Good evening. It is a great pleasure to be back in Wales, and I am honoured to have been asked by the Welsh Centre for International Affairs to deliver this year's annual lecture. My particular thanks to Sir Emyr Jones Parry, my friend and former colleague, for the invitation. The people of Wales have a long history of engagement and activism in the fight for social justice and equality, summed up in WCIA's vision that 'everyone in Wales contribute to creating a fair and peaceful world'. A clear vision but one, which in today's world, is becoming harder to realise.

This evening I would like to share with you some of the successes we have achieved as a global community, the ongoing challenges we face in grappling with the complex set of issues affecting our world, and I hope in discussion to hear from you, what you think we can do about it.

For the last four years I have been the person at the UN responsible for humanitarian coordination, working with colleagues and partners across the UN system, with NGOs and civil society organizations (national and international), colleagues from the ICRC and Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and national Governments on making our humanitarian response efforts more effective. It is a role which is rewarding, demanding and frustrating. Why? Because in the last four years I have seen the best and the worst that we as people can do to each other. I have seen the aggressive use of State sovereignty as an excuse for inaction in countries where there is a clear humanitarian imperative and where the needs of people should be put front and centre. I have seen the callousness of leaders whose rhetoric is inclusiveness and concern for their people, but whose practice is something else. I have seen people and donors around the world support resource
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mobilization at unprecedented levels. I have seen narrow national interest override commitment to basic human values. I have seen increasing fragility, fragmentation, polarization and marginalization, but I have also seen economic development, community and individual resilience, promotion of human rights and fight for justice and equality, improvements in poverty and other development indicators. I have seen brutality and violence on an almost unimaginable scale. But crucially I have seen greater connectivity between people of different cultures and religions, despite the intolerance and insecurity which remains one of the biggest challenges we now face.

Yes, we are living in a more complex world with an unprecedented series of challenges. What I don't know is whether we are living through a seismic shift in relationships and attitudes that will push us to truly transform our global institutions to better reflect the power and other shifts we continue to see, or whether we will continue to manage the anomalies and contradictions in a way that leads to piecemeal but not transformational change.

These are truly challenging times when humanitarian actors are being called on more and more to deal with the consequences of crises that essentially have their roots in conflict, political differences and push for power; in underdevelopment; ongoing and, in some cases, rising levels of poverty and inequality; climate change and environmental degradation; population growth in some parts of the world; and the consequences of increasing levels of internal displacement and forced migration. All of this is overlaid by the growth of terrorist and armed groups, and challenges to democratization leading to major instability and insecurity across the world. There are now very few conflicts which are national in character: they are regional and global. Syria and Iraq, with impact on political relationships with Gulf countries and Iran, impact through refugee flows and significant security concerns on Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey and the broader dimensions of the politics of the Middle East. And now the coalition strikes against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, which have brought an additional dimension in Iraq and Syria. The crisis in Yemen also has a significant and complex regional political and security dimension, but also impacts people-trafficking and migratory flows from Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea and other countries in East Africa. I could make similar connections with the conflicts in Mali, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

The number of people affected by humanitarian conflict and natural disasters has reached record levels. In 2014, UN agencies and their partners asked for US$15.6 billion in humanitarian aid to help 52 million people. And that number does not represent all people in need around the world. These are the people we consider to be most vulnerable, that most need protection. The devastation that conflicts wreak on people’s lives is clear. Between 2002 and 2013, over 80 per cent of the money we asked for through UN inter-agency humanitarian appeals was for assistance to people affected by conflict. And as the nature of conflict and violence changes, so the challenges to humanitarian response become intractable. Despite ongoing reforms and expansion in the number of organizations working to meet the needs of people affected by conflict, humanitarian organizations are not changing fast enough to deal with rising need, and we are not organized to address the economic and social consequences of, for example, gang violence, piracy, drug and people-trafficking. While power and profit continue to be drivers of State-led violence, other factors, including resource scarcity, climate-related
migration, mass unemployment and growing inequality between rich and poor, are becoming more prominent drivers of conflict.

I know that statistics can’t describe the horror of the experience faced by people confronting the horror of conflict, but they do point to an interplay of shocks, which speaks to the complexity humanitarian actors now have to deal with. In 2012, of the 22 countries which had inter-agency humanitarian appeals, 21 had had at least one other crisis in the previous 10 years. Despite the economic gains which have been delivered in many countries, we are seeing a convergence of global trends, which is increasing the risk of major crises, their scope and complexity. Poverty is more concentrated in fragile States, where 50 per cent of the world’s extreme poor live – more than 1.2 billion people still live on less than $1.25 per day. More than 840 million people, around one in eight people, are chronically undernourished. Fifty million people – the highest number since the Second World War – are displaced in their own country or displaced across borders. The food-price crisis of 2007-2008 led to protests in 50 countries and demonstrates how commodity-price shocks can rapidly increase humanitarian needs across countries simultaneously. Think back to the famine in Somalia two years ago and the contained food insecurity across the Horn of Africa, and the nine countries of the Sahel in West and Central Africa. There has been a 114 per cent global increase in the number of people exposed to flooding between 1970 and 2010. The world’s population increased by 87 per cent in the same period. By 2050, it is estimated that the world’s population will be 9.6 billion, and that in the years between now and then we will continue to experience rising levels of humanitarian needs if the situation does not change.

