Informal briefing to Member States on the preparations for the 2021 ECOSOC
Humanitarian Affairs Segment
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Thank you, Ambassador Lauber, for your introduction and Ambassador Baeriswyl for your
stewardship of the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment this year. Thanks also to all who have
joined today for your participation.

This year’s ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment promises to be an exceptionally
important session, given the historic nature of 2020 and the scale and complexity of challenges
facing the humanitarian community in 2021.

As outlined in this year’s Secretary-General’s annual report on the strengthening
coordination of humanitarian assistance of the United Nations in 2020, when humanitarian needs
soared, propelled by conflict, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, that jointly combined
to transform the humanitarian operating landscape, compounding risks, and exacerbating
inequalities and vulnerability.

Over 2020, disturbing trends unfolded, including the shadow epidemic of gender-based
violence, increased protection challenges, violations of international humanitarian law,
impediments to humanitarian access, attacks on civilians and humanitarian and health
personnel, rising displacement, escalating food insecurity and the resurgent threats of
multiple famines, and the climate emergency, which is an existential threat, particularly for
small island states.

In an already difficult humanitarian context, the COVID-19 pandemic presented the
humanitarian community with new challenges. The IASC came together to respond in
unprecedented ways:

- The IASC quickly mounted a coordinated and comprehensive response, with the Global
  Humanitarian Response Plan issued within two weeks of the WHO’s declaration of
  COVID-19 as a pandemic.
- The IASC also rapidly activated its System-Wide Scale-Up Protocols adapted to the
  COVID-19 pandemic, the first-ever global emergency activation that eventually covered
  all 63 GHRP countries.
- With the funding received for the GHRP, humanitarian organizations were able to
  reach 74 million people with critical water and sanitation supplies and services to
reduce the risk of disease transmission. **75 million women and children with essential health care, mental health and psychosocial support.** 33 million refugees, IDPs, migrants and stateless persons received assistance; 2.3 million healthcare providers were trained in COVID-19 detection, referral and case management.

- **Humanitarian partners sustained and adapted operations** and were able to stay and deliver despite the challenges presented by the pandemic.
- Working together, a wider UN Crisis Management Team, led by WHO, involving 23 agencies across 9 workstreams, facilitated information sharing, analysis, and prioritization of key emerging issues across the health, humanitarian, human rights, and socio-economic dimensions.
- The UN COVID-19 Supply Chain Task Force addressed shortages in global supply chains and massively scaled up procurement and delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE), testing and diagnostics supplies and biomedical equipment. WFP staged one of the largest logistics operations for common services including passenger and cargo services which transported 118,000 cubic meters of critical cargo and over 28,000 humanitarian and health workers.
- Humanitarian organizations innovated and adapted their operations, including expanding access to digital cash transfers; partnering with the private sector and local organizations to produce PPE; and, where possible converting facilities into COVID-19 isolation facilities.
- **Local organizations and NGOs - including women’s and women-led organization - were at the frontlines of the response and delivered in the hardest to reach places and in the last mile.** We have seen that community engagement is not an add on - but rather a necessity.
- The **CERF and CBPFs played an important role** in the delivery of emergency assistance allocating $493 million to 49 countries. Some $252 million of this was allocated to international and national NGOs, Red Cross/Red Crescent National Societies, and other local partners.
- The United Nations coordinated humanitarian operations delivered in situations ranging from protracted conflicts to disasters in Africa and the Caribbean, from combatting the desert locusts in the Greater Horn of Africa, to the destructive port explosion in Lebanon.

Let me briefly touch on some of the other concerns reflected in the report and addressed in its recommendations:

- **International law must be promoted and respected.** The way wars are conducted is evolving – with persistent disregard of international norms - and serious violations of IHL, refugee law and human rights law; attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure - hospitals, schools, water and sanitation facilities, food systems; the use of starvation as a method of war; obstruction and delay in humanitarian access; and humanitarian and
healthcare workers killed, kidnapped, attacked, detained and threatened with increased frequency, even in this time of extraordinary need. The humanitarian space and humanitarian principles are under pressure.

