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Your Excellency, Sheik Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al-Thani,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the State of Qatar for its generous hospitality.

This international conference comes at a particularly opportune moment and my thanks to Qatar, Turkey and the Dominican Republic for co-sponsoring it.

Last year, more than one natural disaster with humanitarian consequences – small and large – occurred per day, causing the death of nearly 297,000 people, affected almost 208 million others and resulted in an estimated \$110 billion in damages.

This year is no different and it is clear that there will be more in the future. Conflict, population growth, rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, water shortages, increasing food prices and climate change are just some of the trends leading to larger, more severe and more complex humanitarian emergencies than ever before.

In addition, more governments are becoming engaged in international humanitarian efforts and there has also been a proliferation in the number and diversity of actors responding to disasters. Affected people will want to have more say in how to meet their own needs as they become more informed about what is available and more aware of their rights. The participation of regional organizations in humanitarian action has already increased and is expected to grow further in the future.

To address these challenges, we need to strengthen and reform the current response system. We need to be more strategic. We need to increase accountability. We need to be better prepared. And we need to use all the resources at our disposal, building new partnerships, including with the military. And we need more robust coordination.

The appropriate role for the military in humanitarian response has been the subject of ongoing debate and discussion. This debate has become even more pertinent in the last few years as humanitarian crises have become more complex with a potent mix of conflict and natural disasters occurring simultaneously in some countries.

Over the last two years, the devastating earthquakes in Haiti, Japan and Turkey as well as the disastrous flooding that affected Pakistan demonstrated how national and international military forces can provide invaluable support to improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian response.

It is clear that in many disasters around the world, domestic and foreign militaries are playing and continue to play a significant and increasing role, doing excellent life-saving work in record time.

The military can often move more quickly, on a larger scale and in more difficult conditions than most civilian or humanitarian organizations.

However, the presence of militaries during humanitarian emergencies can also complicate matters, making our work more difficult when we work in conflict situations – or complex emergencies – or in natural disasters occurring in complex emergency settings.

The core principles that underpin humanitarian work – neutrality, impartiality, and operational independence – are particularly important when we work in those complex settings and where there may be many parties to a conflict. It is vital that we remain neutral and are perceived to be so. We cannot take sides as our job is to help everyone in need.

That is why it is so important that we reach a common understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of military and civilian actors during humanitarian emergencies, and define the rules of engagement.

For instance, the Haiti and Pakistan operations in 2010 showed the importance of developing a common understanding of civil-military coordination and use of military and civil defence assets as part of preparedness and contingency planning.

The fact that national civil-military guidelines were developed in Pakistan prior to the 2010 floods largely contributed to the successful civil-military interface at the national level and quicker, more efficient decision-making to accept or refuse offers of foreign military assets based on needs.

In Haiti, on the other hand, the lack of prior understanding or agreements led to confusion, ineffective coordination structures, and delayed decision making, with foreign military and civil defence assets being either not used or used in an inefficient manner.

Based on these and other experiences over the past two decades, we have made great progress in providing a structured, principled framework for humanitarian civil-military coordination. For instance with internationally recognised guidelines, the formation of the Consultative Group on the use of military and civil defence assets, and OCHA's Civil-Military coordination function.

However, despite these developments, there are areas which require further work.

We need to improve the understanding of the different cultures within the two communities, the appropriateness of the capacities and capabilities of the humanitarian

community and the military units deployed, and the ability of affected States to effectively integrate foreign military and civil defence assets in national responses.

We also need to ensure that the “right” type of units and assets are deployed and that there is appropriate training to facilitate transition from reliance on military assets to civilian capacities.

That is why this initiative - led by Qatar with the Dominican Republic and Turkey, to look at ways in which we can improve the effectiveness and coordination of military and civil defence assets deployed in support of the response to natural disasters - is so crucial.

And important decisions have already been made, for example that new initiatives in the field of humanitarian-military coordination should support and complement, but not duplicate or compete with the current international humanitarian response structure.

The clear support expressed for a needs-based approach to humanitarian operations, as well as for the principles and concepts contained in the Oslo, MCDA and other guidelines, is very welcome.

Of particular importance is the principle of last resort, which states that humanitarian organizations should only request the use of military assets when those assets are unique in capability or availability. We all recognise that given the complexities of many operating environments, this is a key principle which needs to be upheld.

I am pleased to see that the Conference outcome document stresses the core role of training, exercises, policy development, and operational capacity and preparedness – with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of the use of military and civil defence assets to support humanitarian missions.

There has also been an extremely constructive discussion on establishing regional Centres of Excellence for humanitarian civil-military coordination to promote at the regional and international levels a common understanding of and respect for principled engagement in disaster response, ensuring that the use of military and civil defence assets is more effective in supporting humanitarian assistance.

Your Excellency, I welcome Qatar’s decision to host a centre here in Doha. It will add significant value to on-going work in this area.

And we at OCHA, continuing our advisory role to the HOPEFOR initiative, stand ready to support this centre as an essential vehicle for training, policy dialogue and the regional sharing of experiences.

We also look forward to further discussion on strengthening global and regional networks of civil-military coordination practitioners. This conference is an important step in the process of building an improved, strengthened humanitarian system.

I thank Turkey for agreeing to host the next conference.

It is clear that in today’s world, no one government, no one agency, no one aid organization can address crises alone.

If we are to meet the challenges which will continue to face us, we have to find new ways of sharing ideas, pooling resources and working together.

An effective relationship between humanitarian organizations and militaries, based on shared principles and a clear understanding of our respective roles is crucial, and this conference and its outcomes provide a significant step in this regard.

Thank you.