

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

Statement for the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

14 November 2023

Honourable Members,

It brings me immense pleasure to be here in Dublin and have the opportunity to address the esteemed members of the Committee. Ireland holds a unique and longstanding partnership with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Over the past two days, we engaged in fruitful discussions with our valued partner, Irish Aid, the Department for Foreign Affairs, and Irish non-governmental organizations. These meetings have allowed us to delve into critical global humanitarian issues, exchange perspectives, and discuss our accomplishments and priorities. It has been an invaluable opportunity to strengthen our collaboration and partnership.

The foundation of OCHA's mandate lies in UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 of 1991 which outlines our role in coordinating the global humanitarian response, shaping humanitarian policy, and advocating on behalf of the humanitarian community. Guided by the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence, we collaborate with Member States and humanitarian actors worldwide to deliver life-saving assistance to those in need.

The world's humanitarian challenges continue to intensify at unprecedented levels, with a staggering 25 million more people in need of assistance and protection today than at the beginning of the year. In total, about 365 million people now require humanitarian aid and protection, and we have set the ambitious goal of addressing the needs of 250 million among them.

It comes as no surprise that these figures have reached such alarming levels. Conflicts persist or deteriorate, and the current horrific humanitarian catastrophe in the occupied Palestinian Territory is just one example. New crises also strike swiftly and severely, as shown by the earthquakes in Türkiye, Syria and Afghanistan, and floods in Libya and other regions this year. Meanwhile, the global climate crisis ravages the globe with relentless force, all unfolding against the backdrop of the economic and social damage inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The financial resources required to address humanitarian needs this year have soared to nearly US\$56 billion. However, despite the generosity of donors such as Ireland, we have managed to secure only 33 per cent of this amount. This shortfall compels our humanitarian partners to confront increasingly difficult choices regarding which programs to support, with even life-saving activities at risk of budget cuts.

Our collective response is approaching a critical juncture, and I would like to highlight three key reasons for this:

First, we face a dire resource deficit. The gap between humanitarian needs and available funding continues to widen. In the past five years, global humanitarian requirements have nearly doubled, surging from \$27.8 billion in 2019 to \$55.5 billion in 2023. However, as of the end of September

2023, we had received less funding compared to the same period in 2022. Humanitarian financing relies on a limited pool of just 20 donors, with the top 5 donors covering 65 per cent of the funding. Regrettably, the outlook for 2024 appears even more challenging, setting the stage for the most austere financial climate in recent years. This will inevitably result in program closures at a time when expansion is indispensable.

Second, the regions in which we operate are becoming increasingly volatile and complex. According to ICRC, last year, there were 524 armed groups of humanitarian concern globally, controlling or influencing areas where approximately 175 million people resided. Additionally, we confront formidable obstacles in many regions, as some governments impose bureaucratic and administrative impediments that hinder our ability to reach their own people in need.

Third, we find ourselves being tasked with an expanding scope of responsibilities, often venturing into areas where our expertise is limited. With today's protracted crises, in many instances, with authorities – whether de facto or otherwise – that certain segments of the international community are reluctant to engage with, the humanitarian community is increasingly expected to provide systems and services that traditionally fall under the purview of governments.

In this context, the significance of OCHA's mandate has never been more important, and our commitment to stay and deliver in challenging crises remains unwavering. To give some examples from the past year, in Yemen, OCHA played a crucial role in mobilizing international efforts, averting a potential catastrophic environmental emergency by facilitating the replacement of the Safer oil tanker. In Syria, OCHA's efforts resulted in the continuation of vital humanitarian cross-border operations, even following the nonrenewal of the Security Council resolution for cross-border aid to north-west Syria. In Afghanistan, OCHA ensured that women and girls continued to have access to humanitarian assistance despite restrictions on women participation in aid delivery by the de facto authorities. In Ukraine, OCHA played an instrumental role in coordinating the implementation of the Black Sea Initiative which allowed about 33 million metric tons of Ukrainian food exports to reach global markets. OCHA acted as the Secretariat for the Joint Coordination Center of the Initiative in Istanbul.

