



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

*As delivered*

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**Opening remarks and brief on the Secretary-General's report  
to the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment 2013**

**Monday 15 July 2013, Geneva**

Mr. Vice-President,  
Excellencies,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Mr. Vice-President, thank you for your opening remarks, and for your facilitation of this year's ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, and for your recognition of the crucial work of OCHA and other humanitarian workers in taking forward the humanitarian agenda.

There are many interesting events over the next few days including panel discussions, side-events and our first-ever humanitarian trade fair.

The panels will be webcast live and featured on OCHA's Facebook and Twitter accounts so that they reach the broadest possible audience. We're hoping for active participation during the events, and we're planning a live feed to talk to Somali refugees at Dadaab camp in Kenya during Wednesday's debate on innovation. Participants can follow the agenda and find out what's coming up on our website, OCHA Online. This is an opportunity to get to the heart of the issues facing the humanitarian community.

I will open this year's segment by presenting the Secretary-General's report on *Strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance*. Many of the report's recommendations have been included in this year's resolution.

Let me begin by outlining some of the challenges of the past year - a year which was dominated by the humanitarian crisis in Syria and neighbouring countries. More than 6.8 million people, nearly a third of the population, are currently in need of help, and 1.7 million refugees have fled to neighbouring countries - a number that rises daily. Over 90,000 people have been killed and as we saw recently in Al-Qusayr and are seeing today in Homs, it is ordinary Syrians who are bearing the brunt of this crisis as the violence continues unabated. Vital infrastructure is destroyed and services are collapsing.

Humanitarian organisations continue to do all they can to bring assistance to those in need wherever they are. In June, WFP provided food assistance to 2.5 million people, up

from 1.5 million in January. This year, 1.75 million people have directly benefited from health interventions, including 1.3 million people. WHO and UNICEF have supported the Ministry of Health in a nation-wide Mumps, Measles and Rubella (MMR) and polio vaccination campaign, reaching more than 1 million children. But we are still falling short in meeting people's growing needs. Ongoing insecurity and denial of access in many areas resulted in people remaining without assistance. Parties to the conflict continue to blatantly ignore their obligations to protect civilians and abide by the rules of international humanitarian law.

A month ago, Antonio Guterres, Margaret Chan and I launched the biggest humanitarian appeal ever, for Syria and Syrian refugees. Humanitarian agencies need an additional \$3.1 billion to cover lifesaving work in Syria and neighbouring countries for the rest of 2013. My thanks to those countries who have contributed to the \$1.5 billion raised so far. But humanitarian aid can only bring temporary relief to the people of Syria; what they need is a political solution which will bring an end to the violence and devastation, which has destroyed their lives. We need the Security Council and the wider international community more broadly to come together on this.

Despite the year being dominated by events in Syria, we faced humanitarian challenges in a number of other countries. In Myanmar, natural and man-made disasters converged when inter-communal violence, floods and an earthquake affected more than 750,000 people. In Yemen, despite progress towards stability, renewed conflict increased the gap between humanitarian needs and our ability to respond. In Sudan, violence in Darfur has displaced over 300,000 people since the start of the year, adding to the 1.4 million dependent on food assistance in IDP camps. More than 1 million people have been affected by conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States, and we are still unable to reach the majority of them.

In the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo we continue to see complex emergencies in countries of chronic vulnerability requiring holistic solutions which bring together economic, political, social, development and humanitarian perspectives. In Mali a coup and military insurgency have combined with food insecurity and vulnerability to create a crisis which has had an impact across the wider region.

What all these humanitarian emergencies demonstrate is the difficult and complex environment in which humanitarian organizations operate.

We have all been appalled by the attacks and threats on medical personnel, facilities and vehicles which have prevented the wounded and sick from receiving the care and protection they require.

I reiterate the Secretary-General's recommendation and remind Member States and parties to conflict of their obligation under international humanitarian law to protect and meet the needs of civilians under their control, and to facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian personnel and aid. Consent to such humanitarian operations must not be arbitrarily denied.

I call upon Member States to simplify and expedite the procedures for humanitarian personnel and goods where necessary to facilitate the provision of such aid.

In these complex environments, it is essential that humanitarian organizations are able to engage in negotiations with all relevant parties to a conflict to achieve humanitarian objectives. This includes needs assessments, addressing protection needs and delivery of aid. In complex environments the principles which underpin our work - humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, remain more important than ever.

