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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations

**Statement by HE The Hon Mitch Fifield
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations in New York**

Mr President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates.

The events of 2020 have devastated lives and livelihoods around the globe.

At the front line of the humanitarian response have been local staff, national organisations, community groups, friends and families, rallying to support each other through this dreadful year.

The UN system has adapted, reprioritised, and the international presence in many operations drawn down. And although there are few silver linings this year, it has forced us to recognise the central and invaluable role of local and national actors.

International humanitarian organisations do incredible work, but it will be at its most powerful when in genuine partnership with local actors, and with the views of affected populations at the heart of their decision-making.

In 2020, Australia has focused its efforts on addressing the serious impacts of COVID-19 on our nearest neighbours. While many countries in the Pacific have avoided the worst health impacts of this crisis, the secondary impacts on their economies have been profound. Compounding this are the disasters that continue to strike the region with increasing ferocity.

Two weeks ago, the United Nations presented the 2021 Global Humanitarian Overview, painting a bleak and 'catastrophic' picture of humanitarian need. In the year ahead, we will face compounding challenges - responding

to the COVID-19 pandemic, rising food insecurity, protracted conflict, and increasingly intense disasters.

However, humanitarian assistance is not the solution. We must find political solutions, hold warring parties accountable for violations of international humanitarian law, and ensure humanitarian access.

Now more than ever is the time to invest in a multi-hazard, cross-sectoral approach to disaster risk reduction, preparedness and resilience building. This is why Australia is so pleased to host the ninth Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction virtually in 2021, in partnership with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The conference will focus on resilient investment and recovery; resilient systems, services and infrastructure; and resilient communities. It will highlight the experiences of women and girls, people with disabilities, and local and indigenous knowledge. As host, Australia will also draw greater attention to the challenges faced by remote, island and coastal communities, particularly our Pacific neighbours.

I conclude today with Australia's thanks to the humanitarian personnel of the United Nations who continue to work tirelessly in the back offices and on the front lines, to deliver urgent humanitarian assistance to millions of people in need.

Thank you.