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Humanitarian affairs segment

Summary record of the 37th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 17 June 2015, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Khiari (Vice-President)..... (Tunisia)

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In the absence of Mr. Sajdik (Austria), Mr. Khiari (Tunisia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance *(continued)*

Opening of the segment

1. **The President** opened the humanitarian affairs segment of the 2015 session of the Economic and Social Council. The theme of the segment was: “The future of humanitarian affairs: towards greater inclusiveness, coordination, interoperability and effectiveness”.

Opening remarks by the President

2. **The President** noted that the humanitarian affairs segment offered a unique opportunity to consider solutions that would be better adapted to the current humanitarian crises, particularly with regard to the financing of assistance and the protection of civilians. Those issues would be addressed in two round tables. In view of the forthcoming Third International Conference on Financing for Development, United Nations Climate Change Conference and first World Humanitarian Summit, the segment was taking place in a period that was crucial to rendering humanitarian assistance more effective.

Statement by the President of the General Assembly

3. **Mr. Kutesa** (President of the General Assembly) recalled, in a recorded statement, that the post-2015 development agenda must be adopted in September 2015. The implementation of that ambitious programme, aimed at eliminating poverty, ensuring sustainable development and protecting the environment, would require joint action by the Member States and the United Nations system. The Economic and Social Council should play the crucial role of coordinating the efforts of national, international, private and public partners.

Statements on behalf of the affected people of Chad

4. **Ms. Izam** and **Mr. Saleh** reported how, in 2013, they were forced to flee violence in the Central African Republic, where they had always lived, and return to Chad, their country of origin. It was important that

humanitarian assistance, to which they still owed their survival, should not cause its beneficiaries to fall into the trap of dependence on handouts but must lead to self-sufficiency through education and employment. It was necessary to involve the affected people in the organization of assistance activities.

Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

5. **Mr. O’ Brien** (*Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator*), presenting the Secretary-General’s report entitled “Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations”, stressed the unprecedented extent of current humanitarian crises. The factors conducive to them included population increase, urban violence, intensification of migratory flows, climate change, epidemics, steeply rising prices and poor harvests. According to recent estimates, US\$ 18.8 billion would be needed to meet the humanitarian needs of 78.9 million persons in 37 countries. Despite reaching record levels in 2014, donors’ contributions totalled only 26 per cent of that amount. It was therefore crucial to redefine and diversify financing channels. To that end, the Secretary-General had established the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing. Since the duration (exceeding seven years on average), gravity and geographical dispersion of crises were on the increase, a high degree of adaptability was required of humanitarian workers, who became ever more exposed to risks.

6. Two points deserved special attention during the segment. First, the need for the United Nations to cooperate more closely with the various development actors, namely NGOs, civil society, expatriate communities and the private sector, with a view to complementarity and synergy. Multiannual crisis-management plans jointly prepared by the Governments, humanitarian actors and development partners would permit to attack the root causes of chronic crises and to meet the immediate needs. Such plans should provide for an end to the emergency phase and for a gradual withdrawal of the United Nations. Second, the growing frequency with which civilians became direct victims of armed conflicts. That trend undermined the Organization’s authority and credibility. It was necessary to promote respect for

international humanitarian law, remind countries of their obligations and ensure that they protected their civilian population and assisted the most vulnerable persons.

7. Preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit scheduled to take place in Istanbul in May 2016 were advancing well. That multi-party event would offer an opportunity to reinforce the principles governing humanitarian action.

General discussion

8. **Ms. Notutela** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, reaffirmed the attachment of those countries to the guiding principles of resolution 46/182 of the General Assembly, particularly those of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, and to respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Because of inadequate resources, developing countries were exposed considerably more to the risk of humanitarian crises. Small island developing states, in particular, were vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Welcoming the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, she called for greater international cooperation, upstream and downstream. Humanitarian assistance should not be planned as an isolated measure but as part of the realization of the right to development.

9. **Mr. Jansons** (Observer for Latvia), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Norway and Ukraine, said that the European Union, resolved to save lives and relieve human suffering, recently faced massive arrivals of displaced persons. In order to reduce the gap between the growing humanitarian assistance needs and the available resources, it was necessary to take, in addition to humanitarian assistance action, steps of a political nature. In that connection, the European Union welcomed the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing and looked forward to its recommendations. The international community had a duty to allocate more resources to humanitarian action. It was necessary to strengthen the role played by the private sector and other civil society actors with regard to financing, identify new ways of helping groups that

were victims of prolonged or recurring crises and form partnerships with the development actors so as to enhance the population's resilience in the face of disasters. Allocations to humanitarian assistance should be more predictable, given that short-term financing cycles precluded any satisfactory planning of activities.

