Thank you all for coming out to the airport today.

I have undertaken this second five-day mission to Yemen in 15 months to see for myself the situation on the ground a week after the UN Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, reiterated the very real alarm that Yemen is at risk of falling into famine if we do not take action now. This is the third time I have visited Yemen since the conflict escalated almost two years ago. I was particularly pleased to be on the first humanitarian UN flight into Aden and stayed overnight in the city.

But since my last visit, the situation has deteriorated. Today, nearly 19 million people – that is about two thirds of the population – need humanitarian or protection assistance tonight. This morning, 7 million people in Yemen do not know where they will find their next meal. They urgently need food assistance to survive. Almost 500,000 children under 5 years of age suffer severe acute malnutrition. A child dies every 10 minutes of preventable causes. And I’ve just seen for myself in As Sabain Hospital, where I’ve been this morning, many malnourished children who are getting the support they need. At least they are in the hospital and getting the help they need. Think of all those who haven’t been able to get there.

However bleak the outlook, there is still time to alleviate suffering and avert a famine in Yemen.

The UN and its over 120 partners have successfully been providing coordinated assistance in all 22 governorates through five hubs – in Aden, Hudaydah, Ibb, Sa’ada and Sana’a. We can do this because in the midst of conflict we remain impartial, neutral and independent. And we have, and I pay tribute to, the extremely strong leadership of the very strong team that we have here in Yemen under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Jamie McGoldrick, and supported by Mr. George Khoury here in Sana’a. We reach close to 6 million people every month. We know that’s insufficient although it’s very significant. And we all want to do more. We can do more and we have a plan to do more. We are ready to scale up the response, but need US$2.1 billion of funding.

But getting the funds is not enough in itself. We also need all the parties to the conflict to immediately facilitate timely, full and unimpeded humanitarian access, at all times. More suffering and the spectre of famine is encroaching on the very people the parties claim to be fighting for; the time is now to prove their seriousness by helping us to try to ensure there is
never famine in Yemen. This includes access to cities, ports and the reopening of airports and airspace.

With the Government in Aden, I discussed the humanitarian situation and how to better protect the civilians that are caught up in this conflict. Given the urgency of the situation, we discussed the need to facilitate commercial imports of food, fuel and medicine, through all the ports of Yemen, and the resumption of commercial flights to all of Yemen. We also discussed a very important point about making sure that if the cash is being made available, the salaries are equitably distributed and paid from the Central Bank.

And in Aden, I met with affected people in the Craitor neighbourhood and met with displaced people from Mocha. I was heartened to know that in the maternity hospital – a ruin of a building that is being reconstructed but still functions – a baby boy and a baby girl were born while I was there. They are indeed Yemen’s hope and future.

In Ibb, I discussed with the Governor the situation of people displaced from Mocha and other districts and an allocation for IDP response from the Central Emergency Response Fund which will help IDPs with health, shelter, nutrition and child protection issues.

Regrettably, I am not here to tell you what I saw in Taizz city. Despite having received assurances of safe passage by all parties for all stages of the mission, the convoy was denied passage at a last checkpoint before crossing the frontline coming from Ibb to Taizz city.

I was outraged that humanitarian efforts to reach people in need were once again thwarted by parties to the conflict, especially at a time when millions of Yemenis are severely food insecure and face the risk of famine. I took the matter up with the highest authorities here in Sana’a in my subsequent meetings, who provided assurances to facilitate sustained access. And I have received news that the WHO truck is now moving from the warehouse in Ibb towards the first checkpoint. It must arrive in Taizz city today.

In and around Ibb and Taizz, I met with families to hear their horrific stories of displacement. Running from violence, bombings and shelling these people from Taizz and Mocha had left with nothing. It is now ordinary Yemenis, host communities and humanitarian actors providing life-saving assistance and protection. But it's not enough. Many are malnourished and hungry. I saw myself; babies and children are sick and listless. There is no money to buy food or medicine.

I was very moved to hear 13-year-old Mariam tell me of how she cares for her seven siblings. She is an articulate, stern girl who has had to grow up too fast, struggling daily to provide for the family and relying on charity to feed her younger siblings. They are hungry and live in desolate conditions.
Yesterday here in Sana’a, I met with authorities to discuss the humanitarian situation. We had a very direct discussion about the need to respect international humanitarian law, about humanitarian access and the need for commercial imports and flights alongside aid to ensure the needs of Yemenis can be addressed. I received renewed reassurances that the authorities understood the importance of safe and unimpeded access and will do everything in their power to ensure humanitarians can reach all the Yemenis in need, including in Taizz city.

Once again, it is clear that innocent women, men, boys and girls suffer the consequences of this terrible conflict that is not of their own making. Mariam – and all people in need across Yemen - deserve our help, support and assistance. With the access and funding, we can help. We have a plan and we can help avert a famine. One thing is clear, though: there are no military solutions to this terrible conflict. Only sustainable peace can bring about the solutions, hope and future of Yemenis. I call on all parties to the conflict to come together and make peace. That is the best humanitarian assistance.