South Africa congratulates you and the Secretariat for this year’s edition of the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment which appropriately identified focus thematic sessions that indeed correlate to the core challenges and priorities facing the humanitarian landscape; the choices we make will undoubtedly also impact on future generations.

South Africa aligns itself with the statement delivered by Burkina Faso on behalf of the Africa Group. We thank the UN Secretary-General for his report on “Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations”, which provides timeous updates on pertinent humanitarian situations, notably in the African continent and the resultant humanitarian needs.

South Africa remains committed to supporting the global humanitarian response wherever humanitarian crises arise within our resources and partnerships to help alleviate human suffering. In the same vein, we cannot over-emphasise the need to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law as well as human rights law and refugee law, the lack thereof often results in many of the humanitarian crises that we are witnessing.
today. This can be realised through appropriate and inclusive policies and ensuring that those responsible for the violations of international law are held accountable.

In facing the Covid-19 pandemic, we sincerely thank the humanitarian actors and stakeholders for their unwavering resolve to assist the most vulnerable and celebrate the spirit of resilience and global cooperation and solidarity, including among the affected communities and persons. The role of local responders who are often the first responders in cases of humanitarian crises cannot be overemphasized.

The launch in 2020 of the Joint Intersectoral Analysis Framework, which undertakes disaggregated data analyses on people in need, is noted with appreciation. However, South Africa emphasises the need to adhere to the principle of confidentiality ensuring the protection of personal information of those in need of humanitarian assistance, thus reducing further vulnerability in particular for those in need of international protection. We further applaud the various measures engaged to ensure humanitarian access, including humanitarian “exceptions”, airlifts, adapted distribution modalities and increased reliance on local actors.

The humanitarian caseload continues to increase due to new and protracted complex emergencies. Natural disasters occur with more frequency and intensity, and global challenges increase vulnerability and create new or exacerbate existing humanitarian needs. In addressing humanitarian challenges, both political and emergency action orientated steps need to be taken in order to ensure sustainable and resilient solutions are reached, which address the root causes as well as the immediate needs in humanitarian crises.

It is worth noting that other than the various conflicts that are taking place in various parts of the continent which increase levels of displacement, increase the number of asylum seekers and refugees and internally displaced persons, natural disasters induced by climate change have resulted in severe droughts and floods, a swam of locust
phenomenon and fall armyworms which threaten food insecurity in various regions of the African continent.

Chairperson,

The existential threat posed by climate change requires urgent, ambitious and collective action by all Member States. Our ambition must not be limited to mitigation but should also include adaptation and implementation support, transfer of technology and means of implementation. South Africa believes that this balance is vitally important for Africa, which is disproportionately affected by the impact of climate change and yet is the lowest emitter. Access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy is fundamental to reducing poverty and promoting inclusive economic growth. South Africa will continue to address these critical issues in the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Paris Agreement and multilateral environmental agreements, such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Chairperson,

South Africa champions the cause for peace and stability in the African Continent in line with the vision of the African Union’s Agenda 2063. In this regard, the humanitarian, development and peace nexus implore us to silence the guns. As such we are one of the five countries globally and the only one on the African Continent to be appointed as the political champions of the Health Care in Danger (HCiD) Project. The Health Care in Danger is an all-inclusive concept and is not limited to physical attacks only; and the example of this is the current COVID-19 pandemic that has plunged the global health and humanitarian systems in crises.

With Covid-19 pandemic which has spread the world over and with various vaccines available, the provision of humanitarian assistance has taken a new dimension. Humanitarian actors have had to work more closely with health actors guided by health protocols as dictated and guided by the WHO to contribute towards containing the spread
of covid-19 and alleviate aggravating already fragile humanitarian situations. South Africa is happy to have partnered with the World Food Programme as part of ensuring that the global supply chain is not completely negatively impacted by the measures introduced to curb the spread of the virus. This partnership which was realized through the establishment of the UN Temporary Humanitarian Hub in Johannesburg facilitated the continued movement of humanitarian and health personnel and cargo across the continent and beyond. Lessons learned from these partnerships should inform future humanitarian responses and anticipatory action.

As we are all aware, Africa has witnessed not only a major disruption to food supply chains in the wake of lockdowns triggered by the global health crisis, but also a major global economic slowdown. These crises have resulted in lower incomes and higher prices of some foods, putting food out of reach for many, with the consequence of increasing the frequency, scale, and complexity of humanitarian crisis on the continent. Although the Covid-19 pandemic has created a global crisis, the response to this crisis is unfortunately not global. Africa has already been going through multifaceted humanitarian challenges.

Vaccine nationalism has proven to be a challenge especially for the countries of the South due to the inability to manufacture vaccines, and patents related challenges, despite the COVAX arrangements in place. It is therefore critical to increase manufacturing capacities among countries in the global South, including technology transfer and reliable distribution. As South Africa we welcome the collaboration that has led to the establishment of the first COVID mRNA vaccine technology transfer hub in our country. This will contribute towards increasing the much-needed vaccine production capacity that will not only benefit SA but the African continent as a whole.

Chairperson,

If we are to save lives and end the pandemic, we need to expand and diversify manufacturing bases and get medical products to treat, combat and prevent the pandemic
to as many people as quickly as possible. The proposed TRIPS waiver is a temporary, targeted and proportional response which recognizes the unprecedented nature of the pandemic. Addressing the intellectual property barriers, enabling the transfer of technology and know-how while facilitating backward integration to raw materials and distribution rights, is fundamental for scaling up manufacturing of medical products and equipment. South Africa therefore calls for Member States to support the waiver and continue to engage in negotiations that will result in a balanced outcome that massively and rapidly expands production in Africa and across the world. Failure to do so will further exacerbate already fragile humanitarian situations as more and more people are infected by the virus due to the incapacity of governments to vaccinate at large scale.

We share the UNSG’s serious concern regarding the extent that women and girls are disproportionately affected in humanitarian situations, particularly by gender-based violence, coupled with decreased access to education, health care, nutrition and livelihoods, putting millions of girls at increased risk of child marriage, child labour and other forms of exploitation. The pandemic caused the largest disruption of education in history. In addressing the issue of gender equality and violence against women, South Africa remains committed to focus on equal representation and women’s empowerment, women’s health and ending violence and discrimination against women and further calls for gender-sensitive humanitarian response plans to address the intersecting nature of the challenges faced by women and girls.

In conclusion Chairperson, South Africa remains committed to supporting the global humanitarian architecture through voluntary contributions, responding to humanitarian appeals, setting up appropriate humanitarian response structures, particularly in Africa and strengthening partnerships to leverage the outcomes of the ECOSOC HAS 2021. In this regard it is also important to ensure the strengthening of the relationship between the UN HAS, local humanitarian priorities and the African Union Humanitarian architecture to ensure sustainable results through humanitarian action.

Thank you.