

Under Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien
Opening remarks to the Humanitarian Affairs Segment of the
2016 Economic and Social Council

New York, 27 June 2016

As delivered

Your Excellency Vice-President Lauber,
Your Excellency Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson,
Your Excellency Ambassador Ulusoy,
Distinguished ministers and delegates. Ladies and gentlemen,

Mr. Vice-President, thank you for your opening remarks and your leadership in overseeing the Humanitarian Affairs Segment of ECOSOC. I would also like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General for his framing of the context of the WHS, and Ambassador Ulusoy for his remarks on the World Humanitarian Summit. Particular thanks go out to the Government of Turkey for putting together a Summit that all will remember for years.

The Summit was a momentous occasion. I am inspired by the commitment and the passion we witnessed at it to put vulnerable people – and indeed our common humanity – at the centre, and I look forward to discussing how we can all make progress in putting the Agenda for Humanity into action.

The ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment is clearly an important opportunity for Member States and partners to discuss and try to address the many grave humanitarian challenges facing us. The Segment is all the more important this year for two reasons.

First, the number of people who depend on international humanitarian assistance to stay alive and to stay safe is the largest ever. Business as usual is simply not an option.

And second, following the World Humanitarian Summit and the major global frameworks agreed in the last year, we are in the midst of an era of unprecedented opportunity to address this outrageous level of humanitarian need and we must seize this moment.

On the first point, many of us just heard in the Global Humanitarian Needs Overview discussion today that more than 130 million people require international humanitarian

assistance. This is the highest number we have ever presented. We also know that the number of people displaced worldwide by conflict and disasters has reached an unprecedented 65 million people. That is the same total as the total population of France.

These numbers continue to rise on our watch. Each of these millions represents a loss of some kind – a lost childhood, lost hope, lost opportunity. We must do more to reduce them, politically, through our programme design and by accepting that most displaced, as other people in need, require a longer-term, sustainable approach.

Protracted conflicts in Syria, Sudan, Iraq and beyond, still show few signs of abating. Extremist violence in the Lake Chad Basin continues to hold millions in its mercy. The devastating impact of weather patterns such as El Niño, intensified by climate change, have stripped millions of their ability to support themselves and their families. Demographic growth, rising inequality and structural poverty bar millions from enjoying the benefits of development the world over.

In many operational arena, humanitarians cannot even reach people in need – in Fallujah, in northwest Aleppo and dozens of other locations, as fighting parties block our path through bureaucratic hurdles, threats and outright attacks. Respect for international humanitarian and human rights laws has fallen by the wayside as populations are held under siege, as civilians are used as human shields, as they are killed while sleeping in their homes when barrel bombs are detonated in their residential neighbourhoods.

In the face of this devastation, humanitarian agencies, as well as governments, civil society, affected communities and the private sector, have done their utmost to continue helping millions the world over, to advocate for more funding, and to improve our own effectiveness and efficiency. The Secretary-General's report on *Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations* highlights the progress that the humanitarian community has made in the last year. We have improved our risk analysis and assessment of needs; we have enhanced our accountability to people in need; we have forged stronger working relationships with a more diverse set of actors.

And donors have not faltered in their generosity. Funding to inter-agency appeals reached \$10.6 billion in 2015, which is a remarkable figure. Yet at the same time, 2015 saw the largest humanitarian funding gap ever, with appeal requirements having almost quadrupled in the last 10 years to reach over \$20 billion.

So despite strengthened efforts, we cannot keep up with growing demand. And indeed our aim should not be just to keep up with demand - we must aim for something better than meeting the needs of people year after year. We should aim to significantly reduce needs, risk, and vulnerability over time. This is one of the key messages in the Secretary-General report before us today.

This brings me to the second point. As a global community we have made tremendous progress when it comes to international agreements to address the needs, risks and vulnerability of people worldwide and to leave no one behind in our efforts. The global frameworks on disaster risk reduction, on sustainable development and on climate change are testament to this, as were so comprehensively set out by the Deputy Secretary-General.

