1. The Group of 77 and China commends the Vice-President of ECOSOC and Chair of this year’s Humanitarian Affairs Segment, along with the Bureau and the Secretariat, for convening this important event under exceptional circumstances. ECOSOC-HAS provides an essential forum for Member States, the UN System and other stakeholders to jointly reflect on current and future humanitarian challenges. Today, these challenges are truly unprecedented: according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ 2021 Global Humanitarian Overview, 235 million people will be in need of humanitarian assistance.

2. This disturbing number is the sum of preexisting humanitarian needs and the COVID-19 pandemic’s direct and secondary impacts. The overarching theme of this year’s Segment, “Strengthening humanitarian assistance to face the challenges of 2021 and beyond: mobilizing respect for international humanitarian law, inclusion, gender, innovation and partnerships”, reflects the multifaceted character of the solutions required to face this crisis.

3. The magnitude of these humanitarian needs requires multiple answers, but also unity of purpose, a symbol of which is the adoption of the annual humanitarian ECOSOC resolution. In keeping with this spirit of unity, the Group of 77 and China supported the draft resolution, while also recording concerns with the text in an official letter to the President and the Vice-President of ECOSOC.

4. The Group commends the co-facilitators Indonesia and Switzerland for their conduction of the resolution’s negotiating process, which focused on updating its text to reflect the impact of the pandemic. The Group supported this approach, engaging earnestly and constructively in negotiations, and believes that the resolution reflects a number of critical issues facing the international community today.

5. Last year’s Humanitarian Affairs Segment was held under the shadow of the pandemic. Since then, the development of vaccines has given the world new hope, but has also made the alarming effects of global inequality as clear as ever. Throughout negotiations, the Group has highlighted that access to vaccines is of critical importance not only in overcoming the pandemic and recovering momentum for sustainable development, but also in adequately responding to humanitarian emergencies, including with regard to displaced persons, migrants and refugees. The Group reiterates that recognizing COVID-19 vaccines as a global public good would greatly contribute to this objective, recalling also that capacity building and transfer of technology should be promoted and carried out on fair, favorable and reasonable terms and conditions, especially with regards to developing countries.

6. In many countries undergoing humanitarian emergencies, the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 has been more intense than the disease itself, and has once more shown that relief, recovery,
rehabilitation, reconstruction and longer-term development are different means to the one ultimate end. Their complementarity should be underscored, while also recognizing that the line that separates their mandates and priorities must not be blurred.

7. As has been frequently underlined by both ECOSOC and General Assembly resolutions, cooperation straddling these two fields must simultaneously respect humanitarian principles and support national priorities, in coordination with affected member states. National authorities of affected States retain the primary responsibility in the initiation, organization and coordination of humanitarian assistance, and we must prioritize the need to strengthen capacity-building and resilience. In this context, the Group of 77 and China also highlights the socioeconomic impact of unilateral coercive measures, which have negative repercussions on the capacity of some States to respond efficiently to the challenges of COVID-19.

8. The Group also wishes to reiterate that humanitarian emergencies engendered by different root causes should receive attention and resources, in particular at the international level, which are compatible with humanitarian needs on the ground. In this sense, due care should be given so that armed conflicts, the outbreak of infectious and non-communicable diseases, the adverse effects of climate change and other drivers of humanitarian need are understood and addressed in a proportional and pragmatic manner.

9. Yet another issue which has been brought into sharp focus is that of education in the context of humanitarian emergencies. The closure of schools and other learning institutions during the pandemic will have long-term impacts, imperiling the transition from relief to development. The Group fully supports, therefore, renewed efforts to provide safe, inclusive, equitable and quality education at all levels and ages in humanitarian emergencies.

10. The pandemic put renewed emphasis on healthcare in humanitarian emergencies, which is the topic of one of this year’s Segment’s high-level panels. The humanitarian system has made enormous efforts to prevent and treat COVID-19 and to cope with disruptions in all other areas of healthcare, from routine immunizations to diagnostics. In this context, the Group recognizes that mental health and psychosocial support, relatively new topics in multilateral humanitarian discussions, have been shown to be significant concerns, especially during the pandemic.

11. Another topic selected for a high-level panel, innovation, has also been at the center of the humanitarian reaction to the pandemic. Humanitarian actors have shown adaptability and resourcefulness during the crisis, developing and repurposing technology in areas such as logistics, family reunification and cash transfers, among others. Technology should not be seen, however, as a universal cure for humanitarian challenges, and cannot be adopted acritically. A realistic approach to risks and vulnerabilities, such as those regarding privacy and the preservation of data, should be a permanent concern. In addition, inclusivity must be guaranteed, for digital exclusion is often a reality in humanitarian emergencies.
12. The last high-level panel addresses the intersection between climate and humanitarian emergencies. The Group stresses that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and impacts disproportionately developing countries, in particular the poorest and most vulnerable among them. Extreme natural disasters can affect the environment, the economy and society and reverse hard-earned developmental gains overnight. Natural disasters require effective responses, such as those examined in the “International cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development” resolution, presented annually by the Group at the General Assembly.

13. Famine prevention and addressing acute food insecurity will be the theme of the annual ECOSOC Event on the Transition from Relief to Development. While all immediate causes for these crises, such as natural disasters or armed conflicts, must be thoroughly understood, the Group reiterates that vulnerability in this field is tied to poverty and lack of development - overlooking these factors will obstruct any attempt to comprehensively address food insecurity and famine.

14. COVID-19 and other topics selected for discussion in this year’s Humanitarian Affairs Segment represent persistent challenges that demand creative and forward-looking solutions. Nonetheless, the basic realities that underpin humanitarian action and which will be the foundation for these solutions have not changed. The humanitarian principles are still the cornerstone of humanitarian action, and the role of the United Nations in coordinating humanitarian response is still of the utmost importance, taking fully into account the primary role of the affected states. In this challenging moment, the Group of 77 and China seeks to work together with all relevant partners towards more effective coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance, so that those caught in humanitarian emergencies have their lives, wellbeing and dignity duly protected.