assistance in the COVID-19 environment and beyond. The EU is fully committed to ensuring that the HAS remains and is further strengthened as a unique forum for an inclusive discussion on the headline trends and challenges in the humanitarian field.

In this context, we are also greatly appreciative of Switzerland and Indonesia for successfully facilitating the ECOSOC humanitarian resolution and their approach to focus on relevant provisions related to the COVID pandemic and thus highlight the immense humanitarian challenges that many countries face. The COVID-19 pandemic has added yet another layer of hardship on top of the significant humanitarian caseload, further amplified by conflicts, climate change and food insecurity. It has triggered the deepest global recession since the 1930s, setting back decades of development gains.

But most importantly, COVID-19 has negatively affected the humanitarian access to people in need. While some restrictions were rightly put in place to curb the spread of the virus, access restrictions and bureaucratic barriers gravely hamper the ability to deliver assistance to affected communities and to access those in need.

Access restrictions are further exacerbated by the growing constraints in the humanitarian operating environment due to the systematic and continued disregard of International Humanitarian Law and disrespect of the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

The EU and its Member States will continue to promote compliance with IHL and to insist on accountability in case of IHL violations. We call on all parties to armed conflict to respect their IHL obligations. The EU remains committed to put the promotion of and adherence to IHL and the centrality of protection at the heart of its external action. This was again

* The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The EU continues advocating for the universalisation of IHL instruments, and supporting the fight against impunity for serious violations of IHL. The EU calls on states that have not yet done so to ratify and fully implement important IHL instruments, such as the 1977 Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, as well as the Rome Statute, and to develop and adopt any necessary implementing legislation, policies and practical measures.

The UN and humanitarian personnel, including local actors, responded to the pandemic with inspiring commitment. Despite their vital role, we are particularly concerned that the COVID-19 context resulted in additional adverse operational and security implications for humanitarian personnel and their work, exacerbating existing impediments to relieving human suffering.

Humanitarian assistance, and tragically, aid workers themselves are increasingly under attack. Despite their vital role, last year at least 125 humanitarian workers were killed while carrying out their duties. Whether internationally or locally recruited, whether from the UN, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement or from NGOs, humanitarian workers are essential and have to be respected and protected.

The EU remains committed to step up its efforts to protect humanitarian and medical personnel from attacks and safeguard humanitarian space. The EU, together with France, Germany, Mexico, Norway, Niger, and Switzerland, co-hosted a discussion series on the protection of humanitarian and medical personnel in armed conflict. An outcome document, capturing all the ideas, suggestions, best practices and possible solutions raised throughout the four meetings will now be prepared. This will contribute to the further promotion and implementation of key elements of the “Call for Action to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law and principled humanitarian action”, launched by Germany and France and endorsed by all the co-hosts of the discussion series. We want to encourage all States to follow the example of 48 States and the EU, and endorse this Call.

We need to make all efforts to avoid any potential unintended negative impact of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures on principled humanitarian action, including medical activities that are carried out by impartial humanitarian actors in full compliance with the humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law. To that end, the EU commits to preserving the humanitarian space, including through the development of best practices and the adoption of mitigating measures, such as the consistent inclusion of humanitarian exceptions to sanctions regimes where relevant.

The multiple lessons underscored by the COVID-19 response - from risk-informed programming and, linked to this, anticipatory action, preparedness and disaster risk
reduction, through ensuring greater efficiencies and prioritisation of needs based on coordinated, multi-sectoral, people-centered assessments, to advancing on the localisation agenda - should be addressed in a holistic and strategic manner. This also includes concerted efforts to ensure that needs assessments include gender, age and disability considerations and sex-age disaggregated data. The operationalisation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is critical to meet and reduce humanitarian needs and to enable the UN agencies to leverage on their respective comparative advantages and to achieve “UN as one” delivery in this respect.

Furthermore, it is in our shared interest not to lose sight of the fact that the COVID19 pandemic heightened people’s exposure to violence, abuse and exploitation, reinforcing the centrality of protection in the humanitarian response. The EU and its Member States remain firm in their commitment to put people at the centre of the humanitarian response. Women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by disasters and conflicts.

Children living in a humanitarian context are especially vulnerable and must be protected and assisted. We consider it fundamental to guarantee that all children, without any discrimination, enjoy their economic, social including health and cultural rights, including their right to health and to education.

