

ODC Regional Presentation

Annual Session of the Executive Board, June 2007

Mr. President,

As we meet today, conflict and humanitarian tragedy continue to unfold in this region especially in Iraq in Gaza and since last week in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Let us hope that this is not going to be another tragic summer for Lebanon. Meanwhile, WFP has responded to the Flash Appeal issued by UNRWA' on Monday and has deployed three staff, who are now in Tripoli (north Lebanon) providing technical support in logistics and ICT to UNRWA's relief operation.

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We are fortunate that Mr Filippo Grandi, the Deputy Commissioner General of UNRWA could join us this morning and we look forward to learn from him on UNRWA work in this region.

We will be presenting, for the Executive Board "PRRO 10387 .1, 'Targeted Assistance fro Relief Support to Productive Ativities and Skills Development for non refugee Palestinians. Our colleague, Mr. Arnold **Vercken, Country Director, based in Jerusalem will be presenting the PRRO.**

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I would like to turn now to broader issues affecting the region and the work we are doing.

The ODC region currently faces two diverging trends: on the one hand, several countries are experiencing improved economic growth and demonstrating stronger capacity to address the needs of poor and vulnerable people through social safety net programmes. We are encouraged by this trend, and the opportunities it provides for WFP to gradually hand over programmes to national and local counterparts.

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On the other hand, a few countries in this region continue to be plagued by conflict, which not only creates displacement of people and growing humanitarian needs, but also has adverse , spillover effects on neighboring countries. We are all reminded daily, through the news and media, of the violence of the conflicts in Iraq, Palestine and now Lebanon and the horrific impact this has on the people who are caught in-between. These conflicts continue to present immense challenges to WFP as we seek to deliver humanitarian assistance to people in need under very difficult circumstances.

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Let me focus first on the positive. WFP has been present in **Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia** since the early nineties, responding initially to emergency needs as a result of conflict. This developed later to supporting vulnerable people through a period of economic transition, which could be difficult . While many of the underlying root causes of conflicts in the Caucasus are not completely resolved , the good news is that there has been increased economic growth in these countries and governments are in the process of expanding investments in social infrastructure and providing assistance to vulnerable families to help meet their basic needs.

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Tajikistan., while still facing the highest levels of poverty in Central Asia is also in the process of strengthening and consolidating a social assistance programme targeted to the poor vulnerable.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Russian Federation for their timely contribution to Tajikistan and recently to Armenia as these two countries are undergoing important changes in their social policies and adopting robust poverty reduction strategies.

Capitalizing on this encouraging trend, WFP has begun working with national governments and local counterparts to hand over its food aid activities, ensuring that people still in need of assistance are integrated and mainstreamed into national social programmes. To support this effort, the Regional Bureau has been working with country offices in the southern Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia) in developing roadmaps that identify key milestones and activities to guide the handover between now and the end of 2008/ 09. With this support in hand, we hope to implement a smooth transition that will provide corporate lessons on how this process can be effectively managed in other countries.

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Similarly, in **Jordan, Syria, and Egypt**, economic growth and improved social indicators provide opportunities to hand over existing programmes and to identify new forms of partnership to support capacity building and advocacy activities.

Indeed, we are at a turning point in our programmes in these countries. As we are gradually phasing out of classical food aid operations, we are exploring new partnerships with the governments and civil society, thinking creatively and realistically about what WFP will do next and what WFP can do best.

In **Jordan**, WFP's support to the National Alliance against Hunger and the high level commitment of the Government has turned it into an outstanding example of how civil society can advocate for the hungry through their innovative campaigns such as Walk the World, Drive the World Rallies and other events

.In **Syria**, the Government is proposing a new partnership with WFP based on a cost-sharing arrangement whereby the Government provides the necessary resources to food-for-education and women's empowerment projects in marginalized areas, with WFP providing management and technical support.

The Country Programme in **Egypt** is an interesting case where WFP is working with Government in implementing what we consider now as best practices models in school feeding, agricultural development and nutrition projects. WFP is also providing capacity

support in improved targeting of the national food subsidy programme. Egypt is also an example of a country that, while still a recipient of a new and innovative form of WFP assistance, has also transitioned to becoming an emerging donor. Egypt has contributed not only to its own programme, but over the past three years to WFP operations in Palestine, Niger, Somalia and Sudan, demonstrating its commitment to south-south cooperation and to assisting those in need beyond its own borders.

