Thank you very much to have started the conversation and in particular to the Minister [Mr. Philippe Goffin, Minister of Foreign Affairs and of Defence, Belgium] and the Commissioner [Mr. Janez Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Crisis Management] and set out the issues facing us today.

Conflict, climate shocks and environmental degradation as they say increasingly go hand in hand. They drive humanitarian need and where they occur together, ramp up suffering.

And I want to congratulate the ICRC for their excellent new report which clearly shows that people affected by conflict are also disproportionately impacted by climate shocks and environmental degradation. And I am sure Peter will speak more for about this and he told the Security Council last week, far too many people are walking on a “tightrope of survival”, as a result.

The world’s least resilient countries are the most likely to experience political instability, economic collapse, and social fragmentation, and they are also exceptionally vulnerable to environmental breakdown.

Of the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change, 13 of them were countries with a UN coordinated humanitarian response plan last year, and almost all are experiencing violence, instability or armed conflict.1

Conflict, climate change and persecution have left a record 85 million people forcibly displaced today.

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1 Ethiopia, Myanmar, Mali, Yemen, Burundi, Afghanistan, Haiti, Niger, Sudan, DRC, CAR, Chad, Somalia.
For many of them hunger is a daily reality.

Last year, seven of the world’s eight worst hunger crises, in fact, were driven by a confluence of conflict and climate shocks.

This year, because of the consequence of the COVID pandemic, we predict the number of food-insecure people may in fact double.

We see famines looming, and particularly acute risks especially in South Sudan, Yemen, DRC, parts of the Sahel - as David Beasley, Qu Dongyu and I told the Security Council last week.

It is also the case that climate shocks and environmental triggers can themselves be among the things that fuel violence and conflict. So these interactions are in multiple directions we see as competition over access to scarce resources leads to rising tensions. We see the behavior of fighting parties can also have a direct effect on the environment.

And this cycle of conflict and violence, climate shock, environmental risk and humanitarian need are playing out now in many countries where humanitarian organizations are working. The Institute for Economics and Peace cites three regional hot spots at highest risk for instability due to environmental threats: the Sahel and Horn belt from Mauritania to Somalia; the Southern Africa belt from Angola to Madagascar; and the Middle East and Central Asia from Syria to Pakistan.

And in fact in you look ahead, analysts expect these problems to get worse as environmental crises increase both in frequency and intensity, and that then has an effect on further compounding already rising humanitarian needs.

If current trends continue some people think that more than one billion people could be displaced by ecological disaster and conflict by the middle of the century.

The demand for food and water is projected to reach crisis levels for some regions over the next few decades, with one country in five experiencing catastrophic food insecurity and over a third of countries set to experience catastrophic water stress – all that means is that they won’t have enough water to meet their needs.

It doesn’t have to be like this. There are things that we can do to build countries’ resilience to climate change and environmental disaster, and to address tensions when they arise to stop them turning into conflicts.

Firstly, we know that early action saves lives and money. We can already predict many climate-related events and where and who they will hit hardest. By forecasting risk, we can use this
evidence to trigger pre-positioned financing ahead of an impending climate hazard, to fund, as the Minister said, anticipatory action.

And that is one of the best things to do to protect hard-won development gains and support resilience.

And humanitarian agencies are already pursuing important examples to track that kind of programming and indeed it is a priority for me and the major fund line manage the Central Emergency Response Fund to allocate out money especially for the anticipatory action for this kind of problems.

Scaling up adaptation finance also for those countries most vulnerable to climate change can increase their ability to withstand climatic shocks.

Secondly, respect for international humanitarian law is vital to protect the lives of civilians in conflict, to protect aid workers, to help preserve essential services and also to avert food insecurity. Hence, by doing all these kinds of things, it could also contribute to the reduction in the pressure on the natural environment.

Thirdly, I think donors and international financial institutions can help build the resilience of at-risk countries by investing in risk reduction and risk management, including by supporting social safety net systems. This requires that all donors step up to meet the climate finance needs of the most vulnerable countries, so they are able to prepare for rising competition over food, water, and other resources.

And fourthly, I think we need to really seize the opportunity of the COVID-19 crisis to heed the call the Secretary-General has been making to build back better by investing in a green economic recovery. As the key to tackle growing unemployment, inequality and environmental degradation.

It is only when world leaders start to take serious action on climate change, that humanitarian organizations will be able to see a future beyond nearly dealing with the symptoms. At the moment, all our focus is on trying to contain violence, hunger, displacement, disease, and suffering. We need to have a mind set with a much stronger focus on solving the underlying problems.

Thank you.