

Sir John Holmes, Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

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Opening Remarks

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests and fellow humanitarians,

I am delighted to join you here in Dubai for this important conference, and would like to take this opportunity to thank His Highness Sheikh Mohammed, on behalf of the international humanitarian community, for his continued support to DIHAD and for the outstanding initiative and leadership that he has shown in humanitarian and charitable causes worldwide, most recently through the enormously successful 'Dubai Cares'.

DIHAD is distinguished as much by its inclusive nature - with representatives from governments, the Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, UN actors and the private sector and civil society - as for the quality of the discussions in which you engage. In my comments, I shall endeavor to match Dubai's reputation for forward-looking approaches to the many challenges we will face in the future, which of course is the theme of this fifth annual DIHAD conference, and one that I very much welcome.

Dubai's role as a hub of innovation makes it an ideal location for such an event, for if we are to meet today's growing humanitarian needs, let alone those of tomorrow, we must go well beyond the current conventional capacities of humanitarian actors. And as the overwhelming success of the 'Dubai Cares' initiative demonstrates, the desire to help those in need truly does extend across all cultural, commercial and political boundaries. Under the leadership of HH Sheikh Mohammed, and with the active involvement from corporations, schools, public and private individuals, this initiative was able to raise an astonishing \$3.4 billion to help improve the lives of children around the world

And more widely, let me commend the role played by OIC Member States, the Red Crescent Societies, and Muslim NGOs in providing assistance to tens of millions of people in every corner of the globe. From Afghanistan to Indonesia, Kosovo to Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq, Bangladesh and beyond, your combined humanitarian efforts have made a life-saving difference, reaching communities that, at times, the UN and other aid actors could not.

Your regional contribution to the UN does not of course end there. In peacemaking, as with humanitarian aid, development, climate change and other key UN endeavors, Muslim nations have invested both manpower and resources in the UN. Indeed roughly one-half of all UN peacekeepers come from Muslim countries.

Over the years, governments and NGOs throughout the region have provided generous levels of bilateral assistance to communities in crisis. According to our figures, over the past three years (2006-2008), the countries of the GCC have given a combined total of **\$488 million**

and pledged a further \$320 million in humanitarian aid. Unfortunately, there is too often a lack of clarity about bilateral donations and some of this generosity is too often not reflected in official multilateral donor tallies, and hence remains unrecognized by the wider international community.

There is a role for well-targeted bilateral aid, based on need. But I am concerned that many countries, in this region and elsewhere, underestimate the fundamental value – and benefits – that come with the multilateral humanitarian approach, as well as the responsibilities this approach carries with it. We need to strike the right balance between bilateral and multilateral engagement and bilateral and multilateral giving. Without this balance there is also a risk that perceptions of humanitarian assistance as principally a western enterprise – however incorrect these are – will be reinforced.

In the eyes of the United Nations, nothing could be farther from the truth. The humanitarian enterprise must be for all, from all. Your talents, dedication, knowledge and capabilities are crucial to building a more fully representative humanitarian movement, one that is universally accepted and hence better equipped to meet the challenges posed by both man and nature in the 21st century. The Secretary General's Special Humanitarian Envoy to the region, Mr. Abdul Aziz Arrukban, has a crucial part to play in this respect. The first Gulf Arab person to take on this critical role, he is working hard with our full support to strengthen partnerships between regional actors and the UN.

Common Values and Common Interests

Why do I say all this? Because what unites us as humanitarians – the values of compassion and humanity toward the most vulnerable, as expressed in Islam and all major Abrahamic faiths – is much stronger than anything that might divide us. Our shared belief in these values far outweighs any political and cultural differences. Humanitarianism is a universal concept that applies to all people at all times, rooted in the core principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality.

Nevertheless, in my own travels to places like Sudan, Somalia and Iraq, I have sometimes been struck by the depth of the suspicion and mistrust with which some people regard the humanitarian endeavor. I have also been surprised to see how little many official interlocutors know about international humanitarian efforts and the role of the UN. I am convinced we need to redouble our efforts to explain what we do and why we do it, the values that underpin our work, and the principles of neutrality and impartiality that guide us. We need a much more systematic effort to explain modern humanitarianism, and to address head-on suspicions about hidden political agendas.

This is where the importance of partnerships comes in, and in particular, the value of multilateral frameworks for providing aid in an accountable, transparent and coordinated manner that enables the most lives to be saved and ensures donor contributions have maximum impact in the struggle to alleviate mass suffering, in particular, by identifying and supporting the most urgent and important priorities.

