

**United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and  
Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock**

Remarks to the media in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo on 13 March 2018

*Near verbatim*

Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, I would like to thank you for your presence today as we wrap up this mission of crucial importance.

First of all, I would like to thank the people and the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since my first visit more than 15 years ago, some enormous progress has been made. Kinshasa has become a modern African capital. Other cities such as Goma and Lubumbashi have been transformed. The number of children who have attended in school has increased and child mortality has dropped. The vaccination rates are much higher. At the same time, while this should be and could be a story of hope brought on by sustainable development and peace, we are witnessing some of the worst human suffering in one of the largest and most tragic humanitarian crises in the world.

The crisis has its origins in politics and economics. Tensions created by the jostling for positions ahead of the political transition which must be completed by the end of the year and economic stress, including spiraling inflation and the budget deficit, which are inflicting great hardship on people all over the country.

Humanitarian needs have doubled since last year, 13.1 million people need humanitarian assistance. Four and a half million people have been forced to flee their homes as a result of fighting across the whole country. More than 4.6 million Congolese children are acutely malnourished, including 2.2 million cases of severe acute malnutrition. We've seen mushrooming epidemics including the worst outbreak of cholera in 15 years.

To address these acute and pressing needs, the humanitarian community has significantly scaled up operations across the whole country. We are supported by MONUSCO which makes a vital contribution to ensuring that civilians are protected and creating space for humanitarian agencies. I am also impressed by the selfless solidarity many Congolese families have displayed. They have so little yet they welcome their brothers and sisters fleeing violence into their homes.

Minister Kaag and I have just arrived from Kalemie, where we saw firsthand the appalling living conditions of thousands of people forced to flee violence in Tanganyika. We heard their

heart-wrenching stories, their descriptions of what they need, but also their hopes and their stories of resilience and courage in the face of unimaginable challenges.

What we've seen today, and what we know is happening in many other parts of the country, doesn't need to persist if we work together – government, the Congolese people and the international community. Every vulnerable Congolese family deserves all our support to rebuild their lives.

While in Kalemie, the Governor of Tanganyika, Richard Ngoy Kitangala, and the Humanitarian Coordinator, Kim Bolduc, signed an agreement, under the auspices of Minister Kaag and myself. It includes an exemption of certain taxes for humanitarian actors and commitments to enable access and provide security by the authorities. This will help us to reach a lot more people.

Yesterday in Kinshasa, Minister Kaag and I met with acting Prime Minister and Vice Prime Minister Jose Makila Sumanda and the Minister of Solidarity and Humanitarian Action, Mr. Bernard Biando Sango. We had fruitful discussions on the best ways to support the Congolese people. The Government declared that it will allocate more money to humanitarian aid. It also agreed to revise the procedure for delivering visas for humanitarian actors so that it becomes faster and more efficient. They also agreed to use the agreement with authorities in Kalemie in order to reduce taxes and customs fees for humanitarian actors through the whole country. They also agreed to reduce customs fees and response time for humanitarian imports, including for medicine and food. They also pledged to promote a safe working environment for humanitarian workers. Finally, it is also important to mention that they recognized the need to review the laws envisioned by the Government regarding NGOs in order to ensure a conducive climate for humanitarian agencies.

Last year humanitarian organisations were forced to make impossible operational choices due to severely constrained resource availability and expanding needs. We are this year seeking 1.7 billion dollars for the UN humanitarian appeal for the Democratic Republic of the Congo to save lives and reduce the suffering of 10 million people.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, Minister Kaag and I, together with our colleagues from the European Union and the Minister from the United Arab Emirates, will be bringing the international community together in Geneva for the first-ever high level humanitarian conference for the DRC. We greatly look forward to being joined by senior representatives of the Government. We will be seeking pledges for financial support there for the UN Humanitarian Response Plan, but beyond money it will be a collective opportunity to reaffirm that we care about this country, that we care about those who are suffering, and that we want to help them.

Thank you very much.