

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and  
Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien**  
**Opening remarks at Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week**

*Geneva, 8 February 2017*

*As delivered*

Welcome to the third Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week (HNPW). It is a great pleasure to be here with you today to open the Inter-Network Day which brings together more than 20 humanitarian networks and other partners to discuss challenges, and they are many, innovations, also many, but very necessary in order for us to try to find the solutions when we all know that the only way to do humanitarian action today is by coming together as a collective.

I want to start by thanking our host, the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency, as well as the co-chair of this event, the UK Department for International Development, for supporting this initiative. I am truly grateful for your backing.

As you well know, today we face the highest levels of humanitarian need ever – at 130.2 million people. This is of course varying all the time, sadly it appears only to be upwards and that is primarily out of man-made conflict settings. We also have the highest number of people forcibly displaced today in world history – at 65 million souls– since the Second World War. Protracted conflicts that know no end, fast and slow-onset natural disasters, compounded by climate change, are driving these unprecedented needs.

Humanitarian funding is also higher than ever, so let's just take a moment to salute the generosity of particularly donor agencies – that is where the big money comes from - and the people of those countries that they represent. Thank you – but it is not keeping pace with the relentless rise in need, that is why we have this widening gap. Last year, humanitarian agencies received just over half of their funding needs to carry out the necessary quality response.

In this climate, it is more important than ever that we do find new tools and approaches, and new ways of working together, to meet the needs of the world's most vulnerable people.

The humanitarian eco-system continually shifts and is now made up of not only first responders, civil society, governments, UN agencies and NGOs, but also the private sector, philanthropists, Diasporas, scientists and regional actors. While the number and diversity of these actors involved make coordinating humanitarian action very complex, we recognize that it is only through inclusion that we will realize our full potential and bring about a deep and lasting impact on the lives of those we are determined to serve.

The scale and complexity of needs of our fellow human beings mean that we all know that no one of us can hope to meet those needs alone; that is why these collaborative partnerships and the approach we are taking is as strategic as it is necessary. The humanitarian eco-system values unity of purpose over competition, collaboration over non-cooperation, and diversity over uniformity – characteristics that are all too important in today's fractured world. Let us for a moment step back and if I may ask you to join me in celebrating just how far we have come in embracing this over the years.

The diversity of the humanitarian eco-system is mirrored in the networks and partnerships that have been forged by each of you in this room. Many of them were launched or expanded at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, preceded by the big, global consultations that we had in this very building in October 2015, so again we have a lot to thank the Swiss hosts for because that really paved the way. And I am here today to encourage you to further expand and strengthen these partnerships, to launch new ones and to spark ideas about how we can work together better to improve humanitarian response.

Thank you to the Member States as you still provide the bulk of support to humanitarian action, and your continued support and commitment which is essential if we are to keep up with the escalating needs.

I also welcome the representatives from the private sector. The energy, technical expertise and innovation that the private sector brings to the full spectrum of humanitarian action – from providing risk insurance to cash vouchers – was in full evidence at this year's World Economic Forum in Davos where I was just a few weeks ago, and I look forward to harnessing it together with you. You are bringing more to the table that many of us ever envisioned just a few years ago.

Over the course of this week, private sector partners will engage in thematic sessions to develop solutions to humanitarian challenges as partners and stakeholders. They will convene to discuss the business case for engaging in humanitarian action, and will identify other opportunities for collaboration through the Connecting Business Initiative (CBI), a network that was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit.

Also in the line-up, disability-focused agencies will have an opportunity to discuss progress and priorities in delivering on the Humanitarian Disability Charter. Again another brilliant initiative which was catalyzed and announced at the World Humanitarian Summit following the extensive consultations worldwide with all stakeholder, not just the Member States, in that very important global consultation that we had here in this city, being the hub of humanitarianism and the guardian of principled action for humanitarian affairs. It is that Humanitarian Disability Charter which is going to really move and make us much more alive and adjusting in our programming to meeting the needs of people with disabilities in crises in all aspects of our humanitarian action.

Representatives from members of the new Regional Organisations Humanitarian Action Network will share experiences as peers and partners on how they can help meet mounting humanitarian challenges.

Organizations working on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination will meet throughout the week to address challenges of humanitarian access, security and protection as well as civil-military coordination while upholding humanitarian principles.

And well-established emergency response networks, including INSARAG and UNDAC, will discuss how to hone quality rapid response, in full recognition that their effectiveness is founded on truly worldwide, inclusive, international cooperation.

This year, Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week will serve as a platform to take forward the Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity and its five core responsibilities. Two outcomes of the World Humanitarian Summit stand out as being of particular relevance to our work here:

The first is the signing of the Grand Bargain by many of you who are here today. By signing we have committed to work more efficiently, coordinate more effectively, to be more inclusive of a diversity of actors and to improve transparency and accountability for our performance, in exchange for greater support to meet that funding gap.

The second is the New Way of Working that many agencies and donors signed onto at the Summit, including myself, to build resilience and reduce vulnerability. This new way of working involves humanitarian, development and other actors working towards collective outcomes, with joint needs assessments, over multi-year time-frames, based on our individual and distinct strengths. Public-private partnerships will be of particular relevance to bring about sustainable approaches to building resilience at the community, society, country and regional levels.

This brings me to my final point. To bring life to these new approaches, to hold each other to account, to measure our progress and identify roadblocks, OCHA has set up the Platform for Action, Commitments and Transformation, or PACT. This is an information hub to report progress on our individual commitments to deliver on the Agenda for Humanity. I invite each of you to join today's session which will outline how you can use and contribute to the PACT, both to report on existing commitments and to log new ones.

I look forward to hearing the outcomes of the many discussions that will take place over the week. Each of them will bring us one step closer to delivering better for the world's most vulnerable people for years to come, whether in natural disasters or now, in the vast majority of man-made, conflict-driven needs in unresolved protracted crises, one on top of the other, for as long as political solutions and peace elude us and the politics which of course is in the command of Member States. Thank you all very much indeed and I appreciate the enormous commitments to our collective endeavour to meet the need of people who need us.

Thank you.