

Looking ahead: Global Trends
Remarks for Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
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As delivered

It is an honour and a pleasure to be here with you today to discuss two important topics: the critical issues that impact the lives of so many vulnerable people grappling to survive fragility and insecurity, and the changes that we at the United Nations are making to build a future that is marked by inclusive peace and shared prosperity, not by protracted conflict and daily struggle.

We who work in the humanitarian sector engage at the sharp end of vulnerability, risk and structural fragility. The vast majority—97 per cent—of humanitarian suffering is due to complex emergencies, involving a combination of armed conflict, fragile institutions, endemic poverty and climate change.

Our humanitarian caseload comprises the record 141 million vulnerable people across 37 countries who are caught up in these compound crises and need humanitarian assistance to survive.

When the international community fails to resolve conflicts or invest in the right kinds of protection, development and governance solutions in fragile States, the world's most vulnerable people pay a steep price in untold suffering, and humanitarians are left to pick up the pieces in increasingly dangerous environments.

Numbers only ever tell part of a story, but in this case, they do so starkly. At least 87 per cent of all people living in extreme poverty are in fragile countries, most of which require humanitarian assistance, many of them for years on end. These are the people at risk of “being left behind: – if not the “furthest left behind.”

If the 141 million crisis-affected people populated one country, their life expectancy would be 24 years shorter than the global average. The child-mortality rate would be 10 times higher than the rest of the world's. And only one in three of these children would graduate from primary school, less than half of the global average. That is not a fictitious country; it is our humanitarian caseload.

The complex set of challenges that continue to drive up the scale and scope of humanitarian suffering are neither new nor isolated. It is primarily conflict, violence, including extremist-related violence, and insecurity that trigger mass displacement, destroy lives and livelihoods and knock back development gains.

Syria once boasted the highest literacy rates in the Middle East. Today, 45 per cent of its children are out of school. In Yemen, half of the country's health clinics and hospitals have been damaged or destroyed by conflict, while the Ministry of Health is barely functioning, leaving the health sector on its knees as it tries to battle a cholera outbreak that has now infected 200,000 people.

Without political solutions in sight, today's conflicts have lasted for years and even decades, generating a record number of people who need assistance. This year, we are calling for a record US\$23.5 billion to meet the needs of 100 million people.

As the UN Secretary-General has put it: "Nobody is winning today's wars." Of the 37 countries receiving humanitarian assistance over the past decade, six have launched appeals for 10 or more consecutive years, namely the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the occupied Palestinian territory, Somalia and Sudan.

The increasingly brutal and violent nature of these conflicts further exacerbates fragility. From Sana'a to Aleppo, from Juba to Kabul, warring parties—both State and non-State—show utter contempt for human life and dignity, flagrantly flouting their international legal obligations. Fighting parties bomb and shell schools, hospitals, health clinics, places of worship, aid convoys, marketplaces and homes. They target women and girls with sexual violence and rape, they abduct and forcibly recruit children, and they deny families access to life-saving food or medicines, with almost total impunity. This brutality is more likely than ever to take place in urban settings, bringing civilians directly into the line of fire, with devastating results.

Conflict seems unending, but the risk of natural disasters, compounded by climate change, also continues to rise with the earth's rise in temperature, bringing more volatile, extreme weather conditions, including wind storms, flooding, and prolonged, more intense droughts in already arid areas. Climate change will continue to drive mass

displacement in parts of the world where vulnerable communities already struggle to eke out an existence, such as the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. This will intensify competition over scarce resources, mounting intercommunity tensions, and hampering food production just when we need it to increase. To feed the world's projected 9.7 billion people in 2050, we require a 60 per cent increase in food production.

Global warming, increased inequality and population growth, as well as increased global trade and travel, mean we can expect further pandemics such as Ebola, HIV/AIDS and SARS. A more proactive approach is needed now to manage these threats.

These compound factors have created a global displacement crisis. Today, 65.6 million people are forcibly displaced—more people than at any time in the previous seven decades. Last year, one person was driven from their home every three seconds. Two thirds of them are displaced within their own countries. And most will remain displaced for 10-20 years on average.

Displacement puts an enormous strain not only on host communities, but also on institutional capacity and basic services. Let us be clear: it is neighbouring countries, many of them also fragile, that shelter the bulk of the world's 22.5 million refugees. Unsung hero, Uganda, which has one doctor per 24,000 people, took in more refugees than any other country last year, bringing its total to 1.2 million, and placing an enormous strain on its fragile systems.

Humanitarians will always do their best to save and protect people's lives in these contexts, but ultimately these crises demand sustainable political solutions. This recognition is the impetus behind the UN Secretary-General's vision to put **prevention** at the centre of the UN's agenda with conflict resolution and prevention at its forefront. Implementing this vision will involve strengthening the UN's preventive diplomacy architecture, and closely aligning the UN's work around the three pillars of development, peace and security, and human rights.

But UN Secretary-General António Guterres recognizes that while preventing fragile States and societies from descending into conflict and crisis is fundamental, so is the need to boost their resilience through risk-informed, inclusive and sustainable development solutions and better systems to address soaring inequality. National Governments must drive this change, with support from partners, including the UN.

In short, there is no sustainable development without peace, and there is no peace without sustainable development. And that is why the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Sendai Disaster Risk Reduction Framework are our framework for action.

Humanitarians must also work towards this broader change agenda. This is the impetus behind the “New Way of Working” being adopted across the UN, as well as a broad spectrum of humanitarian and development actors, to try to head off crises before they escalate.

In this **New Way of Working**, humanitarians will focus on delivering urgent, life-saving aid in protracted crises, while collaborating with a diverse set of development, Government, peacebuilding, private sector and civil-society partners to work towards collective outcomes to reduce vulnerability and humanitarian need, to build community and societal resilience, and to lay the foundations for peace. In fragile States, the UN supports an approach that is “as local as possible and as international as necessary”, bearing in mind that humanitarians will always ensure this does not undermine the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality.

Momentum is building to operationalize this New Way of Working. As just one example, in each of the countries that are famine-affected or at risk of famine: north-eastern Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, we are working with development partners, including UNDP, the World Bank and in some cases, local authorities, to ensure links between short-term life-saving and long-term risk reduction efforts.

As we progress with this approach, we also need an intensified global effort, led by Member States of the UN and the Security Council, to enhance respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians. All States are obliged to ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances, and all must exert their influence to prevent and stop violations.

At the first World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016, world leaders set an ambitious goal to halve internal displacement by 2030. If we are to reach that goal, we need the political will of world leaders to save lives, protect rights and share responsibility globally, as they committed to doing at the UN’s General Assembly in New York, in September 2016.

Finding the right solutions in situations of extreme fragility has challenged leaders across the international community for decades. But we are now at a turning point. As the German writer and politician Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said: “Willing is not enough. We must do.” Putting our agreements into action is our best hope to ensure that the world’s most vulnerable 141 million people are included in our path to progress. Lest we forget, failing them will only exacerbate crises that threaten our global security. They are counting on us to succeed.