Mr Stephen O’Brien  
Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator  
UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

11th December 2015

Dear Mr O’Brien

We are writing in response to your Statement on Preparations for the World Humanitarian Summit of 24th November. We bring together leading organisations that have a specific mandate to support particular vulnerable groups including children, youth, older people and persons with disabilities, as well as national and international NGOs and networks who are concerned about ensuring humanitarian assistance reaches the most vulnerable crisis-affected people.

We were actively engaged in the regional and global WHS consultations and have collaborated with our national network partners to ensure the needs of crisis-affected people were well reflected. We welcomed the Synthesis Report as a reflection of all those voices and constituencies and the profile it gave to addressing the neglect of vulnerable groups. This in turn reflects recent progress made by donors, the Clusters and humanitarian organisations to deliver programmes that address the respective needs of the different vulnerable groups. It is also consistent with the SDGs which, as you say in your Statement, emphasise the need to focus on vulnerability and risk in all their forms. Similarly the Sendai Framework recognises the diversity of affected populations and pledges to ‘leave no-one behind’. This prompted the specialist organisations signed below to come together to write to you.

We support your assertion that gender equality and women’s empowerment are critical and necessary to effective humanitarian action.

We are concerned to see that your Statement appears not to acknowledge the findings of the consultations regarding the diversity of vulnerability and the important recommendations made in the Synthesis Report to ensure the humanitarian system of the future is able to respond to them.

We urge you to recognise that for humanitarian action to be impartial and effective, it must recognise and respond to vulnerability in all its forms - including, age (childhood, youth or old age), ability (physical and mental disabilities) and other potential vulnerabilities.

The humanitarian system is currently designed to deliver one-size-fits-all response that is not adapted to the different needs of different groups. This creates one of the greatest and most significant barriers to the delivery of truly impartial and accountable assistance. If the Summit is to achieve its stated objective of putting people at the centre of decision making and alleviating the suffering of the 100 million people at risk of being left behind, concrete measures are required to ensure the needs of all affected people are understood and addressed.

Our combined operational experience tells us that this does not require a plethora of different measures for each vulnerable group. It can be achieved by committing to a few specific changes that will result in a humanitarian system that is equipped to provide assistance and protection that is accessible and appropriate for different vulnerable groups. They reflect the recommendations in the Synthesis Report and are as follows:

- Data must be collected and fully disaggregated to show the nature and extent of the needs of different groups. This will provide a proper evidence-base for humanitarian responses.

- Using this evidence, humanitarian action must be designed to meet the specific needs of different vulnerable groups as well as the general needs of the affected population as a whole.

- Delivery mechanisms must make the assistance accessible to those who need it, whatever their ability.
• The knowledge and skills of humanitarian actors must be developed and maintained so they are able to understand different needs and deliver appropriate and accessible assistance for all.

• Affected people must be placed at the centre of humanitarian action. Humanitarian actors must systematically engage with those affected to deliver meaningful participation and consultation to ensure their views are reflected in all aspects of the response from assessment, design, delivery and monitoring and evaluation.

• Funding that is commensurate with the scale of needs must be made available and allocated impartially according to need, recognising the respective needs of different groups.

These recommendations reflect those made in the WHS Synthesis Report on the basis of all the consultations, as well as the recommendations in the SDGs and the Sendai Framework. If they are incorporated in the priorities for the road to Istanbul and the Summit itself, they will ensure the humanitarian system of the future is fit for its purpose of reaching the most vulnerable and helping them survive with dignity.

Signed

HelpAge International, Toby Porter, CEO
Plan International, Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen, CEO
CBM, Dave McComiskey, President and CEO CBMI
Action Against Hunger (ACF-UK), Saul Guerrero, Director of Operations
Christian Aid, Nick Guttman, Head of Humanitarian Division
Islamic Relief, Waseem Ahmad, Director of International Programmes Division
Oxfam International, Nigel Timmins, Humanitarian Director
Save the Children, Kitty Arie, Director of Policy and Advocacy
War Child, Robbert Bodegraven, Head of Advocacy, Campaigning and Communication

World Vision, Ian Ridley, Senior Director, External Relations and Resource Development