Remarks to the press

Helsinki, 10 November 2015

As delivered

This is my first official visit to Finland as the UN’s Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and I am delighted to have been received so warmly by Minister [for Foreign Trade and Development] Lenita Toivakka this morning.

The Minister and I have had a fruitful meeting and in the course of the day I will meet other Government officials as well as key humanitarian NGOs, and have an opportunity to address the Government’s Foreign Affairs Committee.

First and foremost I would like to thank Finland and the Finnish people for their steadfast support and generosity to our work in humanitarian crises around the world over many years.

This year alone, Finland has donated more than US$115 million to critical, lifesaving assistance in virtually every crisis that we face including in Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia and Ukraine. I have been to most of the places myself and have seen the impact of the support. With Finland’s generous support, aid operations are saving lives every day by delivering food, clean water, and healthcare for millions of people in urgent need.

Today, more than 100 million people around the world are in need of humanitarian aid and protection - that is more than 18 times the entire population of Finland.

As providers of neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian assistance to some of the world's most vulnerable people, we count on continued international support to address an extremely complex and challenging situation.

The ongoing crisis in Syria is the clearest demonstration of what we face. Some 13.5 million people are in need of some form of protection and humanitarian assistance, an increase of some 1.2 million in just ten months. More than six million of those in need are children. Some 6.5 million people are displaced inside Syria and nearly 4.2 million have fled across borders, with neighbouring countries bearing an enormous burden.

Syrians fleeing the violence are now willing to risk everything aboard unseaworthy boats to reach Europe. Of the 680,000 arrivals by sea in the Mediterranean so far in 2015, over 50 per cent are Syrian.
These refugees have a right to seek asylum without any form of discrimination. Addressing the needs of refugees places a burden on Europe, but the international community must also continue to support the most vulnerable Syrians who remain in the country.

Generous funding from Finland and other donors is enabling us to reach millions of people in Syria every month, as we continue to try and find ways to scale-up life-saving assistance. But the needs on the ground outstrip the resources available by two to one.

As the challenges grow and change, we as humanitarians must change too. The Secretary-General has convened the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul next May to develop new ideas and find new solutions. The Summit will be a once-in-a-generation opportunity to re-inspire the world with humanitarian ambition.

Finland has for many decades been at the forefront of efforts to create and deliver a safer, more peaceful, more prosperous, more stable future for everyone. We count on Finland’s leadership at the World Humanitarian Summit and for the transformative reforms it will initiate.

Thank you.