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Remarks at the launch of the Global Humanitarian Overview 2020

Geneva, 4 December 2019

As delivered

Welcome to the launch of the Global Humanitarian Overview for 2020. The report, or the GHO as we call it, is the world's most comprehensive and evidence-based assessment of humanitarian needs, requirements and humanitarian trends.

This year, we are issuing the report simultaneously in five countries. I will first summarize the headline messages from the report, and then we will move on to our panel discussion.

The first headline is that in 2019, a lot more people needed humanitarian assistance than we had forecast, largely because of conflicts and extreme climate events.

When I was talking to you in this room exactly a year ago, I said I thought there would be 146 million people on the planet who would need humanitarian assistance this year. That turned out to be wrong. In fact, there has been 166 million people who we needed to try to help.

We have had a generous response from donors who voluntarily support our response plans. Up to the end of November, we received \$16 billion this year for inter-agency appeals. That's \$2 billion more than we received for the same period last year, which was itself a record. So, we have had a record year in response to these heightened needs. I want again to go on record with my very deep, sincere, personal thanks to everybody on the donor side who has responded so generously this year.

We have again this year seen a decline in compliance with international humanitarian law. Armed conflicts are killing and maiming a record number of children. Last year, we told you that more than 12,000 children were killed or maimed in conflict in 2018. That was the highest figure on record – this year has been worse. Children in crises are becoming a lost generation and women and girls in particular are at even higher risk of sexual and gender-based violence. We are also trying to track better than we have done in the past, the number of people in conflict areas who are suffering mental health problems. And for the first time ever, in this year's report, we have included material on mental health and psycho-social support to people caught up in crises. That builds on an important conference that the Dutch Government hosted in the Netherlands on these issues, in Amsterdam just a couple of months ago.

We have also seen an alarming increase in attacks on workers and facilities whose job it is to help the people whose lives are ruined by these crises. In the first nine months of this year, there were 791 attacks against health workers and health facilities resulting in 171 deaths. By contrast, in 2018, 131 aid workers were killed and 130 kidnapped in 400 attacks. So there has been a very marked increase in attacks on people going about their daily work of trying to protect other people and I am extremely disturbed at this trend.

The second headline is about the emerging risks and trends we see.

Climate change is increasing people's vulnerability to humanitarian crises. Thirteen of the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change are places in which we've had an inter-agency humanitarian appeal this year.

Infectious diseases are becoming more prevalent and harder to control because of conflict, weak health systems, poor water and sanitation, and lack of access to vaccinations. To give you one example of this: in the first three months of this year, there was a 700 per cent increase in the number of measles cases in Africa compared with the same period last year.

In 2019, 33 low-income countries were in, or at risk of, debt distress. Of them, 12 countries with humanitarian appeals are home to 40 per cent of the people in need of humanitarian assistance. A global economic slowdown could further increase vulnerability in countries already experiencing economic stress and debt problems.

Conflict is also the key driver of hunger, and there were more than 820 million people without adequate food at the beginning of this year. That has got worse as the year has progressed.

Displacement has increased as well. At the beginning of the year, more than 70 million people had been forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution.

The third headline is about our projections for 2020.

We project that next year, nearly 168 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection. That represents about one person in 45 on the planet, and it is the highest figure in decades. It is really the highest figure since we began collecting this data on a comparable basis.

The situation is going to keep getting worse unless climate change and the root causes of conflict are better addressed. On current trends, and we set these trends out in the report, for the first time we've got a more medium-term perspective on future trends. The projection is that more than 200 million people could need assistance by the year 2022.

I want to say a word about some of the major crises.

Yemen next year will again be the world's worst humanitarian crisis, and the number of people in need is going to be similar to this year. The humanitarian response we are planning to run will

be the world's largest, and we will run it despite huge operational challenges inside the country. But we are projecting some improvement in the situation in Yemen and our response plan for next year in Yemen is actually a bit smaller than it has been this year.

The conflict in Syria continues to drive the world's largest refugee crisis, with more than 5.6 million refugees in the region. And of course, there are still more than 6 million Syrians displaced inside their own country.

In Sudan, a deepening economic crisis has significantly increased food insecurity and weakened essential services, including health, water and education. And I want to say, as I said when I finished my visit to Sudan last week, that I think the international community would be smart to respond faster and more generously to emerging humanitarian problems in Sudan than we see at the moment. The Minister for Social Protection from Sudan was hoping to be with us today to give you a briefing on the situation, but unfortunately there was a terrible accident in which many people lost their lives in a factory in Khartoum yesterday, so she had to stay in Khartoum. But we are looking at ways to impart the information in the briefing and the response planning in Sudan because I am really very concerned about the situation.

In the Sahel, displacement has dramatically increased, and hunger has reached critical levels. In the Lake Chad Basin, the humanitarian crisis shows no signs of abating as it enters its seventh year.

The needs have also grown significantly in several other countries, including Afghanistan where we are projecting that almost a quarter of the population is going to need humanitarian assistance next year.

In Venezuela, where I was a month or so ago, a deepening economic crisis has led to a severe reduction in the income of many households and a sharp deterioration in water, power and health services that people can actually access, and quite a number of Venezuelans have left. We are planning a large increase in our response plan in Venezuela next year, building on the progress we've made this year in helping with medical services, vaccination, and malnutrition, so we've had constructive discussions with the government there.

Humanitarian needs are also going to remain exceptionally high in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and South Sudan.

The fourth and my last headline is about the response we plan.

The UN and partner organizations will aim to assist nearly 109 million of the most vulnerable people next year. We have set out summaries of the plans to do that in the report. That is going to require funding of some \$29 billion.

This year, we've been trying to raise in total \$30 billion. One of the questions you may have is: if there are more people in need, why are we seeking less money this year? The answer to that is because we are making significant and important progress in improving humanitarian response in a couple of important ways. There is a lot in the report about this. The first thing that we are doing is targeting assistance through our response plans much more rigorously than we have done historically. And we are paying greater attention – which is illustrated in quite some detail in the report – to the most vulnerable people, especially women and girls and people with disabilities. For the first time we've got additional coverage of that in the report.

The second thing we are doing is working to anticipate problems. With most of the problems we are dealing with, you get a little bit of notice. With an earthquake, there's almost no notice, maybe 10 or 60 seconds, but most of the other problems we are dealing with you get a bit more notice. If you anticipate problems, you can deal with them more cheaply, more quickly and with less suffering. We've had some success in doing that during 2019.

Those are the headlines. We look forward to a discussion with you on the details of all the country situations and your feedback on the report. And I will now invite contributions from my colleagues on the panel.

Thank you.