And I hope the UN's impartiality is not in doubt when it comes to where we give humanitarian assistance, not least from a religious point of view. For example, Muslim populations in need have been very important in the UN's humanitarian assistance efforts. Since 1992, some **25%** (\$10 billion of \$39 billion) of all the UN's humanitarian funds raised through our annual consolidated appeals have gone to assisting Muslim countries. If we include countries and regions that are partially Muslim, for example Sudan and West Africa, that figure increases to around \$23 billion **or nearly 60% of all the monies raised** by the UN for humanitarian work.

Strengthening Humanitarian Action

We are all gathered here in Dubai today for the same reason: because we want to strengthen humanitarian action, whether as humanitarians, working on the frontlines of war and disaster, or as vital partners, working behind the scenes to make this kind of life-saving assistance possible.

In recent years, my office, OCHA, has helped launch several initiatives designed to improve the reliability, speed and effectiveness of international humanitarian aid. These efforts fall into four broad categories: strengthened humanitarian partnerships; more predictable funding; better sectoral coordination to improve coherence and minimize gaps; and improved on-the-ground leadership from better trained UN humanitarian and resident coordinators.

On the funding side, the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund, which OCHA manages, is a major new resource, aimed to reach \$500 million every year, that has transformed our ability to respond quickly and also equitably to crises of all kinds. It has helped to save many lives, and enabled us to direct much needed resources to some of the more neglected, under-funded emergencies. In particular, the CERF helped us to respond quickly and fairly to the plethora of climate-related disasters last year by kick-starting the international response. I am particularly proud of the more than 90 country donors the CERF now has, but we still need to broaden and deepen further the donor base of this vital international fund.

And let us be candid. We are likely to need much more than current resources to help us meet what I believe will be a likely dramatic escalation in humanitarian needs in the coming years, in particular from current compounded threats such as climate change and structural food and energy price rises. I will come back to this in a moment. And we will need to up our game in nearly every other area as well, from common needs assessments and improved data analysis to strengthened early warning efforts, for example in areas like climate modeling, bolstered response capacity, and greater investment in disaster risk reduction efforts. We need in particular to strengthen the ability of local and national governments, who of course retain primary responsibility and are always the first responders, to prepare for and respond to disasters and crises. This must become a much greater priority in the future, as part of a general change of attitudes and culture, with less arrogance from us on the international side, and more advance cooperation and partnership with local governments and local actors of all kinds.

The Critical Value of Partnerships

I say this in particular because one of the most important initiatives we have undertaken, and one of the four pillars of reform I have already referred to, is that of strengthening partnerships. I think we can all agree that strengthening humanitarian partnerships and networks within the region, and between the Middle East and other regions, represents a win-win situation for all involved. The benefits are clear. The international humanitarian system will be strengthened through greater cooperation. The United Nations humanitarian contribution will be reinforced and diversified. And the governments and aid agencies in the Middle East will be better able to tap --and track -- international resources, help set the agenda, and generate well-deserved international recognition for their humanitarian activities.

Since we opened a regional office here in Dubai in 2005 we have been encouraged by the growing interest in humanitarian collaboration, as well as some early-stage coordination efforts. We also value the excellent working relationship we have with Red Crescent organizations of the UAE and other Gulf States. We have had numerous frank and constructive dialogues with charitable organizations from the Arab-Muslim world, which has enabled us better to understand specific challenges faced by our Muslim partners in this difficult, post- 9/11 environment. A recent OIC-sponsored meeting of humanitarian organizations in Dakar, in which we participated, was particularly helpful in sharing views. But we need to do much better.

The point is that the need to forge stronger partnerships, based on the principles of equality and mutual respect, is anything but a rhetorical platitude. It is a simple, practical necessity. In a world ever more inter-connected, and with a humanitarian community that is ever more diverse and numerous, cooperation is essential to ensure that the impact of our efforts is greater than the sum of its parts.

To that end, last summer we convened the first-ever Global Humanitarian Platform, an initiative that brought together some 40 NGOs, Red Crescent/Red Cross societies and UN agencies as equal partners seeking to improve collaboration, and agreed key principles of partnership on this basis. Going forward, we hope to strengthen the participation of many of the organizations in this region in this and other partnership initiatives.

What does partnership building mean? Firstly, it means we start by giving credit where credit is due. Governments and organizations in the region are best placed to know how things work – and don't work - on the local level. We also pay tribute to the Red Crescent Societies and other Muslim NGOs who are often the first responders in crises. These courageous aid workers serve as bridge builders to the community, for they know the local culture and coping mechanisms, and can best articulate the principles that underpin international humanitarian action.

