

**ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment - Informal Briefing to Member States**

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As the Secretary-General has said, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a global crisis on a scale not seen since the founding of the United Nations 75 years ago.

It has brought widespread death and disruption, playing havoc in some of the world's wealthiest countries. It rendered travel and trade nearly impossible and slowed the global economy to a standstill.

In some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries, the virus is only beginning to take hold. As it does, it lays bare just how vulnerable the people the humanitarian community serves are.

Even before the scale of needs generated by COVID-19 were apparent, the Secretary-General outlined in his report on the strengthening of coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, humanitarian needs were growing rapidly, driven largely by conflict, disregard for international humanitarian law, and disasters, all of which were exacerbated by the climate crisis.

By the end of 2019, 145.7 million people needed humanitarian assistance, and this number is likely to be surpassed in 2020 because of the primary and secondary consequences of COVID-19.

From 1 January to 31 December 2019, the period covered by the Secretary-General's report, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners, supported by a record US\$17.4 billion in funding, and assisted more than 61 million people in need in 22 countries with humanitarian response plans in 2019. Despite donors' generosity, the funding gap was over \$12 billion, or 41 percent.

United Nations coordinated humanitarian operations providing food, shelter, clean water, protection, education, medical services, and livelihoods support were delivered in situations ranging from conflicts in South Sudan, Syria and Yemen to natural disasters in Mozambique and the Caribbean.

Humanitarian needs grew sharply over the course of 2019, with 20 million more people in need of assistance than when the year began.

A number of factors contributed to these trends:

Deteriorating and protracted conflict situations, coupled with grave violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. Children and women were disproportionately affected.

Restrictions on humanitarian access deprived people of food, water, healthcare, protection and other life-saving assistance. Humanitarian workers, both national and international, were killed, kidnapped,

attacked, detained and threatened. Across conflicts and disasters, the effects on mental health and psychosocial well-being were profound.

Extreme weather events increased in frequency, intensity and variability, compounded by climate change. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, new internal displacement doubled in the last three years. And, looking forward, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance annually due to the climate crisis is expected to double by 2050 and costs to balloon if urgent action is not taken.

Over 70 million people were forcibly displaced by war, violence and persecution, including some 45.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). Another 24.9 million people were newly displaced by natural disasters. In many cases, countries experienced both conflict and disaster-induced displacement, compounding peoples' vulnerabilities, with gendered impacts.

Food insecurity continued to rise, with 135 million people facing acute hunger globally due to conflict, climate and poor harvests caused by chronic drought and increasingly unpredictable weather patterns. Climate shocks and natural hazards accounted for 34 million people in crisis or worse food security conditions.

2019 also saw rising disease outbreaks including cholera, measles and Ebola, as protracted crises, displacement and climate change made them harder to control. In some regions, outbreaks of pest infestations such as the Desert Locust increased food insecurity, damaged livelihoods and had wider humanitarian impacts on health, education and other essential services.

In summary, the underlying issues driving up humanitarian needs - conflict, climate change, disrespect for IHL - have not gone away. Thus, the SG's recommendations contained in the report on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance remain crucial, if not even more important, in light of the pandemic. Those recommendations include to:

- Continue to fund humanitarian appeals and pooled funds generously. Needs described in the GHRP are urgent, but we cannot forget those already in need.
- Ensure adherence to the humanitarian principles and to promote and respect IHL
- Facilitate the rapid, unimpeded and sustained access of impartial humanitarian
- Simplify and expedite procedures for the entry and deployment of humanitarian personnel, goods and services.
- Protection of civilians, other protected persons and civilian objects must remain at the centre of humanitarian action. All practical measures must be taken to protect medical and humanitarian missions.
- Measures should be scaled up to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. It is also necessary to scale up efforts and funding to respond to gender-based violence,
- Increase strategies to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and to mainstream the inclusion of persons with disabilities into programmes, policies and strategic frameworks.
- Increased efforts are needed to provide and fund cross-sectoral mental health and psychosocial support services.

- Efforts must be intensified to prevent and respond to food insecurity, including by providing urgent and flexible funding, scaling up support for risk-sensitive and shock-responsive social protection.
- Continue to scale up efforts on anticipatory approaches to humanitarian crises to curb the scale of humanitarian impacts.

Thank you, Mr Chair, for your leadership of the Humanitarian Segment and your support for our humanitarian endeavor.