- The climate crisis will not wait for us to catch up after the pandemic is over. We need ambitious, accelerated and scaled-up global action to address it and its destructive impacts. We need to better understand and address the systemic nature of risk, invest more in preventing and anticipating future disasters, pandemics and other shocks and strengthen resilience at all levels.

- Urgent action on vaccine equity is needed, recognizing the COVID-19 vaccine as a global public good. The most vulnerable people in humanitarian crises need have equitable and swift access to the vaccines. This means speedy and increased support for the ACT Accelerator and the COVAX Facility. And as we move forward, we must ensure that COVID-19 response, including vaccines, do not get financed in humanitarian crisis countries at the expense of other life-saving activities. Diversion of resources from routine immunization or water, sanitation, shelter, or food, will only result in more loss of life and suffering.

- Displacement continued to rise, and we need stronger solutions. By mid-2020, there were 26.4 million refugees worldwide. The number of IDPs has reached an all-time high, with 45.7 million people forcibly displaced by conflict and violence by end of 2019. Another 5.1 million people remained displaced due to disasters.

- In this landscape, women and children, and those with overlapping vulnerabilities are further marginalized - persons with disabilities, IDPs, refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, youth - are being hit the hardest. A generation of children, especially girls, are facing increased protection risks, missing meals, dropping out of school, being forced into marriage, labour and become victims of trafficking. And we likely are facing mental health and psychosocial impacts to an extent and scale which is still to be fully understood. Protection must be central in humanitarian action. The scourge of gender-based violence must be determinedly addressed. And the role and participation of women and women-led organizations need to be promoted in humanitarian action.

- As previously emphasized, we must avert famine and address acute food insecurity. Some 155 million people in 55 countries were estimated to be classified as reaching Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Phase 3 or worse. 28 million people are on the very edge of famine (IPC4/Emergency) and the further shocks can risk pushing them over into famine. Of these, around 133,000 people were classified in the most severe phase of acute food insecurity in 2020 - Catastrophe (IPC5/Catastrophe). This must be tackled with urgency. Women and girls represent 70 per cent of the world’s hungry. WFP and FAO have issued an important Call to Action; and the Secretary-General established a High-Level Taskforce on Famine Prevention to lead a
rapid and coordinated effort to mobilize adequate support and funding and scale up humanitarian operations.

- The **frequency and diversity of infectious disease outbreaks have increased** significantly over the past four decades; health and protection risk must be understood and incorporated into humanitarian planning and response. **Over the past five years, 94 per cent of countries with inter-agency humanitarian appeals have recorded at least one disease outbreak. As the climate, environmental, animal and human interfaces are further put under stress by climate change we must get ahead of exacerbating risks.**

The road ahead will not be easy. The response plans included in the Global Humanitarian Overview require 35 billion dollars to help 160 million of the most vulnerable people in 56 countries - a record high. Despite the generosity of donors, the gap between needs and available funds keeps growing. To help bridge this gap, the donor base must be broadened, and the root causes of humanitarian crises and drivers of need have to be addressed.

As we heard, the HAS is a unique forum to shape how we move forward together into unprecedented times. The side events enable us to dig deeper into issues and solutions. Over the week (21-25 June), we have a limited number of side event slots and will seek to maximize their impact and avoid duplication. We have already received quite a few expressions of interest from humanitarian partners, which is very welcome. Those wishing to express interest in holding a side event may do so through the forms found on the 2021 ECOSOC HAS website already referenced. The deadline is 10 May, following which we will be in touch to provide more information on whether the side event can proceed and on other partners to connect with if there are complementary proposals. All relevant logistic information and contact details for OCHA focal points are found on the website which will be regularly updated. We encourage partners to join up, given the limited slots, and wherever possible to look for diverse partners, as Ambassador Lauber also this is important.

We look forward to the HAS as a key part of our collective drive towards solutions, to reinforcing humanitarian action, local partners and communities, and to bolster respect international norms. This is an opportunity - and responsibility - for us all to step up, to act with greater ambition to tackle the perfect storm of compounding risks of conflict, climate crisis, and the COVID pandemic.

Thank you.