

**Opening remarks by the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ursula Mueller, at the UNDAC Advisory Board Annual Meeting**

*Geneva, Switzerland, 6 February 2018*

*As delivered*

Distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) Advisory Board Annual Meeting. Today, we will celebrate the achievements of UNDAC as it marks its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year. We will discuss how we can further strengthen UNDAC to ensure that it continues to be a nimble, effective international emergency response mechanism in a fast-evolving operational environment.

We are honoured to have with us here today representatives and focal points of UNDAC member countries and organizations including the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movements, the European Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the United Nations.

In the spirit of UNDAC, which is a true example of UN collaboration and multilateralism, I would also like to welcome UNDAC's operational support partners, including the International Humanitarian Partnership, Map Action, Telecoms sans Frontières, Atlas Logistique, ACAPS and DHL, to name but a few.

Today, humanitarians are grappling with complex, protracted crises and with natural disasters that are set to increase with climate change and increasing pressure on scarce natural resources. Growing needs consistently outstrip funding levels, despite generous donor support.

UNDAC is needed more than ever before to mitigate the impacts of sudden-onset emergencies. In 2017, UNDAC undertook 13 missions, including responses to Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the Peru floods, the Mexico earthquake, the cyclone in Madagascar and devastating mudslides in Sierra Leone.

Thanks to the generous collaboration and support – both financial and in-kind – of member countries, organizations and partners, UNDAC has, since its inception in 1993, deployed emergency response personnel and resources to 281 missions in 111 countries, thus helping to save lives.

In UNDAC's 25<sup>th</sup> year, it is with great pleasure that I am speaking with you today about how our work as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) relates to UNDAC, in terms of our commitment, priorities and support to the humanitarian system.

Last year, when the Caribbean islands were hard-hit by super-strength hurricanes Irma and Maria, affecting millions of people and wreaking devastation across the region, I was impressed to see how effective regional partnerships promoted the timely deployment of emergency experts. This included the deployment of several UNDAC teams, which worked closely with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency and Management Agency (CDEMA) and national authorities in civil-military coordination and information management.

UNDAC quickly brought on board analytical and technical experts, as well as logistical support. In collaboration with regional and international partners, CDEMA deployed over 90 response personnel to conduct search and rescue, assess damage, identify needs and get relief operations going.

The joined-up response to the hurricanes in the Caribbean had a tremendous impact, and we can draw some important lessons from it. It was a clear example of the value that strong partnerships – built on mutual respect, trust and confidence – have on delivering an effective response. We need to invest in this.

The strength of the UNDAC system and its approach is built on the partnerships it forges between national disaster management authorities and international humanitarian assistance in the very first phase of a crisis response.

The draft 2018-2021 UNDAC Strategy emphasizes how to forge stronger linkages between national and regional counterparts. This approach resonates strongly with OCHA's focus as a facilitator of humanitarian assistance that is driven by trust, strength in diversity, and always supportive of local and national ownership.

We all recognize the impact of effective humanitarian response, which protects the lives and well-being of tens of millions of people around the world every year. But we also recognize the need to more closely adapt humanitarian response to the specific context, and to find better ways to engage the capacity of local, national and regional actors on the ground.

This means OCHA and UNDAC must continue to strengthen inter-sectoral and inter-agency coordination as well as comprehensive needs assessments and analyses to boost joint humanitarian programming. And it means UNDAC's diverse network can work with local responders, drawing on the individual strengths of each, to get on top of the situation as fast as possible.

We have seen some positive developments over recent years.

Local, national, regional and international capacity to prepare for and manage crises continues to grow. Humanitarian partners are more diverse, bringing new perspectives, experiences, and capacities to the international humanitarian system. The Connecting Business Initiative in Madagascar, for example, was highly effective in linking private sector resources and initiatives with the national and international response during the response to Tropical Cyclone Enawo.

Developments in technology and communications are empowering crisis-affected people as well as transforming humanitarian response, and boosting accountability.

Local, national and regional authorities are increasingly taking control in international humanitarian response, and they are voicing their high expectations of the quality of the international help they receive.

National authorities are investing more in disaster risk management, enabling stronger emergency preparedness and prevention. The Madagascar Bureau for Disaster Management, for example, is pro-actively seeking guidance and technical assistance from the United Nations, including from UNDAC and bilateral partners, to strengthen its disaster management capacity. This is also happening in Haiti through the Civil Protection authorities. Madagascar and Haiti are both represented here today.

Continued progress is critical. But let us just, for a moment, take a step back to celebrate UNDAC's achievements.

This year, OCHA is marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary by launching a 12-month campaign to mark UNDAC's achievements in 12 emergencies, month by month. It kicks off in commemoration of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

We will celebrate the contribution of UNDAC members from all regions, particularly national disaster management experts, who are active participants in UNDAC's roster. And we will call on pioneer UNDAC members to share their experiences on how the network's role in a changing world has evolved over the past 25 years.

I thank each of you here today for your continued support to UNDAC and for your engagement in this annual meeting. The future success of UNDAC relies on the continued support of each and every one of you.

Tonight, immediately after the meeting, there will be a small celebration to mark UNDAC's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in this same room. You are all welcome to attend.

Thank you.

