Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator
John Holmes

Opening remarks at ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment
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Mr. Vice-President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be able to join you for the fourth time at the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment. Sadly this will be my last opportunity to appear before you. Let me therefore start by thanking you for your continued and outstanding assistance to the humanitarian system in general, and to OCHA in particular, and for the great support you have shown to me personally over the last three and a half years.

I have spelled out in previous years how we were expecting demands for humanitarian assistance to grow because of chronic and increasingly acute vulnerability caused by global trends such as climate change, the recent global food crisis, demographics, and changes in the climate and key ecosystems. These are no longer predictions – they have become reality, with profound consequences for humanitarian and development work. Globally in 2010, humanitarian needs continued to rise, sustained and triggered in part by armed conflict, but also driven by natural disasters and global structural challenges. This was reflected in a record high initial Consolidated Appeal (CAP) request for 2010, requesting $7.1 billion for assistance to 48 million people, compared to 43 million people in 2009. That has now risen to $9.5 billion to help 53 million people, following the mid-year Review of the CAP, which I will be launching later today.

Natural disasters continued to increase humanitarian needs in 2009 and 2010, even if the majority of these needs still flow from man-made disasters. In the first half of 2010 there were massive earthquakes not only in Haiti, but also in Chile and China. Both the Chinese and Chilean Governments responded rapidly by deploying relief and assessment teams, temporary shelter materials, food, medicine and water to the affected area, with some assistance from the international community. The Haiti earthquake, the second deadliest in the last 100 years, necessitated one of the largest and most complex international relief operations mounted in recent years, one which six months on is still in full emergency mode, with 1.3 million people in temporary and unsatisfactory shelters, and very vulnerable to the continuing rainy and hurricane season. My visit there over the last two days confirmed both how much we have achieved in six months, and how much we still have to do.

Somewhat less high profile but still very significant in their humanitarian impact were the slow-onset disasters. In South and East Asia, Africa and Central America, unpredictable and unprecedented weather patterns have become the new normal. In the last year alone, for example, we have launched appeals for people affected by chronic drought-related vulnerability in Guatemala, Kenya and in Niger. Asia saw major flooding crises from successive cyclones in autumn 2009, with the Philippines particularly severely hit. In many of the countries in which

we work, the impact of climate change is already being deeply felt, often in what are traditionally perceived as development settings. Floods and droughts are not only more frequent but increasingly unpredictable. Rains no longer arrive in large parts of Africa at the times they should. Farmers in Uganda, Chad and Sudan have told me that they no longer know when to plant or when, or indeed even if, they can expect to harvest.

In the Horn of Africa, humanitarians are working with nearly 23 million people severely affected by a drought which has in some areas lasted six years, and dealing with large and growing affected populations, weakened by years of difficulty and insufficiency. Similarly, the most severe food and nutrition crisis in decades has spread across the African Sahel belt this year, as I saw dramatically illustrated by thousands of children being treated for severe malnutrition in feeding centres, on recent visits to Niger and western Chad. Against the same background of cumulative problems from global trends, lack of reserves, exhausted coping mechanisms, and rapidly growing populations, malnutrition rates are now well above emergency levels and continuing to rise. This crisis in particular still threatens a major human catastrophe if we do not act in time, with the right level of resources.

Many countries have been hit by a combination of global financial crisis and economic downturn, extreme poverty, resource scarcity, particularly of water, population growth, rapid urbanization, and volatile energy prices. For example, while global food prices have decreased since the peaks in 2008, they still remain high relative to historic levels, affecting an estimated one billion people. And locally, in many developing countries, they are often higher still. Combined, these factors threaten to create chronic acute vulnerability on a scale we cannot readily imagine now. More hunger, malnutrition, misery, displacement and death are likely to be the outcome of these so-called mega trends.

As I have already suggested, most of our work continues to be related, sadly, to the humanitarian consequences of conflict. Protracted conflicts in places such as Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Sudan show no sign of letting up. The actual or potential drawdown of peacekeeping missions in several contexts will pose further challenges to affected communities and humanitarian operations. Humanitarian needs arising from conflict have also kept growing as new internal conflicts have appeared, with particularly serious impact on civilians caught in the middle of them. We saw this in 2009 for example in Pakistan and Yemen, as well as new twists to old conflict situations, with the Lord's Resistance Army's continuing and appalling brutalities in north-east DRC and southern CAR. Globally, an estimated 27 million people are now considered internally displaced because of armed conflict, with over 6 million newly displaced in 2009 alone. 10.4 million refugees were meanwhile being assisted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in 2009, in addition of course to the Palestinian refugees helped by UNRWA.

All this tells us not just that humanitarian needs are greater now than ever, but also that our worst-case projections of where humanitarian trends might go in the next few years are materialising. Even in countries where we have seen some improvement of the humanitarian situation, such as in Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka, the need for significant assistance will continue in the immediate future. There are nevertheless a few places where we have been able to close or reduce OCHA's presence because, even though the situations often remain fragile, humanitarian

needs have declined significantly. Examples are East Timor, Nepal, Cote d'Ivoire and Uganda. Some there is some good news, among the bad.