Two-hundred-and-fifty million more Africans will live under conditions of severe water stress by 2020. Forty-seven per cent of the world’s population will be living in areas of high water stress by 2030. And 6.3 billion people will live in urban areas by 2050. Add to that the consequences of conflict and you can understand why, despite the significant progress we have made since setting the Millennium Development Goals, the success of the ‘Stop the Debt’ campaigns, the establishment of a framework of international humanitarian and human rights law to hold individuals and Governments accountable, there is significant uncertainty and questioning about what the future will hold.

Let me now turn to the specific challenges we face in working in conflict settings. First, distinguishing who is who on the battleground is increasingly complex. In the Libya uprising, teachers and medical workers joined the fight; fighters in Mali included members of international terrorism networks, religious extremists and unemployed youths. And in conflict zones worldwide, from Afghanistan to South Sudan, civilians are caught in the crossfire, making up the majority of conflict casualties. They are killed and injured in targeted or indiscriminate attacks in violation of international humanitarian law and often with complete impunity. Civilians are particularly vulnerable as the battleground increasingly shifts to densely populated urban areas, virtually shutting down basic services. In 2013, over 80 per cent of people killed or injured by explosive weapons were civilians, over 90 per cent of them targeted or caught in the crossfire in populated areas.

In Syria, the cities of Homs, Aleppo, Damascus and many smaller towns have served as battlegrounds. The nature of urban warfare, which typically involves heavy artillery, snipers and small mobile groups familiar with the terrain, poses new challenges for
humanitarian agencies, rendering response extremely difficult and dangerous. The conflict in Syria provides stark evidence of how conflict can consume and threaten a society: some 9.5 million Syrians are displaced, two thirds of them internally, and hundreds of thousands remain in hard-to-reach or besieged areas. Being forced from their homes disrupts every aspect of families’ lives, hampering access to basic services, barring children from attending school and stopping adults from earning a living. It can also mark the beginning of a dangerous daily struggle for survival. Three weeks ago I was in Turkey speaking to families displaced by the fighting in Kobane. A woman broke down in front of me. She had fled Homs for Kobane, now Kobane to Suruc in Turkey. Her concern was all for her children. Their future. It’s a plea I have heard everywhere. And the question which follows, which is why they have been abandoned by the international community, one I can’t answer.

The violence that broke out in 2013 in the Central African Republic forced a quarter of the population from their homes. Returnee women from CAR living in a camp in southern Chad told my colleagues that they had no choice but to turn to survival sex to feed their children. While entire communities suffer the impact of armed conflict, women and girls are disproportionately affected because of the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, the central role played by women in bringing up children, and the chaos and breakdown in social order. Women and children make up some 80 per cent of refugees around the world. Sexual violence in conflict settings continues to be grossly underreported. On a recent visit to South Sudan, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Sexual Violence said that women and children in South Sudan continue to be victims of the worst sexual violence she had ever seen. And I saw and heard it from women myself when I visited earlier this year. They were the first targeted–deliberately.

Children in conflict zones run the risk of being forcibly separated from their parents, being abducted or recruited into armed groups. Hundreds of thousands of children continue to be recruited into armed conflict, to serve as fighters, porters, cooks and sexual slaves. Against this backdrop, the challenge facing humanitarian organizations has never been greater: to deliver effective assistance quickly to people who need it, the most amid burgeoning chaos and danger in an environment where international humanitarian law is routinely violated. Humanitarian work is dangerous. Thus far in 2014, 82 humanitarian workers have been killed, 46 wounded and 83 kidnapped, the overwhelming majority of them staff from the countries themselves. Humanitarian supplies are looted, be it in Afghanistan, Syria or Mali. Each time a hospital is attacked or an aid convoy looted, a huge swathe of affected people lose the opportunity to secure much needed assistance. In the Central African Republic, when 16 people, including three MSF staff, were killed in an attack on Boguila hospital in April this year, MSF had to suspend all but its most vital operations. As a result, in just one week some 25,000 outpatient consultations did not take place.

In March 2014 in South Sudan, the World Food Programme estimated that enough food to feed more than 275,000 people for a month was lost following the looting of their stocks in Bor, Bentiu and Malakal. Faced with these challenges, humanitarian organizations must turn to the principles which govern our work and are key to independence and neutrality of action, and turn them into practical tools to help them “stay and deliver” assistance. Approaches to secure access to vulnerable people

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include negotiation, establishing collective red lines and, as a last resort, remote programming. We have captured some lessons from these approaches.

