Remarks for Moderator Ms. Heli Uusikyla, Director, Humanitarian Financing and Resource Mobilization Division (HFRMD), OCHA
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ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS)

High-Level Panel 1: *Humanitarian assistance and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic: working together to ensure children and women are not left behind*

Tuesday, 21 June 2022
3:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. (New York)

Chair: H.E. Ambassador Diego Pary Rodríguez, Permanent Representative of Bolivia to the United Nations & Vice-President of ECOSOC responsible for the Humanitarian Affairs Segment

Excellencies and distinguished guests,

I am pleased to be here to discuss the lessons that the humanitarian system has learned from the pandemic, and how we implement them to ensure an inclusive recovery.

Whilst COVID-19 is not the main headline story today, many countries and communities have a long way to go before they fully recover from the multidimensional impact of the pandemic and the unprecedented reversal in poverty reduction. For many people, particularly those in vulnerable situations, and especially women and children, it is far from over.

As we will hear from our panel, the pandemic worsened poverty and inequality, strained national health-care systems, set back children’s education, and increased violence against women and girls.

Two and a half years on, COVID-19 vaccinations, which have enabled economies to re-open in wealthy countries, still remain inaccessible in many humanitarian settings. This is an egregious global failure. Thirteen countries with a humanitarian
response plan are yet to vaccinate even 10 per cent of their population, leaving them
vulnerable to future surges, new variants, illness and excess deaths.

Today’s panel offers a platform to explore how the humanitarian community
responded, where we can do better, and what we need to do collectively so that we
are ready for - and indeed more cable of preventing - a future pandemic and its
devastating ramifications.

The Chair has introduced our distinguished panelists and it is my pleasure to turn the
floor to them to respond to their own vantage points to the guiding questions that
have been put before us for this session. I particularly look forward to hearing about
the lessons we can learn for future preparedness and response, and where
investments are needed, now and in the future.

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My thanks to all for a stimulating discussion.

As we heard, pandemic exposed weaknesses and fissures that were common to many
Rising violence against women and girls. Marginalization of women and girls. The
digital divide.

Investing in stronger national health-care systems will help us better manage future
COVID-19 surges or the next pandemic. It will also equip us to address the
secondary health impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls, and to get ahead of
other infectious disease outbreaks.

Understanding that for the poorest among us, the COVID-19 crisis translated to a
hunger and poverty crisis, we need to be investing in food, social protection and
financial systems that better serve the needs of the most vulnerable people.
As the digital divide threatens to leave behind many women and children, blocking their access to online learning and eventual employment opportunities, we can and must step up global efforts to extend digital connectivity to all.

And as vulnerable children remain at risk of not returning to school, they still have a right to learning and to protection from harm. We must go that extra mile to try to give them that, so they can hope for a better future.

My thanks to all of our excellent panellists for the ideas you shared today. I look forward to collaborating with you to implement them as we move forward.

I will now hand over to the Chair for his concluding remarks.

Over to you, Chair Ambassador Rodríguez.