I would like to begin with a very brief overview of CERF’s activities in 2012.

David Gressly, the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel, will then talk specifically about the ways in which the CERF has been used to strengthen the humanitarian response in the Sahel, and how it has been used strategically by Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators on the ground.

We’ll then open the floor so that we can hear about your experiences with CERF and hear your suggestions on how we can further improve this valuable mechanism.

So, to give an overview of the CERF in 2012: we have allocated US$465 million so far this year, including more than $303 million through the Rapid Response window. This is the highest amount we have ever allocated in a calendar year. As the film showed, we have been truly global in our activities. In 2012, CERF funds have been used by UN agencies and IOM in 49 countries and territories.

CERF’s support has been critical to saving the lives and livelihoods of millions of people throughout the world. It has bolstered the transformative agenda, which aims to strengthen humanitarian response, and our efforts to have a robust and well-coordinated UN-led humanitarian response in support of national efforts.

In Syria, I have used the CERF to ensure that the UN could expand its programmes at several crucial points during the year. This allowed the agencies to respond to access opportunities as they arose. The CERF has given nearly US$52 million to Syria and the region since the crisis began last year. In 2012, UN agencies and IOM in Syria have received nearly $36 million in CERF funds, and a further $12.6 million has gone to support Syrians in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. You will find more information on CERF’s allocations for Syria and the region in your folder.

In South Sudan, the CERF contribution of $20 million toward core pipelines early in the year allowed humanitarian partners to ensure that people displaced by communal violence and armed conflict, refugees, and newly arriving returnees, received essential life-saving humanitarian assistance. I allocated a further $20 million in July to cope with the massive influx of refugees from South Kordofan and Blue Nile States. Funds
supported life-saving projects that helped an estimated 65,000 people, including 13,000 children under the age of five.

And CERF was in the frontline of the response in Haiti and Cuba to the devastating effects of Hurricane Sandy, allowing UN agencies to support national governments in their efforts to assist their people.

The rapid and flexible support offered by the CERF makes it a central pillar of the UN agencies’ humanitarian response. We are one of the largest supporters of UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, UNFPA and FAO, and the sixth largest contributor to WFP. The agencies have repeatedly told us that the CERF’s support enhances their ability to respond, particularly when it is used within their own internal funding mechanisms.

Despite the heavy demand on the CERF Secretariat, we have remained focused on continuous improvement, including through the implementation of the Management Response Plan for the Five-Year Evaluation.

We have made a concerted effort to increase the pace of disbursements from UN agencies to implementing partners. The level of reporting on sub-grants has improved greatly, allowing us to conduct more detailed analysis on the timing of CERF funded sub-grants to implementing partners, and helping us to better understand the linkages between disbursement times and implementation of activities. The CERF Secretariat is using this information to work closely with UN agency headquarters to maximize the efficiency of the CERF process and ensure assistance reaches affected people as quickly as possible.

We are also actively reviewing our internal processes to make sure that they are delivering the results we want. We have just completed a review of the Underfunded Window, and are already putting the recommendations into place in the current underfunded round.

We have also just completed two regional reviews and one country review under our Performance and Accountability Framework. The reviews showed that the CERF had added value to the humanitarian response by increasing the availability of resources and filling time-critical gaps, and by enabling agencies to quickly scale-up their humanitarian responses. In some situations, CERF funds had also helped the agencies to leverage additional funding.

Now that the Performance and Accountability Framework has been in place for two years, it will be reviewed by a consultant to ensure it is fit for purpose. We want to maintain our practice of measuring and reporting on our performance in a rigorous and transparent manner.

The CERF has demonstrated its added value this year. We were able to do this because of the very generous support of the 84 member states and many others who provided US$459 million in 2011 and more than $405 million so far this year. In both years, more than 60 per cent of the pledges were turned into contributions by the end of the first quarter, giving us the funds we needed to respond to emergencies from the beginning of the year.
Because of this generous support, we were able to critically assess each request that came to us. And we will need your continued support if we are to respond to the difficult challenges ahead.

I would now like to invite David Gressly to share his experiences in using CERF in the Sahel. We will then open the floor for a broader discussion on the CERF.