Your Excellency Vice-President Mattila,

Distinguished delegates. Ladies and gentlemen,

Mr. Vice President, thank you very much for your opening remarks and for your excellent leadership in overseeing the Humanitarian Affairs Segment of ECOSOC. I also thank the President of ECOSOC and the ECOSOC Bureau members for their support. And I take the opportunity to acknowledge the co-facilitators, Switzerland and Zambia, for their stewardship of this year’s ECOSOC humanitarian resolution.

This is my first Humanitarian Affairs Segment as Emergency Relief Coordinator, and I look forward to the opportunity to discuss how to strengthen and improve our work to save lives, and reduce humanitarian need, risk and vulnerability in today’s humanitarian context.

First, I am pleased to present the Secretary-General’s report on the strengthening coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations; and I would like to share with you some thoughts about the current state of play of the humanitarian system.

Today, we have a global humanitarian system that is more effective than ever.

Humanitarian organizations continue to reach tens of millions of vulnerable people each year and to save millions of lives.
In the past year, we prevented famine from spreading in four countries. By August 2017, the United Nations and our partners were providing food assistance to nearly 13 million people a month.

We provided life-saving aid and protection to millions of conflict-affected people, including in Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, Iraq, the Lake Chad Basin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and beyond.

We partnered with national and regional authorities in the Caribbean to provide relief to thousands of people who were hit by record-breaking hurricanes.

We launched a swift response to the Rohingya refugee crisis, and we are currently assisting over 700,000 Rohingya people.

Response plans are more coordinated, comprehensive, innovative and well executed. We are focusing more on anticipatory approaches and early action, drawing from the lessons of El Niño/El Niña and the famine response last year.

And technological advances are propelling swifter, more nimble aid responses, like mobile money and blockchain transfers.

We have seen a significant improvement in the quality and timeliness of funding. I particularly want to thank those who have made commitments to provide multi-year and pooled funding, which enable timely, effective action on the ground. Last year we recorded the highest level of contributions to the Central Emergency Response Fund and the Country-Based Pooled Funds.

**But despite all this, the humanitarian system is unquestionably under strain.**

Today, more 134 million people require humanitarian assistance –that’s almost three times the number a decade ago. Humanitarian organizations are targeting 96 million of the most vulnerable people for help in 2018. So far, we have received $8 billion of the $25 billion we need.

Conflicts have increased in number and inintensity over the past decade. Last year, conflicts and disasters caused nearly 31 million people to flee their homes and become internally displaced.

In 2017, more than 300 natural disasters occurred, affecting more than 96 million people and causing more than US$300 billion in economic damage—the second highest economic losses on record.

To keep pace, the humanitarian system needs continually to adapt and improve. and to do so successfully, it needs to strengthen collaboration and partnerships. That is what we are here to discuss.
Amid the challenges, there are opportunities.

The Secretary-General’s vision for reforming the United Nations is the most persuasive I have seen in 30 years. These reforms should increase the effectiveness and impact of the UN and help reduce some of the underlying drivers of humanitarian crises.

The aim of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ‘leave no one behind’ recognizes that humanitarian crises threaten to reverse development progress made in recent decades. We have a major opportunity to change course. We must take it.

But I first want to highlight serious challenges that we need to address before we can succeed: conflict and the behaviour of belligerents in war. The scourge of protracted food crises that can verge on famine. The growing number of forcibly displaced people. And the need for a more anticipatory financing model to meet needs amid growing intensity and frequency of natural disasters which are the impact of climate change.

First, we need to uphold international humanitarian law and the norms intended to protect civilians in conflict.

In an environment increasingly marked by conflict, neutral and impartial humanitarian action is more important than ever.

The brutality of today’s wars is an outrage. Civilians are deliberately or indiscriminately injured and killed with shocking frequency and intensity. International humanitarian law and the fundamental rules of distinction, proportionality and precaution are disregarded with apparent impunity. We must do more to ensure political actors and fighting parties respect international humanitarian law and the humanitarian principles.

The recent Security Council debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict underscored the need to challenge the behaviour of parties to conflict. I remain committed to this.

Second, we need to apply collective and coordinated efforts to improve food security.

Today, 124 million people need food assistance. Most of these needs are driven by conflict.

Last week, I launched a call to action for the Sahel Region to scale up response efforts against the drought. Across Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal, 5.8 million people need urgent food and livelihoods assistance to survive the lean season—the highest number in years. Response efforts are underfunded. We need better and early action to avoid the worst.

Third, we need to find better lasting solutions for internally displaced people and their host communities.
This year is the 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. It is important we intensify our efforts in line with the December 2017 UN General Assembly Resolution on Internally Displaced Persons, to explore ways to better address the needs of IDPs and host communities. We have launched the GP20 Plan of Action. The Plan convenes States, IDPs and donors around priority issues to improve the situation for IDPs, with backing from UN agencies and NGOs so that together we can accelerate progress.

**To address many of today’s challenges, we need a change in approach. We must move towards more anticipatory action and a greater join-up in our response.**

Disasters and emergencies are largely predictable. By adjusting the way we operate, we can reduce their impacts.

Anticipatory and early action concerns the delivery of assistance as well as the way we finance emergency preparedness and early response. This was exemplified in last year’s response to the hurricanes in the Caribbean, in which preventative evacuation measures saved thousands of lives, and insurance payouts helped finance faster recovery.

Based on lessons learned from the 2015/16 El Niño response, OCHA is exploring options to apply more anticipatory, data-driven models of allocating funding, including through CERF to kick-start early action. This approach can prevent hazards becoming fully-fledged disasters.

Partnerships with Governments, regional organizations, insurance firms, international financial institutions and local organizations are invaluable to this approach.

There are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian crises. The solutions are in the realms of peace and security, politics and development.

Last year, the Secretary-General created a Joint Steering Committee to advance humanitarian and development collaboration, under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General. I have the honour of being co-vice chair with Achim Steiner, the UNDP Administrator. We have made considerable progress in joint objectives to reduce vulnerability and need in countries such as Somalia and Ethiopia, and many other countries are also beginning to operationalize this join-up.

**We must ensure the highest standards of our own behaviour for those we serve.**

As I underlined earlier today in at an event on Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, the humanitarian system is taking active measures to eliminate the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as sexual harassment. In line with the Secretary-General’s strategy and approach of zero tolerance, we are committed to ensuring that people in crises feel safe and respected and have access to the assistance they need, without fear of exploitation or abuse by any aid worker.

All of these issues merit further attention and will be discussed this week.
As Ambassador Matjila outlined, this year’s theme is “Restoring Humanity, Respecting Human Dignity and Leaving No-one Behind: Working together to reduce people’s humanitarian need, risk and vulnerability.” It links with the 2030 Agenda in committing to lift our fellow human beings out of suffering and respect for human dignity.

As we open the 2018 session, let me leave you with Nelson Mandela’s words, as this year also marks the 100th anniversary of his birth: “We are humans through the humanity of other human beings” and “no power on this earth can destroy the thirst for human dignity”.

Thank you all for your commitment and engagement. I look forward to a productive week.