

Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien
ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment High-Level Panel
“Moving beyond business as usual: Working together to reduce need, risk and vulnerability”

New York, Tuesday, 28 June 2016

As delivered

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to open this first panel discussion on how we “move beyond business as usual, working together to reduce need, risk and vulnerability.”

Just one month after the World Humanitarian Summit, this topic is timelier than ever. We must now quickly move towards turning our commitments for change into action. There was very strong support at the Summit to move beyond meeting needs, to change people’s lives by reducing their needs and to this end, to undertake a new way of working and a new way of financing that promotes not just surviving, but also thriving.

Member States and regional groupings, international and local aid organizations, development banks and the private sector and academia made more than 500 individual and joint commitments towards this theme – more than in any other category – at the Summit

Our efforts will always be underpinned by our collective, unwavering commitment to principled humanitarian action and the imperative to respond with impartial, independent assistance in times of crisis. The capacity and space for upholding humanitarian principles cannot be compromised. But as described by my colleague Sam Worthington, head of InterAction said at the Summit, in some contexts: *“That is not enough. Our challenge is how to ensure this need for aid is met and lessened, and as much as possible, complementing local development efforts.”*

At the Summit we committed to support people in reducing their risk, need and vulnerability. Member States and organizations agreed to substantially bolster social protection measures that limit the impact of shocks. For example, the African Risk

Capacity (ARC) committed to work with Member States to dramatically increase risk insurance coverage in Africa – aiming to reach 150 million vulnerable Africans by 2020.

We committed to “reinforce, not replace” local and national response capacity, with multiple commitments to promote locally-led response, as well as direct investment and support for national institutions. We also saw support for meaningful community engagement, and to initiatives such as the Core Humanitarian Standard to promote quality and accountability.

And finally, we have committed to break the cycle of protracted crises and to transcend the humanitarian-development divide.

We in the UN are the first to recognize that we cannot continue business as usual: The Commitment to Action on transcending humanitarian-development divides, signed by 8 United Nations Agencies and endorsed by the World Bank and IOM at the World Humanitarian Summit shows the willingness of all involved to work to collective outcomes over multi-year timeframes based on comparative advantage in each context. International NGOs and NGO networks also made significant commitments to advance this new way of working.

Within the context of the Stockholm Declaration, the OECD’s International Network on Conflict and Fragility committed to strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus through financial and political support with an initial focus on 5 to 10 countries and to progressively expand a new way of working and financing by 2020.

The World Bank's intent to establish a Global Crisis Response Platform to support countries facing exogenous shocks is another initiative to watch. There is also an important need to take forward discussions to align short and longer-term funding better, as proposed by the Secretary-General, through an International Financing Platform.

The Secretary-General’s report calls on us to focus on demand rather supplies and on collective outcomes and comparative advantage, rather than project delivery and “mandates first.” As Her Excellency Justine Greening, UK Secretary of State for International Development, said at the Summit, we must “*overcome the silos that have divided our humanitarian and development work for far too long.*”

First, we must look beyond short-term, sector-based projects and work towards collective outcomes to help us achieve Agenda 2030. Together we can identify the greatest risks and drivers of vulnerability that prevent development progress and together we can reduce them.

The response to the current El Niño crisis in Ethiopia and beyond is a phenomenal example of how the Government, supported by humanitarian and development partners, has been able to avert an even deeper crisis by reducing risk and improve resilience. These include Government’s Growth and Transformation Plan, an effective Government-

led early warning system, and the launch of the Productive Safety Net Programme, in 2005, now Africa's largest social protection programme.

Second, given most crises are protracted or recurrent, we must work over multi-year time frames, identifying the kinds of results we want to achieve over 3-5 years, or longer. We need to consider how and when to harmonize planning, coordination and financing, and what kind of leadership and accountability are required to deliver those results.

In the Sahel, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs) are working together under the leadership of the Regional RC/HC to implement a multi-year regional Humanitarian Response Plan, while also addressing how to integrate risk into development assistance.

Third, we must work based on comparative advantage as demonstrated in context, rather than institutional mandates. We need to ask: What will it take to deliver on an outcome? And who is best-placed to get it done?

This calls for greater and more predictable participation and inputs by private sector actors, as well as local responders and authorities and civil society. For example, the Nigerian Economic Summit Group, a platform for public-private sector cooperation, has developed a social-inclusion strategy training people displaced by Boko Haram in the northeast, in professional skills and then matching them up with jobs.

There will always be situations, as we are seeing in Syria, Yemen, and other active conflicts, where humanitarian action primarily will be about securing access to move life-saving assistance to people in dire and urgent need as moving national development indicators forward will be extremely difficult. We must protect this part of our work, and the fundamental principles underpinning it. But there are many other situations, where closer collaboration toward common objectives and results is needed. We must push ourselves in these contexts, to achieve more.

Many of these ideas are not new. What is new is the scale of need, the diversity and scope of capacity at the local and national levels, and the global political commitment to change. We face a once-in-a-generation opportunity. The 2030 Agenda, the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change are among the most prominent signals of the momentum that is building on this front.

I look forward to continued partnership with Member States, UN agencies, civil society, the private sector and all other stakeholders to take this vision forward. By adopting this shift we can not only deliver better results for people affected by crisis, but also broaden the development gains for millions of the "furthest behind" so they can chart their own course out of aid-dependency.

Thank you.