Distinguished delegates and colleagues,

Thank you for inviting me to the launch of the Burundi Regional Refugee Response Plan, and for giving me the opportunity to highlight the humanitarian situation in the country.

Since 2015, the socio-economic and political developments in Burundi have had important repercussions on the humanitarian situation. Currently, 3.6 million people—that is 1 in 4 people in the country—need humanitarian assistance. This is 28 per cent more people than in 2016.

The suspension of donor support to the national budget has resulted in cuts in funding for essential services. For example, the water and sanitation sector is facing a devastating 72 per cent cut to its budget. With one in four Burundians already facing limited access to water, these cuts are expected to increase the risk of preventable epidemics, including recurrent cholera outbreaks.

The health and education sectors are also grappling with heavy budget cuts of 54 per cent, and 30 per cent, respectively. Many people are facing huge hurdles accessing basic services that were previously provided free of charge by the Government. Pregnant women and children aged under five years, who depend on medical care provided free by the State, are particularly at risk.
It is important to highlight that this deterioration is happening in what, even before 2015, was one of the world’s poorest countries, ranking 184th out of 188 countries in the Human Development Index.

Currently, over one-quarter of Burundi’s population is estimated to be acutely food insecure. This represents a seven per cent increase compared to 2016. Rising food prices have considerably reduced the availability of and access to staple foods. A rapid assessment conducted in October last year indicates that much of the country has pockets of malnutrition.

The prolonged socio-economic crisis, coupled with political and security uncertainty, has increased peoples’ vulnerability to protection risks, including human rights violations and gender-based violence. Some 1.1 million people now need protection support across the country – the majority of them are women and girls.

Within Burundi, 180,000 people are displaced despite a five per cent decrease in the number of people fleeing their homes since October 2017. Most of these people depend on host communities for support. This, coupled with returning Burundian refugees, has added pressure on already scarce resources and social services, and deepened the vulnerability of these communities.

It is thus essential that both refugees and host communities receive adequate and targeted support, including peacebuilding efforts to avoid tensions with the returnees. The United Nations and the Humanitarian Country Team have developed a response plan for the Burundian refugee returns which includes measures to provide both returnees and host communities with access to essential services and income-generating opportunities to boost their self-reliance and resilience.

While the situation is extremely challenging, I would also like to highlight some important results that we achieved in responding to humanitarian needs last year. About 750,000 people received food and nutrition assistance. Over 280,000 people were supported with agricultural inputs to boost food production. Some 53,000 children received treatment for acute malnutrition. More than 100,000 people received protection assistance. And 450,000 children benefited from school feeding programmes.

We also managed to successfully contain a malaria epidemic that had caused 9,400 deaths between 2015 and 2017, thanks to the joint efforts of the Government of Burundi and the humanitarian community. Six million people were provided with mosquito nets and four million others received malaria treatment.

However, humanitarian needs are on the rise and the response needs to be significantly scaled up if we are to save more lives.

This year, it is estimated that US$141.8 million will be required to assist 2.4 million people across the country. This is more than double of what we needed last year. The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2018 for Burundi will be launched in Bujumbura.
It will, inter alia, focus on supporting the return of internally displaced people and the reintegration of returnees and repatriated people, as well as give due attention to people affected by natural hazards. Of particular note is that the HRP has been prepared with a view to ensuring its linkages to other planning documents being prepared in the country, including the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), the Burundi Resilience Framework and the National Development Plan.

The important work that humanitarian workers are carrying out in Burundi can only continue if donors remain firmly engaged in supporting the humanitarian response. I call on Member States to sustain and intensify their support to our collective efforts. This will allow us to provide much needed life-saving assistance to the people of Burundi, while the international community seeks a long-term solution to end the political impasse and help bring the country back on the path to sustainable development.

Thank you.