

Remarks by Ms. Anja Nitzsche, Chief, OCHA Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Branch, at the ECOSOC-HAS High-level Panel on “Humanitarian action and climate change: advancing anticipatory approaches, strengthening resilience and enhancing collaboration in response to the climate crisis”

**Thursday, 24 June 2021
3–5 p.m. Geneva time**

As delivered

Merci beaucoup, Madame la Présidente.

Excellencies, Distinguished Panellists, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to all and thank you for the opportunity to moderate this high-level panel today.

Humanitarian needs are soaring in 2021, propelled by conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis. Increasingly frequent and severe weather events have devastated livelihoods, destroyed millions of homes, caused large-scale displacement and escalated food insecurity. These events have affected countries and communities’ resilience and undermined their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Even worse, these extreme events have left the people more vulnerable and in greater need of urgent support during a global pandemic. These events have affected places still recovering from earlier climate shocks or in protracted crises. This is illustrated by the fact that 8 out of 10 countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change had an inter-agency humanitarian appeal in 2020. I repeat, 8 out of 10, which makes 80 per cent. For many Small Island Developing States, the climate crisis is an existential threat.

Last year was one of the warmest years on record, fuelling intense weather events. The Atlantic hurricane season was the most active on record, with 30 named storms. In South Asia, Cyclone Amphan triggered nearly 5 million displacements. And excessive rainfall caused major flooding and landslides across East Africa. Droughts affected 13 million people across the Sahel. In Mongolia, represented today at this very distinguished panel, Mongolia faced extreme winter conditions known locally as *dzud*.

Last year, weather-related events were responsible for 98 per cent of the 30.7 million new displacements triggered by disasters – so over 30 million people. This is the highest recorded number in the past decade.

And this is only the beginning. Colleagues at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies estimate that following climate-related disasters, the number of people requiring our support could double to over 200 million by 2050, and associated funding needs could increase up to US\$20 billion annually already by 2030.

The humanitarian system has a clear role to play in the fight against climate change, not least as to advocate for affected vulnerable people. We also provide solutions to help anticipate specific climatic shocks, such as storms, floods, or droughts to mitigate their humanitarian impact.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me point out that despite this gloomy picture just painted, we have already made some inroads, and quite significant ones.

Disaster mortality, for example, has decreased over time, thanks to effective early warning and pre-emptive evacuations ahead of hazards, and thanks to strengthened preparedness and increasingly effective responses.

Advancements in weather forecasting and predictive analytics enable us today to act much more rapidly.

Early warning systems and communication technology help ensure information reaches people faster and more effectively than ever.

Local- and community-level resilience is recognized as key and increasingly being reinforced by international support.

Ambitious partnerships across sectors and disciplines have fostered new initiatives involving humanitarian, development, disaster risk reduction and climate entities.

And last but not least, the critical importance of anticipatory approaches and the need to have faster, more efficient and more dignified approaches to reduce risk has become crystal clear as we struggle to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. This means we need to invest more – and more systematically – in prevention, preparedness and resilience.

Ladies and gentlemen, the climate crisis spares no one. However, it disproportionately affects women and girls and other vulnerable groups, including the poor and marginalized. To truly help the vulnerable, we have to work collaboratively with local communities and strengthen their resilience.

To help better prepare people on the front lines of climate change, we need to invest in the anticipatory approach. This anticipatory approach includes a set of actions taken to prevent or mitigate potential disaster impacts before a shock or before acute impacts are felt. These actions are carried out based on a prediction of how the event and its humanitarian impact will unfold.

Let me give you a few examples. Last year, anticipatory action projects were advanced in over 60 countries. OCHA, for example, facilitated the development and activation of anticipatory action frameworks in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Somalia. And right now as we speak, we are facilitating collective anticipatory action pilots in nine more countries.

The Central Emergency Response Fund has played a key role. OCHA has committed an initial \$140 million from the Fund for two years to pilot collective anticipatory action, putting money against declarations. And we have already seen some great results. In Somalia last year, for example, we

reached people ahead of the full impact of the triple threat of locusts, floods and COVID-19. Our data show that the rapid CERF investment of \$15 million, in this context, has helped to significantly mitigate the adverse impact of these multiple shocks to more than 330,000 people who would have otherwise been highly vulnerable.

Another example: In Bangladesh – a country that experienced the worst flooding in decades in 2020 – in Bangladesh we reached more people at half the cost earlier compared to similar post-facto humanitarian responses in the past. We also found that some 76 per cent of women and girls – so three quarters – who received early information and menstrual hygiene kits were more likely to access regular health care, continue school, generate income, or participate in social and community activities. This is a major socioeconomic dividend.

Ladies and gentlemen, the humanitarian system is adapting to meet the challenges posed by climate change. Yet, we need to do more, and we need to do it faster, and we need to do it at scale. Over half of all humanitarian crises are at least somewhat predictable, and nearly 20 per cent of all crises are currently very predictable. I already talked about our advances in weather forecasting and predictive analytics. Yet, only 1 per cent of crisis financing globally is currently pre-arranged to enable an anticipatory approach. This needs to change. And to scale up anticipatory approaches, we need political commitment to build collective systems and pre-arrange financing together.

I look forward to today's discussion on these issues.

Here are some of the guiding questions I would like to put forward to the panel for its discussion:

1. Are we ready? How can the humanitarian system ensure sufficient capacity and readiness at all levels to effectively address the escalating risks and impacts of disasters and climate change, now and in the future?

2. What have we learned? What are key challenges, solutions and enablers to scale up anticipatory action and advance the humanitarian system-wide shift to earlier, more effective and cost-efficient responses? How can and should we capitalize on lessons learned and best practices?

3. How can we all work better together? What are some of the best practices and recommendations for reinforcing capacities, resilience and responses in communities and countries vulnerable to climate change and affected by recurring disasters? How can we strengthen women's leadership in disaster resilience and response and anticipatory action? And how can humanitarian, development, disaster risk reduction, climate and peacebuilding actors work better together to deliver on life-saving action?

ENDS