Your Excellency Vice President Schultz,

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Mr. Vice President, thank you very much for your opening remarks and for your leadership in overseeing the Humanitarian Affairs Segment of ECOSOC. I also thank the President of ECOSOC and its Bureau members for their support. And I take the opportunity to acknowledge the co-facilitators of this year’s ECOSOC humanitarian resolution - the Philippines and Switzerland - for their stewardship.

The Humanitarian Affairs Segment is a key annual opportunity to discuss the pressing challenges we face and how to work together to improve our collective efforts to save lives, protect people, and reduce needs, risk and vulnerability.

As I look out from this podium, I see so many familiar faces with whom we work throughout the years - this is also a chance on behalf of the UN and as the Emergency Relief Coordinator to thank you for the continuing interest, partnership, collaboration and commitment to joint action to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people on the planet.

To frame our discussions, let me turn to the context in which we work.

Today, more than 141 million people across 37 countries need humanitarian assistance and protection tonight. Our current inter-agency humanitarian appeal calls for a record US$23.5 billion to support the most vulnerable 101.2 million of these people. Despite ever-more generous donors, at mid-year, these appeals are only 26 per cent funded. I particularly want to thank those donors who contributed to the Central Emergency Response Fund and the Country Based Pooled Funds, enabling timely, strategic, coordinated and effective action on the ground. Yet, despite more funding in relative and indeed absolute terms than ever overall, the gap between needs and resources available is rapidly increasing. We will have more chances this evening to discuss global funding in a side-event starting at 18.00 in conference room XXIII.
The vast majority - 97 per cent - of these needs are in complex emergencies, most of which involve armed conflict. In 2016, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners responded to a record four 'L3' emergencies in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and South Sudan. The increasingly brutal and violent nature of today’s armed conflicts, as well as the urbanization of warfare, have resulted in thousands of deaths and forced tens of millions of people to flee their homes.

Today, 65.6 million people are forcibly displaced, more 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. Most will remain displaced for 10 to 20 years on average. From Afghanistan to the occupied Palestinian territories, from Central African Republic to Syria, we are working with partners to try to address both the short- and long-term needs of displaced people and host communities. The New York Declaration and the ongoing Global Compact negotiations represent an important step for refugees and migrants as they commit world leaders to find durable solutions for them in vulnerable situations. We must now mobilize momentum on behalf of internally displaced people whose need for access to basic services, safe housing, economic and educational opportunities is too often overlooked and under-resourced.

Last year, 297 natural disasters affected 377 million people, and caused $92.4 billion of damage. An increasingly powerful driver of humanitarian suffering is climate change which brings more volatile, unpredictable weather and weather patterns, including chronic drought in regions such as the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. Climate change exacerbated last year’s El Niño phenomenon which caused severe drought, flooding and storms around the world, and led 23 countries to seek humanitarian assistance.

The complex set of challenges that continue to increase the scale and scope of humanitarian suffering each year, are neither new nor isolated. And therefore, alongside our efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance and protection, we must also work towards a broader change agenda. We must have a New Way of Working with our development partners as well to adopt a preventative approach in trying to head off crises before they escalate.

An example of this new approach is our collective response to respond to and avert famine. The Secretary-General called for action in February when risk factors were pointing to the threat of famine. He asked the international community to step up for the more than 20 million people – including 1.4 million severely malnourished children – who are facing famine or the immediate risk of famine in South Sudan, Somalia, northeast Nigeria and Yemen.

As we heard earlier, we are doing everything we can to step up to the Secretary-General’s call to action to prevent a catastrophe and are assisting nearly 10 million people each month across these four countries. We are also working with partners in the development sector, including UNDP and the World Bank, to ensure linkages between short-term and long-term efforts. Thank you for the funding received so far, yet unfortunately more is
needed in terms of resources, access and - essentially - a major push for political solutions.

The four crises are symptomatic of the broader humanitarian landscape. While there are many factors for escalating needs, including structural fragility and climate change, many crises are spurred by conflict, violence, insecurity and the lack of protection. Violence and conflict has destroyed hospitals, undermined public institutions, wiped out developmental gains, decimated agricultural systems, displaced millions of people and obstructed people from accessing aid.

While of course we should not discount the suffering associated with large-scale natural disasters, we are now living in a time where protracted crises, displacement and disease are the norm of humanitarian work. A lack of political solutions is driving needs and increasing the costs of humanitarian work. In such an environment, principled, neutral and impartial humanitarian action is more important than ever.

The need to uphold international humanitarian law and the norms intended to protect civilians in conflict is critical. The brutality of today’s wars is an outrage. Civilians are deliberately or indiscriminately injured and killed with shocking frequency and intensity. People in besieged areas have been starved, intimidated and deprived of food, water and electricity. Hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure have been attacked. International humanitarian law and the fundamental rules of distinction, proportionality and precaution are disregarded with outright impunity. This leaves a deep scar on our collective humanity. We - and by we, I do include political actors - must do more to respect international humanitarian law and the humanitarian principles.

Alongside our efforts to deliver immediate humanitarian assistance and protection, humanitarian actors must also continually adapt to the changing global context so that we make a meaningful and tangible difference to people’s lives.

We have seen progress in a number of areas. Momentum is building across the humanitarian and development sectors to operationalize the New Way of Working. This means that while humanitarians work to deliver urgent, life-saving aid in protracted crises, we will collaborate with a diverse set of partners to work towards collective outcomes to reduce vulnerability and humanitarian need.

A great deal of momentum is also underway to increase national and local response capacities. Donors have reported increased amounts of funding channelled directly to local actors, including women-led organizations. In 2016, of the $715 million that were allocated from country-based pooled funds, $128 million were directly allocated to national NGOs - almost double the amount recorded in the previous two years.

We have also seen a great deal of progress by stakeholders to direct more funding to ensure that marginalized and vulnerable groups such as people living with disabilities are included as an integral part of humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery.
Last year’s World Humanitarian Summit helped mobilize and accelerate many of these and other new partnerships for progress. All of these efforts support the five core responsibilities of the Agenda for Humanity which aligns with the Secretary-General’s vision to prevent and reduce human suffering.

This year’s [ECOSOC HAS] theme is “Restoring Humanity and Leaving No-one Behind: Working together to reduce people’s humanitarian need, risk and vulnerability”. It is very much building on the discussions and momentum of the Summit, in line with the New Way of Working as well as connecting with the vision of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Each of these issues I mentioned runs across the three High Level Panels at this year’s Humanitarian Affairs Segment. The first panel examines best practice to reach people in need and promote respect for international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles. The second will examine protracted crises and how to meet needs as well as reduce needs, risk and vulnerabilities. The third panel will explore the risks linked to natural disasters and climate change and approaches that can be taken to mitigate, prepare for and respond to those risks.

The ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment has long been a vital forum for Member States and other stakeholders to discuss how we will rise to meet the humanitarian challenges of today and tomorrow. As we open the 2017 session, let us remember that we are all working towards the same goal: to save lives, reduce risk and vulnerability, and lift our fellow human beings out of suffering.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those in the field who many times are a target along with schools and hospitals. They should not be a target. Therefore, we pay tribute to them for their amazing work to deliver to peoples’ humanitarian needs.

Achieving the 2030 Agenda will only be possible if the 141 million people who are caught up in humanitarian crises have their needs addressed and are given the opportunity to reap the benefits from the Sustainable Development Goals.

Over the course of this week, I look forward to hearing your perspectives and priorities, to exchanging stimulating ideas and outlining action that will drive stronger results in support of those women, children and men who are counting on each and every one of us.

Thank you all for your commitment and engagement and I look forward to productive discussions.

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