As we embark on new and innovative approaches, we continue to consult with governments – who are in the driver’s seat – to understand their priorities and discuss with them where WFP can be of help.

This region also offers some promising opportunities for fund-raising and advocacy. I recently met with the near East Group and with representatives of the List E countries. I always benefit from their guidance and wealth of ideas. During the meeting, we discussed several issues related to country presence for advocacy and fund-raising in this region, and for transforming countries which are recipients of WFP assistance into emerging donors to WFP programmes, both in their countries and elsewhere, as is the case for Egypt and also Syria.

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At the country level, there has been significant progress in strengthening partnerships with other UN agencies in preparation for the “One UN.” While none of the eight pilots are in the ODC region, there is a significant progress in developing joint programmes

where WFP expertise is able to complement the capacities and resources of other UN agencies within the context of UNDAF. Furthermore, several of our country offices in the region are participating in the food security theme groups, demonstrating the results that can be achieved when all of the Rome-based agencies work together to support national partners.

By being fully engaged in the PRS process, WFP can have a catalytic role in ensuring that food security remains at the top of national priorities. As part of this commitment, ODC was the first Regional Bureau to hold last month a workshop on capacity-building for engaging in PRS in cooperation with the Policy Division. This workshop was a good learning exercise on how WFP country Directors and staff can be fully engaged in policy dialogue with governments and partners in formulating policies and programmes to support the poor and vulnerable.

At the regional level, the UN Regional Directors' Team (UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and WFP) has been particularly proactive in providing guidance and advice in assessing UN coordination to identify areas for improvement. We look forward to strengthening this regional planning further as UNDG agencies are now establishing management teams in Cairo, which has been become a regional co-location hub.

ODC is also expanding regional partnerships with WHO and UNICEF, particularly in the area of nutrition. Over the past months, WFP has been working with these agencies on the development of regional food-based dietary guidelines, national nutrition strategies

and in sharing experiences on fortification. Last week the ODC Nutrition Adviser participated as a resource person in a health and nutrition workshop in Kuwait organized by the WHO Regional Office and the Kuwait Ministry of Health and gave a presentation on WFP's experience in food fortification

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Partnerships with UN humanitarian agencies are also critical to our ability to respond to humanitarian emergencies that affect the region. ODC is now strengthening its cooperation with OCHA and working with UNCT in contingency planning and emergency preparedness covering also countries where WFP does not have a operational activities. such as Kosovo, Uzbekistan and Khyrghistan .

We are also working closely with UNHCR in preparing plans to address the needs of vulnerable Iraqis within the country and those that have fled violence at home and now live in neighboring countries.

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-In April, WFP participated in a meeting hosted by UNHCR in Geneva to adopt a strategic framework for humanitarian action in Iraq and to bring international attention to the growing humanitarian needs in the country. We continue to work within the UN inter-agency cluster system and to provide food assistance to malnourished children, pregnant and lactating women and schoolchildren in food-insecure areas of **Iraq**. However, our work has been severely hampered by growing political instability and the deteriorating security situation.

At the same time, and working in close collaboration with UNHCR, WFP is providing food rations to some 30,000 of the most vulnerable Iraqis that have fled to Syria. This is in addition to our work with UNHCR in support of refugees in **Algeria, Iran and Yemen.**

Mr President, I would like to conclude by highlighting the importance of our cooperation with UNRWA with whom we developed over the past 10 years one of our most active and practical partnership in the region. Working together to support the needs of both refugee and non-refugee Palestinians in the region have helped us forge a strong and collaborative relationship. This serves us well during these difficult times. Over the past weeks, we have been put to the test in responding to emergency needs in Gaza, where factional and cross-border fighting has further aggravated a situation where a growing number of people have lost their livelihoods, and are faced with poverty and food insecurity. By working together in Gaza, the West Bank – and indeed in other parts of the region, including Lebanon – WFP and UNWRA have been able to coordinate assistance programmes, share information, fill gaps when needed and learn from each other's experience. In so doing, we have been able to better serve the people we support.

Thank you, Mr. President.