Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here with you today on this high-level panel. Today we will discuss the role of local authorities and organizations in humanitarian action, the steps we need to take to both complement and empower local organizations and systems, and finally, how we can better engage with crisis-affected communities, including marginalized groups such as women and girls, persons with disabilities and the elderly. I am pleased that we have such a diverse panel here with us today, including women leaders and responders.

Over the past five years, awareness has grown across the international humanitarian community, that we need to do more to complement and strengthen existing national and local capacity. At the same time, there has been a growing call from national and local organizations for greater participation and influence in decision-making processes, and more direct access to international funding.

Gradually, we are making progress.

National and local non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, have made modest gains in accessing international funding, while the ability to track funding flows more precisely is improving. In 2018, almost 25 percent of the US$836 million disbursed by OCHA-managed Country Based Pooled Funds went to our national NGO partners.

In other areas of progress, international humanitarian organizations and donors have increased investment in capacity strengthening programmes, including with mentoring, training and technical guidance.

Important conversations are taking place on what equal partnerships between international and national and local humanitarian actors mean on the ground.
We are also improving the representation of national and local authorities and organizations in humanitarian decision-making and coordination.

When OCHA reviewed the make-up of clusters in 23 crisis response operations in late 2018, half were found to have national or local authorities in leadership roles. And national and local NGOs make up more than 40 per cent of cluster members across the world.

This is important progress. But the question remains as to whether this progress is maximizing the enormous contribution of local responders and whether it is leading to the desired change in the way international humanitarian actors prepare for and respond to crises.

To make lasting change, we need to make sure we are investing in the right type of financing, capacity building and partnerships that will support national and local actors’ ability to prepare, respond and recover from crises over the long term.

We need to ensure that we are taking into account the diversity of affected communities, bringing in gender perspectives as well as age, disability and other factors into discussions on localization.

And we need an international system where local and national actors and platforms are recognized, respected and engaged as equal partners in response and decision-making.

I hope through our discussion today we will be able to identify some concrete ways in which the humanitarian community can work together to achieve these objectives. To this end, I wish to frame our conversation around the following three questions:

First, what kind of support are national and local authorities and organizations seeking from international partners? How should the configuration of international, national and local responders adapt over time?

Second, how can we give a greater voice to national and local organizations in the development of humanitarian programs, and provide them with longer-term financing and support?

And finally, how do national and international organizations promote the participation and leadership of women and people with disabilities in all stages of disaster preparedness, response and recovery? Where are some of the barriers and how do we overcome them?

Thank you.