

**Opening remarks to the First Regular Session
of the WFP Executive Board 2017**

Check against delivery

Thank you, President Wadhwa.

Thank you to the outgoing President, Ms Stephanie Hochstetter Skinner-Klée.

Excellencies, welcome to this first session of the 2017 Executive Board, especially those of you who have traveled here from your capitals.

It is a pleasure to offer my greetings to our distinguished guests:

From El Salvador, His Excellency Hugo Alexander Flores, Vice-Minister of Agriculture and Livestock.

From Lao People's Democratic Republic, His Excellency Kikeo Chantaboury, Vice-Minister of Planning and Investment.

From Sudan, His Excellency Ahmed Mohammed Adam, General Commissioner of Humanitarian Affairs.

Finally, a warm welcome to our special guest, my friend His Excellency Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

At a time when the world is witnessing unprecedented movements of refugees and forcibly displaced people, there is no better leader to share his perspective on how we must, collectively, provide support and opportunities to those who have lost everything. The World Food Programme partners with UNHCR on a range of initiatives to assist refugees and support the livelihoods of long-term displaced people, so Filippo, thank you for joining us here today.

Not since World War II have so many people been forced to leave their homes. Last September alongside the United Nations General Assembly, the world recognized the urgency of this crisis at the *United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants*.

High Commissioner, I look forward to hearing your analysis of what is required to make the *New York Declaration* a reality.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the first time I sat before you as Executive Director at the February 2012 Board, I committed that Management would work to make WFP Fit for Purpose. Fit for the Purpose of serving the World's hungry poor. Fit for the Purpose of achieving Zero Hunger.

George Harrison once sang: "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there".

From the start of my tenure, together, this Board and Management shared a vision of a Fit for Purpose WFP working together to achieve Zero Hunger. We have known where we are going. As we begin my final WFP Board - our final Board together - I must admit, that while

we have gone down the road, we have not reached our destination. Yet, the road that we have travelled together, has made a real difference.

First, working together, we have successfully begun implementing programs which change lives as well as save lives; moving where appropriate from food aid to food assistance. From the Sahel drought in 2012, through the Ebola Response, to the five L3s, we have worked to bring the right tools to the response. Yet, we know our journey on this road is far from done.

As we convene today, WFP, together with our UN partners FAO and UNICEF, have just delivered a dire famine warning for Unity State in South Sudan. Yes, Excellencies, this warning now brings to four, the number of places where insufficient action by the humanitarian community may result in famine: North East Nigeria, Somalia, Yemen, and now, for the second time in as many years, South Sudan.

In Nigeria, WFP is sounding the alarm over the critical levels of food insecurity. In the northeastern areas affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, 4.7 million people are facing hunger, of whom 1.8 million require emergency assistance.

In November, together with UNICEF and our NGO partners, WFP successfully scaled up to reach 1 million people. But in the newly liberated areas we find famine looming, averted only by our rapid response mechanism and our rapid action. By April, with your support, we will reach 1.8 million people per month.

Early warning tools, jointly supported by FAO, have enabled WFP to analyse the data and issue early warnings about potential crises before they take hold. Doing better than we have in the past, and letting the world know when famine is looming.

You will recall, in Somalia in 2010, the alarm bell was not rung until July – too late for too many. This time, we are raising the alarm much earlier, in February, to say the world must pay attention to Somalia and must provide the resources that are necessary to provide the support required. But early warning must lead to concerted early action, from both humanitarians and politicians.

Because, in Somalia, the rains failed late last year, again creating emergency conditions in Somalia: nearly 3 million people require urgent lifesaving assistance to avoid another catastrophe.

And In Yemen, as we sit here, the situation deteriorates by the day. Yemen is now the fastest growing and greatest food emergency crisis in the world. The latest Emergency Food Security and Nutrition Assessment, conducted during the last quarter of 2016, found that 65% of households are food insecure, and a further 30% of households are severely food insecure.

