As delivered

Your Excellency President Samba-Panza, Honorable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends,

I thank the European Union for hosting this conference at such a critical time, and for leading by example in its continued support for the humanitarian response and resilience efforts in the Central African Republic (CAR).

I visited the CAR and Cameroon in February with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Dr. Chaloka Beyani, and the ECHO Director of Operations, Mr. Jean-Louis de Brouwer.

In CAR, we met minorities in enclaves who needed special protection from hostility and violence, and displaced people in camps who were still too fearful to go back to their homes. In Cameroon, I met a woman refugee from the CAR who told me about the suffering she, her family and her community went through; the appalling levels of violence; and how she and her family walked through the bush for days to reach safety in Cameroon. She was one of the lucky ones. Many did not survive the attacks or the journey.

Despite everything, her greatest wish was to return home.

Her story reminded us that the people who fled the violence inside the country and across borders are all Central Africans. They want to return home as soon as possible. They want to live in peace with their neighbours.

I am pleased to say that since March, there has been significant progress on the political front.

I welcome the national reconciliation efforts in Bangui. President Samba-Panza, the Transitional Authorities and the people of the CAR have done their best to keep the political dialogue as inclusive as possible under challenging circumstances. It will be critical to continue this engagement and ensure that minorities are fully represented going forward.
I also welcome the agreement signed earlier this month on disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration - another welcome step towards stabilization. We all hope that everyone concerned will follow through on their commitments without delay.

And moves to release up to 10,000 children exploited as combatants and sexually abused are another extremely encouraging development. More than 300 children were released in three ceremonies near Bambari two weeks ago and I am happy to say that they will receive psycho-social assistance to help them re-integrate into their families and communities.

These steps all give us real hope that the worst is now over for the people of the Central African Republic.

The international community has played a crucial role in averting a worst-case scenario. The deployment of international peacekeepers has saved countless lives. But we must be aware that this newfound stability is fragile and does not extend to the whole country.

Indeed the humanitarian situation in the CAR remains dire: almost two third of the country, or more than 2.7 million people out of a population of 4.6 million, require humanitarian assistance and protection. These numbers are still fluctuating because new displacements are still happening. Fifty thousand people were newly displaced so far this year.

Half a million people are displaced inside the country with nearly half a million more seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.

People’s resilience has been severely eroded. The CAR is at 185th position among 187 countries in the Human Development Index. In many places, the state cannot meet people’s most basic health and education needs. Students have missed almost two complete school years. 1.5 million people - more than 30 percent of the population - are food insecure and lack access to drinking water and sanitation facilities.

Protecting civilians is extremely challenging. Women and children in particular are exposed to violence and abuse as they are trapped between the various armed groups.

Horrific human rights abuses against minorities have been documented. Some 36,000 people, including many Muslims and nomadic Fulani people, are still trapped in enclaves, in fear of their lives. There are still more than 100 camps across the country for displaced people who are too scared to return home.

These levels of violence and fear are preventing civil servants from returning to work, with clear implications for the rule of law and the vital issue of accountability for the terrible crimes that have been committed.
Violence and fear are also impeding humanitarian staff as they try to distribute aid. In March and April, there was an average of one security incident per day targeting humanitarian workers. This is a very dangerous environment for our staff.

To respond to the huge increase in needs last year, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee - the global body that coordinates international humanitarian assistance - activated its highest level of emergency response which continued until earlier this month.

This ramping up of assistance was effective. The number of humanitarian organizations working in the CAR doubled. Humanitarian agencies and our partners were able to deliver more aid to people more quickly, undoubtedly saving many lives. They offered more protection to the most vulnerable. The humanitarian team was strengthened under the leadership of Claire Bourgeois who will brief you later today.

It is now crucial that after this surge in capacity, the level of response and commitment by both humanitarian actors and donors is maintained. The people of the CAR need the continued and focused support of the international community.

The UN peacekeeping operation, MINUSCA, is now helping to stabilize the security situation and creating conditions for the safe aid delivery in some parts of the country. But the State’s capacity to deliver basic services is extremely limited. Humanitarian agencies and our partners are currently the only ones reaching many people in desperate need.

Humanitarian needs continue to far exceed our resources and our partners report that operations are shutting down due to lack of funding. If this continues, we could lose all the security, political and humanitarian gains of the past year.

For example, we have been able to supply seeds to just half of the 250,000 households that need them. Those seeds should be planted now, to grow crops for next year’s harvest. But we don’t have the money for the other half.

US$613 million is urgently needed to meet the most basic needs for this year, as outlined in the 2015 Strategic Response Plan. But halfway through the year, just 21 percent of these funds are available.

We need to build on the generous support of donors in 2014. We must continue to build people’s resilience if we want to make sure that the post-conflict recovery is built on strong foundations.

We must not lose sight of our goal: to set the CAR firmly on a path to stability and recovery. This requires long term support. Meanwhile there is a need to provide life-saving assistance to the 2.7 million people in need and to the many refugees abroad.

We now have an opportunity to end the cycle of violence and devastation in the CAR. We are heading in the right direction and making important progress on several fronts.
We can hold out some hope for the people who have seen their lives turned upside down by violence and chaos.

Most of all, we must not deny life-saving assistance to the 2.7 million people in need inside the country and to the refugees hoping to return home.

They all count on all of us.

Thank you.