

*The Permanent Mission  
of the Kingdom of Morocco  
to the United Nations  
New York*



البعثة الدائمة للمملكة المغربية  
لدى الأمم المتحدة  
نيويورك

## **Briefing on 2020 ECOSOC HAS**

**\*\*\*\***

**Presentation**

**by**

**Ambassador Omar Hilale,  
Permanent Representative of the  
Kingdom of Morocco**

**Vice President of the ECOSOC  
and Chair of the Humanitarian Affairs  
Segment**

**14 May 2020 – 11:00-12:30**

## **Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This year's Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS) comes at a critical juncture. It is a time for global solidarity and for reinforcing the critical work of the United Nations in preventing and responding to the spread of COVID-19, which comes on top of an already highly challenging humanitarian landscape.

As we prepare to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations where global solidarity, and the role of the UN in addressing humanitarian challenges, is centrally important to the world's future.

The theme of this year's Segment is "*Reinforcing humanitarian assistance in the context of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations: taking action for people-centered solutions, strengthening effectiveness, respecting international humanitarian law and promoting the humanitarian principles*".

This theme is highly relevant to the current context, as we must take the opportunity of this year's HAS to reinforce the essential work of the UN and its humanitarian partners in alleviating human suffering and saving lives as we and respond to the humanitarian needs of the world's most vulnerable people. This is even more necessary as we work together to overcome the threats of this pandemic and to mobilize support for affected people and communities caught in humanitarian crises.

As 2020 began, the world was confronted with a new array of challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. For countries already facing a humanitarian crisis, the COVID-19 outbreak exacerbates peoples' vulnerabilities and risks. This is particularly so considering weakened health systems, decimated by years of stressors, conflict and attacks.

As economies are impacted by secondary effects of the pandemic, pre-existing drivers of humanitarian needs, such as poverty and inequality, compound the impacts on the most vulnerable people. There is great concern that disruption to food production and supply will push already profoundly troubling levels of acute food insecurity to levels not seen in decades.

We have already seen the beginning of the impact of an infestation of desert locusts in the Horn and Eastern Africa. For many countries, the pandemic is arriving just as annual storm seasons begin. Many countries were already suffering the effects of outbreaks of deadly diseases like measles, Ebola and cholera. The climate emergency already posed severe challenges to many Member States. Rising sea levels continue to pose an existential threat to Small Island Developing States.

The implications of the pandemic comes on top of already high humanitarian needs and humanitarian challenges. 2019 ended with more than 145 million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. 2019 saw deteriorating and more protracted conflicts, coupled with grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, which drove high levels of displacement and dire levels of humanitarian needs. Civilians were killed or maimed, civilian infrastructure destroyed or damaged, schools targeted, and humanitarian and health workers attacked and threatened.

Extreme weather events increased in frequency, intensity and variability, compounded by climate change. The climate crisis also fuelled record levels of displacement, increased competition for scarce natural resources, and worsened food and water insecurity.

In the first ever joint ECOSOC HAS-OCHA mission last year, my delegation witnessed first-hand the devastation caused by natural disasters and climate change in Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe wrought by Cyclones Idai and Kenneth. And we also saw the remarkable efforts of OCHA, UN humanitarian agencies, NGOs, and other partners to work with affected countries and communities, with regional organizations and neighboring countries to save lives and deliver desperately needed assistance.

### **Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to brief you about the organizational arrangements for this year's HAS.

Due to the pandemic, we have adapted our processes to follow the advice of the UN Medical Director that in-person meetings will not resume until at least the end of June. Therefore, this year's HAS will have to be **fully virtual**.

We are currently looking at the most appropriate technology that would allow us to conduct our work in the smoothest way possible.

**One major challenge is interpretation.** Our colleagues in the UN are working hard to make available a platform that would allow the conduct meetings with possibilities of interpretation in all 6 UN official languages. I hope that such technology would be available on time for our meetings in June.

**The other challenge is the procedure for adoption of the HAS resolution, in case of requests for a vote.** On this issue, the Ambassador of Jamaica, has been appointed by the President of the General Assembly as facilitator for the e-voting process. He is looking at the modalities to conduct such procedures, which I hope will also be ready before our meeting in June.

The **programme of this year's HAS** will begin, on 9 June, with the Opening Session, which will provide a more forward-looking discussion about the humanitarian landscape considering impacts of COVID-19 coupled with the global trends and emerging challenges mentioned earlier. We will consider how the UN and humanitarian partners are adapting and what lies ahead.

More broadly, the HAS comprises several high-level events, including three high-level panels under the following themes:

1. The first panel will take place on 9 June and is especially timely "*Addressing the increasing complexity of health challenges in humanitarian contexts*".

This panel will focus on critical next steps needed to better mitigate the impacts and respond to increasing needs driven by the COVID-19 pandemic; recognizing also the evolving landscape marked in recent years by disease outbreaks and epidemics. Panelists will discuss how the UN and its partners are mobilizing, and working with local organizations, to respond and adapting to current and future challenges; identify emerging needs, access challenges and delivering by remote. They will discuss how to anchor these new approaches in humanitarian principles in a context where needs are driven by an ever more complex mix of health, economic, and development crises.

