Thanks, Kate. Thank you for moderating this event and to all those present in this important high-level event.

Before I go into my prepared remarks, I just want to say that the main message that I think we’ll all be wanting to both convey and to respond to today is that famine is not a technical matter. Famine is a threat. It exists. There are almost certainly people dying as a result of it today that we can’t see.

And when famine finally opens the door, it goes viral in a way that other threats perhaps don’t.

Famine is a terrible, terrible companion to have in this year, and that’s why we’re so keen to do this event, to raise awareness, to raise money, and to raise the priority to famine.

Thank you very much.

Forty-one million people, 41 million people, across 43 countries and territories are at risk of dying from hunger and associated causes unless they receive immediate help. That’s a 50 per cent increase in the last two years.

In Ethiopia, as we’ve been hearing recently, southern Madagascar, South Sudan and Yemen, 584,000 people are experiencing so-called famine-like conditions.
Communities in northern Nigeria are also facing an extremely high risk of catastrophic food insecurity.

This is a toxic mix of economic decline, climate change, COVID-19 and of course, most importantly, conflict driving this terrible scourge, with women and girls, as always, left particularly vulnerable.

Women tell us of the desperate measures they must take to find food to feed their families, including trading sex for food, resorting to early and child marriages, as I was hearing when I was in Syria quite recently.

But the countries I’ve mentioned are not the only ones. There are 43 countries, other countries, on our high-alert list that include Afghanistan, Burkina, the DRC, Haiti, Sudan and Syria, as I’ve just mentioned.

And in each of these countries the ripple effects of hunger spread far. Health systems become swiftly overwhelmed. Livelihoods are wiped out. Children pulled out of school. The social fabric frayed.

A child in Syria said to me, when I asked him why he’d missed school for two years, he said: “Because I was needed to look after my mother, as nobody else was there to do so.”

But the truth is we can also stop hunger in its tracks.

And the Secretary-General formed this High-Level Task Force. And since then, my predecessor, Mark, much more than me, of course, and now I, with my colleagues David Beasley and Qu Dongyu, have been taking urgent action to prevent famine.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the IASC, and its members, as well as Governments and international financial institutions, have been our partners.

And through this task force we have collaborated more closely than ever.

We have repeatedly rung the alarm bell at the highest levels to Member States, including in Security Council and Member State briefings, G7, and through a Secretary-General letter to all Member States.
And as a result of advocacy efforts, we have secured humanitarian access in hard-to-reach parts of Burkina, southern Madagascar and other places. And I give credit to FAO for leading the charge in Madagascar.

With thanks to generous donors here present, we have raised a great deal of money, enabling us to ramp up humanitarian operations in high-risk countries.

In South Sudan, for example, we scaled up assistance in the most food-insecure areas, saving thousands of people from famine, and preventing women and girls from exposure to more gender-based violence.

In Ethiopia — we have been talking about this a lot in recent days — we continue efforts to stave off food insecurity in Tigray, and now in Amhara and Afar regions.

In Burkina we provided food or cash to 1.1 million people, including those in hard-to-access areas.

Yemen went from being critically underfunded to becoming the best-funded Humanitarian Response Plan this year. This enabled us to reach 10 million people each month across every province and district in Yemen.

And together with the support of generous Member States, and the efforts of local NGOs in particular, but also international NGOs and UN partners, I think they have been able to save many, many, many, many lives from hunger.

But many more are now still in crisis. And there are two reasons for this. First, we do lack sufficient funding to reach all those who need our help. We need $6.6 billion to prevent that kind of catastrophe. So far just half of these funds have come in. So over $3 million to be needed.

In Madagascar’s Grand Sud, for instance, we staved off hunger for nearly a million people. But as we try to extend this aid to others, funding shortages mean we must now halve the amount of food we distribute.

Second, issues with humanitarian access mean that we have not been able to reach people in need in many of the most vulnerable hotspots.
We need to work together. We need you to continue to exert all the pressure you can to help us secure access to at-risk communities.

It’s time, as this event would suggest, to redouble our efforts, and to show that we can collectively rise to this challenge before us.

There is time, not much, and we need it to happen.

Thank you very much.