The World Humanitarian Summit built on this global momentum – the Deputy Secretary-General outlined some of the ways how. The ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment provides the opportunity to further build on this momentum. We can reflect on, debate, and suggest ways forward on all we achieved at the Summit, ensuring your individual and our collective commitments do become reality and improve people’s lives.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to highlight three of these areas we need to urgently move forward:

First, the crisis in the protection of civilians. Civilian deaths and suffering have continued unabated due to the blatant and shocking lack of respect for international humanitarian and human rights law. Parties to conflict continue to use explosive weapons with wide-area effects in urban areas. Where explosive weapons are used in populated or urban areas, an estimated 92% of deaths or injured are civilians. We see parties to conflict use rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence as weapons of war. We see healthcare workers and patients die in their thousands, and health facilities and their means of transport becoming the subject of deliberate direct attacks as part of war tactics. We see millions of people besieged by fighting parties, cut off from aid, trade, and essential supplies.

Tens of millions of people are looking to us – the international community, the United Nations, and its partners, regional and sub-regional organizations - for answers. We must do more to ensure parties to conflict comply with international law and are held to account when they do not. We must find a way to better protect healthcare workers in armed conflicts. We must collectively overcome the barriers to accessing the people we were set up to help. We need to implement measures to minimize harm to civilians living in urban areas that have become open conflict zones. These challenges are complex, but they are not insurmountable.

I look forward to hearing your views at the panel discussion on impediments to the protection of civilians.

Second, is the growing global crisis of forced displacement – IDPs, refugees, and their impact on host countries and communities. Given the sheer scale and intensity of this challenge, I am glad to see global efforts to find solutions through the important initiatives and events addressing it this year. At the World Humanitarian Summit it became clear that forced displacement is not only a pressing humanitarian issue, but first

and foremost a development and political challenge. We need to be much more ambitious in emphasizing the need to reduce displacement. The 50% goal by 2030 is ambitious but transformational for our approach to displacement.

There was resolve to pursue a new approach that will include meeting the immediate, life-saving and protection needs of refugees and IDPs, while strengthening resources, programs, policies and support to their longer-term needs: helping them to regain self-reliance and access to labour markets, to find lasting solutions to their displacement, and supporting host communities and countries that have taken them in. In his Agenda for Humanity, the Secretary-General called on international leaders to find ways to measurably reduce internal displacement in a safe and dignified manner. We must make more progress on this front. Sixty-five million deserve so much more than living in limbo and uncertainty for years, decades, even generations.

I look forward to the discussions on the panel on addressing forced displacement and I know they will contribute to the High Level Meetings on refugees and migrants in September.

Third, we must adjust the way we work according to today's contexts. In most crises, contexts, humanitarians must stay and deliver assistance and protection for years on end. Short-term aid does not fit long-term situations. We need to change our mind-set from not only continuing to improve the delivery of our assistance year after year, but also adapting our programming so that it contributes to longer-term positive outcomes for people that put them on the path towards sustainable development. This is captured in the New Way of Working – a Commitment to Action made by the Secretary-General, eight key UN organizations, and endorsed by the World Bank and the IOM.

We in the humanitarian community need to work better together with the wide range of stakeholders, including local and national actors, development actors and others to work towards collective outcomes or priority areas that over multiple years significantly reduce people's risk and vulnerability. Development action needs to happen with an ever greater focus on reducing risk and vulnerability, and with a greater sense of urgency. Again, this will be no easy task. We have talked about breaking down silos for decades. But within the UN we have made a good start. The Deputy Secretary-General mentioned the Commitment to Action endorsed by the Secretary-General and 8 UN agencies that will move us in the right direction.

This new way of working will also require much greater investment in local, national and regional leadership, capacity strengthening and response systems. A major outcome at the Summit was the recognition of the role of local communities and first responders in preventing and responding to crises and significant commitments were made in this regard.

We will need the right financial architecture to underpin these shifts and support our work towards collective outcomes that reduce need, vulnerability and risk over multiple years, and towards reinforcing local and national capacities. This will require a shift from

funding individual projects to funding the achievement of outcomes or results, directing more funding to local and national actors, and promoting early action by development actors. This is not a zero-sum game.

I look forward to hearing your views at tomorrow morning's panel on Moving beyond Business as Usual.

Distinguished delegates, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are five weeks on from the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit. While it was a great success, it was only a first step in implementing the Agenda for Humanity. We must continue the momentum for change we catalysed for people in need at the Summit. I hope to engage in some of the tough issues we need to tackle over the coming days, months and years to make reducing need, risk and vulnerability of millions of people the reality we all aspire to achieve.

Thank you.