My friends, excellencies, distinguished guests and panelists, ladies and gentlemen. It is fantastic to see so many of you here today. You are an example of every UN meeting should be like. If anyone is looking for an example of resilience, it is here in this room. I am really delighted to have the opportunity to participate today in this important meeting.

Thank you to all of the partners that are co-hosting this important high level event with OCHA: the Governments of Australia and Mexico, UN women, Oxfam and ActionAid.

As Emergency Relief Coordinator, I have continually advocated for gender equality and the protection of women and girls in emergencies. Most of our work takes place behind the scenes, but it helps lay the foundation for action across the humanitarian system. We remain deeply committed to working towards a future in which humanitarian action lives up to the needs and expectations of women and girls, and is firmly guided by their priorities and voices.

We all recognize that humanitarian crises affect women and girls differently, and in many cases, disproportionately as emergencies heighten pre-existing discrimination, inequality and vulnerability. Sexual and gender-based violence is now perpetrated as a weapon of war in armed conflicts the world over, with devastating impacts on the health, mental health and socio-economic status of women and girls. This simply has to change.

We are now just two months away from the first ever World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, which will provide an unprecedented opportunity for leaders and stakeholders from all sectors to make firm commitments to enhance gender equality in humanitarian action. At the Summit, we look to leaders to make concrete commitments at the High-Level Roundtable on women and girls, which focuses on ‘Catalyzing Action to Achieve Gender Equality.’ Your ideas, your vision, energy and leadership are crucial to making this a success.
This High-level Roundtable will seek to create international consensus to end gender inequality in humanitarian action. For this, I need you to call on your leaders to come to Istanbul to announce robust commitments that prioritize meeting the needs of women and girls in humanitarian settings.

These commitments will lead to substantially increased support for women’s groups in crises; they will strengthen efforts to prevent and respond to gender based violence; and they will mobilize global action to ensure women and girls have access to reproductive health services. The commitments will promote women to assume leadership roles in humanitarian settings, which evidence tells us, leads to better humanitarian outcomes for the entire community. If you have any doubts many of you will know from my previous life I am proud to have coined the phrase which I occasionally hear recycled back to me: “On the evidence, if you get it right for girls and women, you get it right for development.” Nine months into this job I can confirm that if you get it right for girls and women, you get it right for humanitarian action.

As we approach the Summit, we call on support from all of you to ensure that it prioritizes meeting the rights of women and girls, and heeds the call to close the gender gap in humanitarian action – a call that we heard repeatedly in each regional consultation held worldwide over the past two years.

This gender gap has - I know you agree - existed for too long, imperiling women’s lives, health, and right to thrive in their own communities. The World Humanitarian Summit is a once in a generation opportunity to be able to say that humanitarian action will now be working for all affected people.

At the Summit and beyond we must firstly ensure that we heed the call of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda to leave no one behind, including women and girls. We must also ensure we prioritize women’s voices and leadership in vulnerability reduction and humanitarian action; that we improve accountability to reaching gender equality across the system; and that women and girls are protected from sexual and gender based violence. None of this progress will be possible unless we develop strong gender analytical frameworks to measure our progress. The Interagency Standing Committee’s Gender Marker is a good example – now mandatory in the Central Emergency Response Fund, Humanitarian Response Plans and OCHA-managed pooled funds.

Women in crises and women’s civil society groups must be at the forefront of humanitarian decision-making, and to support this, we call for more funding to go directly to these groups. By doing so, we will not only put women and girls in the driving seat of decision-making but we will also render our humanitarian programming more effective. As the Secretary-General stressed in his report ‘One Humanity, Shared Responsibility,’ “Women and girls’ full and equal participation…at all levels, must become the standard.” This is part of the Agenda for Humanity, which we hope leaders will support to take forward in Istanbul.
For its part, OCHA will continue to make the most of its pivotal role as a convener and coordinator in the humanitarian system by advocating for gender-responsive humanitarian action and by creating an enabling environment that prioritizes and protects women and girls in emergencies. OCHA continues to implement commitments under the Global Call to Action on protecting women and girls from gender based violence in emergencies, and supports inter-agency and inter-governmental processes, such as the Women Peace and Security Agenda and UN Action. We also host the inter-agency Gender Capacity Project that deploys senior gender advisers to humanitarian emergencies. Each of the commitments that we make over coming months must reinforce these initiatives, including the ambitious 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda which puts gender equality at its heart.

Let’s now turn words and meetings into action.

As we move forward we must recognize that the World Humanitarian Summit will be a success only if it supports and prioritizes women and girls’ rights at every level. I look forward to hearing your insights and your agendas to accomplish these goals.

Thank you.