Mr. Vice-President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Mr. Vice-President, thank you for your opening remarks.

It is a pleasure to open this year’s ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, which gives Member States and humanitarian agencies the chance to discuss important and pressing humanitarian issues. We have some interesting panel discussions and side events. This year, the panels will be webcast live and feature on OCHA’s Facebook and Twitter accounts so that they can reach a wider audience. We also have a special section on our website, OCHA Online, where you can follow the agenda. I hope you will participate.

We have also made some changes to the Report of the Secretary-General on Strengthening Coordination. We tried to make it more focused and concise than in previous years. I hope you will agree that our work needs to speak not only to our Member States but also to the public who supports humanitarian work across the world. That is what we are seeking to achieve through this report. We appreciate the feedback we have received through you, which will help us to improve next year’s version. I am happy to see that most of the report’s recommendations have been included in this year’s draft resolution.

Today I would like to focus my remarks on two areas: the need to support data and evidence-based humanitarian decision-making, and the importance of broadening and deepening partnerships for humanitarian response, in support of the primary role of affected States in initiating, organizing, coordinating and implementing humanitarian assistance.

However before I do that, I would like to touch on some of the challenges we have faced during last year. Our work is taking place in increasingly complex environments. War, displacement, climate-related disasters, high food and energy prices, population growth, political unrest and migration are all pushing us to think about the way in which we work and how we seek to tackle these multiple challenges. We see each of these elements reflected in crises around the world.

The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors.
Last year, there were 302 natural disasters around the world which claimed an estimated 29,780 lives and affected 206 million people. This was fewer than in 2010. But the economic damage from natural disasters last year was the highest ever recorded: at an estimated US$ 366 billion.

One of the ways we are seeking to work differently is by linking the work we are doing on the humanitarian/development sides of the equation to build the resilience of communities in support of national led efforts. This is particularly important in countries and regions that are vulnerable to recurrent and slow-onset disasters, last year in the Horn of Africa and now in the Sahel. Resilience means the capacity to withstand shocks and stresses, and to take action to prevent or protect against predictable emergencies. I understand that there was an interesting discussion on this during this morning’s transition event and I am sure there will be more over the next three days. One of our priorities now is to demonstrate the difference we can make by having a more coordinated approach.

Let me now turn specifically to the two themes which are a priority at this year’s ECOSOC.

First of all Evidence-based decision-making:

To make the best use of resources for humanitarian response, decision-making must be based on evidence from reliable data. Solid information is crucial. Operational datasets, for example, can highlight the locations and scale of essential services like functioning health centres or water sources. If this information is in place ahead of time and updated immediately after initial assessments, it will help planning and directly support the response to a crisis. National and subnational authorities have a wealth of this information, but do not necessarily have the mechanisms in place to share it. Making basic data more easily accessible will support efficient and effective coordination and response, and enhance the transparency and accountability to beneficiaries and affected States, as well as to those who fund the response. The Kenya Open Data Initiative is a good example of how this can work.

On this basis, the Secretary-General’s report recommends that Member States improve the quality of data and facilitate the exchange and sharing of information. Again, I am pleased to see that this has been reflected in the draft resolution.

The coordination of humanitarian organizations throughout the programme cycle – from assessing people’s needs to prioritization and planning, allocating resources and monitoring impact – are the operational core of OCHA’s work at country level. We are now introducing standardized reporting procedures so that we can coordinate needs assessments with our partners inside and outside the UN. We are also expanding our collaborative efforts with governments and our partners to make sure that operational datasets for preparedness are in place. The creation of “one-stop-shop” information-sharing web sites will be of great help to staff and organizations working in emergencies, and will give Humanitarian Country Teams a solid basis of evidence for decision-making. It’s all work in progress.
On Partnerships:

New and diverse groups of people and organizations are becoming involved in humanitarian assistance. We are working with these new actors to ensure that the multilateral humanitarian system is as inclusive as possible.

There has been continued growth in the number and diversity of Member States who are contributing to our work. For example Aid organizations originating in Turkey and the Gulf took a lead role in the response to the emergencies in Libya and Somalia. We have worked to ensure that are systems include all partners and Through our partnerships and relationships with regional and national actors we are able to gain access to areas and help people who would otherwise be difficult to reach.

Argentina and Saudi Arabia have joined the UNDAC system and Brazil has begun negotiations to join. The Dialogue on Humanitarian Partnership, launched by Sweden and Brazil last year with OCHA’s support, has brought together 19 Member States ranging from emerging partners to traditional donors, to consider key humanitarian policy issues.

OCHA has signed Memoranda of Understanding with the League of Arab States, the African Union and the OIC, and we are discussing joint standard operating procedures with ASEAN. This is a step towards ensuring that regional and international disaster response are aligned, and enables Governments to understand what help is available, should they need it.

Finally, efforts are also under way to deepen partnerships with the private sector, particularly with logistics companies such as DHL but also with media, entertainment and advertising companies. We will hear more about some of these plans during tomorrow’s panel discussion on partnerships.

Let me finish by touching on the efforts being made by the IASC to improve field effectiveness. We have held Member States briefings and other events in Geneva and New York to brief you on what we are doing. I look forward to providing an update and to hearing your views at tomorrow’s Special Event on the Transformative Agenda. Through the changes that we are making as part of the agenda we aim to improve our support to the Governments of affected countries and to demonstrate to those who fund our work that we are making every effort to enhance our effectiveness.

During the next two days I hope we can address some key questions, I would like to highlight three if I may firstly: How can we improve the quality, timeliness and exchange of humanitarian information?

Secondly, how do you think we can really deliver on partnership and inclusivity?

And finally: what would you like to see from us that in your view would make us more accountable and effective?

I look forward to our discussion.

Mr. Vice-President, thank you very much.