Secondly, not only do we recognize your unique strengths, we realize how much we need to learn from you in order to build a more universally accepted and effective humanitarian movement. Dialogues premised on mutual respect and equality, such as those conducted here at DIHAD, are a vital step in this direction.

Let me also touch on the private sector for a moment, for it is becoming an increasingly important partner for the humanitarian community. International business leaders are quickly realizing that in a global economy with 24/7 telecommunications, the corporate backyard is,

quite literally, the world. A disaster local in origin can quickly become national or even global in impact, potentially affecting their ability to operate, their employees, supply chains, customers and brand reputation in numerous far-flung places across the planet. And many of those companies and their employees also want to help actively.

That is why the last few years have seen a tremendous upsurge in private sector engagement in global humanitarian relief efforts with companies such as DHL, Ericsson, TNT, Nokia, and many others supporting operations with vitally-needed resources and know-how. In this region, the recent 'Masdar' initiative is an example of the private sector engagement's with some of most pressing issues of our day, including climate change and sustainable human development. However, I am convinced we are only scratching the surface of what the private sector can offer. We must put our heads together and see how we might leverage our combined strengths more effectively.

The Road Ahead

Finally, with the potential represented by these partnerships firmly in mind, let me briefly sketch out some of the larger humanitarian trends as I see them over the next few years, and what we need to do today to get in front of these trends.

In my view, the global demand for humanitarian assistance, which is already considerable, is likely to grow in the coming decade, and to see a major increase in our lifetimes. The biggest single cause, for my money, will be climate change, and the increased incidence and severity of extreme weather events associated with it.

Indeed, we are beginning to feel the effects: last winter, large swathes of Central Asia were devastated by the most severe weather for nearly three decades. Cyclone Gonu, which hit the Gulf coast last June, was one of the most severe cyclones ever to hit this part of the world. What we are witnessing is not an aberration, but rather a 'curtain raiser' on the future. These events are not abnormal; they're what I call the 'new normal'. The number of recorded disasters has doubled from approximately 200 to over 400 per year over the past two decades. Nine of out every ten disasters are now climate related. Last year, my office at the U.N. issued an unprecedented 15 funding appeals for sudden natural disasters, five more than the previous annual record. 14 of them were climate-related.

Compounding the challenges of climate change, in what some have labeled the "perfect storm," are the recent dramatic trends in soaring food and fuel prices, which are poised to have a major impact on hunger and poverty across the world and are having an immediate impact on the cost of humanitarian operations. Since mid-2007, food prices have risen an estimated 40% as a confluence of factors have increased demand. These factors include rapid global population growth, ever greater numbers of people eating resource-intensive foods such as meat and milk, bio-fuel production, shortage of reserves, and increasing oil prices. Current food price trends are likely to increase sharply both the incidence and depth of food insecurity; and as many households will spend more on food to the detriment of other household needs, price rises will also result in lower school attendance rates, poorer health care and asset depletion. The security

implications should also not be underestimated as food riots are already being reported across the globe.

We have to ask the question: are we properly prepared for this? Not only are we adequately prepared for the next big storm or flood or drought that devastates countless lives and livelihoods, but also how close are we to a generalized crisis of hunger and malnutrition? How exposed is the global emergency system to overload and failure? More to the point, are the tens of millions of people living in impoverished, drought and disaster-prone areas ready? Because in the cruel calculus of natural disasters, it is always the poorest who are most vulnerable and least able to withstand the impact of a crisis.

My aim in saying all this is not to create a sense of doom and despair. On the contrary, my point is that we have the means to tackle all these issues, if we have the will. What we need to do above all is to start investing in the concrete, practical risk reduction measures that can help save lives and livelihoods. It is going to take all of our combined efforts to prepare and mitigate their effects. To that end, we must build on and develop lasting and substantive partnerships across *all* nations and sectors.

The good news is that some steps in this direction are already occurring. We are strengthening our collaboration with regional actors for contingency planning purposes. We're continuing to ramp-up joint training activities for disaster preparedness and response. And governments, the UN, NGOs, and private sector actors in the region are beginning to highlight the potentially devastating effects of climate change, not least desertification and water stress, through strengthened research and advocacy activities. Some of the countries in this region are already at the forefront of finding innovative methods for preparing against natural disasters. I would encourage these countries to transfer this knowledge and also to invest in building the capacity of disaster prone nations to respond to humanitarian challenges themselves.