The main good news is that the humanitarian architecture put in place in recent years is helping us cope. Sectoral coordination is improved, partnerships are stronger, financing quicker and more predictable, and leadership on the ground is more effective. The generosity of donors, particularly governments, but also individuals, companies or foundations, has improved. The most urgent humanitarian needs are usually able to be funded from the global humanitarian aid budget, which is estimated to exceed $12 billion annually, although of course many needs still are not met.

However, with humanitarian needs growing as quickly as they are, I fear the traditional humanitarian toolbox will increasingly often be insufficient to address and to change these situations. In cases of long-running vulnerability caused by climate change and other global challenges, the consequences are emergency levels of malnutrition, disease and mortality. However, without any distinct trigger event, how will we decide when to launch a response or at which point emergency responses should end? To stay relevant and effective, the humanitarian system must keep up with this paradigm shift. We need to get ahead of the curve and identify where humanitarian need is imminent, and how we can avert the crisis, rather than just focusing just on shock-driven, after the fact responses.

The Secretary-General's report to the Economic and Social Council outlines the need for the humanitarian system to recognize the changing nature of humanitarian need, and to find new ways to deal with it. The point is not that the humanitarian system should or could take on all global challenges or regard ourselves as key players in the fight against poverty and underdevelopment. This is well beyond humanitarian mandates and capacities. Governments and international development institutions and donors have to be the major actors here. But these are humanitarian problems too, and the traditional, event-driven approach is no longer enough for humanitarians, if it ever was. We must find new ways of working closely with others to help tackle chronic acute vulnerability, particularly with these same governments and development actors.

Above all, the underlying structural causes of the symptoms we try to treat as humanitarians must be dealt with at the same time, and with the same urgency, as the short-term life-saving needs. But how do we share roles and responsibilities when there are new and additional humanitarian caseloads in supposedly 'developmental' contexts? What capacities are needed? Where will the money come from? We can no longer avoid these questions. We need strategies and relationships, developmental and humanitarian, which favour resilience to the multiple threats which loom. We also need to ensure that national and local authorities and partners on the ground are in the lead wherever possible, and to assist in the strengthening of their capacities accordingly.

To be more precise, and operational, this shift from shock-driven to needs-based response requires a humanitarian system that is able to: (i) contribute to reducing vulnerability and strengthening resiliency through improved risk reduction and preparedness; (ii) improve modalities for identification and monitoring of acute humanitarian vulnerability and need

wherever it may occur; and (iii) strengthen partnerships with government, development, civil society and other actors to engage in knowledge transfer and early analysis of potential implications. To achieve this, more emphasis must be placed on prevention and preparedness, common needs-assessment and analysis of acute vulnerability across multiple sectors, better monitoring and evaluation of responses, and closer partnership with governments, development partners and organisations. This will facilitate adaptation to contexts where entry and exit strategies for humanitarian relief may be harder to define and help develop a better understanding of global and regional tipping points, ultimately enabling a more effective and timely response to increasing vulnerability.

Mr. Vice-President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

At the same time as needs are growing, the ability of humanitarians to reach those in need is increasingly constrained in many places. Violent attacks on humanitarian personnel are increasingly frequent and brutal. The sad truth is that, in some areas, a UN, NGO or even in some instances a Red Cross/Red Crescent flag no longer offers protection for those flying it, but instead invites attack. 2009 was statistically the deadliest year yet for humanitarian staff. The numbers of deliberate deaths, kidnapping and attacks are particularly worrying in contexts such as Somalia and Afghanistan, as well as Pakistan. Chad, DRC and Sudan are becoming increasingly dangerous too, though in a less deliberately targeted way and more connected to banditry than ideology, at least so far. Let us be open about this. If we send our staff and colleagues to operate in such areas, we need to have a frank and constructive debate on this complex and sensitive issue. Humanitarian workers in these high-risk environments are entitled to look to member states for understanding and support.

At the global level, OCHA has launched a study on operating in high risk environments, to learn from recent experiences and codify best practices. In the field, OCHA and other actors are trying to change perceptions about aid work by driving home the messages that humanitarian assistance is genuinely neutral and independent, responding only to needs on the ground, is not just a Western or Northern affair, and does not reflect any kind of wider Western or Northern political or security agenda, but only universal values; and that UN humanitarian agencies and NGOs are ready to help all in need, independently of whether other international forces may be there or even of whether there is a separate UN mission there whose mandate is to support the government. For the effectiveness and safety of humanitarian operations and for the sake of access to those in need, we need to be ready to engage in dialogue with any and all armed groups in order to promote their compliance with international humanitarian law and to seek their understanding of our neutrality, independence and impartiality. Engaging with Hamas in Gaza, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, with the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, with Al-Shabaab and other armed groups in Somalia, is essential to ensure that we can reach all populations in need of humanitarian aid. Negotiating access should not and must not be confused with political negotiations, and certainly does not confer respectability or legitimacy. I am aware that acceptance of our role is not always possible, but it is certainly always desirable. Although robust physical protection measures, such as armed escorts, might be a necessity for some organisations in particularly difficult contexts, increasing acceptance is the key and is likely to be a more sustainable form of protection, with less risk of confusion about our aims and roles.