10. **Mr. Rugema** (Observer for Rwanda), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that Africa continued to experience numerous lasting humanitarian crises which severely tested humanitarian action capacities. The ensuing lack of financial resources could seriously undermine the welfare of affected communities, displaced persons and refugees. Humanitarian coordination should not be limited to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations system and the international humanitarian organizations. In all emergency situations, the United Nations and the international organizations should coordinate their action with the States. The national authorities and the affected communities should play a key role in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. In 2016, the international community should seize the opportunity offered by the World Humanitarian Summit to consider possible linkages between humanitarian and development assistance.

11. **Mr. Isbister** (Australia) said that current crises were ever more frequently characterized by extreme violence and high vulnerability of the population, particularly women and children. The international community should consider setting up new mechanisms and adopting new methods in order to increase the resources allocated to humanitarian assistance and build capacities in that area; and should examine ways in which humanitarian organizations could further base their action on private sector practices in order to promote its effectiveness and encourage innovation. Welcoming the establishment of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing by the Secretary-General, he nevertheless noted that the international community should not limit itself to humanitarian assistance but take fundamental steps to address the crises, which often resulted from geopolitical factors, and focus both on humanitarian action and on political measures and development assistance. Lastly, Australia was highly concerned over international humanitarian law violations committed by certain parties to armed conflicts. Such violations

would continue as long as the offenders were not held accountable for their acts.

12. **Mr. Bokhari** (Pakistan) endorsed the statement made by South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Pakistan was accustomed to natural disasters causing the displacement of population groups, humanitarian crises and economic loss. Based on its experience in the area of humanitarian action, Pakistan had set up the National Disaster Management Authority, responsible for considering means to deal with disasters at the national and international levels. He encouraged the United Nations system and the humanitarian actors to seek long-term solutions to the problems related to refugees. That implied the promotion and adoption of policies aimed at improving the living conditions of displaced population groups in their native countries.

13. **Mr. Serra** (Italy) endorsed the statement made by the European Union. The international community should review the effectiveness of the measures that had taken, so as to render humanitarian assistance more effective. In 2015, the Italian Government had so far allocated €394 million to humanitarian initiatives and development assistance.

14. **Mr. Bessler** (Switzerland) said that humanitarian action should focus on the affected population groups and their needs and that efforts undertaken by the local, national and international actors should complement each other. In connection with the protection of the population, humanitarian organizations should consult with all parties to a given conflict and ensure the security of humanitarian workers. Switzerland was looking forward to hosting in Geneva, in October 2015, the Global Consultation on the World Humanitarian Summit.

15. **Ms. Godin** (Observer for Canada) expressed particular concern over the attitude of Governments and non-State actors that failed to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. In order to meet the world's current needs in humanitarian assistance, the international community must comply with the principles enshrined in international humanitarian law, broaden the range of donors, take an inclusive approach to all of its activities, seek risk reduction at all levels, enhance the population's resilience, build the capacities of the Governments and further promote the protection of the civilian population. The Canadian Government condemned

attacks against civilians. It should be recalled that all parties to an armed conflict must allow humanitarian workers to access the affected areas freely and securely.

16. **Mr. Lomonaco** (Observer for Mexico) said that, to set up a satisfactory coordination system, the international community must review the progress achieved and the difficulties encountered in the framework of humanitarian action. In particular, it was necessary to advocate and ensure respect for the fundamental humanitarian principles, establish public-private partnerships, launch innovative initiatives combining humanitarian and development assistance, focus on prevention in order to reduce the number of victims and promote development, use financial resources as effectively as possible and apply the principles of effectiveness and transparency in the area of humanitarian action.

17. **Mr. Wang Dazhong** (China) advised against militarizing humanitarian assistance, which must be provided in accordance with the beneficiary countries' legislation. There was a need to address the fundamental causes of crises, which frequently resulted in lasting poverty in the countries affected. The international community should respect the choices made by the beneficiary countries and provide them with targeted assistance according to their needs with a view to enhancing their long-term stability, resilience and capacities. In particular, technology and knowledge transfer was necessary in order to help those countries to build their infrastructure and their risk management capacities. Better coordination of humanitarian action at the regional, national and international levels was crucial. It was to be hoped that OCHA would become more transparent and finalize its work programme with the participation of the Member States. Regarding assistance to countries affected by the Ebola virus, China was fully prepared to increase its contribution to the solidarity fund against the Ebola virus outbreak and was in favour of setting up a disease control centre.

18. **Ms. Kaji** (Japan), referring to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 adopted at the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, said that her country proposed to declare 5 November as World Tsunami Awareness Day for the purpose of sensitization to such matters as the importance of early warning. Disaster risk reduction, the role of women and technological

innovation were some of the topics that Japan hoped would be treated at the World Humanitarian Summit.

