I join the Secretary-General in thanking the Emir of Kuwait for hosting this important conference and for announcing their generous contribution of US$300 million. In my presentation I will address the humanitarian needs of the people inside Syria. Mr. Antonio Guterres will speak about the needs of Syrian refugees in the neighbouring countries that are shouldering a heavy burden in hosting over 700,000 refugees. This gathering today is an important opportunity for the international community to share their burden and to give essential life-saving support to refugees and also to show support to the people of Syria.

I was in Syria three days ago. It was my fourth visit in the last year and it is clear that the security situation is getting worse. The sound of shelling in Damascus is constant. In March last year I saw for myself the total destruction which had taken place in the Baba Amr area of Homs and that is a pattern which has been repeated in many towns and cities in Syria - you saw the footage yourself in the film. The ongoing violence has shattered the lives of millions and made people fear for their lives. The collapse of the economy, rising food prices, rising unemployment and the destruction of essential infrastructure has put considerable strain on the social sector and is having an impact on the whole country. Farming is in crisis and people are now destitute and desperate.

Half of Syria’s public hospitals have been damaged; one third are out of service. Many doctors have left the country. Forty per cent of ambulances have been damaged and there are shortages of life-saving medicines like insulin, anaesthetics, serums and intravenous fluids. Even pain killers are not available. Getting medical help is a daily challenge.

Up to three million people are having trouble getting food. Bakeries have been destroyed or cannot get fuel, so bread is in short supply. Cereal, fruit and vegetable production has dropped by half in some areas.

Twenty-five per cent of schools are no longer in use because they have been destroyed or have been turned into communal shelters. Thousands of children are unable to go to school.

The needs are huge. The UN estimates that four million people need urgent humanitarian assistance, including two million who have fled their homes and are now living without
the most basic services: without clean water, sanitation facilities and electricity. But, these figures may be an under-estimate. According to the preliminary assessments by the Assistance Coordination Unit, the humanitarian arm of the Syrian National Coalition, there are an estimated 3.2 million people in need of assistance in opposition-controlled areas. The Government of Syria states that three million people have fled their homes.

The harsh winter conditions have made the situation worse, with people living under plastic sheets and leaky roofs, facing snow and sub-zero temperatures without winter clothes, blankets or fuel. Women and children are particularly vulnerable.

And the constant threat of violence has taken its toll, with millions of women and children traumatized and needing psychosocial support. I have heard some terrible stories from those who have witnessed and experienced the violence and brutality. Some of it is almost too impossible to conceive and repeat. Yet this is what people continue to live through, day by day.

And it is not just the Syrian people who are affected. Many of you will have seen the terrible pictures of the devastation in Yarmouk camp, which was home to some 150,000 Palestinian refugees. Out of 500,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria, an estimated 400,000 now need humanitarian assistance. And with the conflict reaching the Damascus area, where 80 per cent of the refugees live, needs are becoming even more acute. Several Palestinian refugee camps have become ghost camps as residents flee with the arrival of gunmen and Government forces. The UN’s Relief and Works Agency is sheltering some 9,000 displaced people in its facilities across the country, including Syrians. They urgently need more resources. And the IOM continues its work with third-country nationals that are trapped in the country.

A large-scale aid operation is already under way inside Syria with the UN, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations reaching more people every month. And the ICRC and its affiliated organizations continue their important work. While access to opposition-controlled and disputed areas remains a challenge, assistance is being delivered in all affected governorates.

Some examples: The UN Children’s Fund, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization with their partners have carried out vaccination campaigns against polio and measles to millions of children throughout Syria. Essential supplies like blankets and mattresses have been delivered to more than 550,000 people and there is a slide showing the amount. Clean water has been provided to thousands of people in shelters in Rural Damascus, and shelters are being rehabilitated in Aleppo, Damascus and Hasakeh governorates. The World Food Programme, WFP, through its partners has delivered food to 1.5 million people in opposition-held, disputed and Government-held areas and UNFPA and its partners have provided reproductive health services and psychosocial support to around 600,000 women residing in areas affected by the violence.

The World Health Organization is running mobile clinics including one which is providing care to 2,500 families in Homs. And the Food and Agriculture Organization is supporting tens of thousands of farmers during the winter planting season.

But we need to scale up our response. We need to reach more people in all affected areas. That is why today’s conference is so important. 50% of the needs are in just three governorates, Aleppo, Homs and rural Damascus.
As we move more staff and supplies to Syria and neighbouring countries to improve our collective response, we will need additional funds to help us to sustain that effort.

And we know we need to find ways to reach as many people as we can in those areas which are currently not being served. We have established contacts with the Assistance Coordination Unit, and with militia groups on the ground. This is particularly important to us as whilst there is coordination at the global political level with the Syrian National Coalition, there are hundreds of militia-style organizations on the ground, which are not necessarily coordinated. For example, late last year we tried to send a convoy to Homs. We needed to pass through 21 checkpoints – they negotiated their way through 20 of them and were turned back at the last one. Control of areas in towns and cities can shift on a daily basis and humanitarian workers have to negotiate with field commanders on the ground to get access.

Last week, senior Directors from a number of UN humanitarian agencies visited Syria. They were concerned and appalled by what they found. They were able to move from a Government-controlled area to an opposition-held area in Homs – something we have been trying to do for some time. We can now build on this and get more supplies in. A few days ago UNHCR sent blankets and mattresses to rural Idlib and Aleppo, in non-Government controlled areas. In any conflict, contact with all the parties involved – be they Government or others – is essential to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid. In this respect, we must further strengthen our ties with opposition groups on the ground as well as with the ACU.

The work undertaken by the United Nations and its partners forms only part of the response in Syria. We know that other organizations are, at present, reaching areas that we cannot.

Today we are appealing for US$1.5 billion. $519 million of this is for work in ten sectors inside Syria, to meet the essential needs of Syrians affected by this crisis. The plan is based on four priorities:

- First, to provide relief supplies and emergency services to people who have been most badly affected – food, healthcare, water supplies, blankets and mattresses.
- Second, to help people who have fled their homes and the communities hosting them.
- Third, to support the reconstruction of critical infrastructure that has been destroyed.
- Fourth, to help the very poorest people avoid total destitution.

This conflict, conducted as it is in urban settings in Syria, has taken a brutal toll on Syria’s people. More than 60,000 have died. Those who have fled have told me terrible stories of ongoing and senseless violence and human rights violations, including sexual abuse, arbitrary detention and indiscriminate shelling.

The Secretary-General and many others have, throughout this crisis, stressed the obligation that all parties have under International Humanitarian Law to protect the ordinary women, men and children caught in the midst of this conflict. We are watching a human tragedy unfold before our eyes. We must do all we can to stop the violence. But whilst it continues we must also do all we can to help those affected by it.
The volatility of the security situation, logistical challenges and bureaucratic constraints play their part in hampering our response effort.

We need to have better access to all people requiring assistance and I call upon everyone with influence on the Government or the opposition to do all they can to facilitate that access. Our work is guided solely by the humanitarian imperative of helping those who are in need.

But the continuing major obstacle of all is a lack of funding. We are facing a huge shortfall that could totally undermine our operations inside Syria.

Every Government and organization represented here today has already given generously. We are asking you to increase that contribution, as the violence continues unabated and the needs grow.

We all know that this is a crisis that demands a political solution. But in the absence of one, we must do all we can to help the Syrian people. We cannot let them down. I hope you will give generously.