Your Excellency Vice-President Hilale,
Distinguished delegates,
Monsieur le Vice-President, dear Omar, thank you very much for your opening remarks and for your leadership of the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment. Thank you also to the President of ECOSOC and the ECOSOC Bureau members for your support. And I also want to thank the co-facilitators for this year’s resolution, Donatirin Sahadatun of Indonesia and Gilles Cerutti of Switzerland, for your work this year.

This is the second year that I am addressing the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment. In that period, I have seen progress on some areas, but I have seen many continuing challenges.

Today, I will share some thoughts with you on where we stand and I will highlight some opportunities and some milestones that if we take them, will allow us move forward.

In the last year, I have travelled to many countries in crisis to see for myself the humanitarian conditions on the ground and to help identify priorities as we move forward.

From Bangladesh to Chad, from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Zimbabwe, from Syria to Yemen, from Afghanistan to Indonesia, I’ve seen incredible strength and resilience in the face of, at times, unimaginable levels of suffering.

Humanitarian crises are lasting longer than ever - on average countries in crisis launch nine annual appeals in succession.

Currently 143 million people need life-saving humanitarian assistance. Most of them are women and girls. Many of them are disabled people. Humanitarian organizations are calling for just over US$26 billion now, for 2019, through the UN-coordinated response plans, to reach the most vulnerable 107 million of those people.

To put this into perspective, that is 2.5 times the amount needed ten years ago.

Conflict, violence and persecution, compounded by climate change, mounting pressures on natural resources, institutional fragility and endemic poverty, continue to drive this suffering. The results are growing food insecurity and mass displacement.
Much of the suffering is also caused by violations of international humanitarian law, with widespread, indiscriminate killing and routine – even deliberate – destruction of civilian infrastructure like hospitals and schools.

We are also seeing tactics of siege, starve and surrender reemerge, driving up acute hunger.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence are being used as deliberate tactics of war. And aid workers are killed, kidnapped, harassed and intimidated. According to Humanitarian Outcomes, 2018 was the second worst year on record for aid worker security, with 126 aid workers killed, 143 wounded, and 130 kidnapped.

As of the most recent count, war, violence and persecution have uprooted 68 million people – an increase of 66 per cent - two thirds - over the past decade.

Most of those people are displaced within their own countries, ripped apart from their local areas and their sources of livelihoods.

At the same time, climate change is causing more frequent and prolonged extreme weather events.

Prolonged and repeated droughts are devastating farmers and herders in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. In the Horn of Africa for example, the chances of drought have now increased from once every seven years to once every two and a half years.

While in the Sahel, per capita water availability has dropped by over 40 per cent in the past 20 years.

Storms and flooding are becoming more intense. Cyclone Idai that hit southern Africa in March where the Ambassador has just come back from with my Deputy, Ursula Mueller, that was the strongest cyclone ever to hit the southern hemisphere. Last year natural disasters displaced 17 million people within their own borders, and affected a total of 68 million, while causing over $130 billion in economic damage.

Since the World Food Programme and the Food and Agricultural Organization sounded the alarm on rising levels of hunger due to conflict two years ago, food insecurity levels have remained exceptionally high. 143 million people are on the verge of crisis-level food insecurity. Sixty per cent of the more than 800 million hungry people in the world live in conflict-affected countries.

The breakdown of health systems in fragile settings, combined with more urbanized populations and other factors are making it harder to contain disease outbreaks and epidemics. The current Ebola crisis in the DRC – with a few cases now also in Uganda – has infected more than 2,000 people, with over 1,500 confirmed deaths, and it comes just a few years after the world’s worst-ever Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

Despite these strains, there are some reasons to be hopeful.
While we rightly focus on the challenges of meeting the needs of those still left behind, let us also note some of our achievements.

The humanitarian system today is effective, more effective in fact than it has ever been. It is reaching, through UN supported efforts, 100 million people in the last year and is unquestionably saving millions of lives.

We are mobilizing earlier to respond when disasters strike. Response plans are more comprehensive, more innovative and more highly prioritized.

We are getting better at understanding the specific needs of different affected groups so that we can ensure a more inclusive response.

And we are not only saving lives but restoring livelihoods, sustaining education and sustaining health systems when countries fall into crisis.

In the last year, through UN coordinated assistance programmes, we targeted 98 million people with humanitarian assistance and protection, and we raised a record $15 billion to support our appeals.

We helped 7 million children access education, despite being caught up in prolonged emergency situations.

Every month we are now reaching 10 million people caught up in the world’s worst humanitarian crisis in Yemen, including providing food and food assistance to 8 million. We are reaching 2 million Somalis helping to stave off another threatened famine and acute severe food insecurity.

None of this work would be possible without the tens of thousands of aid workers who risk their own lives to protect the lives of other people. I am constantly inspired by the expertise, dedication and human spirit of the many humanitarian workers I continue to meet wherever I travel around the world.

