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COORDINATOR**

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**Opening Remarks at the Ninth Conference on
Effective Partnership for Better Humanitarian Aid**

Kuwait, 12 May 2024

AS DELIVERED

His Excellency Counselor Mr. Faisal Al-Ghurayeb, Minister of Justice and Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs; His Excellency Dr. Abdullah AlMatouq, President of the International Islamic Charitable Organisation and Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General,

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Asalaam aleikum. I am honoured to speak with you today and would like to thank the Government of Kuwait and the International Islamic Charitable Organisation for their steadfast support to people caught in crises worldwide.

Their leadership in convening this conference for the ninth time is a testament to their determination to reduce suffering around the world. And it comes at a critical time for the people of Gaza.

The war in Gaza has become a moral stain on the conscience of our collective humanity.

As we gather here today, the war in Gaza, now in its eighth month, has entered yet another horrifying phase.

Despite repeated appeals, Israel moved ahead with its military offensive in Rafah and seized control of the Gaza side of the Rafah and Kerem Shalom border crossings earlier this week.

As warned, this has triggered new and more challenges. These crossings are a lifeline for the delivery of humanitarian aid to Palestinians in need.

This spells further catastrophe for more than a million people who have been forcibly displaced to Rafah to escape fighting, disease and hunger elsewhere.

Seven months of fighting have turned Gaza into a hellscape for millions trapped under incessant bombardment.

The war has killed some 35,000 people; 70,000 more are wounded or missing, with many more trapped under the rubble.

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For months, women and children have been killed at a rate that exceeds any war in this century.

And those who've escaped death and injury now risk losing their lives because of a lack of food, safe water, medicine and healthcare.

Every day, scores of women give birth in horrifying conditions, often without anesthesia or medical aid, as bombs explode around them. Mothers watch their babies die in their arms because they don't have enough milk to keep them alive. And children are dying because they don't have enough food or water.

What aid makes it into Gaza is being delivered by humanitarian workers who are forced to navigate checkpoints, unexploded bombs, lawlessness and intense fighting – at tremendous risk to their own lives.

The courage of the frontline responders as they risk everything to reduce the suffering is astonishing. Doctors are refusing to abandon patients, putting their lives on the line as medical facilities are attacked. And humanitarian workers continue to work for others even as they flee their own homes.

For our part, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – or OCHA – continues to do everything it can.

We are in daily access negotiations with the parties. We are coordinating the humanitarian response. We are supporting the humanitarian community. We are advocating for the protection of civilians and respect for the laws of war at the highest level. We have pulled people out of the rubble and repatriated the bodies of aid workers, including those working for World Central Kitchen and Médecins Sans Frontières who were killed serving those in need.

OCHA also works on behalf of dozens of UN agencies and NGOs to share the coordinates of humanitarian convoys and premises so that the warring sides will not harm them. And we continue to lead humanitarian missions to northern Gaza.

We have also worked since the beginning of the conflict to continually assess the needs of the Palestinian people, which is why we're appealing for \$2.8 billion to support more than three million people in Gaza and the West Bank over the next eight months.

This war – which has caused such pain, suffering and grief – must end so that the Palestinian people can begin to confront the trauma inflicted on them.

I echo the Secretary-General's longstanding call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza, and the immediate and unconditional release of hostages.

Even in the absence of a ceasefire, there is still much we can do given the right conditions. The UN and our partners, many of whom are in this room today, deliver aid in conflict zones around the world. Gaza should be no different.

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To reach people in need, we need multiple, reliable entry points for aid. We need law and order. And humanitarian workers must be protected, and not attacked.

Until we have safe routes, the flow of aid simply will not match the enormous scale of the catastrophe.

We also need Israeli authorities to abide by their obligations to facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded access for humanitarian aid and humanitarian workers. This includes for UNRWA, which has been the backbone of the humanitarian response in Gaza for decades and is best positioned to respond to the dire needs of the Palestinian people.

Here, allow me to salute the Government of Kuwait, which, along with other important partners, came to the support of UNRWA financially and diplomatically, allowing UNRWA to continue its critical role.

Despite the immense challenges, we have strengthened our partnerships with local organizations, working hand-in-hand with our Palestinian partners to support those in need.

This has been particularly crucial when it comes to organizations led by Palestinian women working on the frontline. These organizations have access that others simply do not. We must do everything in our power to continue to support their heroic efforts to reach Gaza's women and girls, who have been forced to bear the war's very worst horrors.

When I think about what effective humanitarian partnerships are built on, I think of the shared values that define and unite the humanitarian community – our impartiality, our neutrality and our independence, even in the most politicized conflicts.

And I think of how these values emerge from a shared acknowledgment of our common humanity, a recognition that those most vulnerable to the depravities of war – the women, children, elderly and those with disabilities – must remain our focus.

So, as we gather here today, let us recall these shared values and recognize their importance – not only in meeting the urgency of today's growing needs, but also in building and strengthening the partnerships that will be needed to rebuild Gaza once the war ends.

There is complex and fraught work ahead of us. But if we can hold onto the values that unite us as humanitarians, then I know we will navigate these difficulties the best we can, in ways that ensure we continue to reach people whose lives have been shattered by a war of unimaginable horror.

I once again would like to extend my deepest appreciation to our hosts – the Government of Kuwait and the International Islamic Charitable Organisation – for bringing us together in this crucial moment for humanity.

Thank you.