Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ursula Mueller remarks at the launch of the 2020 Global Humanitarian Overview

German Federal Foreign Office, Berlin 4 December 2019

English version as prepared for delivery

Welcome to the launch of the Global Humanitarian Overview, or GHO, for 2020.

This year, we are issuing the 2020 GHO simultaneously in five countries through panel discussions such as these to help show that increasing humanitarian needs require a collective and effective response.

My thanks to all of our partners and donors who have been so instrumental to making this happen. And to all of the donors that have generously supported humanitarian action this year. I am particularly grateful to our hosts, the German Federal Foreign Office, and especially to State Minister Niels Annen.

Our discussion today will focus on the full spectrum of global humanitarian need, as well as highlighting the situation for internally displaced persons, or IDPs.

These IDPs who flee their homes to seek refuge in their own countries remain too often, invisible.

This focus coincides with the recent announcement that the UN Secretary-General will be establishing a High-Level Panel on internal displacement. The panel will aim to increase global attention to internal displacement and support the roll-out of practical solutions for IDPs.

The Global Humanitarian Overview is the world’s most comprehensive and evidence-based assessment of humanitarian needs, requirements and humanitarian trends.

It is a reminder that for many, our planet is increasingly a difficult place to live.

Millions of people are stuck in never-ending wars or affected by climate shocks.
Millions are displaced from their homes, cut off from livelihoods and uncertain of where the next meal will come from.

But the United Nations, and all those we work with, do make the world a bit better for people caught in crisis.

By providing, not only assistance but also hope.

We try to make sure that in a crisis no one goes without food, water and shelter.

We help ensure women and children are safe and protected.

We work hard to address the needs of people with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

And we support people’s own efforts to sustain their lives and protect their families.

As you will see in the report, the good news is that the humanitarian response has never been better.

The bad news is that the number of people caught in humanitarian crisis has never been higher.

In 2020, we expect that nearly 168 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection across 53 countries.

This means a record 1 in 45 people in the world.

With the help of evidence-based analysis, we have identified 108 million of these people as especially vulnerable.

We need US$28.8 billion to respond effectively, to save and improve their lives.

In the first nine months of 2019, we managed to reach 64 per cent of the people targeted to receive aid through Humanitarian Response Plans in 22 of the countries for which data were available.

We now have a better understanding of who is most in need, where crises are most likely to occur and the kind of assistance that people value the most.

Our sophisticated analysis of data and event forecasting means we can act more quickly.
We got ahead of crises in 2019 by providing anticipatory funding from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund or CERF.

For example, in Somalia, swift action and a major scale-up of assistance after two failed rains in 2019 meant 1 million people initially projected to suffer acute hunger, were helped out of danger.

And when deadly storms hit Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, early warnings and pre-positioning of aid helped us limit the number of deaths, and the severity of need.

We are also increasing the impact and reach of our pooled funds. As of mid-November 2019, CERF had allocated more than US$494 million to support both sudden-onset and chronic urgent needs in 47 countries and territories, while Country-Based Pooled Funds or CBPFs had allocated US$ 701 million in 18 countries.

A growing portion of these funds went towards preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence. And one quarter of it went to national and local organizations on the ground.

We are also making strides in improving coordination between humanitarian and development assistance to reduce vulnerability and risk.

In particular, we are fostering humanitarian-development collaboration to change the way we respond to displacement in protracted crises.

For instance, in Somalia, and more recently in Ethiopia, ‘durable solutions initiatives’ are bringing together the governments, humanitarian and development institutions to undertake joint analysis, planning and programming, and to set collective outcomes to reduce the vulnerability of IDPs and support their resilience.

We are extremely grateful to donors, who provided a record US$16 billion to inter-agency coordinated plans between January and November 2019.

But this covered just 54 per cent of the funding needs.

Much of the suffering in 2019 was caused by conflicts, leading to deaths, disease outbreaks, displacement, mental trauma and gender-based violence.

Sadly, all crises impact our future. Last year the cost was horrific, with children – as always -- particularly affected.

More than 12,000 children were killed or maimed in conflict in 2018, the highest figure on record.
Conflict is also the key driver of hunger, and at least 821 million people were without adequate food at the beginning of this year.

At the beginning of 2019, almost 71 million people had been forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution, close to 60 percent within their countries.

Compliance with the international humanitarian law is declining.

In these difficult times, health and aid workers continue their work at great personal cost.

There were 791 attacks against health workers and health-care facilities in the first nine months of 2019, resulting in 171 deaths.

Two of the world’s biggest and longest-running conflicts - in Syria and Yemen - are expected to continue into 2020.

We predict that next year, Yemen will remain the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, with people in need expected to remain at about 24 million, or 80 per cent of the population.

We also expect that the conflict in Syria will continue to drive the world’s largest refugee crisis, with 5.6 million refugees in the region. In addition, more than 6 million Syrians are internally displaced, over 800,000 of them freshly displaced this year.

Internal displacement in sub-Saharan Africa has more than doubled over the past three years due to a combination of conflict, floods and protracted droughts exacerbated by climate change, and other natural hazards.

Climate change will continue to cause more frequent droughts and other extreme weather events, including flooding and cyclones. The world’s eight worst food crises are all linked to both conflict and climate shocks.

In 2018, over 17 million people were displaced due to extreme weather events, often linked to climate change.

Earlier this year, Cyclone Idai left a path of destruction in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, killing over 1,000 people; injuring 2,300 and leaving more than 3 million in need of emergency assistance. Several hundreds of thousands of them were displaced. Within hours of the cyclone striking, UN agencies and their partners scaled up to support Government-led efforts. We deployed search and rescue teams, delivered life-saving food, and supported health, water and sanitation and protection systems.

In addition, economic slowdown and debt problems worsen living conditions for the world’s most vulnerable people.
Millions will continue to need our support next year in other long-running crises such as in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sahel, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.

To meet humanitarian needs in 2020, we will have to do even more to improve our efficiency and effectiveness.

This report will provide a glimpse into how we plan to do this.

For example, we will expand cash and voucher responses, which make assistance cheaper and quicker while empowering people and respecting their dignity.

We will expand our anticipatory action, which has been proven to save lives and reduce suffering.

We will keep up our strong capacity to respond to unpredictable crises and to activate surge support for sudden displacement crises. In doing so, we aim to lessen the response burden of host communities and local authorities.

We will further strengthen collaboration between humanitarian and development strategies and government plans to end needs, reduce suffering and build people’s resilience over time.

The data and analysis in the report will help lead the way.

The GHO is based on analysis from hundreds of data sources including national governments.

It includes feedback from face-to-face interviews with hundreds of thousands of crisis-affected people including women, the elderly, the internally displaced and people with disabilities.

It represents the global collective response across the United Nations, NGOs, and others.

Supporting this global response plan is not only an efficient, cost-effective way to make a difference in the lives of millions.

It is also, quite simply, the right thing to do because, in addition to being humanitarians, we are human, and stand in solidarity with people who are at risk of death, suffering, or being left behind.

Thank you for being here today and for your support.