19. **Mr. Henczel** (Observer for Poland) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Latvia on behalf of the European Union. Although the number and extent of humanitarian crises kept increasing, the financial resources earmarked for dealing with them were lagging behind, as the traditional donors ran out of funds. That called for structural changes, more intensive fund-raising aimed at the private sector and the mobilization of new donors. Since protection must be a cornerstone of humanitarian action, the international community should stress to all parties to a conflict their responsibility to respect all of the relevant legal frameworks, particularly international humanitarian law, human rights law and international law on refugees.

20. **Mr. Nyman** (United States) said that his country shared the concerns expressed by the Secretary-General in his report over the ongoing substantial needs for assistance and the international community's collective inability to meet them all effectively. With regard to building the capacities of humanitarian personnel, he firmly supported the timely provision of human and material resources and encouraged the United Nations to recruit qualified and experienced humanitarian workers and deploy them promptly. In view of a possible negative impact of counter-terrorism measures on humanitarian action, the United States sought dialogue with civil society in order to understand its preoccupations. His country was seriously concerned over certain paragraphs of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, particularly with regard to technology transfer.

21. **Ms. Gebremeldhin** (Finland) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Latvia on behalf of the European Union. She welcomed the recommendations formulated by the Secretary-General in his report, particularly those related to promoting greater respect for the humanitarian principles and ensuring compliance with the obligation to protect the humanitarian and medical personnel. It was necessary to improve the protection and assistance offered to displaced persons and to pay special attention to violence against women and girls during conflicts. Emphasis should be placed on resilience and on building local capacities for action.

22. **Mr. Auajjar** (Observer for Morocco) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Rwanda on behalf of the Group of African States. He firmly condemned aggression against humanitarian personnel, the obstacles to its mission, and the exploitation of the suffering of vulnerable persons, especially women and children, for political purposes. As pointed out in the Secretary-General's report, the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance hinged on the ability to access the population, particularly in order to assess its needs. Preventing the diversion of humanitarian assistance away from those who needed it was mainly the responsibility of the beneficiary countries and the humanitarian actors. The World Humanitarian Summit should focus on purely humanitarian issues and abstain from any interference with the political affairs of States.

23. **Mr. Reaich** (Observer for New Zealand) pointed out that the Asia-Pacific region was the one most prone to natural disasters, to which Europe and Africa were, respectively, 21 and 4 times less exposed. He welcomed the attention paid in the Secretary-General's report to disaster risk management and vulnerability reduction. In connection with the efforts made to meet the needs of people affected by crises in such countries as Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and in Nigeria and its neighbours because of the advance of Boko Haram, it was necessary not only to respect the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, but also to ensure that humanitarian workers had access, without undue delays, to person who needed their assistance, and were protected in carrying out their mission, in accordance with the basic principles of international humanitarian law.

24. **Mr. Choi Seokyoung** (Republic of Korea) recommended setting up effective machinery for financing humanitarian action and ensuring in particular that available resources were used on a priority basis to meet the most urgent needs. In addition to the World Humanitarian Summit, advantage should be taken of such major conferences as the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 and the United Nations Climate Change Conference in December of the same year in order to tackle world problems related both to development and to humanitarian action.

25. **Mr. Seilenthal** (Estonia) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Latvia on behalf of the European Union. The Member States, the United Nations and the humanitarian organizations should consistently condemn violations of international humanitarian law. He thus firmly supported current initiatives to promote respect for the relevant provisions and hoped that the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and the World Humanitarian Summit would permit to reaffirm the State and non-State actors' obligation to comply with those rules.

26. **Mr. Khelif** (Observer for Algeria) endorsed the statement made by the representative of South Africa on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. He supported the Secretary-General's call for better coordination of the action of humanitarian and development actors so as to allow for the unobstructed channelling of assistance to activities of recovery, reconstruction and development. Humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent and, in principle, at the request of the beneficiary States, and should respect their sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity.

27. **Mr. Çarıkçı** (Observer for Turkey) said that his country was hosting in its territory more than 1.8 million Syrian refugees and fully mobilized its resources to meet their humanitarian needs. Turkey was also engaged in humanitarian action in Iraq, setting up camps for displaced persons and providing humanitarian assistance in kind in cooperation with the local and national authorities.

28. **Ms. Reiffenstael** (Germany) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Latvia on behalf of the European Union. It was crucial to understand the role that the local actors and humanitarian partners and the affected population groups could play.

29. **Ms. Clifford** (Sweden) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Latvia on behalf of the European Union. Sweden contributed to the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and encouraged other countries to do so as well. It was an honour to sit on the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing established by the Secretary-General.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.