Many girls currently out of school will never return to the classrooms. Access to quality and safe education is key to ensuring that no generation is lost. This should remain a primary focus for all. Sadly, the pandemic has provided clear evidence that crises exacerbate structural gender inequalities, with a worrying rise of sexual and gender-based violence. The EU is convinced that preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence is lifesaving. All humanitarian operations need to take into account the needs and capacities of the survivors of those crimes. This includes assistance to women and girls as well as actions to prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual and gender-based violence including crucial sexual and reproductive health care services – this is to be considered life-saving assistance. We also continue to support ongoing efforts related to the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation and sexual harassment, as well as to ensure that mental health and psychosocial support become an integral part of the humanitarian response.

Mainstreaming both the protection of people with disabilities and their empowerment, as well as their organizations, particularly at local level, is a priority for the EU and its Member States.

With the latest figures being unprecedented in scale and severity, food insecurity further remains a grave cause of concern. Conflict remains the main driver of hunger; compounded with the impact of climate change. The EU and its Member States call for more efforts to alleviate hunger in armed conflict, in line with UNSC resolution 2417, including condemning the use of starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare.
While welcoming the international efforts to address the food insecurity crisis, and the increased allocations for humanitarian assistance by the main global donors, including the EU, we call upon everyone to step up their engagement as well and to explore possibilities to increase flexible funding.

In the spirit of global cooperation and solidarity, the EU through a Team Europe approach has been leading the multilateral response to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring global and equitable access to vaccines, tests and treatments is an integral part of our Team Europe commitment. The EU consider the immunization against COVID-19 as a global public good and advocate for equitable, timely and affordable access to effective, safe, and quality vaccines and any other health products related to Covid-19 for all. The EU and its Member States support the COVAX Facility and the establishment of the Humanitarian Buffer. We underline, however, that the Humanitarian Buffer is a last-resort tool only and that national vaccine deployment plans should be inclusive. We will continue to ensuring that vaccines reach all who need them, including conflict-affected and displaced people, leaving no one behind.

By mid-2020, more than 80 million people in the world were forcibly displaced – a tragic record which is testament to the international community’s collective inability to prevent and resolve conflict. Refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants and stateless persons are among those that also feel the effects of this crisis and risk being left behind. To win the battle against the pandemic, safe and effective vaccines should be accessible to all across the globe.

The EU underlines that routine immunization must be continued to prevent severe outbreaks of other communicable diseases. The EU is a strong supporter of the Gavi Initiative to guarantee this.

The EU remains particularly concerned by the consequences of climate change. We call for humanitarian actors to progressively adapt their response strategies to the realities of climate change. As humanitarian donors and actors, we should also lead by example. The EU is determined to reduce the environmental footprint of its humanitarian operations. We have set an ambitious approach to achieve this, and we hope that others will join us.

Mister President,

In a world where the footprint of crises is expanding rapidly and humanitarian principles are being challenged as rarely before, the EU’s global responsibility as a humanitarian actor has never been more important. This comes regrettably as humanitarian needs rise to an all-time high while the global donor base remains disturbingly narrow. The world’s top 10 donors currently contribute 80% of humanitarian funding. This is unsustainable in light of budgetary constraints and, more importantly, it falls short of addressing increasing humanitarian needs.
At the same time, it is key to stress that humanitarian assistance can never be the solution to armed conflict. We therefore urge the international community to work on political solutions to put an end to armed conflicts – still the main driver of humanitarian needs worldwide. The EU and its Member States reaffirm their strong support for the UN Secretary-General’s call for a Global Ceasefire.

The EU and its Member States are committed to remain at the forefront of addressing the current humanitarian challenges. The strategic framework of the EU’s response, centred on respect for IHL, safeguarding humanitarian space, including safe, rapid and unimpeded access to people in need, and protection of civilians in situations of conflict and disaster, remains unchanged.

Getting back on track is not impossible. It takes determination to deliver better and works towards greater efficiency and effectiveness of international humanitarian response, including greening of humanitarian assistance. It takes investment in measures to increase preparedness and more anticipatory action, including at local level and in displacement settings. It takes concerted effort and collective action, in the spirit of effective multilateralism and of building back better, and it takes a collaborative and coherent approach along with development partners and communities as well as peace actors – in the spirit of the Humanitarian Development Peace-Nexus.

The EU and its Member States remain committed and ready to take their share of responsibility. We count on the rest of the international community to stay the course and step up to this common endeavour.

Thank you.