Opening Remarks For H.E. Ambassador Ms. Pascale Baeriswyl, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations and Vice-President of ECOSOC

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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ambassador Kyslytsya and I are honored to co-chair this important event, bridging the ECOSOC Operational Activities for Development Segment with the Humanitarian Affairs Segment. We are particularly pleased to have you join us here in the Palais des Nations in person as well as online.

Every year for the last decade, we have seen a new record high in humanitarian needs. Once again this takes place in a context of rising humanitarian need and increasingly serious threats to food security globally. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, humanitarian needs have increased sharply, not only in terms of numbers of persons affected, but also the intensity of their needs. Conflict and instability, a sharp economic downturn, worsening poverty, and the relentless pace of climate change conspire to compound the living conditions of the world’s most vulnerable people, all with disproportionate effects on women and girls. These conditions are driving food insecurity to new highs, and, when coupled with conflict and violations of international humanitarian law, they raise the threat of famine which we know see in multiple countries.

According to the multi-partner system of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), some 35 million people face emergency levels of acute food insecurity (IPC 4) --- one level away from catastrophe or famine. 155 million people in 55 countries are experiencing crisis levels of food insecurity and risk losing their livelihoods. The international
community must act with the urgency the situation requires and remember that we can still prevent food insecurity from reaching such alarming levels elsewhere.

This suffering being experienced is not abstract. More than 500,000 people are already at the brink of starvation and at immediate risk of famine in Ethiopia, Yemen, South Sudan, and North-east Nigeria - that is more than double the population of the city of Geneva, where we meet today. Worse, the severity of their acute food insecurity will surely rise in coming months without urgent assistance and without access.

The 2021 Transition Event today will focus on fighting the scourge of famine that threatens the lives of millions of people today. It will also discuss what we need to do to prevent and respond to the sharp escalation of food insecurity. The threat of acute food insecurity is sharply escalating and the risks we are seeing are unprecedented in its scope and scale across the globe.

Our high-level panel will discuss progress in working collaboratively to address the drivers of food insecurity. We will learn how humanitarian, development and peace actors are strengthening their collaboration by working together in practical ways in conflict and other contexts to reducing vulnerability and risk to save people from immediate danger, and to prevent similar needs in the future.

The ambition of the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one behind” obliges us to make use of all the tools at our disposal. In addition to immediate life-saving assistance, we need to address the longer-term development gaps that drive humanitarian needs when shocks hit. This collaborative approach is more important than ever before, as we strive to protect the most vulnerable from the humanitarian and the massive development damage caused by COVID-19.

I therefore look forward to hearing more on how the UN development system reforms will help tackle underlying causes, including in investment in agriculture and food, building resilience, supporting shock-responsive social protection systems, and building proactively disaster risk reduction into strategies.

We will hear from our panelists how new approaches are being applied across the humanitarian, development and peace contexts to tackle the complex challenges posed by famine and food insecurity. We will hear lessons learnt from innovative approaches and emerging practices.
With this, I am very pleased to now hand over to Ambassador Kyslytsya, Vice President of ECOSOC in charge of the Operational Activities for Development Segment.