I am pleased to see the progress made on protection in this year's resolution and the affirmation by Member States that protection is a basic and core need of those affected by crisis. Protecting people from harm is a fundamental element of the principle of humanity, and a core objective of all humanitarian action.

More than 300 natural disasters were recorded in 2012, including floods, cyclones, droughts and earthquakes affecting more than 106 million people. While there was a significant decrease in the number of deaths from these disasters, the number of people displaced was almost double the number in 2011. It was also the third consecutive year when economic damage caused by disasters cost more than \$100 billion. That is why preparedness, risk management and resilience are such an important part of the humanitarian agenda.

In the Philippines, we saw how investment in preparedness and building resilience can reduce the impact of hazards. Typhoon Bopha, which hit eastern Mindanao last December, was the deadliest natural disaster of 2012. But preparedness measures did pay off, including early warnings, pre-emptive evacuations and pre-positioning of essential stocks and personnel. Typhoon Bopha had three times the wind speed and twice the rainfall of Tropical Storm Washi which hit in 2011, but the evidence suggests that preparedness measures saved more lives.

Working with our partners on the resilience agenda has been a top priority for us in the past year. Strengthening the ability of families and communities to cope with climate and economic shocks saves lives and livelihoods, protects development gains, and supports better and faster recovery. There are increasing concerns about the way chronic vulnerability undermines development and results in recurring humanitarian crises. Our development partners own the bulk of this agenda, but we are pushing hard on new ways of working so that we break the cycle of crisis, particularly in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. In the Sahel, more than 11 million people continue to be affected by drought, compounded by chronic poverty, low agricultural productivity and high food prices. This includes an estimated 1.1 million children who are at risk of severe acute malnutrition.

The development of a three-year consolidated appeal for Somalia linking humanitarian assistance with strengthened livelihood support is another way in which our humanitarian and development efforts are coming together. This year's resolution encourages the UN to consider making further use of multi-year appeals.

Over the past year, the UN and its partners have continued to improve the effectiveness and the accountability of the humanitarian system, including through implementation of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Transformative Agenda. We have taken steps to

strengthen humanitarian leadership, provide more streamlined and strategic coordination mechanisms, improve accountability to affected people, build capacity for preparedness and response, and strengthen partnerships with a broad range of countries and organizations at the national, regional and global level.

Building on this work we will continue to look at ways in which we can become more inclusive, accountable, interoperable and adaptable to help the increasing number of people in crisis, and to work with the greater number and variety of actors involved in humanitarian work. The growing national and regional capacity to prepare for and respond to crises is welcome. And we must also take full advantage of new technologies that can increase the reach and impact of our work.

Let me now turn to the two themes that will be discussed at our panel debates. First, on reducing vulnerability, improving capacity and managing risk.

The importance of governments, humanitarian and development actors investing more in preparedness and working together systematically to reduce vulnerability has been discussed for many years. This approach requires a better understanding of the drivers of crisis – including doing more joint risk analysis and joint planning leading to sustainable recovery and development. This approach also requires support to national authorities to build the capacity of national and regional authorities and of local communities.

With respect to innovation, we need a system in which innovation can flourish, where new products, tools and ways of working can be tried and tested. Utilizing the right new technologies will help humanitarian organizations deliver aid more quickly and effectively.

The humanitarian trade fair will showcase some of the innovative work that is already being done by humanitarian organizations, the private sector and Member States. We expect discussions this week to help to shape our thinking about what a global humanitarian agenda for post-2015 might look like.

The Secretary-General has called for a World Humanitarian Summit before the end of his second term to map out an approach to humanitarian action that takes account of the changing nature of crises, the new tools and systems available to us, and the diversity of actors involved in humanitarian response. We see the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment as the first of many opportunities for Member States to become involved in setting the agenda and being involved in the discussions in the lead up to this summit.

Over the next two years, we will work with Member States, civil society, first responders, technical experts and other partners focusing on four themes: humanitarian effectiveness, reducing vulnerability and managing risks, transformation through innovation, and serving the needs of people in conflict. The consultations in the run up to the Summit will be broad, inclusive and transparent.

Your views and active participation are essential. These conversations will be as important as the summit itself in shaping the post-2015 humanitarian agenda.

Thank you and I look forward to an interesting few days.