Excellencies,
Ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, welcome to this third annual conference to promote humanitarian partnerships and information sharing. It is a personal pleasure to be here again and to join you in Kuwait.

My thanks to the Government of Kuwait and to the IICO for hosting this meeting, to Direct Aid for their continued partnership with us, and to the Advisory Board of the Effective Partnership and Information Sharing Initiative, who have done such a good job of organizing the conference.

When I started this job as UN Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator two years ago, I made it one of my top priorities to build stronger partnerships with Governments, NGOs, academic institutions and businesses.

There was a simple reason for this. We can’t really call ourselves a global humanitarian system if we are not inclusive and diverse.

So I am very proud to be here today with a bigger and more diverse group of Governments, institutions, NGOs and businesses-from the Gulf, Turkey, Europe, New Zealand and elsewhere. Every kind of organization is represented here: big and small; Government and non-Governmental; national and international.

As the number of humanitarian disasters and emergencies grows every year, as a result of global trends such as urbanisation, environmental degradation, climate change and migration, we need to continue to work together to make maximum use of the resources available to use and to minimise duplication.

Last year, the UN coordinated humanitarian relief for 56 million people in 33 countries. But overall needs were even greater than that. Disasters and emergencies affected 245 million people and caused record-breaking economic losses of $366 billion.

As the World’s Emergency Relief Coordinator, as your relief coordinator, I am responsible for coordinating the humanitarian response from United Nations agencies like...
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My job, and that of my organization, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, is to consult interested stakeholders including governments, NGOs, donors and relief agencies, and to agree priorities, share information, and to make sure that aid goes where it is needed most, as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

One of the core missions of OCHA is to build partnerships that facilitate coordination between relief agencies, improve that information sharing and our collective response. The support from this region and the response capacity has grown year on year. But we all know that coordination is not easy.

Last year when we met, we spent half the conference discussing the crisis in the Horn of Africa, and particularly in Somalia. I am sure we were all pleased to hear the news this week of the election of Somalia’s new President, in Mogadishu. So many countries in this room have played a key role, not only in responding to the ongoing humanitarian crisis but also in promoting economic investment and political stability.

Somalia still has a long way to go, but thanks to good rains and our collective efforts, famine is no longer present there. The number of people suffering from severe food insecurity and malnutrition has fallen, and it is continuing to fall.

The number of Somali children suffering from malnutrition has fallen by almost 100,000 – that is, by nearly one-third. We are all now working to consolidate the fragile gains we have made. We have to build the resilience of communities and households so that when there is another drought, and we know that there will be, it will not lead to the loss of life, terrible suffering, displacement of people and economic collapse that we saw last year.

The situation in Somalia remains critical; it needs to stay high on our agenda so that we don’t let it fall back into crisis.

Humanitarian aid has made a difference in Somalia and the Horn of Africa. The people, the businesses and the royal families of the Gulf have been extremely generous.

I would particularly like to thank the Governments of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, who have contributed a total of nearly twelve million dollars towards humanitarian activities in Somalia so far this year. Others in the Gulf region gave generously last year and in previous years.

But as we look around the world, needs elsewhere are growing. You are all aware of the terrible human rights and humanitarian crisis in Syria, which has already been mentioned by speakers this morning.

After eighteen months of unrest and armed violence, we estimate that more than 2.5 million people need urgent humanitarian aid. Food prices have tripled in some areas. Thousands of homes, schools and health facilities have been destroyed, in contravention

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of international humanitarian law. Hospitals and medical facilities, where they are still functioning, lack basic medicines.

I was in Damascus last month, and I met families crowded into schools and public buildings. They had to flee their local communities for their lives.

We and our partners on the ground, particularly the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and national NGOs, are doing our best to distribute food, water and basic medicines inside Syria and in the camps outside its borders. To meet the ongoing needs in Syria, we need $347 million. So far we have raised 104 million. UNHCR estimate that they need $193 million to support more than 250 thousand refugees who have crossed the border into neighbouring countries. But that figure is being revised right now and they are planning for 650 thousand refugees. Our thanks to Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq for hosting the refugees and for keeping their borders open.

We all know that humanitarian aid can only offer temporary relief. The only permanent solution is a political process which results in security and stability for the people of Syria. But while Syria has been at the top of the political agenda this year, there are many other countries which urgently need our support.

In Yemen, five million people need emergency food aid. More than half the country’s children under five are stunted by malnutrition.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has played a leading role in helping to stabilize the Yemeni economy and the $6.4 billion pledged in Riyadh by the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Kuwait and other countries, last week will help to make a real difference. I hope that Governments will consider channelling resources to life-saving humanitarian work through the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan, as the Yemeni Government’s transition programme recommends.

In Myanmar, the violence in Rakhine state has affected all communities, but particularly the Rohingya. Some 80 thousand people, most of them in camps and temporary shelters, need our help.

The OIC has been particularly active in Myanmar and has worked closely with the UN on the ground. I want to thank the OIC for their engagement, particularly on helping to secure NGO access. We hope to continue working closely with you.

The generous pledge of fifty million dollars from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will help humanitarian agencies to step up their activities in Myanmar, and help us to reach more people.

The ongoing emergency in the Sahel region of West Africa continues to be one of our top priorities. Eighteen million people in nine countries are experiencing food shortages, and the conflict in northern Mali has resulted in a flow of refugees to neighbouring countries and contributed to major security concerns across the region.

As I saw for myself when I visited Mali two weeks ago, children are the face of the food and nutrition crisis in the Sahel. It costs only $100 per child to prevent a child from dying
from severe acute malnutrition. But at the moment, we don’t have the funds to do everything that is needed.

Again, we are working closely with the OIC, and a number of NGOs, regional organizations and governments have expressed interest in joining a joint OCHA/OIC mission to the Sahel later this month. This will be an opportunity to see the effects of the food and nutrition crisis on the people in the region and the impact of our response.

One of the tools at my disposal to jump-start the UN’s response to all these emergencies is the Central Emergency Response Fund, the CERF.

I am proud that this year alone, I have allocated more than $34m to our response in Syria, $24m to Yemen, $11m to Myanmar and $84m across the Sahel.

This money helps to tackle urgent needs, fast - my thanks to Kuwait, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for their significant support to the CERF.

Excellencies,

When we met two years ago, we agreed to do three things: to establish an OCHA office to enhance cooperation with governments and NGOs in the Gulf; to hold this meeting on an annual basis; and to develop a bilingual website to strengthen our partnerships and dialogue.

With today’s launch of the Arab Humanitarian Portal, I am happy to report that we have achieved all three.

The portal is at www.arabhum.net; please log on and see for yourselves the news reports, in-depth analysis, maps and other resources. This portal is going to be an important tool to improve information-sharing and dialogue and to spread best practices between organizations and Governments in the Gulf, the Arabic-speaking world more generally, and colleagues and organizations in the wider international humanitarian system.

I hope that we will continue to strengthen our relationships with governments and organizations in the Gulf region; that you will continue to see OCHA as a strong partner helping to make it easier for national organizations and international actors to join forces and to maximise the impact of our response.

This meeting continues to be important in contributing to that - my thanks again to the Government of Kuwait and the IICO for hosting us. I hope that you will have an enjoyable conference and I would also like to say that we have a very short film, which brings together the issues I have talked about this morning and in particular on information-sharing, which we will show to you later.

Shukran. Thank you very much.