Thank you, Mr. President.

I’ll start by saying what a privilege and a pleasure it is to be sitting next to Hans here, and to be with him in this chamber. I know, like all of us, you wish him all the best.

Much of what I will say will echo and mirror his own remarks that he has made this afternoon.

The war in Yemen, Mr. President – and the wider crisis it has unleashed, as we have heard – continue to threaten millions of lives across the country. And for now, that crisis shows no sign of abating.

As Hans has so aptly described, we have seen over the last six weeks a sharp and dangerous escalation in conflict, with devastating consequences for civilians and civilian infrastructure.

More than 650 civilian casualties were reported in January. That means, on average, 21 civilians killed or injured every day by air strikes, shelling, small-arms fire and other violence. It is, by far, the highest toll in at least three years.

The war is finding people in their homes, schools, mosques, hospitals and other places where civilians should be protected. On 21 January, an air strike hit a detention facility in Sa’ada, killing or injuring more than 300 detainees. Cross-border attacks have also intensified, killing, injuring and threatening civilians in the region.

And as Hans has said, international humanitarian law requires very clearly all parties to respect the principles of distinction and proportionality, and to take all feasible precautions to avoid harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure. And I urge the parties, as he did, to uphold these obligations, and I call for accountability for any serious violations.

Mr. President,
This recent escalation is the latest turn in a conflict that has now dragged on for seven years. Yemen has become a protracted crisis. A generation of children is growing up with no thought of other than war.

Throughout this crisis, humanitarian partners have done everything we, they, can to reduce people’s suffering. In 2021, nearly 200 organizations worked together through the UN response plan to assist more than 11 million people every month. These programmes are reaching every one of Yemen’s 333 districts – the entire country.

On a separate note, I am pleased to report recent progress in efforts to resolve the Safer tanker issue, including an agreement in principle to a UN-coordinated proposal to shift the oil to another ship.

However, as we have said before, working in Yemen is often much harder than it should be.

Access impediments remain one major problem. Aid workers face far too many restrictions, including lack of facilitation of their presence, movements and activities. Visas, notifications and other routine processes have all created challenges recently. IHL requires all parties to facilitate access and to ensure freedom of movement for humanitarian workers.

Security challenges have also persisted. Last week, armed men abducted five UN staff on official mission in Abyan governorate. We’re all working urgently to secure their immediate release, with support from the Government of Yemen. These kinds of incidents are, of course, utterly unacceptable.

[Two UN workers who were arrested in Sana’a last November also remain in detention, although we understand they have been allowed phone calls with their families. We continue to seek their immediate release.

A third UN worker who had been arrested in Marib last November was released on 14 February, which is a very positive development.]

Mr. President,

However, by far the biggest challenge for aid agencies right now is funding. The humanitarian operation – a lifeline for millions of people across Yemen and for these many years – is about to start doing a lot less.

Aid agencies are quickly running out of money, forcing them to slash life-saving programmes. By the end of January, nearly two thirds of major UN aid programmes had already scaled back or closed altogether.

In December, the World Food Programme reduced food rations for 8 million people. Starting next month, those 8 million people may get no food at all – or just a reduced ration.
In March, we may also have to cancel most UN humanitarian flights in Yemen, which would cause enormous problems for the aid operation, and for the movement of our staff. There is, it seems, no money.

Looming disruptions to water and sanitation services – again for want of funds – could soon deprive 3.6 million people of safe drinking water, putting them – and especially children under 5 – at greater risk of deadly diseases.

Programmes to combat gender-based violence and promote reproductive health are also on the chopping block, as are a range of critical activities in the health, shelter and other sectors.

Mr. President, this Council has heard aid agencies warn about funding shortages in the past. I have listened to my predecessor in this Council along these lines. But the scale of the current gaps are unprecedented in Yemen.

We have never before contemplated giving millions of hungry people no food at all, or to suspend the flights that we need to get aid workers and supplies into, around and out of the country.

If these gaps aren’t addressed, it will simply be a death sentence for people whose coping mechanisms in some cases are completely exhausted and who rely on assistance for their survival.

Agencies are doing what they can. Last week, I released another $20 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund to shore up operations around Marib – the second time we have done so this year. WFP, meanwhile, has exhausted its internal loan mechanisms to keep their programmes going a bit longer.

None of those are sustainable solutions. We cannot let the aid operation in Yemen, obviously, fall apart.

So, I am very grateful, Mr. President, to the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland for co-hosting with us, the United Nations, a high-level pledging event for Yemen on 16 March. My own Secretary-General has made it clear to me and to all of us how willing and open and wanting he is to intervene to remove this funding gap.

I implore all donors to use that opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the people of Yemen.

Mr. President,

We are also keenly aware that people’s survival cannot rely only on the ebbs and flows of humanitarian funding cycles. A more sustainable approach, and indeed Hans has referred to it, is both necessary and achievable.

As we have said before, the international community must come together to address the underlying drivers of need in Yemen, especially the collapsing economy.
The UN economic framework offers a path forward on this. It brings together initiatives that could make an immediate difference in boosting incomes, reducing prices and enhancing macro-economic stability.

This includes foreign-exchange injections, which the Government of Yemen is working hard with its partners to secure, as well as policy changes, like resuming civilian flights through Sana’a airport, lifting restrictions on commercial imports and using import revenues to pay public sector salaries. It pains me to refer again to these measures, which we have been wanting for so long, and for which we still wait.

Paying those salaries will also help preserve basic services. Finding your way out of a crisis is nearly impossible if you’re too sick, too hungry or undereducated to make your way in the world. Like economic support, preserving basic services is key to reducing humanitarian needs.

But finally, Mr. President, and you will not find this surprising, I want to stress that the best thing anyone could do for the people of Yemen would be to find a just, lasting end to the war.

This is no small feat, as I know well. And so, I want to offer my unqualified support for everything Hans has just said, for all the work he is doing under exceptionally difficult circumstances, as I should know well.

Thank you.