Panelists will discuss the measures that are needed to lower the human costs of these new dynamics, providing first-hand examples of how they are managing to deliver in such challenging environments. They will describe ways they are meeting the urgent existing needs, even as the COVID-19 threatens to drive already historic levels of hunger to new extremes and add hundreds of millions to the ranks of poverty. They will also discuss solutions for facilitating the flow of humanitarian and medical supplies to where they are most needed. They will also discuss the pandemic's Mental Health and Psycho-Social (MHPSS) impacts and solutions for affected people, and for front-line humanitarian workers.

2. The second panel on 10 June will be on “*Mobilizing action to improve humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons and achieve durable solutions*”.

This Panel will explore concrete ways the international community can better support IDPs, host communities and Governments to help IDPs to move towards durable solutions to internal displacement considering ever-growing numbers who are uprooted within their own countries.

Panelists will share experiences of new approaches towards achieving durable solutions given the challenges of protracted displacement and how long-term solutions can be advanced from the very outset of a humanitarian emergency.

3. A third high-level panel on 11 June will consider “*Improving humanitarian effectiveness through new technology and innovation: opportunities and challenges*”.

This panel will discuss concrete ways the humanitarian sector is improving humanitarian effectiveness in a changing landscape through use of new technology and innovation. It will showcase examples of new technology and innovation being deployed in humanitarian operations to improve the impact of humanitarian operations, and share best practices and lessons learned. It will also discuss how the humanitarian sector is positioning itself to work with partners, including national and local actors, and the private sector and to identify and roll-out further opportunities.

The Panel will also identify some risks and challenges associated with new and emerging technologies and how these can be mitigated. This includes considerations of data protection and protection against privacy breaches, the potential curtailment of personal liberties through the misuse of data, the spread of misinformation and disinformation, and the use of technology to stigmatize or incite tensions, and the need to respect international norms.

In addition to the three high level panels, a high-level event will be convened on the margins of the Segment under the theme “*Combating and preventing sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian crises*”.

This event will assess the disproportionate impact on women and girls in humanitarian crises, and in particular the trends exposed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic; what is being done; and what more needs to urgently be done to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in humanitarian contexts. The event will bring together key stakeholders including Member States, humanitarians, civil society, and survivors to engage in dialogue about key issues and experiences, and promising practices to address gender-based violence.

I should also mention that before the formal opening of the Humanitarian Affairs Segment on 8 June, there will be a Joint Event on the Transition from Relief to Development. It will be convened jointly by the Chair of the Operational Activities for Development Segment and myself, under the theme “*The multidimensional and interconnected challenges in the central Sahel region: reducing needs, risks and vulnerabilities for people through closer humanitarian, development and peacebuilding collaboration*”. This year’s transition event will consider some of the intersecting challenges facing this region, such as persistent and increasing insecurity, climate impacts, displacement, food insecurity, transhumance, and protection concerns. Panelists will discuss actions to bring together humanitarian, development and peace actors, and bring to scale initiatives for improved cooperation across traditional pillars.

**Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Because of the exceptional circumstances, a limited number of side-events organized by diverse stakeholders will take place during the week of the Humanitarian Affairs Segment.

The side events will cover a range of priority humanitarian issues that will enable us to discuss in more detail some of the key operational and policy challenges humanitarian actors face. Based on the consultations with Member States and the humanitarian community, this year's side events topics will include: community based engagement, food insecurity; protection including children protection concerns and Preventing Sexual exploitation and Abuse; climate change; anticipatory action; implications of counter-terrorism measures; mental health and psycho-social support.

These 10 or so side events will be held from 8 to 12 June. I encourage Member States who have an interest in leading side events in these topics to reach out to OCHA as soon as possible.

On the annual resolution, negotiations began with the presentation of the zero draft on Monday 11 May. Following extensive consultations, we propose to take the process forward though "light negotiations", given the current circumstances. Our intention is to focus only on a few targeted additions to the resolution focused on COVID-19 dimensions in a way that adds value and reinforces humanitarian work. We encourage delegations to refrain from contentious areas and take a focused and measured approach in the spirit of "light negotiations" which delegations sought.

Finally, and in response to the appeal by many delegations and partners to have an outcome that is specific to COVID-19 pandemic, I have the intention to launch a "Call to Action" on this issue.

The Call will be in the form of an appeal to all concerned actors to take series of measures that are very much needed for the humanitarian response in the context of COVID-19. It will be under my own responsibility as Chair of the HAS, in other terms, it will not be adopted and not legally binding.

It goes without saying that I will consult with all delegations and partners in the elaboration of this Call and all comments will be taken into consideration. With this Call, I am looking for unity and

solidarity. Therefore, do not expect divergent or problematic issues, but rather a consensual and uniting Call.

**Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented in our lifetime and it requires an unprecedented humanitarian response. Once we have finally turned the page on this pandemic, there must be a time to look back to analyze what went wrong in our response and strengthen the humanitarian system. The lessons learned will be essential to effectively address similar challenges, as they may arise in the future.

**I thank you for attention.**