

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, STEPHEN O'BRIEN**

**REMARKS TO THE PRESS AHEAD OF THE WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT
22 May 2016, Istanbul**

Checked against delivery

Thank you very much indeed, Deputy Secretary-General, particularly for setting out the scene and providing us with the background. Let's be clear, however grave that may sound, that is why we need this first ever World Humanitarian Summit; officially opening tomorrow for two days, which will help bring us to a point where we can build on the best and really make the scale of change that is necessary to help meet the needs.

I do thank also, the people and the Government of Turkey for so generously hosting this conference and being strong partners as we have pulled the whole of the Summit together. I do want to pay tribute to my many fellow colleagues in the United Nations and particularly in OCHA, who have worked so hard to bring this together.

I do start, also, by sharing some recent personal experiences in the job - which indeed, the DSG once held before me. Very much part of what we have to do is to try and always have the people affected by crises front and centre of our hearts and minds at all times.

In this ever globalizing world, where we know things so quickly, we need to be able to reach the people who have the greatest vulnerability and need and the ones who are furthest behind, first. It's people caught up in crises through no fault of their own who need us to be even better at delivering the humanitarian action of food and shelter and making sure that water and sanitation and medical treatment is available to them, as well as their needs to be protected when innocent civilians are caught up in crises.

On my way here, I came, quite deliberately, via the Lake Chad Basin, in Western Central Africa, where I went to Diffa on the border with Nigeria, which is in Niger, where hundreds of thousands of people have gathered across a stream of water in a lean season over which many people have had to flee because of the brutal activities of Boko Haram. Yet, at the same time, in an area which was already deeply challenged by the huge scarcity of resources brought about by climate and weather effect. So here you have a confluence of all the contributory factors that lead to humanitarian need.

Then I went just across the border to Maiduguri [in Nigeria], and I met a large number of people both in the host communities of those who have been internally displaced and those who had to flee when eleven months ago, they were torched out of their homes. Mustafa, who was a barber,

arrived with ten family members and he was so grateful for the place of safety. But, deep down he wanted the chance to go home, to a secure home. The same with Ameena and all the women who were looking after their children, concerned to get the next meal and at the moment, being provided with one meal a day. So these are the stories which of course, we carry with us, when it's man-made or natural hazard disaster that has arisen.

Likewise, I was in Ecuador just 40 hours or so after the earthquake and seeing the devastation in Pedernales and what it means to have to pick up the pieces and to help people be rescued. That's what humanitarians, the world over, within the United Nations and beyond, are dedicated to achieving and so, the opportunity for us all to gather together, and to meet and speak with affected people from around the world, makes us all more determined to deliver a success here at this Summit.

So let us not underestimate the gravity of what lies before us in the coming days. This is a once in a generation opportunity to set in motion an ambitious and far-reaching agenda to change the way that we alleviate, and most importantly, that we prevent the suffering of the world's most vulnerable people.

When UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for this World Humanitarian Summit four years ago, he indeed recognized that the status quo could not continue. Since then, we have consulted with 23,000 people in over 150 countries and it has taken us right across the world, in eight regional consultations and various thematic consultations. So have really built up all the information, the data, the demands, the ambitions, not just of course of Member States as representatives of the United Nations, very much part of our overall drivers of information and demand, but also the stakeholders who deliver for the affected communities themselves.

We have the momentum to build towards the Summit, which will provide a launch pad, the rocket fuel, for new initiatives of these commitments to action, which are being made and will be made through the Summit, which is going to be both the fresh thinking and building on the best, and the change that's necessary to deliver for our fellow men and women who need us most.

So, I do call upon the world leaders, be they of States or of organizations, be they NGOs or civil society organizations or the private sector, to make sure that we try here in Istanbul to give us the platform where we turn the Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity into the reality for the people who need us.

That will come through concrete commitments, for instance, making sure that we can really deliver education in emergencies or we can deliver in urban environments. These will be the things which are concrete, which we very much want to examine and report on, like the Disability Charter, where often it is the most vulnerable [people] left behind. That will be something coming out of the Summit and will be able to be actioned in the coming days and months.

We must be ready to change, we must be ready to adapt and, above all, we must live up to our responsibility, collectively and individually, to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people. This opportunity that we get with this Summit, is one which we must grasp with both hands, to really make a difference for the people who most need us all.

Thank you.