



Excellencies,

On 10th October I expressed the General Assembly's solidarity with the people of Pakistan and its neighbours India and Afghanistan who had been tragically affected by the devastating earthquake two days earlier.

Since then, we have all watched with horror as the full scale and impact of the South Asian earthquake has become clearer. We now know that an area of 28,000 square miles was devastated by the quake. Entire towns and villages have literally disappeared off the face of the earth. More than 50,000 people have been confirmed dead, including a great number of children. A further 75,000 people were injured. One million people are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance, and three million are without shelter. These figures almost defy comprehension. But the expectations are that the numbers will rise still further.

While Pakistan bore the overwhelming brunt of the disaster, over 1,300 people were killed elsewhere in the region. We stand in solidarity with the governments and peoples of Pakistan, India and Afghanistan as they continue to respond to the impact of the disaster.

In Pakistan, the needs of the people are enormous, and they are urgent. There is a three week window of opportunity to deliver aid to the mountains before the first snowfall. If this is not done, the grim reality is that there will be a further dramatic rise in the death toll.

The United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) has called a Ministerial Meeting in Geneva tomorrow to review the response to date by the international

community. The Secretary-General will be present. I have every confidence that Member States will ensure they are represented at the appropriate level, and that they will make adequate funds available so that the humanitarian agencies can respond as quickly as possible.

In the coming weeks, the United Nations will need to ensure that proper planning for long-term reconstruction is underway. I am sure the General Assembly will want to play its part in this. But this week our focus must be on ensuring that the basics of survival get to those who need them. To the hundreds of thousands of people who, right now, are huddled together in the cold and dark in the hills and mountains of northern Pakistan. They need winter tents, blankets, sleeping bags, stoves, kitchen sets, fuel, clean water and vaccinations. More mobile health care teams are needed to administer help to the injured. And they will need food through a long harsh winter.

This year, the United Nations has responded to a succession of devastating natural disasters, the frequency and intensity of which have been almost unprecedented. The Secretary-General has described the response to the South Asian earthquake as the most challenging relief operation ever faced by the United Nations. Our response to this disaster will be no less than a measure of our common humanity. Yesterday we celebrated the 60th birthday of the United Nations. Tomorrow, in Geneva, we must show the world what this Organization, and the international community, can deliver.