

ECOSOC HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS SEGMENT 2011
CLOSING REMARKS

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[Checked against delivery]

Mr. Vice-President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates and colleagues,

Can I begin by thanking you all for your engagement during this Humanitarian Affairs Segment. Our discussions have been timely and valuable, and I hope they will support improvements to the way we work.

In particular, I wish to extend thanks to the many panelists, moderators and participants who enriched our debate with their expertise and experience, including first hand testimony from the field.

Taking the title of this year's Humanitarian Affairs Segment to heart, I was pleased that so many discussions were organized jointly by our humanitarian and development partners.

In these closing remarks, I would like to highlight some of the most important messages that came up during our discussions, and draw attention to one or two others for your further consideration.

Mr. Vice President,

I very much welcome the importance given by Member States to the need for effective coordination of international humanitarian assistance, and their support for our efforts to strengthen it. This lies at the heart of what we do.

Many speakers shared concerns about the increase in humanitarian needs – due to protracted crises, the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, and the effects of global challenges such as population growth and climate change.

Many also highlighted the progress we have made in building a more effective, accountable and timely humanitarian response system. But we know that more needs to be done.

We need to strengthen our accountability to affected people, encouraging greater participation in decisions which affect them.

We need to work more closely with local, national and regional partners, to prepare for and respond to crises.

And we need to maintain our efforts to strengthen humanitarian leadership at all levels – and to shift our focus, where possible, from reaction to anticipation, preparation and prevention.

We had a rich discussion on preparedness and resilience this morning. There was convergence among all of us that we need to improve our support to help local and national partners improve their preparedness levels. We also need to work on clarifying the roles and responsibilities of international actors.

Throughout the debate, participants focused on the importance of partnership as an essential tool to provide an adequate, needs-based and principled humanitarian response that addresses current and future challenges.

This includes building partnerships with UNDP, the World Bank, regional organizations, the private sector, as well as private individuals.

In building partnerships, we need to work together to find innovative solutions to problems and think more strategically about leveraging each other's comparative advantages. We need to work harder to get this right.

To that end, I am pleased with the progress we made in this segment, but recognize that further progress needs to be made.

We also devoted considerable attention to humanitarian financing. Yesterday, panelists discussed how we can ensure a more effective and timely responses.

In particular, they stressed the need to systematically fund preparedness measures, and better address the transition from emergency relief to recovery and development.

We recognize that we need to report to our donors, and to affected people, on clear, identifiable outcomes, showing the impact of our work.

Mr. Vice-President,

I also wanted to thank the organizers of the many side events. We held more this year than in any previous humanitarian segment.

On Tuesday, for example, we spoke about the challenge of safe access to fuel in humanitarian crisis settings, highlighting the threat of rape and physical harassment faced by women when gathering firewood and charcoal.

Partners also discussed the impact of migration, urbanization and population growth, underlining the need to strengthen national, local and community response systems.

Our discussion on protecting education in emergencies reaffirmed that education is an important part of humanitarian assistance and that we must do more to ensure children affected by crisis are given the chance of a better future.

Yesterday, we discussed opportunities and challenges in the use of Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA) to support humanitarian response. You reaffirmed the important principle that these assets only be used as a last resort, and that MCDAs, need to be demand - rather than supply - driven.

In the event on protection in situations of natural disaster, we learned that some 42 million people were newly displaced due to natural disasters in 2010 (compared to 3 million due to conflict in the same time period) – a stark reminder of the challenge we continue to face.

And we heard a compelling presentation, which made the case that humanitarian needs assessments must include data disaggregated by age and sex. The gender equality side event reinforced that the specific needs of women, men, boys and girls must be taken into account to effectively deliver humanitarian assistance.

Another report demonstrated that while humanitarian aid has risen, the humanitarian caseload is increasing, as is the cost of the provision of aid due to higher food and energy costs.

Yesterday evening we had a very timely discussion on food insecurity and the importance of working together to address immediate needs and longer-term structural issues.

And in our last side event today we had a very good discussion on how to support affected States in their disaster response – an important theme throughout these days.

Mr. Vice-President

Yesterday we launched the Mid Year Review of the Consolidated Appeals. At mid-year, we have 21 appeals, including three Flash Appeals.

Humanitarian funding requirements have increased by half a billion dollars since the start of the year, bringing the total 2011 target to \$7.9 billion.

These appeals have been funded at 45%, or 3.6 billion dollars. This means that 4.3 billion dollars are still needed in order to fully respond this year.

We just heard about the dire situation in the Horn of Africa, where 11.5 million people need our urgent assistance, including Somalia, where famine has been declared in two areas.

I urge Member States to continue to support our appeals. People are at risk.

On Tuesday evening we took some time to reflect on the past 20 years of humanitarian assistance, and commemorate the creation of the forerunner to OCHA. We will have future opportunities to discuss what we have achieved and the challenges which face us at further events later in the year.

Mr. Vice-President,

Please allow me to commend Member States on achieving the consensus resolution you have just adopted.

I would like to add my thanks to the co-facilitators Australia and Indonesia, for their able stewardship. The progress made in this year's ECOSOC resolution confirms the importance of continually engaging in inter-governmental discussions.

This year, the resolution reaffirmed the importance of access and humanitarian principles. Progress has been made on referencing the cluster approach, as well as accountability, and the need to include acceptance as part of security risk management strategies.

The resolution highlights the need to work with local and national partners on humanitarian response and preparedness.

And it asked you – the Member States – to coordinate better with OCHA in your responses to humanitarian crises.

I look forward to continuing these discussions with you in ECOSOC and the GA - in particular on the importance of timely access; accountability to affected people, and the need to improve protection for people displaced by natural disasters. We also need to discuss how to further engage constructively in building Member States preparedness and response capacities.

I encourage you to draw on this year's Segment as you continue to engage with each other, the humanitarian community and new partners.

The more that Member States own a shared vision for principled humanitarian assistance, the better our collective response will be.

Mr. Vice President and Colleagues,

In conclusion, I hope the ideas generated during this Segment will enhance all our efforts to assist people in need.

The humanitarian system is once again in the spotlight, and we cannot afford to fail.

I would like to thank again all Members of this Council and indeed all Member States for their continued support.

I would like to thank you personally, Mr. Vice-President, for your distinguished and able leadership of this session, and for Belgium's stewardship in facilitating the ECOSOC process since February.

And finally, I would like to thank those who have worked with you, particularly the Bureau, and all those behind the scenes, notably the interpreters, who have done so much to make this year's Humanitarian Segment a success.

Thank you.