But I fear we are also going to need more global resources to tackle these challenges, to find innovative ways of raising these vitally-needed additional funds, and to make sure that these extra resources are spread evenly across the sectors. Allocations must not be devoted exclusively to the most visible aspect of this new demand i.e. meeting immediate food needs, but also to health, emergency education, etc. So the UN, NGOs and donors – both public and private - must continue to work together to increase the level of resources coming from both new and broader sources of funding, not least from the private sector, and to set appropriate priorities. We also need to continue to work on the diversity of funding mechanisms, in addition to core contributions to agencies and NGOs.

In this respect, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF) in Sudan and the DRC, and the numerous smaller, emergency response pooled funds have in my view contributed significantly to the aim of strengthening the timeliness, effectiveness and predictability of relief, and of re-enforcing coherent and well-coordinated humanitarian action. But we must stay aware of new developments in the funding environment. These range from the increased multisectoral financial needs of emergency operations to the programmatic shifts from use of surplus commodities to a much greater utilization of cash-based food assistance. We should also consider seriously the innovative research now under way on insurance-based solutions to cope with measurable natural hazards, such as droughts that afflict particular areas.

Of course, we will always have human conflicts to contend with in addition to nature's hazards. The good news is that wars between States have diminished. On the other hand, it's not at all good news that various kinds of internal or civil conflict appear to be on the increase. Not only are civilian populations the main victims of these conflicts, they are too often actively used as pawns for political purposes by those promoting conflict. Certainly respect for international humanitarian principles and basic international humanitarian law – the responsibility to protect innocent civilians – sometimes seems at an all-time low in key hotspots, for example Sudan, Somalia and Gaza.

The crisis in Darfur is now five years old, with no immediate end in sight to the violence, pillage and displacement, despite the deployment of the UNAMID force, which will inevitably take time to build its real strength. A staggering 2.4 million people are now displaced. Two-thirds of the population require some form of humanitarian assistance. The world's largest aid operation, comprising more than 13,000 humanitarian workers, the vast majority Sudanese, is struggling to cope with fatigue exacerbated by continued harassment, car-jackings and targeted attacks on humanitarian workers.

What may surprise some of you is that the number of displaced in Darfur is comparable to the number of internally displaced people in Iraq. While many are aware of the suffering of civilians in Darfur, it saddens me to see that the daily threats faced by Iraqis, exacerbated, of course, by the ongoing violence, are still under-reported and under-estimated.

In Somalia too, some 1.5 million people are expected to be in need of assistance this year – a 50% increase from last year. And in the West Bank and Gaza, the UN is now on its sixth decade of providing aid to the Palestinians in the absence of a political resolution to the Middle East conflict. In February, I visited Gaza. I saw how some 1.5 million people are living in what must seem like a giant open-air prison in which 80% of the population relies on UN food aid. Of course, citizens in the West Bank, as well as those in towns in southern Israel, are also not immune from repeated violence and suffering. International humanitarian law is regularly violated by both sides. But a solution cannot come from collective punishment of populations or violence which only increases despair and alienation.

And when it comes to these conflicts born of human causes, one fact stands out again and again. Humanitarian relief is no substitute for political action and the active search for conflict prevention and resolution. Which is why as humanitarians we must go on pressing the politicians for more proactive searches for solutions, and not to succumb to passivity while we keep the victims alive.

The Road Ahead: Meeting the Challenges Together

So where do we go from here?

Despite the severity of these challenges, perhaps the greatest risk that we as a humanitarian community face is not from nature itself, but from human nature. In other words, the greatest risk is our ingrained habit of not acting radically and courageously ahead of time,

before disaster or conflict occurs, be it a cyclone or flood, or a human pressure cooker about to boil over, like in Gaza or as we saw recently in Kenya.

The lesson is that working together, we must redouble our efforts and work together even more cohesively not only to respond to crises, but also to reduce vulnerability to crises -- both the chronic, so-called silent emergencies and those that strike suddenly. If we are to meet the growing array of humanitarian needs, we must harness the energies and goodwill of all humanitarian actors, including NGOs from Muslim and other nations, as well as regional partners, including the OIC, the African Union, the League of Arab States and the GCC.

As this region's growing engagement in humanitarian issues demonstrates, great things can be achieved when compassion is transformed into action. In an era defined by a changing climate and the ever-present menace of conflict, no single humanitarian agency or set of agencies can cover all humanitarian needs. Collaboration is not an option, it is a necessity. Because only by working together can we further our ability to alleviate suffering, and help to restore a measure of hope and humanity to a world sorely in need of both.