As delivered

Mr. President, Distinguished Representatives,

As I noted in my remarks to the Security Council on Friday, I have been deeply moved by the terrible, entirely avoidable human suffering in Yemen. As you know, millions of people in Yemen are facing a triple tragedy: the spectre of famine, the world’s largest ever single-year cholera outbreak, and the daily deprivation and injustice of a brutal conflict. The statistics are familiar to all of us: 17 million Yemenis do not know if or where they will get their next meal; nearly 7 million are facing the threat of famine; nearly 16 million lack access to water or sanitation; and more than half a million suspected cases of cholera have been reported in only the last four months, with the latest figure of 2,000 deaths. When looking at these figures, we must remember that Yemen’s catastrophe is entirely man-made. It is a direct result of the deliberate policies, tactics and actions of the parties to the conflict, and as such, it can and must be stopped.

Mr. President,

The invitation circulated for this meeting raised several points for discussion today, focusing primarily on obstacles to the humanitarian response. Before addressing this issue, I wish to emphasize that the UN-coordinated response continues to reach millions of people in every governorate of Yemen with life-saving assistance and protection, as it has done since the escalation of this crisis in early 2015. More than 120 partners are participating in the 2017 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan, working through five humanitarian hubs in Aden, Hudaydah, Ibb, Sa’ada and Sana’a. Together, these partners have assisted more than 5.9 million people this year in every governorate of the country. This includes an average of 4.4 million people who have received emergency food assistance every month; 1.8 million people who have received water and sanitation support; 2.7 million people who have benefited from healthcare programmes; and some 300,000 malnourished children and pregnant or lactating women who have received treatment. In delivering this assistance, partners work tirelessly to reach even very difficult areas.

I raise these points to demonstrate clearly that the humanitarian response in Yemen is delivering, and that we are doing so in a principled, effective manner across the entire country. This is not to say that there are no obstacles to our work – indeed, there are too many. Restrictions on key
commercial imports is one of these obstacles, as these restrictions play a key role in pushing humanitarian needs beyond existing response capacity. As was the case even before this civil war, Yemen imports over 90 per cent of its staple food and nearly all medicine and fuel, meaning that any restrictions on imports have an immediate, deleterious effect on the humanitarian situation. The UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) was established in May 2016 precisely to facilitate critical commercial imports into the Red Sea ports of Yemen. Yet the Government of Yemen and the Coalition at times bypass UNVIM by unilaterally denying or excessively delaying entry to vessels carrying essential cargo. These fluctuating restrictions have had a chilling effect on the willingness of some commercial vessels to serve Al Hudaydah port, which before the crisis was handling an estimated 70 per cent of imports into Yemen, and is the most efficient port to reach the majority of Yemenis who live in the north, especially those who are most vulnerable and in dire, urgent need.

Humanitarian partners in Yemen do not have the resources, mandate or capacity to replace a faltering commercial sector, and wilful restrictions on the commercial sector therefore constitute a serious obstacle to the response. The closure of Sana’a airport to civilian traffic by the Government of Yemen and the Coalition is another restriction, blocking thousands of Yemenis from travelling abroad for medical care. Commercial flights served Sana’a in the first year of the conflict, and should immediately resume, at the very least for humanitarian cases. Airspace is controlled by the Saudi-led Coalition, and those tight restrictions as imposed are hampering commercial flights for supplies, let alone humanitarian flights, deliveries and evacuations.

A further obstacle relates to the ability of humanitarian supplies and staff to move swiftly to their final destination without interference. Too often, de facto authorities in Sana’a or local officials in areas under their control, delay, block or otherwise interfere with humanitarian action. These restrictions are especially prevalent in front-line areas, and can prevent or delay partners from reaching the most vulnerable. Local officials in areas controlled by Sana’a de facto authorities at times also seek to influence the selection of beneficiaries or operational partners, which restricts the independence of humanitarian action. We have also seen repeated incidents of aid diversion in areas under the control of Sana’a de facto authorities, especially in Taizz governorate. Monitoring and risk mitigation measures, including insurance arrangements, are in place to minimize the impact of any diversion incidents on beneficiaries. In the end, many of these incidents are eventually resolved through discussions with de facto authorities, but the time lost represents an unacceptable burden for people who desperately need help.

Mr. President,

Humanitarian action is predicated on the assumption that public institutions are able to provide at least minimum basic services. However, after two years of war, we are seeing accelerating
institutional collapse in Yemen, which is also putting considerable additional pressure on the response. Today, only 45 per cent of health facilities are fully functioning. Sanitation systems have mostly ground to a halt. Some 1.2 million public employees – including 30,000 health workers and 193,000 teachers – have been paid erratically or not at all since October last year, thereby accelerating the decline in essential services and depriving about a quarter of the population – civil servants and their families – of a reliable income. We see the consequences of this collapse in people’s rising needs across all sectors – and perhaps most dramatically in the current cholera outbreak, which has spread rapidly across Yemen in the wake of degraded sanitation systems and shuttered health facilities. As with commercial imports, this institutional collapse is an obstacle to our response in that it puts undue pressure on humanitarian partners to take on the role of public institutions, which is beyond our capacity and proper role.

Finally, funding remains a critical obstacle to the response – despite our achievements this year. While we strongly appreciate the funding provided to date, the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan has to date received only [41] per cent of its revised requirements of US$2.3 billion. This is a revised careful best estimate of the true cost to meet needs this year 2017, not a negotiating figure. We need the full $2.3 billion to have a chance to reach all Yemenis in desperate need. We urgently need Member States and other partners to provide full funding to this plan so that humanitarian partners can continue saving lives across the country.

Mr. President,

The most pressing issue in Yemen remains the speedy resolution of the conflict – humanitarian action cannot itself resolve the crisis. I therefore reiterate the call that I made in the Security Council session on Friday:

1) **Provide full funding for the Humanitarian Response Plan.** I urge Member States and other entities to provide immediate funding against any outstanding pledges, and to work together to fill any remaining funding gaps.

2) **Support the flow of civilian commercial imports into Yemen, and ensure that all ports – land, sea and air – remain open.** Restrictions on commercial imports play a significant role in increasing humanitarian needs. Member States should take all steps possible to ensure that all ports remain open. This includes lifting restrictions on imports, supporting UNVIM, immediately re-opening Sana’a airport and allowing delivery of desperately needed mobile cranes to Hudaydah port.

3) **Influence parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian and human rights law.** This entails all Member States using all possible means of leverage and
influence to ensure that the parties protect civilians and infrastructure, respecting the fundamental rules of distinction, proportionality and precautions. It also includes facilitating entry of life-saving supplies into Yemen and their rapid distribution without interference.

4) **Pay civil servant salaries.** Failure to pay civil servant salaries is driving institutional collapse and increasing humanitarian needs across the country. Only full payment of civil servant salaries across the country – a basic obligation of the State – will halt institutional collapse. This collapse is in no one’s interest.

5) **Demand an immediate cessation of hostilities, a return to negotiations and a political settlement.** There is no military solution to this conflict, and the international community must push for a political settlement based on peaceful negotiations – and, dare I say it, compromises.

Thank you.