This World Humanitarian Day we will be paying special tribute to the pivotal role that women play in humanitarian action. Women working for humanitarian organizations have a particularly crucial role to play in protecting those affected by sexual and gender-based violence. A month ago, humanitarian donors and organizations meeting in Oslo under the leadership of the Government of Norway pledged a record $363 million dollars to ending sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian crises. That event was attended by upwards of a 100 states who committed to take actions running into hundreds of different activities to stamp out the scourge of sexual and gender-based violence.

We’ve had a very good event earlier today to remind everybody of the pledges made a month ago in Oslo and remind everybody that we will be tracking what people do to follow up the promises that they have made. There will be further events following that, including as the Delegation from the United Arab Emirates told you today, an event at the General Assembly
next year so that we can ensure that when people make commitments, everybody can see the extent to which they are implemented.

I have also seen the beginnings of a transformation in how we finance crisis and dealing with vulnerability. A transformation that has the potential substantially to reduce suffering, but also to reduce the cost of dealing with humanitarian suffering over recent years.

Humanitarian organizations, donors, investors and scientists are making progress in translating early warning information into timely early as well as preventative action to saves lives and mitigate the impact of disasters.

A few weeks ago, we started the first Central Emergency Response Fund-supported anticipatory action pilot in Somalia to deal with what we know will be severe consequences from another drought striking that region. We will continue to advance our ability to respond early enough to prevent hazards from becoming full-blown disasters.

At the General Assembly last September, we saw the launch of the UN and World Bank Famine Action Mechanism, which seeks to anticipate and prevent famines from taking hold by using predictive analytics and threshold triggers to unlock resources much faster and deliver assistance much sooner than we have previously done. That approach is also currently being used to prevent suffering in Somalia.

While the push to empower and coordinate better with local and national NGOs and systems has a good distance still to go, we have also seen some signs of progress in this area. Last year, 29 per cent, that is $246 million of the $836 million disbursed by the OCHA-managed Country-Based Pooled Funds, went to national NGO partners. That meets the commitment made at the World Humanitarian Summit to provide 25 per cent of resources to national responders.

Multi-year humanitarian plans have been adopted in many countries, reflecting the reality that crises typically are lasting many years. I want to thank the donors who increasingly are providing multi-year funding in support of those multi-year plans.

In several countries, including in Ethiopia, Nigeria and Somalia, we have seen more joined-up efforts from humanitarian and development partners to work together towards collective activities to reduce vulnerability and risk. In each of these countries we are addressing acute needs while also trying to strengthen local resilience. Humanitarian assistance is very good at saving lives, but what it can’t do is solve the underlying problems. To solve the underlying problems, and to give people a chance to rebuild their lives, we have to work better with the development system, with the peacebuilding system and with the colleagues who work on political solutions to crises.

This year we are marking some important milestones.

First, we see the 70th anniversary of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 20th anniversary of the Security Council’s Protection of Civilians agenda.
We need to use these opportunities to reaffirm our commitments to uphold international humanitarian law and protect civilians in armed conflict.

The laws of war - including the 1949 Geneva Conventions - are cornerstones of the rules-based order. And they are just as relevant today as they were when they were adopted 70 years ago.

The challenge we have right now is not with the content of the law, but with compliance with the law.

We need to focus our energies on changing the ways belligerents behave in conflict, including by engaging constructively with non-State armed groups.

States and parties to armed conflict must incorporate and implement IHL norms into domestic law, national policy frameworks, standard operating procedures and rules of engagement.

There are positive examples to draw from. They include the national policy on the prevention and mitigation of civilian casualties in Afghanistan. The draft national policy on the protection of civilians and civilian harm mitigation in Nigeria. The civilian casualties mitigation team launched in Ukraine. And civilian casualty tracking activities carried out in Somalia and Afghanistan.

We also need stronger national and international accountability mechanisms to ensure that perpetrators of violations of humanitarian law, including of sexual-based violence crimes are held accountable. We need to see an end to impunity.

Second, the Secretary-General’s climate action summit is an opportunity to turn the tide on climate change, which continues to drive mounting humanitarian need.

A few months ago, as I said earlier, we witnessed the devastating impact of Cyclones Idai and Kenneth on Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi.

In addition to expanding anticipatory action, we also need to address the root causes of climate change and vulnerability to it.

The Secretary-General’s climate action summit is focused on harnessing concrete actions to increase ambition and accelerate the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Later today we will discuss what humanitarian organizations can do, to address the escalating risks that mark one of our biggest collective challenges.

For many years, ECOSOC has been a vital platform for Member States and others to convene and discuss how to step up to present and future humanitarian challenges.

As the 2019 ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment opens, let us focus on how we can collaborate to act early to reduce need and risk, and to pave the way to resilience to protect the world’s most vulnerable and those most in danger of being left behind.

Thank you all for your participation and your commitment. I look forward to practical and productive discussions and real-world concrete outcomes. Thank you very much indeed.