When it comes to negotiation, we have learned the importance of gathering evidence to back up our negotiations for access with the authorities and the value we have in working together. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Humanitarian Country Team, made up of UN agencies and NGOs, developed a common approach to tracking violations of access and negotiating access with the authorities to add weight to their discussions.

We are currently developing a tool to analyse denial of access to people in need in 12 countries and the impact of these patterns on humanitarian response. Establishing red lines involves retaining a distinction between humanitarian and wider political and military efforts to ensure we remain impartial, while leaving communication channels open. In Libya this meant that the humanitarian community turned down the offer of NATO armed escorts. Why? Because NATO was seen as supporting one side. In Yemen in 2011, it meant that we led efforts to build trust between armed groups and humanitarian actors in a bid to boost access. Over the course of the year, non-state actors participated in coordination meetings and the number of humanitarian projects increased, reaching more people. But despite our best efforts in some cases—from Mali to Somalia—direct programming is considered too dangerous and agencies must turn to remote programming. In such cases we are learning how to maintain programme quality and accountability from afar, and are making better efforts to keeping national staff safe.

Turning humanitarian principles into reality can involve difficult decisions, which may sit uncomfortably with emerging national legislation. For decades, humanitarian workers have negotiated with all parties to conflict to access vulnerable people. This may include negotiating with groups designated as "terrorist" by some States or entities, which violates some States’ national laws. In Syria, where the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant group now controls large parts of the north and neighbouring Iraq, NGOs have been confronted with the harrowing decision of whether to continue to negotiate with such groups for access, or to cease delivering aid to vulnerable civilians living in these areas. I continue to play a lead role on advocacy around access to vulnerable groups. In Syria, where access has been highly constrained, we convened a 22-nation high-level group, including Security Council members, to try to find ways to guarantee access to besieged communities, and to demilitarise schools and hospitals. And there is always the difficult issue of resources.

I and my colleagues continue to push for humanitarian financing to be aligned according to need, not to geo-political preferences. While humanitarian appeals have been on a more or less steady rise over the past decade, they remain stubbornly underfunded by one third on average. And the money comes in too slowly. In Syria, Central African Republic, Yemen and South Sudan, it took on average 10 months for humanitarian organizations to receive just 50 per cent of the humanitarian funding they had asked for. UN pooled funds, like the Central Emergency Response Fund, as well as emerging NGO network funds, are helping bridge the aid response gap. These need to continue to grow in strength.

Timely response also relies on better early warning and preparedness, a sector which
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currently receives just 0.5 per cent of global humanitarian spending. When it comes to
conflict, had the humanitarian community better analysed the risk dynamics in Central
African Republic, South Sudan, or the security threat posed by ISIS, we might have been
better prepared. So good analysis and engagement with our colleagues doing political
analysis is critical. It’s all about understanding the context. About preventive diplomacy.
About being tougher in how we read the signs–particularly continued and sustained
human rights violations.

In an increasingly fragmented world where we face multiple crises, we need strong
leadership, coordination, accountability, preparedness and early action to inform the
global agenda for transformation. We need vision from Governments, multilateral
institutions and humanitarian agencies to build up our collective capacity to deal with and
try to mitigate the crises created by conflict, rather than struggling to cope with the
consequences.

Between 2003 and 2013, the protracted crises in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of
Congo and Somalia accounted for half of all humanitarian appeal funding. Something is
very wrong. Humanitarian aid cannot be used to fill the development funding gap or be a
substitute for political engagement. As needs grow, humanitarian organizations are being
asked to take on more and more: peacebuilding, development, resilience, protection.
Humanitarian workers have always operated in politicized environments, where attempts
are made to use humanitarian action to pursue political or security ends. The last two
years have been a juggling act in this regard. Keeping humanitarian response from
political imperatives in Syria, Iraq, Ukraine and Gaza has been particularly difficult.
Humanitarian efforts are essential to save lives and preserve people’s dignity, but are no
substitute for political action.

And I have an even bigger worry. After every major conflict we say “never again”, and
yet what I see every day is an inability to halt the violence. To find political solutions.
And the tools available to the international community now appear extremely limited in
light of the complex set of challenges we face. We need a stronger and perhaps more
interventionist global architecture to deal with the humanitarian consequences of conflict.
But I recognise that this would come with major risks given power dynamics and other
differences around the world. We need a greater sense of active, global citizenship to
deliver the more peaceful world we would all like to see. I don’t have the answers on how
we can make this happen. But we all have to try.

When I was about 16, I thought the world would be a much better place if I were running
it. As one gets older the constraints become clearer, but let’s not become the prisoners of
those constraints. I look to our young people with their interest in global connectivity,
their impatience with the slow pace of change, disdain that what we could achieve given
technological and other developments—stopping famine, getting rid of poverty,
educating everyone, preventing conflict—that in 2014 we have still not done.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have huge opportunities to make our world a different, a better place. Let’s not
squander it.

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Thank you.

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