As delivered

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

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Opening Remarks for the Third Annual Global Humanitarian Policy Forum

3 December 2014
Dear Valerie,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests and Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentleman,

Welcome to the 2014 Global Humanitarian Policy Forum. It is a pleasure to be here, among so many old and young friends. I hope we will have a lively and productive debate. As a predecessor to Valerie Amos, I very much have my heart in the humanitarian imperative for the United Nations.

2014 has been dominated by the humanitarian crises in Syria, Iraq, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, that have destroyed and disrupted the lives of millions of people. Protracted conflicts like those in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan, violent natural disasters, as well as the Ebola crisis, are seriously testing the limits and response capacities of individuals, organisations, governments and the United Nations.

But 2014 is not just a troubled and turbulent year. Regrettably, it is also a sign of things to come and a loud warning signal for us all to seriously heed.
All the evidence shows that humanitarian needs are now rising faster than our capacity to meet them.

Over the past ten years, the amount requested through humanitarian appeals has risen nearly 600 per cent—from $3 billion at the start of 2004 to $17.9 billion today.

It is increasingly difficult to raise these funds. Earlier this week, the World Food Programme was forced to suspend its support to 1.7 million Syrian refugees, because of acute funding shortages. With winter fast approaching the situation is getting even more critical, and we must also not forget Iraq.

Three times as many people are in need of humanitarian need, compared to ten years ago. That total is now more than 100 million people.

The humanitarian landscape is darkening and changing faster than ever before. We see greater numbers of factionalized conflicts. We see the impact of climate change. We see big demographic shifts and massive displacement. We see serious food insecurity. We see rapid urbanization and slum-dwelling as well as critical water scarcity. All these factors are worrying features of this new landscape.
Despite economic gains in many countries, we are seeing a convergence of global trends increasing the risk of continued crises of growing scope and complexity. Poverty is more concentrated in fragile states where half the world’s extreme poor live. More than a billion people still live on less than $1.25 per day. More than 840 million people – around one of eight people around the world -- are chronically undernourished. The number of unemployed and deeply and dangerously frustrated young people is staggering.

Statistics only tell part of the story, but they point to this toxic interplay of various trends and shocks.

Fifty million people – the highest number since the Second World War -- are displaced in their own countries or across borders. The food price crisis of 2007-2008 led to protests in 50 countries. This demonstrates how food price shocks can rapidly increase humanitarian needs and cause social unrest.

Ladies and gentlemen,
This is indeed a somber picture. But let us at the same time recall that we have made progress towards achieving several of the Millennium Development Goals. The ‘Stop the Debt’ campaigns have made a difference. We have established a framework of international humanitarian and human rights law that should hold individuals and governments to account. This demonstrates that solidarity still exists both between and inside nations.

But as these projections show, we face significant uncertainty and serious questions about the future. We are at a crossroads. The trajectory is unsustainable. We must change the way we work and chart the road ahead.

We still need to give humanitarian assistance and deploy staff quickly and efficiently to emergencies.

But our efforts need to be more focused and coordinated. We need to be better organized inside the humanitarian community, and with colleagues working in the development and human rights area. We need to anticipate risks and prepare for crises. We need to strengthen the resilience of people and communities so that they can deal better with stresses and shocks, and recover more quickly. Likewise, national institutions
in the affected countries need to work more closely with colleagues from the humanitarian community.

In crisis after crisis, survivors repeat the same message: “Thank you for saving my life, but what about saving my living?” Millions of people live on the brink of an emergency for years. We must do more for them. Between 2003 and 2013, the protracted crises in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia accounted for half of all humanitarian appeal funding.

Humanitarian aid cannot be used to fill the development funding gap or be a substitute for political solutions that are so desperately needed, not least in Syria. But humanitarian organizations should work more closely with development partners. They should make use of political analysis, so that all risk factors are taken into account. And we should do more to address the underlying causes of crises.

So, this is at the heart of today’s discussions: how can we connect the efforts of different actors earlier and more systematically? We call this **inter-operability**. Getting that concept right in practice and in the field will require a serious change in our work culture.
This starts with the recognition that the United Nations and our partners in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee are just some of the many agencies and organizations that are involved in crisis response.

Other actors, from community organizations to businesses, from local authorities to the military, will often respond - whether or not the United Nations is there.

We should take into account that each partner brings their own individual strengths and comparative advantages to the table.

How can the UN best work with these partners, and help them to work together, so that people’s needs are met as quickly and efficiently as possible?

Looking back to the Philippines’ most recent natural disaster, for example, how can the UN best support the government when it gathers its resources to respond to a devastating typhoon? How can we today work with mobile phone and internet companies in West Africa to help stop the spread of Ebola? How can we harness the power of community groups, the media, international and national NGOs in Iraq, so
that displaced people and host communities get the help including information, they so desperately need?

Ladies and gentlemen,

We can no longer afford to operate separately or in parallel with one another in silos, we have to work horizontally. We have to make the most of all the resources available, avoiding duplication and gaps, and prioritizing so that we meet urgent needs quickly, putting people at the centre of our response.

Almost 25 years after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 46/182 - which is still the basis for the United Nations’ humanitarian coordination system, I am happy to say - we must face reality: working together remains a key challenge, a central task and a humanitarian imperative.

We must take on and grapple with this challenge, if we are to stand any chance of meeting rising humanitarian needs over the next years.

It is encouraging to see such a diverse and insightful group here today. I invite you to consider how to make the most of the comparative advantage of each actor? Which coordination mechanisms and tools are fit for purpose?
And how can we convince other organizations and agencies of the vital necessity of working together more effectively?

Thank you for being here, and for your commitment to helping the most vulnerable, now and in the future.

I wish you productive discussions over the next two days resulting in many lives saved around the world.

Thank you.