Thank you very much indeed, Mr. President.

Two years ago, this Council passed Resolution 2417, asking that you be swiftly informed of the risk of conflict-induced famine and widespread food insecurity.

And so I join you today, together with Dongyu and David, to highlight rising food insecurity and the risk of famine in several countries.

Mr. President,

Famines have existed throughout human history, and almost every country has suffered them. But, remarkably, the world got much better at preventing them in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Famines are now less frequent and less lethal for three main reasons.

First, agricultural output and productivity has expanded. Food has become more available and more affordable to millions of people.

Second, the number of people living in extreme poverty has fallen drastically and their purchasing power has increased. In recent decades, the extreme poverty rate dropped from nearly 36 percent of the global population in 1990 to 10 percent in 2015.

And thirdly, when the threat of famine has arisen, countries and organizations have set aside their differences and shared knowledge and resources to avert the crises through decisive action.

Before COVID-19, which may unfortunately reverse previous gains, we had got to the point where the risk of famines was confined to places in conflict.
That is one of the reasons why Resolution 2417 is so important. It explicitly recognized the links between armed conflict, food insecurity and the threat of famine.

And those links are clear. Conflict disrupts all aspects of life. Civilians are injured and killed. They are driven from their homes, losing land and livelihoods. Their farms, food supplies, livestock, infrastructure, and public services are damaged or destroyed.

That drives up the price of food and other basic necessities like water and fuel. Over time, conflict tears apart the social fabric, undermines public institutions and erodes economic growth and development. The human and economic cost is astronomical. In the ten most affected countries, the average cost of conflict is estimated at around 40 per cent of GDP.

And we can now see that COVID-19 is making hunger much worse.

We know from the 2019 report of the Global Network Against Food Crises that 135 million people were facing acute food insecurity even before COVID-19. And now David and his colleagues at the World Food Programme project that the number of people suffering from acute hunger will almost double this year, to 270 million people. In the same vein, the World Bank predicts that the number of people in extreme poverty is set to rise for the first time since the 1990s. As always, the most vulnerable pay the biggest price -- women, children, the disabled and the elderly.

Mr. President,

David and Dongyu will talk to you in more detail about some of the countries we are most concerned about, and I briefed you earlier in the week on two of them, South Sudan and Yemen. So I would like just to touch briefly on three other places.

I am particularly concerned about the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Nearly 22 million people there are now acutely food insecure, the highest number in the world - a result of COVID-19 compounding the impact of decades of conflict.

In north-east Nigeria, as we told you in the white note, violence by extremist non-state armed groups is largely responsible for driving up humanitarian need. I am pleased to report we have had constructive engagement in recent days with the Nigerian authorities, and the Government has taken important steps to improve access to people in need, which we look forward to building on further.

In the Sahel, an upsurge in violence and armed group attacks has forcibly displaced more than a million people, most of whom are dependent on agriculture. In total, some 14 million people are experiencing crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity – the highest figures for a decade. Just in Burkina Faso, 3.3 million people are now acutely food-insecure, and famine conditions are growing.

Mr. President,
As I told you on 9 September, the pandemic is dramatically increasing wider humanitarian need. Things are going to get worse. I don’t think we have seen the peak of the pandemic yet, but the indirect impact is already deepening poverty, destroying livelihoods, undermining education, disrupting immunization, and exacerbating food insecurity, fragility and violence.

Humanitarian aid helps to avert food insecurity. And humanitarian workers are committed to staying and delivering. But they face unacceptable risks. This year more than 200 humanitarian workers have been attacked, including dozens in countries I have mentioned today. Humanitarian operations face repeated attacks and other forms of obstruction on movement and access.

International humanitarian law is an important line of defense against food insecurity in conflict. Starvation as a method of warfare is prohibited, as is the destruction of objects that are indispensable to civilians’ survival. The problem is that too many people don’t comply with the law. Parties must allow and facilitate humanitarian access and protect aid workers and assets.

Mr. President,

Within the humanitarian system, we are doing what we can to meet growing needs. But the humanitarian agencies are in danger of being overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the needs, and that will get worse in the absence of a lot more financial help.

So there are concrete measures the Council and Member States more widely can take:

First, press for peaceful and negotiated political solutions to bring armed conflicts to an end.

Second, ensure the parties to conflict respect international humanitarian law.

And third, mitigate the economic impact of armed conflict and related violence, including by mobilizing international financial institutions.

And you know most important of all, scale up support for humanitarian operations, and take bigger and more ambitious steps to support the economies of countries facing severe, large-scale hunger.

Growing food insecurity is one of the major consequences of COVID-19, as we told you on 9 September when we briefed you on the issues covered by Resolution 2532. The history proves that even in the midst of conflict, famine can be prevented. In order to prevent it, we must act. And we have to act in time to make a difference. Unfortunately, in too many places, time is now running out.

Thank you, Mr. President.