Access to the people we are trying to reach is not of course just restricted by threats of violence, but in many operating contexts also by bureaucratic delays or impediments. Think of the almost complete inability of humanitarians to get into the conflict zone in the latter stages of the Sri Lankan Government's battle against the LTTE, the Sudanese Government's expulsion of NGOs last year, or the blockade in Gaza, despite recent welcome steps to ease it. We, and more importantly the beneficiaries, depend on the authorities of the affected States to use close cooperation with humanitarian actors to facilitate and expedite humanitarian aid. Slowing it down or blocking it entirely, or making artificial distinctions between the provision of goods and services and equally essential protection work designed to prevent abuses and save lives, may be frustrating for us, but ultimately hurts those in need.

The point here is that access for humanitarians is fundamental. It needs to be full and unimpeded, as well as timely. Parties to conflict are obliged by international humanitarian law to provide for affected populations under their control and, if they are unwilling and unable to do so, to allow and facilitate the passage of impartial humanitarian aid. Allow me, after three and half years as Emergency Relief Coordinator, to defend the hard work and the dedication of the overall international aid community. Perceptions that foreigners and foreign organizations are following political agendas are easy to propagate and all too easy for many to believe. And perceptions, as we all know, create their own reality that we ignore at our peril. Again, I hope we can count on member states to counter this kind of propaganda.

Mr. Vice-President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Despite the scale of the challenges we face and the difficulties we are increasingly encountering because of insecurity, I am pleased to be able to report that our overall efforts to ensure a coordinated, predictable and accountable humanitarian response capacity are continuing and reaping results, as we saw during the Haiti response in January.

The post-earthquake humanitarian operation in Haiti was, and is, a huge challenge, with many frustrations and apparent slowness, particularly in the initial stages. But it was an operation in which, in the final analysis, a lot more went right than wrong. For example, while the organization of the international response through the cluster approach within the first days of the earthquake may not have solved all the problems – and we were all frustrated by how long it took to get some parts of the relief effort moving with the scale and speed necessary – by common consent, even from NGOs and others who have sometimes been critical of the cluster approach in the past, without it we would have struggled to get anything moving at all in critical areas like health, shelter and water. Haiti proved the worth of the resources which have been invested in the cluster approach, although the work is by no means complete. We are very keen to learn the lessons of Haiti. More cluster management capacity and better inter-cluster coordination were needed to ensure cohesion between the strategic and operational levels of the response operation. Joint consolidated rapid needs assessment was still inadequate despite a new trial of methods there. Greater understanding of the socio-economic environment and the community-based urban context we were operating in, and better communication and collaboration with local actors, whether with authorities, civil society or those affected themselves, would have led to better targeted assistance, and will do so elsewhere too. We need better ways to include major bilateral players, military actors and the private sector in our

coordination mechanisms. The organisations of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee have produced a report on achievements of the past six months, and lessons to be learned from the experience.

Meanwhile, to help channel as much money as possible through the multilateral system, which is by far the best way to ensure donations are effective, CAPs and Flash Appeals are being better prioritised and better integrated. Contributions to CAP reached $6.9 billion in 2009, nearly double the amount raised two years earlier. CERF and local pooled funds, which also make a real difference to speed and flexibility of response, have also received strong support from the international community. Although funding for the CERF dropped in 2009 compared to 2008 due to currency fluctuations, 22 Member States increased their contributions in their national currencies, while another 17 countries joined the ranks of CERF donors, bringing the total number that have contributed to 117. All of these funding mechanisms continued to focus on further improving their effectiveness and accountability.

One area for particular focus in the year ahead will be joining up the related, but in practice too often separate, activities of needs assessment, joint planning (as in consolidated and flash appeals), resource allocation, and monitoring and impact evaluation. At the front end of this program cycle, the humanitarian community continues to move, as it should, towards better common, coordinated and harmonized assessments, particularly in the early stages of a crisis. The aim is an agreed assessment tool that can be easily adapted in the field for use in emergencies, to give those on the ground and those in headquarters, a quick and valid snap shot of requirements. This should help to prioritize the wider planning process in CAP and flash appeals, and orient funding we manage ourselves through the CERF and country level pooled funds.

Mr. Vice President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The challenges are great, the needs are huge, and the problems before us considerable.

I hope you find the debate and the panels during these two and half days helpful and interesting. We approach the Humanitarian Affairs Segment as an opportunity to provide Member States with a field perspective. ECOSOC is a unique forum to help Member States in their formulation of the normative framework for strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

I therefore hope that the work of ECOSOC and the General Assembly will not only serve to strengthen effectiveness, coordination and operational coherence but also to provide guidance and help to prepare for the current and future challenges. More important still, let us remind ourselves again that the purpose of us gathering here, and of all our work, is to serve those who need our help most – the people and communities affected by conflict and disaster, who expect and need support in their most difficult hours.

I look forward to our discussion and debates during the next days, and once again thank ECOSOC members for their support over the years.