Dear colleagues,

It is a pleasure to be here today for this panel discussion, which is focused on an issue that is very close to my heart and is crucial for OCHA’s work.

We are all aware that women and girls bear the brunt in humanitarian crises.

As primary care givers, women traditionally look after children, family members with disabilities, the elderly or the sick. During an emergency, women’s duties multiply. Women and girls may also have to seek protection, food, water, shelter, and medical services for their families.

These responsibilities often expose women and girls to additional risks of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. Like Grace, a 15-year-old, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Last year, Grace along with her mother was internally displaced in South Kivu. She was kidnapped by a group of militias, while she was out searching for food for her family. These men raped her every day, until she managed to finally escape four months later.

Grace was forced into this horrific scenario just because she wanted to feed her family during a crisis. Unfortunately, her experience is not an isolated event.

But we are beginning to change the narrative. You just heard about women and girls’ strength and resilience, and about the number of opportunities that exist for local women to lead humanitarian action. You heard for example, of women taking charge and responding during the earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia, of women’s experiences informing the Syria response, and from others who have promoted feminist approaches to humanitarian action.
All of these examples indicate an important trend: that we are set on the path to make gender equality a reality in humanitarian action.

Last month, OCHA reaffirmed and strengthened its commitments to gender equality at the Ending Sexual and Gender Based Violence Conference in Oslo. These included three big efforts to address gender inequality and to end gender-based violence, which collectively could lead to true transformation.

First, we asked, humanitarian coordinators and humanitarian country teams to push for greater gender analysis in programming.

Second, we asked that gender equality and gender-based violence programmes be prioritised for funding.

And third, we asked humanitarians to do more to promote women’s leadership and participation in decision-making. To do this, we must identify and partner with local women’s organizations, and strengthen allocation of resources to women’s NGOs.

OCHA is working hard to support the achievement of these objectives.

We prioritize funding for gender equality and gender-based violence programming. Last year, almost 80 per cent of all projects financed by OCHA-managed Country-Based Pooled Funds were designed to contribute significantly to gender equality, which is equivalent to more than US$630 million.

Also in 2018, more than two third of all projects funded by the Central Emergency Response Fund had a strong gender component; and 58 per cent of all projects had a gender-based violence component.

OCHA continues to host the Gender Capacity Standby Project, which deploys Senior Gender Advisors to crises to provide strategic advice and support humanitarian country teams in gender equality programming. Currently, there are six GenCap advisors deployed to operations in Colombia, Tanzania, Syria, Malawi, Mali and Chad.

We are leveraging our leadership role as OCHA to support the system, ensuring that tools such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Gender with Age Marker are utilized in designing and monitoring humanitarian interventions. This is helping to transform policy into practice, with the potential for making a real difference on the ground.

This year, OCHA also is leading an Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls. The evaluation will identify best practices and generate ideas and solutions that we can replicate.
Colleagues,

I am pleased to see a stronger focus on gender equality in the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment this year, including through the important discussion that you have had here today. And I agree that we should go as local as possible.

I look forward to working together to ensure that women and girls – including Grace – are included, empowered and protected in all aspects of humanitarian action.

Thank you.