ECOSOC HAS 2021

“Strengthening humanitarian assistance to face the challenges of 2021 and beyond: mobilizing respect for international humanitarian law, inclusion, gender, innovation and partnerships”

23-25 June 2021

General Discussion

Statement by Portugal

Madam Chair,

Let me start by expressing our full support to Switzerland as the chair of this Humanitarian Affairs Segment of the ECOSOC. It takes place in an unprecedented context, when the current pandemic adds to an already dramatic increase of humanitarian crisis induced by conflicts, climate change and food insecurity.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, humanitarian needs of populations in situations of vulnerability have increased and protection challenges became wider and even more urgent. The theme of this year’s meeting is therefore key and timely.

A coordinated response of humanitarian assistance is more needed than ever. Strengthened cooperation, collaboration and coordination across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is even more crucial. In this context, we are grateful to Switzerland and Indonesia for successfully facilitating the ECOSOC humanitarian resolution on “Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations”. Portugal fully supports the text of the ECOSOC HAS resolution.

Madam Chair,

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economy has contracted sharply, reversing gains of the last years, affecting the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people, pushing them to unemployment, extreme poverty and hunger. We see increased gender inequality and women and girls’ exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, as well as negative mental health and psychosocial consequences.

The pandemic has also disrupted humanitarian access to those in need. This access has further deteriorated by growing constraints in the operating environment
due to disrespect of International Humanitarian Law and of the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Portugal remains a strong supporter of IHL, attaches great importance to its study and dissemination, as well as to promoting compliance with it.

We commend the humanitarian actors for quickly adapting to the new state of play and express our gratitude to the staff for their commitment to deliver assistance under very challenging conditions and for remaining in their duty stations. We acknowledge the growing difficult operational conditions and increased insecurity in humanitarian settings.

The Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union has placed humanitarian assistance high in the agenda and led the discussion on humanitarian action in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We focused on four main areas: inclusion and protection of the most vulnerable people, including women, children and young people, and forcibly displaced; impact of climate change in humanitarian action; operationalisation and implementation of the humanitarian, development and peace nexus; and education in emergencies.

We have also put a strong focus on partnerships with United Nations, International NGO and civil society, and have sought to reaffirm the essential role and importance they play in crises.

The European Council conclusions, adopted in May, welcoming the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the EU’s humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles are an important milestone of our Presidency. These are the guidelines for the current and future response of the EU and its Member States to humanitarian crises and emergencies caused by natural disasters and/or by human hand, in the current context of unprecedented humanitarian needs.

Portugal has a long tradition in promoting Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which have always been dear to us, namely the right to Education. The complexities of many conflicts, the increased duration of wars and their profound long-lasting effects have reaffirmed the key role of education. Higher education in countries facing conflict is crucial for both early recovery and long-lasting rebuilding of affected societies. It is a fundamental step towards consolidating peace, breaking cycles of violence and avoiding the relapse into conflict. If humanitarian efforts fail to integrate higher education programs, there will be a generational loss with poorly educated and unskilled young people less prepared to contribute to their country’s recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the need to prioritize education in a time of crisis.

Among the initiatives supported by the Portuguese Government, is the Global Platform for Higher Education in Emergencies. The platform is designed and developed as an emergency scholarship program, to enable students from countries in conflict to continue their training and thus prepare for the future, either
by participating in the reconstruction of their countries, or by contributing to their host communities.

Madam Chair

Portugal remains willing to share the burden and responsibility and has joined the international community's efforts to respond to calls for financial contributions from UN Agencies.

Under the “Team Europe” approach, Portugal facilitated the humanitarian flights to São Tomé e Príncipe and Guinea Bissau; was co-facilitator of the humanitarian flights to Venezuela and to Haiti and contributed to the flight to Lebanon. We gathered material donated by our national partners and national NGOs to help responding to the immediate needs of the most vulnerable populations and to reinforce the beneficiary authorities’ capacity to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of this month, Portugal will be joining efforts with the EU, together with Italy, NGO and UN partners, for another humanitarian flight to the north of Mozambique (Cabo Delgado).

Furthermore, Portugal is redirecting 5% of our vaccine supplies to Portuguese Speaking Countries in Africa and to East Timor. We have also supported prevention and the fight against the pandemic in those countries, namely through the supply of medical equipment and training in intensive care, and through our Emergency Medical Teams.

We firmly believe that the inclusion of persons of concern in national health responses as well as other necessary services is crucial. Therefore, although also impacted by disruptions of healthcare, Portugal has prioritised inclusion and protection of the most vulnerable in the COVID-19 response.

Madame Chair,

In order to respond to the growing challenges and needs of humanitarian assistance, three “C’s” are vital: cooperation, collaboration and coordination. For that reason, we all have to be more efficient, resilient and results oriented. It is key to continue guiding our actions through the principles of humanitarian responsibility and solidarity leaving no one behind.

I Thank You