Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Last year at the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, I moderated a panel entitled “moving beyond business as usual,” in which I outlined the need for a new approach to not only meeting needs but also reducing them in crises.

Today I am very happy to say that we have all taken heed to move beyond business as usual by embracing the New Way of Working which aims to both meet and reduce needs, as well as reducing risk and vulnerability in protracted crises. We each have a role to play in identifying opportunities to apply the New Way of Working in practice, and to ensure the results lead to meaningful change in the lives of the world’s most vulnerable crisis-affected people. This work has already begun.

Today, an unprecedented 141 million crisis-affected people make up our humanitarian caseload. Let me give you a sense of their reality in numbers. If these 141 million people populated one country, its life expectancy would be about 24 years shorter than the global average. Its child mortality rate would be ten times higher than the rest of the world’s. And only 30 per cent of its children would graduate from primary school. It would be a country which has no president, no flag and no money, and would be the 10th largest country in the world.

As protracted crises become the norm, as inequality mounts, and vulnerability linked to climate change grows, the scale and scope of humanitarian suffering is set to increase. This will continue to stretch the humanitarian system beyond its capacity to cope. In the last decade, humanitarian funding requirements have gone up by nearly 400 per cent and the number of people targeted for assistance has more than tripled. I leave you to draw the conclusion as to what is the safe planning assumption looking ahead: more need, or less.

We do all we can to keep people alive, safe and healthy in the world’s most difficult environments, but this is not enough. Treating people’s immediate needs will not lift them out of crisis but trap them in a perpetual cycle of need. To change our course, I echo
the Secretary-General words on taking the oath of office: The system must work together to break down silos from the beginning of a crisis to support affected communities, address structural and economic impacts and help prevent a new spiral of fragility and instability. This does mean delivering coherent, long-lasting solutions that address both crises’ symptoms and their root causes.

At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, nine UN agencies and the World Bank agreed to a Commitment to Action adopting a New Way of Working to help deliver on this goal. By committing to the New Way of Working we agreed, and I was a signatory, to collaborate towards collective outcomes focused on reducing need, risk and vulnerability, over multi-year timeframes, each of us working to our unique comparative advantage.

Since signing on, we have made progress both at the policy and practical levels. For instance, to take the response and prevention activities relating to the four countries at risk of, or experiencing, famine - Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen - the UNDG lead and I are co-chairing a Steering Committee to guide joint analysis, planning, coordination, leadership and financing of our response. And we’ve been working very closely on that with the World Bank as well as peacebuilding actors and many of the relevant UN funds and programmes. Development partners are actively working to shore up resilience and reduce needs in all four countries. Their activities include for instance boosting basic services in Yemen; supporting the Government to rebuild in north-eastern Nigeria; and building the capacity of the local authorities in drought-affected parts of Somalia. And I’m sure you’ll hear soon from our panellists about what’s happening in neighbouring Ethiopia in that respect.

But we still need to tackle some barriers. For example:

- Headquarters need to signal to their country and regional staff that they have the space to try new approaches to reduce needs, risks and vulnerability and to provide coherent support across the humanitarian-development nexus. But it isn’t just the headquarters, it’s also you - we have to share more risk, otherwise we won’t be able to innovate and be more efficient to get greater impact.

- Together with the field, we need to map out the tools and approaches that have been proven to work to support better joined-up or coordinated strategies, and make them available to be further adapted to context.

- Finally, we must work with our donors to shift from a way of financing that incentivizes working apart, to working together over medium and longer-term to deliver on our collective responsibility. We also need to increase the financial literacy of Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators and other field staff to increase awareness of the tools that exist.

There will remain a need for principled humanitarian action of course, and rightly, and for humanitarian structures and processes. Yet, we need also to find better ways to
coordinate around the delivery of agreed common objectives that bring humanitarian and
development actors into closer collaboration from the onset of a crisis.

At the centre of each of these actions must always be the people whose lives have been
torn asunder by crises.

Today and over coming weeks and months we have the opportunity not only to evaluate
our individual institutional readiness to work together, but also to come up with
innovative solutions to help us overcome these barriers. I really am looking forward to
hearing your ideas here today and working with you to set them in motion and to
continue to build on the progress already made on the New Way of Working, and to serve
the people who need us most more effectively.

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