Madam President,

Today marks World Humanitarian Day, commemorating the 19 August 2003 terrorist attack on the Canal Hotel which served as the UN compound in Baghdad. The attack killed 22 people and injured over 100, most of whom were working tirelessly on the humanitarian relief effort in Iraq. Sadly, in the years since then the number of people attacked while delivering life-saving assistance continues to rise. Ten humanitarian workers were killed in every month of 2014. In Syria, 77 humanitarians have lost their lives since the start of the conflict. In Yemen, five aid workers have been killed, others injured and another two kidnapped this year. In the last ten years in Yemen, 17 humanitarian workers have died in the line of duty and 44 have been kidnapped.

The contexts in which humanitarian workers serve around the world, and the terrible plight of the more than 100 million people in need of humanitarian assistance they seek to reach, continue to deteriorate.

Madam President,

I have just returned from Yemen, where the scale of human suffering is almost incomprehensible. I was shocked by what I saw. The civilian population is bearing the brunt of the conflict - a shocking four out of five Yemenis require humanitarian assistance and nearly 1.5 million people are internally displaced. More than 1,000 children have been killed or injured and the number of young people recruited or used as fighters is increasing.

As I highlighted in my 28 July briefing on Yemen, the needs of the people are massive. This is exacerbated by impediments to commercial imports, resulting in widespread scarcity of food and fuel. Humanitarian assistance alone cannot meet all the needs of an entire country with a population of 26 million people. This is why airports and seaports need to remain open and be used for both commercial imports and humanitarian supplies – without restrictions.
Disregard for human life by all parties continues, with attacks on residential areas and civilian infrastructure having a disproportionate impact on the lives of ordinary people in Yemen. Reports of airstrikes and other shelling in and around Hudaydah port earlier this week damaged the main lifelines for the import of basic goods: food, medicines and fuel. These attacks are in clear contravention of international humanitarian law and are unacceptable. I am extremely concerned that the damage to the port of Hudaydah could have a severe impact on the entire country, and would deepen humanitarian needs, making more people food insecure, leaving them without access to water or medicines, which could also mean the spread of disease.

Madame President,

Parties to the conflict must ensure that humanitarian aid is facilitated and not hindered. All parties to the conflict must respect and implement international humanitarian law and possible violations must be investigated and perpetrators held accountable.

I have seen the anguish of the Yemeni people with my own eyes - men, women and children alike unsure where their next meal will come from or if they will ever be able to return to their homes. In Sana’a I witnessed queues for fuel which were kilometres long with people waiting for several days to meet the basic needs of their families.

I visited Al-Thawra hospital, where the lights flickered as the generators were running low on fuel, patients lay on the floor and cardboard was used as mattresses. There I saw a young man injured by shrapnel; he said he had been a soldier since he was 15 years old. I saw a young woman who was grazed by a bullet across her face while sitting in her own home, and I saw a young Somali man with tuberculosis. The hospital has run out of examination gloves, and has insufficient quantities of essential medicines as the supplier in Dubai is unable to fly their cold-chain aircraft to Sana’a. Hospital staff informed me that the blood bank recently closed due to a shortage of laboratory reagents used for screening. In Faj Attan, a neighbourhood in Sana’a, I saw homes destroyed by airstrikes; neighbours told me of numerous civilian deaths and injuries.

In Aden, an entire road of homes and businesses were destroyed by street battles and airstrikes, leaving the streets littered with tanks and unexploded ordnance. I heard the story of a father and his daughter being killed by an improvised explosive device, just days earlier.

The Governor of Aden informed me that some people were slowly returning to their homes and basic services were being restored, but not in vast swathes of the city where unexploded ordinance litter the streets and buildings. People are overwhelmed by the scale of the destruction and the task ahead in rebuilding their shattered city. Electricity, essential for water pumping and cereal milling, is rare and intermittent.

Madam President,

It is appropriate on the occasion of World Humanitarian Day to reflect on the courage of my colleagues – Yemeni and international – who continue to deliver vital assistance despite the tremendous operational challenges, often risking their own lives to help others. Since the conflict began in late March, nearly seven million people in Yemen
have been supported by UN agencies and their partners, with food, water, shelter, health support and protection assistance. I am humbled by the tireless efforts of my colleagues.

But much more needs to be done. We continue to scale up the humanitarian response so that we can reach all those in need with the assistance they so sorely need. This includes positioning more international staff across the country, outside of Sana’a and Hudaydah. We aim to establish operational hubs in Aden, Ibb, Sa’ada and Mukalla as soon as the security situation allows.

Madam President,

The success of our effort to continue to assist the people depends on our having sufficient resources to respond. Today, the World Food Programme warned again that a lack of immediate and unhindered access to people who urgently need food assistance and the shortage of funding create the possibility of famine for millions of Yemenis.

To date, only 18 per cent, some 282 million U.S. dollars, of the 1.6 billion dollars requested through the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan has been received. UN agencies have still not received the funding from Saudi Arabia of $274 million pledged in April. Even once these funds are received, the response plan will only be funded at 33 per cent. Substantial additional resources will be needed to support the Yemeni people through the rest of this year and beyond.

Madam President,

Throughout my mission, I emphasised that peace is essential to ending the tremendous suffering of the people. There is no military solution to this conflict – peace must be reached through a dialogue of words not a dialogue of weapons.

We, the international community, must match our actions with our words and take immediate measures to end the violence which is destroying the lives of millions of people across the country. We must get the parties to stop the fighting and return to the negotiating table, before it’s too late. Otherwise there will be nothing left to fight for.

Madam President,

As we reflect on the state of play globally on World Humanitarian Day we unfortunately see a worsening situation, and a scale of needless humanitarian suffering that is truly shocking. We must act. We must do more to ensure that those of us in a position to prevent the abuses perpetrated against those who can do nothing are stopped, and that those who continue to carry them out are held to account.

Thank you.