Good afternoon everyone.

I would first like to thank the Government and the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the hospitality and warm welcome they have shown me on my first visit to Iran as the UN’s Humanitarian Chief.

I have had an important opportunity to discuss with key Government officials and humanitarian partners how we can strengthen the partnership between the UN and Iran to improve cooperation and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance particularly in the Middle East region.

This region suffers from earthquakes, floods and droughts, and climate change is now intensifying the impact of these hazards with devastating effects on communities living in high risk areas. Iran has a well-developed system for disaster preparedness and response and often generously shares its capacity and expertise when responding to emergencies in other countries. To this end, I have encouraged the Iranian authorities to become members of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams (UNDAC). This would be of mutual benefit for the international community and for Iran and would allow a systematic exchange of experiences and expertise.

Conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Iraq continue to affect the whole region, with millions of people displaced at home and fleeing across borders to safety in neighbouring countries. As the UN’s humanitarian chief, together with all Member States the UN strives to improve aid operations and ensure we can reach more people more quickly. Iran has a very important role to play in helping us gain better access for humanitarian organizations in the region and elsewhere. I stressed the importance of the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian work. These are the principles that guide our action.

I met His Excellency Dr. Abdolrezza Rahmani Fazli, Minister of Interior and His Excellency Mr. Esmail Najjar, the Head of the National Disaster Management Organization. We had fruitful discussions on how to strengthen our collaboration on the use of international emergency tools like the INSARAG and UNDAC teams. Iran plays an important role contributing to the work of these life-saving emergency teams. This was underscored not least in my meeting with Dr. Amir Mohsen Ziaie, President of the Iranian Red Crescent Society, who is doing tremendous work to support emergency and relief operations in Iran and in the region.
In my meeting with General Gholamreza Jalali, Head of the Passive Defense Organization, we discussed concrete steps for cooperation on emergency preparedness.

I met Special Advisor to the Supreme Leader Dr. Ali Akbar Velayati, and Ambassador Sadegh Hossein Jaberi Ansari, Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs, to discuss humanitarian response to conflicts in the region and the important role Iran plays in ensuring access to those in need. I am encouraged by the continued engagement by the Government in these efforts and their commitment to cooperate with the UN.

I look forward to working more closely with our Iranian partners to further improve the international humanitarian system so we can respond effectively, efficiently and fast to crises now and in the future.