UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR VALERIE AMOS

REMARKS TO THE FOURTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON INFORMATION SHARING AND EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP FOR BETTER HUMANITARIAN ACTION

KUWAIT CITY, 17 SEPTEMBER 2013

Checked against delivery

Your Excellency Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait,

Excellencies,

Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 4th Annual Conference on Information Sharing and Effective Partnership for Better Humanitarian Action – our yearly opportunity to discuss humanitarian action in the Gulf region and the broader Middle East.

My thanks to the Emir of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the Government of Kuwait for hosting this meeting again this year and for the continued strong support to humanitarian aid. I also thank the IICO (International Islamic Charitable Organization) and Direct Aid for their continued partnership with us and their contribution for organizing this conference. Please accept my deepest condolences on the death this year of the founder of Direct Aid, Dr. Abdel Rahman al-Sumait, whom I’m sure many of you knew.

The widespread participation at our meeting today with such a large and diverse group of stakeholders shows the dynamism of the humanitarian sector in the Gulf region and the partnerships and networks that continue to form between United Nations agencies, governments, regional organizations, Community-based and Non-Governmental Organizations, and the private sector.

In the past year alone, the Kuwait Pledging Conference for Syria, the appointment of the Secretary-General’s Special Humanitarian Envoy, Dr. Al-Matouq – tireless advocate for our work, the continued success of DIHAD, the signing of the Action Plan between OCHA and the League of Arab States, the convening of fundraising meetings on Myanmar and your continued support for people in crisis around the world – all show what a significant role the countries of this region are playing in global humanitarian action.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We continue to work to build a more diverse and inclusive humanitarian system. Responders are now more diverse and numerous than ever, and global trends in demographics, geopolitics, technology and the environment have changed the way humanitarian work is being done today - examples on the ground in Yemen, Somalia and Sudan show how we are getting better at understanding each other and at working together.

I remember coming to this conference two years ago; there was so much misunderstanding and mistrust between the United Nations and our partner organisations. I am delighted to see how much progress we have been able to make through working together.

The United Nations Secretary-General will convene a World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 to help us set the agenda for humanitarian action post-2015.

It will provide an opportunity for all of us to come together to shape the future of the humanitarian system. Regional consultations will begin next year. And those regional consultations are crucial because they will be the opportunity to bring together all of our partners - governments, charitable organisations, the private sector and UN agencies - to discuss the challenges we face and to agree on a way forward.

I hope that all of you present here today will participate in those consultations and that Governments in the region will consider hosting one or two regional consultation events.

Let me now turn to some of our joint activities since we last met:

OCHA and the OIC have organized two joint partnership missions, to the Sahel region of West Africa and to the Philippines, in the past year. You saw some footage in the opening short film. Representatives of several OIC Member States, regional organizations and other civil society groups took part. Both missions were a success and we hope to build on them in future.

We are in the final stages of signing a MoU with the Government of Saudi Arabia which I hope will lead to greater and better coordination between Saudi Arabia’s humanitarian initiatives and the multilateral system. I would also like to congratulate the United Arab Emirates on establishing a Ministry of International Cooperation and Development; I hope these developments will strengthen our partnerships further.

At the working level, the Arab Humanitarian Portal, ArabHum, which was launched at last year’s conference, is now fully operational and is being used regularly by many of you here. And we have organized two joint training sessions on humanitarian standards with the OIC and affiliated organizations this year.
And overall our partnership with the GCC particularly on some of the political issues which have an impact on humanitarian action continues.

One of the themes of this year’s conference is increasing our engagement with the private sector. OCHA has had some success in this area already: for example, we have a strong relationship with the logistics company DHL through which their staff can be deployed quickly after a disaster to manage airport warehouses and sort donations. We also work closely with our global partners on advocacy, for example, around the campaign we run in August each year for World Humanitarian Day. This year, the private sector in Kuwait and UAE gave exceptional support to WHD by promoting the key messages of the campaign on social media and at events. Etsilat, Amaar, Dubai Mall, Zain Telecommunications and Gulf Bank were among the companies involved.

Partnerships are a win-win for businesses and for humanitarian agencies. We gain from their knowledge and expertise while private sector organisations are able to demonstrate a commitment to social issues and also have the opportunity to access new markets. I look forward to the discussions during this conference on the ways to promote private sector partnerships in the Gulf region. Mobile phone companies, social media, online banking and solar power are just some of the areas that we believe would be fruitful areas for cooperation.

Excellencies, Ministers, Ladies and gentlemen,

People, governments and civil society in this region have demonstrated their commitment to the humanitarian cause, not only through generous funding, but in operational engagement and presence in countries including Pakistan, Somalia, Libya, Haiti, Afghanistan and Yemen. In particular, I would like to thank the people and governments of those countries hosting Syrian refugees, especially Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt, for their generosity and hospitality in keeping their borders open and providing shelter.

The people of Syria are going through an unprecedented human rights and humanitarian crisis. Speakers have already mentioned it this morning. Some 7 million people are urgently in need of humanitarian aid including over 2 million who have taken shelter outside its borders and more than four million who are displaced within the country. We are doing what we can but it is not enough. There are 1000 staff from UN agencies operating on the ground - the majority of them national staff. Additional 3700 staff from UNWRA are working with Palestinian refugees. But we continue to face serious problems in getting aid to the people who need it most. Apart from the dangers of traveling in a war zone, there are hundreds of checkpoints across Syria and our convoys cannot pass through them without permission.
We also face problems with funding, and I would like to extend my gratitude to the Governments of the GCC for your enormous contribution in this area. The International Pledging Conference for Syria recorded a total of $1.54 billion in new pledges; $881 million of this came from Gulf countries, including from Governments of Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain as well as charitable organizations in this region. Kuwait itself pledged $300 million, all of which went through the United Nations appeals. I thank the Emir, the Government and the people of Kuwait for your solidarity and generosity towards Syrians in need and for your confidence in the United Nations system.

But we then had to revise our appeal because of the scale and enormity of the crisis. Thanks to our work and that of our partners over 10 million people in Syria continue to have safe water. We are reaching 2.4 million per month with food in opposition controlled and Government areas. Over 2 million children have been vaccinated. We have mobile health clinics operating across the country. But it is not enough. We have to raise more money. The challenge we face is that the increased financial requirements for Syria could imply diverting funds from other very serious crises around the world. We need to unlock new funding streams and find innovative ways to make our resources go as far as possible. We need a total of US$4.4 billion for Syria and neighbouring countries just for this year. So far we have raised $1.84 billion of that.

In Somalia, despite overall improvements in the humanitarian situation, 2.7 million Somalis continue to depend on humanitarian aid. We are reorienting our approach to include programmes designed to increase the resilience of the people of Somalia, to support a lasting and sustainable recovery from crisis. It is a chronic emergency requiring long-term thinking and planning.

And I have just been in Yemen, where poverty, unemployment and the effects of conflict and displacement continue to affect millions of people. More than half of all Yemenis need some form of humanitarian aid; ten million people do not have sufficient food and six million lack access to basic health care. But as I saw, charities and foundations from the Gulf region are helping to bring aid to Yemenis in need.

Excellencies,
Ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Cooperation between governments, regional organizations, donors, relief agencies and NGOs in the Gulf and the broader Middle East region has a solid foundation. I hope we will build on this during this conference, and that you will continue to see my own organization, OCHA, as a valued partner in humanitarian action and the link with the broader multilateral system.

Thanks again to the Government of Kuwait, the IICO and Direct Aid for hosting us. I wish you all an enjoyable and fruitful conference.

“Shokran”