Remarks for Assistant Secretary-General Ursula Mueller at the Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development Conference and Exhibition (DIHAD):
“Doing better with the resources at hand”

Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 5 March 2018

As delivered

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. It is a pleasure to be here at the annual DIHAD conference.

Today, I will focus on how we can do better in humanitarian and development action with available resources, and how can we scale up innovative programming modalities, partnerships and financing models to not only meet humanitarian needs more effectively, but also to reduce them over time?

We all know the numbers, but allow me to just share a few here, because they remind us of the enormity of the challenges we face.

This year’s Global Humanitarian Overview projects that in 2018, in countries with humanitarian response plans, 136 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection, up from 26 million one decade ago.

To respond, the humanitarian community needs US$22.5 billion, or four times what we needed ten years ago in 2007.

While donors are giving more generously than ever, the gap between needs and response continues to grow. This is largely due to new large-scale emergencies such as Yemen, and protracted crises – almost seven years of conflict in Syria, over 20 years of instability in Afghanistan, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The cost of our response is also rising, both due to the expense of operating in these insecure conflict zones, but also because our definition of humanitarian response now encompasses not only food, protection, water and healthcare, but education, livelihoods and early recovery support.
Amid these challenges, we also face exciting opportunities. Innovations in financing, technological developments and new approaches to partnerships have the potential to increase the effectiveness, accountability and scale of humanitarian response.

As most of you will know, in May 2016, the Agenda for Humanity was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. This agenda sets a roadmap to improve the lives of millions of people in humanitarian crises and to reduce suffering in the future.

At the heart of the Agenda for Humanity is the recognition that “doing (even) better with the resources in hand” requires more from all of us, including Governments, regional actors, humanitarian agencies, development organizations, civil society and the private sector.

The thousands of commitments and the many initiatives launched at the World Humanitarian Summit are beginning to turn this framework into action. But are we rolling out change at the speed and scale that is required, and where do the major obstacles lie?

I will focus here on three areas that were core to the Agenda for Humanity: (1) transforming humanitarian financing; (2) establishing new partnerships with the private sector; and (3) collaborating to not only meet needs, but to reduce them.

First, humanitarian financing. One of the results of the UN High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing was a call to humanitarian and development actors as well as international financial institutions to be more creative and efficient in how we use resources.

The Grand Bargain set out to address this, committing its signatories to transform the way they channel and report on financing to make assistance more nimble, cost-effective, and better suited to people’s needs.

We have seen some progress since then.

Several donors, including the Netherlands and Sweden, have scaled up multi-year financing and reduced the proportion of aid that is earmarked.

Cash responses, which have been shown in evaluations to be more cost-effective and empowering, continue to grow in scale. Last year, for instance, a widespread cash response helped to avert a famine from breaking out in Somalia. And last week, I met internally displaced people in Chad, like Malika, who had fled violence and insecurity due to Boko Haram. The cash assistance they receive gives them options to buy what they need, supports their independence and dignity, and helps to develop local markets.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has updated its financial tracking system and its links to international transparency standards (IATI) to enable
better reporting and tracking of funding flows. And we continue to bring pooled funds to critical mass.

The UN Central Emergency Response Fund and Country-Based Pooled Funds, both managed by OCHA, together reached US$1.3 billion in 2017, the latter channeling 23 per cent of their funding directly to national NGOs.

But other areas need more progress, notably the call to make available predictable, longer-term and larger-scale financing. All actors must live up to their side of the bargain if we are to collectively meet growing humanitarian needs.

This brings me to my second point: the need to intensify, enlarge and deepen our partnerships with private sector partners for innovation, scale and impact.

Leveraging business capabilities will be a UN priority over the coming years. UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, made this very clear in his report in August 2017, “Enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, in particular the private sector.”

Last week, I attended the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona. It was hosted by GSMA, which recently launched the Humanitarian Connectivity Charter, a groundbreaking agreement between more than 100 mobile network operators in 100 countries, including Etisalat, to support access to communication and information for crisis-affected people.

Another example of the power of networks in the humanitarian ecosystem is the Connecting Business Initiative (CBi), supported by OCHA and UNDP, to coordinate private sector engagement in disaster preparedness and response. Since 2016, CBi business networks have responded to emergencies in eight countries.

There is growing evidence that companies acting together can make a real difference in humanitarian action. Unlocking the full potential of this collaboration will be key to our success in supporting people affected by crisis as well as in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Third, to reduce suffering over the long term, we need not only to expand our capacity to meet growing needs, but we must focus also on reducing needs, vulnerability and risk, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

This is the goal of the New Way of Working, which aims for greater join-up between humanitarian and development actors to establish collective outcomes to anticipate and manage crises.

We are already seeing International Financial Institutions, such as the World Bank, directing more investment to fragile states and crises such as Yemen and Somalia, in order to increase resilience and address root causes of vulnerability.
But we still need a more fundamental shift in how we overcome institutional siloes to work towards achieving collective outcomes that improve peoples’ lives over the longer term. This join-up is also central to the Secretary-General’s UN Development System reforms.

I have highlighted areas of progress. I would now like to turn to some issues that require more concerted effort.

One of the Agenda for Humanity’s core goals was to ensure that no one in crises was left behind, including women and girls, internally displaced people (IDPs), the elderly, people with disabilities and other groups that are often marginalized.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is at the core of principled and effective humanitarian action. It is our fundamental responsibility to protect and promote the rights of all people we serve. While we have seen efforts to increase funding to women’s organizations, to promote the leadership of women, and to improve on policies and tools to promote gender equality, we need to direct significantly more resources to helping women and girls in crises if we are to achieve the 2030 Agenda’s goal of gender equality and empowerment.

Delivering better for women will be a resource-multiplier and allow us to deliver better for all.

Before closing, I must reiterate that the most effective means of reducing humanitarian needs requires Governments to use their influence to prevent conflicts from breaking out, and when they do, to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and to find political solutions to bring conflict to an end. This preventive approach is at the core of the UN Secretary-General’s reform agenda and the newly established prevention platform.

Together, we can lift people out of crisis, but only by redoubling our efforts and building strong partnerships. Thank you.