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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT BY THE COMMISSIONER-  
DESIGNATE**

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**Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management**

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Madam Chair,  
Honourable Members,  
Dear colleagues.

It is a real honour to be here today as the Commissioner-designate for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management. It is a privilege to have been proposed for this portfolio at the heart of universal values. I am well aware of the huge responsibility.

I am here before you as a colleague. As a politician addressing politicians. We are all in the business of decision making. Often difficult decisions. A politician is in a constant battle with history.

We are accountable to the generations that will follow. We must, therefore, have a vision, political courage and dignity. My responsibility is to provide the leadership and turn the vision into results on the ground.

The needs for humanitarian aid are rising every day. Conflicts, climate change, health disasters, extreme poverty and hunger are among the main drivers of this increase in needs. The shocking facts speak for the gravity of the situation. By the end of 2013, fifty one million people were displaced by conflict. An average of thirty-two thousand people are newly displaced every day. Every day more than eight thousand children die of under-nutrition and almost three thousand die the day they are born. We have a responsibility to address this now, not later.

Today! Not tomorrow.

I know what it means to be in a conflict situation, to have no shelter, to be without the basic needs, to live in fear and be stripped of your dignity.

As a child and then again as a student I witnessed the suffering of the people of Cyprus. Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. I witnessed the pain of displacement. I understood the hard way the importance and the necessity of humanitarian aid. Let me be clear: the impact of conflict has no ethnic or religious colour. It hits everyone: old, young, men, women, girls, boys.

Humanitarian aid is based on needs, not on political expediency.

We have a very challenging context ahead of us. First of all allow me to pay tribute to the humanitarian and relief workers. They risk their lives every day to help others irrespective of identity, religion or nationality. I am thinking of the murder of British humanitarian aid worker David Haines by ISIS militants. I am thinking of the killing of eight courageous national aid workers trying to explain the dangers of Ebola. These are painful reminders of the dangers facing humanitarian aid workers.

But they also remind us of the increasing disrespect of the most basic universal principles set in International Humanitarian Law. The number of attacks against humanitarian workers has increased by four times since 2003.

The world is becoming more fragile because of the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters. Developed countries, including Europe, are not spared: take for example

the floods that hit the Balkans region this past May, the worst the region had seen in over a hundred years. The EU collective response to this disaster was immediate and impressive: twenty-three Member States acted in solidarity and under the coordination of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism sending experts and vital assistance.

Beyond the human tragedies, disasters also have devastating consequences on economic growth and development. Crisis management means working on the whole disaster cycle, including prevention and preparedness.

We are doing so with our Member States (helping them to reduce the risks) and also internationally within the Hyogo Framework for Action. The upcoming World Conference in Sendai next March will be an opportunity to make disaster prevention and preparedness equal priorities to disaster response. The Parliament's views are very important; and I am ready to discuss with you ahead of the conference.

In the area of conflicts, the situation is overwhelming: it is unprecedented to have FOUR simultaneous level-three crises, the highest classification in the UN system: Syria, Iraq, Central African Republic and South Sudan. But there are also many other protracted crises that continue deserving sustained humanitarian assistance: Palestine, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Colombia, Myanmar to mention just a few. In Syria, we are witnessing one of the world's biggest humanitarian disasters.

Well over ten million people have been affected by the conflict, nearly six point five million (half are children) are internally displaced, and the number of refugees has surpassed the three million. Europe must act now. Not tomorrow!

On top of this, we have the devastating effects of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. Ebola should be addressed like a mega natural disaster – "it is like a typhoon in slow motion". It is also a threat to global security as noted by the UN Security Council. Behind the worrying statistics of the devastating spread of the virus are real human lives, people and communities that will also need psychosocial assistance after recovery. These are immediate and pressing crises and they need immediate response, but also long term planning.

This unprecedented situation is placing the international humanitarian system under a tremendous strain. I am confident that the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 will contribute to improving the capacity of the international system to serve people in need.

The world economic situation is unfortunately not contributing to respond to all these challenges. I would like to thank this Parliament, and especially this Committee, for its steady and firm commitment to support essential life-saving operations. It is imperative to avoid disruptions in humanitarian aid activities. For that, we need a reliable and sufficient flow of payments to be able to honour commitments.

And now, some final words about **my vision**. The challenges ahead are huge but so is my determination and enthusiasm. It is my intention to consolidate the outstanding work carried out by Kristalina Georgieva.

First and foremost, we will continue with our core mandate of providing essential assistance to victims. The EU must not arrive with too little, too late. Not even once! I want to contribute to humanitarian and relief workers to "stay and deliver". And I intend to concentrate not only

on those major crises in the limelight. But also on those that do not hit the news, the "forgotten crises" (Saharawi, Yemen and others).

Second, I want to be the spokesperson of the most vulnerable, "the voice of the voiceless". I will work with the High Representative Federica Mogherini to help bring the voices of those suffering from conflicts and disasters to the decision-making tables. I was devastated by the testimonies in a recent report of the International Rescue Committee about the violence and harassment that displaced Syrian women and girls are suffering. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable in conflict situations and I intend to give them specific attention.

Third, I will defend the specificities and principles of humanitarian aid. For that, we have an excellent collective basis in Europe: the Consensus on humanitarian aid.

Fourth, prevention is better than cure. Therefore, I will continue the work on resilience.

Investing in resilience today through humanitarian and development assistance is much more cost effective than responding to a crisis tomorrow. For that, I will work side by side with Commissioner-designate Mimica in charge of Development.

Fifth, the Ebola crisis is a perfect example of the crucial need for something beyond coordination – a really 'joined up' approach between countries and different ministries. We are working towards that in the Commission bringing all the services together in the newly created Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC), linking up with member states, our international partners and the big humanitarian donors. But frankly, the results are not there yet. More needs to be done...

Sixth, we need to continue protecting the European citizens. The implementation of the new Civil Protection Legislation should bring up a more reliable, predictable and efficient response to disasters but also contribute to preventing disasters in Europe.

Finally, on the so-called "comprehensive approach", I will follow the line of my predecessor. We are "in but out". For that reason, if confirmed I will work very closely with the High Representative and the other Commissioners to promote addressing the root causes of conflicts, reinforce conflict prevention and resolution, ensure stabilisation and put countries back on the road towards sustainable development.

At the same time, I will continue to ensure that humanitarian aid is not instrumentalised and that tested principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence are respected. This is the precondition that would allow humanitarian workers to get access to the victims. We owe it to them.

Dear Colleagues,

During the last two weeks, I have been on a steep learning curve. This portfolio is full of urgencies.

I am a fast learner and if you offer me your trust, I will continue to work day and night to deepen my understanding on all the issues. And I will regularly be back in this Committee to discuss with you.

Thank you.