I would like to add my welcome to that of Minister Péter Szijjártó [Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary] to this regional consultation in preparation for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. My particular thanks to Hungary for hosting and Finland and ECHO for overseeing the preparations. I am pleased to see representatives from so many partners and sectors here today – governments, regional organizations, civil society, humanitarian practitioners, people affected by crisis – all gathered together in this room.

We have an ambitious task, to help set the agenda for future humanitarian action. We all know why this is so important and so timely. Year on year, humanitarian needs are outstripping our capacity and the resources available to us to respond effectively. Nearly 80 per cent of our work is now in countries and regions affected by conflict - countries where active zones of conflict, proliferation of armed and terrorist groups and parties to the conflict combine with other factors, producing complex operating environments.

And we are required to stay for far too long. Partly because political negotiations and processes take time but also because the norms and standards which guide our work, the framework of international and human rights law, is flagrantly violated, with no meaningful response from the international community. Looking at conflict areas, for example Syria, Central African Republic, South Sudan and Yemen and their significant regional impact, we are reminded every day that we are failing in our responsibility to protect civilians.

As we start the year, there are 78 million people in 31 countries requiring humanitarian support to survive. They are the most vulnerable people in the world and that number will grow as natural disasters strike during the year. The number of people affected by conflict has reached levels not seen since the Second World War. We are now routinely called on to meet humanitarian needs in a world in which civilians living in densely populated towns and cities are in the direct line of fire; in which for millions, chronic drought is the norm, not the exception; in which terrorist networks operate effectively across continents; and in which a displaced person will remain, on average, displaced for 17 years.
Together we need to find new solutions to the way we respond to humanitarian crises. Safeguarding our principles and tackling the constant push to politicize humanitarian work whilst recognizing the importance of understanding the political environment which shapes our work. Expanding our partnerships - no one organization can do this alone and if we don't embrace and manage those partnerships, our sector will fragment to the detriment of those we are seeking to help.

We must have a firm policy, knowledge and evidence base for the changes we make. And the process by which we do this is critical: it is all about building a more inclusive and diverse system, recognizing the challenges, but also the opportunities and added value, that that brings. It is about how we do more prevention but also better prepare for the crises of the future.

Many of the resource challenges we face are familiar to you:

- Protracted conflict is the norm, yet flexible, multi-year financing to address its humanitarian impact is not.

- The persistent gap between humanitarian needs and response. That gap was $7.46 billion last year leading to questions about the cost of response, multilateral versus bilateral aid, and the effectiveness of our operations.

- Aid allocation driven by need and not other factors. For example last year, 98 per cent of the humanitarian appeal for Ukraine was funded; it was 16 per cent for Libya.

- Lack of investment in early warning and preparedness.

There are some significant questions we need to address over the next two days. We need radical changes to how we finance humanitarian operations. The Secretary-General will convene a High-Level Panel to provide some 'out of the box' and creative thinking on how to bridge the growing gap between humanitarian funding and humanitarian needs. About 75 per cent of multilateral humanitarian financing comes from the top 10 donor countries.

How do we more effectively apply the rules which govern the conduct of conflict? Hold countries and non-state armed actors accountable? After every crisis we say “never again” and yet it always happens again.

To stop the cycle of violence, we also need States and multi-lateral institutions to tackle its root causes – inequality, poverty and poor governance, to name but three.

How can we create an environment in which aid is provided on the basis of need alone and where humanitarian workers are protected rather than routinely attacked, kidnapped and killed in increasing numbers? How can we ensure that humanitarian response empowers people affected by crises to have greater voice and choice?
In these consultations, we have a unique opportunity to reshape the humanitarian agenda. I hope that in the next two days you will discuss – and disagree. If you don’t disagree, I don’t think we have succeeded. I hope we will come up with some bold new ideas. I know that this is a different way of doing things and it has made many of our partners uncomfortable.

This is the fourth of our eight regional consultations. Not having a pre-cooked or pre-determined outcome has been pretty difficult particularly for some of our countries, be they donors or countries in which we work. Not having an inter-governmental process, not knowing exactly what the outcome is, is not a comfortable place to be for many. But it is the most important place to be because if we don’t work together, I think that our sector will fail to flourish.

There is a huge number of challenges that we face. We have to be honest about the challenges, we have to be honest about the assumptions we make about each other, and we have to be honest in our discussion about the future agenda. I hope that you will have great discussions and come up with great ideas about the way forward.