Key Messages

1. The situation in the Sahel region is severe, and millions of people are suffering from chronic food insecurity, high levels of malnutrition, and insecurity. The lean season is now beginning in some countries, and people have to cope until rains and the next harvest, several months away. While we cannot stop drought, we can work together to prevent hunger. It is vital that governments and the international community act now and fund essential aid programmes that will immediately provide food and combat acute malnutrition.

2. Circumstances have rapidly worsened for tens of thousands of people in northern Mali, where some 60,000 people are displaced due to the conflict. An estimated 60,000-70,000 people have also fled across borders into neighbouring countries since January, including Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso. They need food, health care and help for their livestock, but arrive in areas where communities are themselves trying to cope with drought and a food crisis.

3. I thank Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso for keeping their borders open to people fleeing the violence, as well as for their support for refugees. I hope neighbouring countries will continue to offer assistance to those who need it. Humanitarian organizations want to scale up help for refugees and the displaced, but are facing security constraints in some areas. We also need to strengthen coordination efforts in the region.

4. I welcome the early response by national governments in the Sahel. In Niger, the Government heeded early warning signs and is addressing needs before they reach crisis level, while at the same time tackling the underlying causes of food insecurity. This approach - which includes setting up nutrition centres and food production initiatives that empower women to support their families - is already saving lives. It is also ensuring that hundreds of thousands of vulnerable households are better equipped to cope in the long term.

5. If we are to end chronic vulnerability in the Sahel, we must adopt a coherent approach to drought resilience, which means investing in disaster risk reduction measures, effective preparedness and building national capacity. International partners have indicated their firm commitment to better alignment of humanitarian interventions with longer-term development. We need this if we are to lift people out of chronic vulnerability - for good.