Our coordination role significantly enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian responses. Recognizing that 20 per cent of crises can be anticipated, OCHA takes the lead in coordinating 'anticipatory action' and allocates funding to deliver assistance before these crises unfold. This proactive approach not only mitigates the impact of crises but also enhances overall efficiency. Hunger, floods, droughts, and diseases (Cholera) are among the crises that we 'proactively' respond to with our anticipatory action.

We actively engage in diplomatic efforts and negotiations to secure humanitarian access. Our civil-military coordination teams and humanitarian negotiations experts engage with militaries, de facto authorities, and non-state armed groups to negotiate access and aid besieged or hard-to-reach communities.

OCHA manages the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and country-based pooled funds to deliver timely life-saving assistance where it is most urgently required. By early November of this year, CERF had allocated \$610 million to UN agencies and partners to provide assistance and protection across 40 countries. Some examples include the response to the earthquake in Syria and Türkiye, actions to address rising food insecurity and looming famine across 28 countries,

and most recently, contribution to the response to the escalating humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. With unearmarked funding from generous donors like Ireland last year, CERF provided life-saving assistance to 32.7 million people across 42 countries

The country-based pooled funds also play a crucial role in providing effective humanitarian assistance in 19 of the most challenging crises worldwide. Donors contribute flexible funding to these funds, channelled through OCHA, which is then allocated to local and international NGOs as well as UN agencies. By prioritizing local implementing partners like community-based organizations and NGOs, OCHA empowers communities to take charge of their own situations. Their involvement includes contributing to the identification of their needs and actively participating in the implementation and monitoring of the humanitarian response. Last year, and with the generous contribution of Ireland, the funds provided assistance to 47 million people.

Since 2015, OCHA has allocated more than \$120 million from the country based pooled funds to major Irish NGOs such as Trócaire, Goal, Concern, Self Help Africa and others across the globe.

Unearmarked funding for OCHA's core program provides the essential flexibility to swiftly mobilize resources to places and countries where it might otherwise be challenging to respond promptly. For instance, when the earthquake struck Syria and Turkey earlier in the year, both offices were significantly underfunded, with barely 30 percent funding in place. A similar situation unfolded in Libya, where we were operating with less than one-quarter of the required funding. In such critical scenarios, the value of unearmarked funding becomes evident, enabling OCHA to deploy within 24 hours.

In alignment with our Strategic Plan, OCHA is committed to drive transformation within the humanitarian system, with a primary focus on enhancing efficiency, fostering innovation, and upholding accountability to the people we serve. In this regard, OCHA is leading a process of reform of how the humanitarian system prioritizes needs, empowers local communities, strengthens anticipatory action, and promotes localization. This process includes piloting an initiative in four countries to empower affected populations to assume a central role in the design of aid programs, thereby bolstering their resilience.

Ultimately, humanitarian action is only ever a short-term solution. It cannot stand alone. Climate change, conflict, and economic instability pose existential challenges that demand improved international collaboration and synergy among the humanitarian, development, and peace sectors. We require increased funding for climate adaptation and political resolutions to conflicts. On climate, OCHA will establish a climate window within CERF which will allow donors to channel climate financing through CERF. I thank Ireland for its commitment to significantly increase its climate financing which will be pivotal in addressing climate-related challenges.

Therefore, the global humanitarian needs demand unwavering commitment from governments, donors, and the humanitarian community at large. It is our shared responsibility to advocate for and actively contribute to alleviating the suffering of those affected by crises around the globe. OCHA will remain committed to coordinating the global response on behalf of the humanitarian system to deliver on its mandate despite all the challenges.

I would like to conclude by expressing my deep appreciation for Ireland's substantial contributions to the humanitarian system and active involvement in alleviating suffering. Whether

it is in Africa, the Sahel, or the Middle East, your contributions have been crucial in increasing our reach to affected communities.

I also wish to convey our gratitude for your steadfast support to OCHA. Starting with your leadership in the OCHA Donor Support Group and the CERF Advisory Group, you have garnered strong support to OCHA's role and mandate, and you continue to do so. Your flexible financial contributions to our core program and the pooled funds greatly enhance our agility and response capacity. They allow us to expand our operational footprint as needed or quickly shift resources when sudden needs arise such as those caused by floods. Your contributions to the pooled funds also allow us to continue working with local and international NGOs to enhance our collective ability to drive the localization agenda, empower local communities and build resilience.

The world continues to count on principled donors like Ireland.

Thank you