Hello everyone and welcome. It’s a great pleasure to be here in Geneva for the Humanitarian Affairs Segment of ECOSOC, and to meet you all this evening in this informal setting.

I would like to thank the Governments of Switzerland and Tunisia for hosting this event, and in particular Mr. Manuel Sager from the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs and Mr. Mohamed Ezzine Chelaifa from the Tunisian Foreign Ministry.

Over the past few years, ECOSOC has become much more than an inter-governmental event. We come together as a community to take a look at where humanitarian action stands and at the challenges that lie ahead. We can also learn from our successes and explore innovations at the trade fair. I look forward to hearing inspiring ideas from all of you over the next three days to meet the challenges ahead.

Tonight’s event sets the stage for the next three days by taking a closer look at the much-cited ‘changing humanitarian landscape’. Almost 25 years after the adoption of resolution 46/182, we are at the centre of profound changes that are redefining not only our operating environment, but also the way we work.

The pace of change is accelerating; what used to take a generation now happens in five years. Humanitarian organizations need to be in a constant state of review, adapting and reinventing ourselves, if we are to remain relevant and do the best to deliver quickly and effectively for people in need.

Tonight, let me highlight a few trends that we believe have had or will have a profound effect on the lives of millions of people, and create new patterns of humanitarian needs.

First, the state - the basic component of the international system - is in flux. We live in a multi-polar world where global power dynamics are changing. China has the world’s second-largest economy, and international financial institutions forecast that Indian growth may outpace China’s this year. Strong and confident middle-income countries may not be interested in engaging in the international system on terms that have been
decided by others. Global systems, including the humanitarian system, will need to argue for the fundamental tenets of our work and forge common ground that takes into account this new distribution of power and rising ideological diversity.

Within many states, central power is waning. Local governments and civil society organizations are becoming more influential and competent. Private sector groups and popular movements connect across borders in transnational networks and organizations. Unfortunately, this is also true of non-state armed groups, and criminal and terrorist networks.

Second, profound demographic shifts are underway. By 2050, it is forecast that two thirds of the world’s population will be living in cities. Sadly, a quarter of them are likely to be in slums.

The world is already being forced to consider the impact of mass migration, but if current trends continue, some 400 million people - four-fifths of the current population of the European Union - could be on the move by 2050. Some of that migration will be for economic reasons, but some will be a result of marginalization, violence and the impact of climate change. The world’s population is also getting younger; there are now 1.2 billion people between the ages of 15 to 24 - an all-time high - and 90 percent of them are in developing countries.

Third, the factors that drive humanitarian need are converging to affect increasing numbers of people. Despite the success of the MDGs, poverty is now concentrated in fragile states where half the world’s extreme poor live. More than a billion people still live on less than $1.25 a day. More than 840 million people - around one in eight people around the world - are chronically undernourished. Even in countries that have made great strides in overall wealth, there are often dramatic disparities between rich and poor. Eighty of the world’s richest individuals control the same amount of wealth as the bottom half of the world’s population.

When these trends are combined with the impact of climate change, the highest levels of forced displacement since the end of World War II, and serious and chronic food insecurity, they increase the risk of countries falling into crisis.

Fourth, there is a growing accountability gap. We see war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law taking place in a climate of impunity in Syria, in Iraq, in South Sudan, the Central African Republic and many other places. The global public is becoming numbed to atrocities. In May 1992, there was international shock and outrage when 17 people were killed in a mortar attack on a bread queue in Sarajevo. But the killing of 40 people in a marketplace in Idlib, Syria, two months ago barely registered. These troubling events are raising questions about collective responsibility, the relevance and credibility of the UN, and whether shifting global power centres are part of the solution, or part of the problem.
Finally, we are also witnessing the rise of the individual around the world. Technology and social media are giving people more access to more information than ever before. This connectivity means they can quickly reach out to others and form groups around issues. It has provided an unprecedented opportunity for new technologies and partnerships to assist people; and has empowered people in ways we would never have thought possible 25 years ago - and given them a much more powerful and audible voice to demand what they need.

In December 2014, my predecessor launched the global humanitarian overview for 2015 and asked for US$16.4 billion to assist 57.5 million people with humanitarian aid in 22 countries. Today, I released the status report. At mid-point, we are now asking $18.8 billion to meet the needs of 78.9 million people across 37 countries. We have received so far a total of $4.8 billion, leaving a shortfall of $14 billion. In relative terms, that’s 26 percent - the lowest figure ever.

All these developments form the backdrop for the Secretary-General’s decision to convene the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul next May.

I am genuinely excited about the possible opportunities that represents. It will set an ambitious and bold forward agenda for humanitarian action. It must re-inspire and re-invigorate everyone involved in the humanitarian community and beyond with the fundamental tenets of our work. It must be a global rallying call for humanity, putting principles and affected people at the centre of our response. The Summit will not be an end in itself, but rather a starting point for progress. It will initiate a set of actions so that people, countries and communities around the world are better prepared for and able to respond to current and future crises.

In this spirit, I would like to invite my distinguished colleagues on the panel to share their perspective on these changes, challenges and opportunities.

I look forward to hearing their views, how we need to adapt so we can meet global humanitarian needs, reduce vulnerability, and remain relevant in this rapidly changing world.

And I hope they will share their hopes for the World Humanitarian Summit and the future of humanitarian action.

Thank you.