Mr Chair,

I wish to thank the Vice-President for convening the meeting under the theme that is relevant and timely.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to global efforts to providing lifesaving assistance to vulnerable populations around the world. It continues to be felt most existentially by people and societies in greatest need of development aid and humanitarian assistance. The pandemic has severely impacted health systems around the world, particularly in low-income countries, in which almost half of all deaths are caused by communicable diseases and maternal, perinatal, and nutritional conditions. The ongoing impacts of the pandemic as disease variants and slow vaccine rollout are accelerating the pandemic, health services and health systems readiness are affected, and the global economy continues to experience disruptions to development gains. The pandemic has also put a spotlight on rising poverty, political conflicts, and climate change effects.

It is estimated that 274 million individuals will need humanitarian assistance and protection in 2022, a significant increase from 235 million people from 2021, which was already viewed as the highest figure in decades. This is a result of the massive impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which increased the number of individuals acutely affected by food insecurity to 811 million and pushed an additional 20 million into extreme poverty in 2021. While challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, violent conflicts, forced displacement and climate change affect humanity on a widespread scale, they disproportionately impact the most vulnerable, especially women and girls. They also highlight and compound existing gender health inequalities.

Mr Chair,

Women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected states experience unequal impacts of the climate crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. In many humanitarian contexts, women and girls are already denied basic freedoms and rights, systematically excluded from decision-making mechanisms, and subjected to heightened insecurity and violence. The pandemic has unduly impacted women
and girls, who suffer a “shadow pandemic” of domestic violence and disproportionate impact. The climate crisis further complicates humanitarian responses, and even immediate action must still overcome decades of impacts due to our delays.

South Africa two months ago experienced the worst floods, which killed more than 400 people and made over 7,000 people homeless, in the Eastern Province of KwaZulu-Natal. The torrential rains and floods damaged homes, schools, roads and other critical infrastructure. The communities affected by the floods were already vulnerable due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, which left many households without a source of income. Just as they were trying to rebuild, another disaster hit. Humanitarian was stretched, and there were urgent partnerships needed to support communities in their rebuilding processes.

This demonstrates that climate crisis is no longer a distant threat in the future. Its effects are happening now, impairing human rights, creating new humanitarian needs and exacerbating those that already exist. Climate emergency is a threat multiplier, contributing not only to more frequent and intense climate-related disasters, but also driving displacement and making life harder for those already forced to flee.

Mr Chair,

To narrow these gaps, shifts are needed towards integrated and longer-term climate risk and impact management by humanitarian stakeholders. Addressing acute humanitarian needs requires the introduction of more anticipatory and preparedness measures, multi-year outcomes, the increased use of flexible cash assistance, in addition to programmes and clearer strategies that prioritize equity, inclusion and access to information for affected communities.

Improved participation, connectivity and complementarity across sectors will help efforts to better communicate the risks and impacts of the climate and pandemic emergencies with local communities, humanitarian and development actors, Governments and donors. Such actions will strengthen community resilience to future shocks and place human rights and humanitarian action as an essential part of global climate-adaptation efforts. It is imperative that the humanitarian and relief agencies are closely linked to efforts to support adaptation and to help prevent and prepare for natural disasters.

I thank you.