

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS TO HIGH-LEVEL PLEDGING CONFERENCE FOR THE CENTRAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND

New York, 8 December 2020

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you in support of the Central Emergency Response Fund.

The CERF is unique. It is quick and non-bureaucratic, and it is sometimes the only source of funds for a true emergency response, because other funding may be too late to be effective.

CERF is the instrument that enables us to act in forgotten crises that do not attract donor funding. And it is an important tool to bring the entire United Nations system together.

When I was High Commissioner for Refugees, I used the CERF many times to fund emergency action for refugees.

Humanitarian action must be principled, coordinated, fast and agile. The CERF delivers consistently on all these fronts.

It fosters joint action across the United Nations system, from analysis of needs, to coordinated planning and prioritization.

This enables United Nations humanitarian agencies and their partners to act together, quickly and at scale.

In the chaos of a humanitarian emergency, that makes an enormous difference.

CERF funding is one of the most effective ways to help people trapped in sudden and deteriorating crises.

It reaches the under-funded emergencies that have fallen off the world's radar – or were never on it. In 2020, CERF provided a record \$225 million to 20 underfunded and neglected crises.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

This has been a year like no other. The COVID-19 pandemic has added another layer of suffering, on top of existing crises caused by conflict and the intensifying impacts of climate change.

In this very difficult environment, the CERF was a resounding success.

In 2020, it gave more than \$820 million to fund life-saving assistance to people in 52 countries.

This is the highest amount ever allocated in a single year, appropriately for this year of unprecedented crisis – and a testament to the commitment of its donors.

Swift support from the CERF to combat devastating swarms of desert locusts in the Horn of Africa helped the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization scale up its control efforts.

When air strikes and shelling in Syria forced nearly 600,000 people from their homes, CERF helped humanitarian agencies provide emergency shelter, food and water.

When Ebola broke out once again in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, CERF supported health services to track cases and provide treatment.

And within days of the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic, CERF was helping to buy protective equipment, stock hospitals, establish supply chains and logistics hubs, and launch information campaigns.

As the effects of the pandemic accumulated in vulnerable countries, CERF allocated \$220 million to provide life-saving assistance to 65 million people across 48 countries.

CERF also responded to the secondary effects of the crisis.

It allocated \$100 million to seven countries in Africa and the Middle East to support people at risk of hunger.

And this year, CERF allocated a record \$65 million to prevent and respond to Gender-Based Violence – a growing threat under pandemic-related lockdowns and quarantines.

This funding encouraged other agencies to prioritise and dedicate resources.

2020 also marked an important milestone for the CERF. For the first time, it funded anticipatory action.

In June, CERF provided funds to avert a food crisis in Somalia.

And in July, when record rainfall was forecast in Bangladesh, CERF paid for essential supplies and helped families to protect themselves and their livelihoods.

This assistance reached more people, more quickly – and at half the cost of the previous year's operation.

Across the humanitarian system, momentum is building for this anticipatory approach. Helping people to take action pre-emptively, before a crisis strikes, is both more effective, and cheaper, than responding after they have been hit.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

In 2016 the General Assembly endorsed my call to bring CERF's annual funding target to \$1 billion, in line with rapidly increasing humanitarian needs,

In 2019, Member States and partners responded generously, contributing a record \$835 million.

Fifty-four Member States that received CERF funding went on to contribute to it – a sign of the CERF's unique status as a fund by all, for all.

But this year, while the world faces its worst humanitarian crisis in many decades, we are only halfway to our target with \$495 million received.

A \$1 billion CERF is a bare minimum to effectively help people trapped in emergencies.

If all Member States and partners allocate a small percentage of their humanitarian funding through the CERF, we can reach our target.

I urge those that have not contributed yet to make decisions quickly, and act on your commitments.

I also urge you to consider multi-year arrangements.

Guaranteed, predictable funding enables CERF to operate to its fullest potential.

An investment in the CERF is an investment in humanity.

Thank you.