Good morning everyone and my apologies for the slightly late start. I just wanted to brief you on my visit to the Philippines and I will then of course have an opportunity to take questions.

I’ll read out a very brief statement by way of introduction.

I’m Valerie Amos – the Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations responsible for humanitarian affairs.

As you are all aware, yesterday, I visited Tacloban one of the worst affected areas hit by Typhoon Yolanda. I saw a city completely devastated from storm surge waves that came in like a tsunami. The surge destroyed almost every building in a city of 220,000 people. Not one single structure was left untouched. And indeed many parts of the city are completely flattened.

Tens of thousands of people are living in the open or sheltering in the remains of their homes and badly damaged public buildings, exposed to rain and wind. Many of course have lost loved ones, their homes, their livelihoods. And my heart goes out to all of them. Medical facilities for those who were injured, food, clean water and basic sanitation are urgently required.

The situation is dismal. Those who have been able to leave have done so. Many more are trying, and we saw thousands of people queuing at the airport. People are extremely vulnerable and in desperate need of help. We need to get assistance to them now – they are already saying that it has taken too long to arrive. Ensuring faster delivery is the priority of the United Nations and our partner organizations.

During my visit, I was relieved to see aid was starting to get through. We have been hampered by a number of things, including the weather. Aircrafts with life-saving supplies, including 2,500 metric tons of WFP high-energy biscuits arrived yesterday. Today and in the next few days things will get even better, as our logistical capacity increases and facilities at the airport continue to improve and of course the road network is now open. We know that much more is required.
The immediate priority for the humanitarian agencies over the next few days is to scale up our efforts on the ground. Transporting and distributing high-energy biscuits and food, tarpaulins, tents and other shelter and non-food items to ensure that people are protected and have basic necessities.

Tacloban of course has been in the public gaze. But there are other areas of priority including areas to the east of the city of Roxas, Guinan and Buruanga. They have also suffered severe losses and damage and have not fallen off our priority list.

We also urgently need to ensure that people have clean drinking water and basic sanitation, as well as hygiene kits particularly for children and for pregnant women. In addition we will be putting in place a family tracing service and other protection measures. People are desperate to know what has happened to their family members and friends.

In Tacloban I met with Defense Secretary Gazmin and the Secretary of Social Welfare and Development, Corazon Suliman, who are responsible for leading the national relief effort with the local authorities in extremely challenging circumstances. I reassured them of the humanitarian community’s commitment to deliver.

I want to thank the many countries who have offered financial assistance, in-kind support and air assets. For example, the United States, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the European Union, the United Kingdom and countries in this region: Singapore, [the Republic of] Korea, Malaysia. But there are many more and I don’t have enough time to mention them all.

There are many challenges ahead. We talk constantly about the resilience of the Filipino people. There have been so many disasters already this year. Yesterday, I saw it personally. People with absolutely nothing are doing their best to regain some degree of normality. We all must do so much more now to ensure they receive the help they desperately need - and the support that they need to rebuild their lives.

Thank you very much.