

**ECOSOC HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS SEGMENT
(23-25 June 2021)**

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

GENERAL DISCUSSION

**STATEMENT BY
THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY**

Madam Vice-President,

Allow me to begin by thanking you for convening the Humanitarian Affairs Segment at a significant juncture following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The year 2020 was a year like no other. The Covid-19 pandemic has added an extra layer of pain and suffering on top of the pre-existing needs. It put even decades of human development at risk.

While almost 4 million people have lost their lives due to the pandemic throughout the world, the number of people who are in need has reached 235 million people with an increase of 40 per cent in a year.

The international community responded to the pandemic as fast and comprehensive as never before. The frontline workers and volunteers have demonstrated an immense dedication and commitment in this process.

However, the gap between needs and financial resources remains huge. The humanitarian system is over-whelmed and over-stretched.

Madam Vice-President,

Turkey is a major global humanitarian actor and advocates for human-centered policies in the conduct of international diplomacy.

In this regard, Turkey has maintained its humanitarian focus and actively engaged in multilateral efforts to contain the virus and mitigate its impact.

Turkey has remained to be one of the most generous countries with its humanitarian assistance provided regardless of geography, ethnicity or religion.

Our agencies such as AFAD, TİKA, Turkish Red Crescent as well as NGOs reached millions of people around the world from Yemen to Afghanistan, from Palestinians to Rohingyas, to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable communities.

During initial peak stages of the pandemic, we have provided emergency assistance to 158 countries and responded favourably to the demands of 12 international organizations.

The pandemic is far from over. Yet, we believe that the world is at a critical stage in the fight against the virus with the roll out of the Covid-19 vaccines.

International community must seize the opportunity and take bold steps to ensure fair and equitable access to and distribution of the vaccines. This is significant especially for the populations in conflict settings or in other forms of displacement.

Madam Vice-President,

Most humanitarian needs are caused by conflicts and the pandemic has exacerbated them.

The Syrian crisis has entered into its second decade.

During the conflict, more than 60 per cent of Syria's pre-war population were forced to flee their homes. More than a half million people lost their lives.

Over 80 per cent of the population inside Syria is living in poverty line. 86 per cent of refugee children do not want to return to Syria.

The humanitarian situation in Syria today is worse than last year. It is estimated that 13.4 million people are in humanitarian need. This is a 20 per cent increase from 2020.

Northwest Syria is certainly one of the worst affected regions from the Syrian conflict, where 4.2 million people, including 2,7 million IDPs live under very dire conditions and a volatile security situation.

These figures show how vital the continuation of the existing UN cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism is.

Given the continuous worsening of the humanitarian situation and the increase in needs, including COVID-19 vaccines, across Syria, the mechanism should be maintained and expanded to save lives.

Madam Vice-President,

Vulnerable groups are among the hardest hit by the pandemic. This is especially the case for displaced communities.

In 2021, Turkey maintained its position as the largest refugee hosting country with more than more than 4 million people, of whom 3,6 million are Syrians.

During the pandemic, they continued enjoying access to all basic services including health and education.

We have introduced specific precautionary measures at our accommodation centres and provided regular information to refugees regarding the pandemic in cooperation with international organizations and NGOs.

One of the issues we have always been very sensitive concerning refugees has been education. Almost 800 thousand refugee children are enrolled in our schools. Also, around 50 thousand refugee students are having university education.

As a matter of fact, all major host countries have done their utmost to support those vulnerable groups and they should not be left alone in their endeavour.

Greater solidarity must be shown. Burden and responsibility sharing principles should be put into action more concretely.

Madam Vice-President,

The pandemic has made the humanitarian situation worse, but it is important not to forget that the needs were already at a peak before.

The danger of hunger, famine, food insecurity and diseases are not less likely.

Climate change has already become one of the top drivers of the humanitarian need. According to international organizations and NGOs, climate change has been a crucial factor in the recent displacement cases. It is even estimated that it could cause displacement of more than 140 million people by 2050.

On the other hand, respect for international law and international humanitarian law is in decline.

Vulnerable groups, including women and girls, people with disabilities, older people and those with mental health needs are affected heavily from worsening conditions.

The humanitarian system must be able to evolve to better respond to these challenges.

The first-ever World Humanitarian Summit held in İstanbul in 2016 was a significant opportunity to discuss a new way of thinking in the humanitarian system.

We should continue our deliberations on innovative solutions and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of our actions.

In this regard, we fully support efforts of the UN in exploring any opportunity in terms of using new technologies and data in humanitarian system.

Madam Vice-President,

The current conditions necessitate all of us to act in solidarity and coordination across the borders. It is high time to put our commitments into action in order to leave no one behind. With our continued engagement and good will, we believe we can make a real change in the lives of millions suffering.

Thank you.