In response to these exceptional needs, WFP succeeded in reaching 7 million people in 2016 - in spite of the significant operational challenges caused by the ongoing conflict. But a severe funding shortfall forced us to cut rations to just 35% in January and February. And our failure to access the necessary funds to scale up our efforts and to reach those in need, will result in nothing less than a hunger catastrophe in Yemen.

Excellencies, as we sit here today the challenges in South Sudan are just as great. In spite of immense security and logistics obstacles, including a deteriorating security environment and staff evacuations, WFP provided a record four million people with food and nutrition assistance in 2016. Yet in Unity State, lack of humanitarian access means hunger and catastrophe for this war's most vulnerable victims.

In every one of these situations our best efforts are mere band aids on the lives of those we serve who need peace, only delivered through political solutions. Famine looms in these place because real peace, accountable governance and the space to develop and maintain massive infrastructure improvements are essential to secure the long-term welfare and well-being of the people in North East Nigeria, Yemen, and South Sudan. And even in Somalia, when the rains do come, without peace and accountable governance we will not achieve sustainable food security.

Excellencies, as you are all too aware, alongside these looming threats, in Syria and the surrounding countries we continue to bear witness to a profound humanitarian crisis. More than 4.7 million people live in areas subject to restrictions on movements, and 640,000 live every day under siege.

Despite these immense challenges, in 2016 WFP managed to reach 4 million people each month with General Food Distribution – partly due to the bravery of WFP staff working in extreme circumstances.

In Iraq, we have restored full entitlements, thanks to the flexibility of donors and the use of funds from the Immediate Response Account. WFP has assisted 890,000 people in addition to the one million already receiving support. If western Mosul is retaken, we anticipate that 750,000 people will require emergency assistance, including 250,000 who may become displaced.

In Iraq and Syria, just like in the other countries I have noted this morning, only peace delivered through political solutions will provide the stability that the people require.

Alongside the human suffering caused by conflict, we must also confront the destruction caused by natural disasters. In Southern Africa, the El Niño-induced emergency is reaching its peak.

WFP has significantly scaled up its activities to meet growing needs of those affected as their food stocks have depleted. A combined portfolio of relief, resilience and development programs delivered by WFP and all its partners, has assisted more than 10 million people in the seven affected countries in January 2017. This represents a threefold increase in the number of people we have served since August. We plan to reach more than 13 million people between now and the March peak.

As we work to address these emergencies, we keep in mind our journey towards changing lives. Our programs include general food, voucher and cash activities as well our ongoing nutrition work. We also partner with others to deliver programs which again keep us on this journey, on this road, towards achieving SDG 2 and changing lives.

Programs like our flagship school meals programs continue to draw children into the classroom, providing them with new access to partners providing educational opportunities. In the MENA region, WFP is leading an initiative which integrates the programs with local economies and national social protection systems. You can learn more about this program at a side event tomorrow lunchtime. This is just one of our many programs where we are knitted up with our education partners to move the education wheel forward as well as the nutrition wheel forward.

WFP is also now the largest cash distributor in the humanitarian system. Our use of cash-based transfers will increase to USD 1.2 billion in 2017, and we will use this modality to

strengthen existing systems of social protection. CBTs are an effective way to facilitate financial inclusion and the development of local financial ecosystems, as well as an effective tool to support food security and nutrition. Where appropriate, they will remain a WFP priority.

Through our Food Systems Program, WFP is working together with the Rome Based Agencies and others, not only supporting Small Holder farmers through the P4P program, but also through our market purchasing power.

WFP has helped convene private sector companies, together with other organizations including AGRA and the World Bank, in a platform which helps support the entire food system - from seeds in the ground, increasing yields, through improved post-harvest handling, reducing waste, and better market access to escalate incomes for smallholders and their families.

Our work with this Patient Procurement Platform, now renamed the Farm to Market Alliance, will build on WFP's activities to support smallholder farmers, particularly women farmers. Helping us change lives as we advance down the road to Zero Hunger.

In addition, we will present three new policies to the Board for approval during this Board session. The Climate Change Policy will support efforts to build resilience and preparedness against the impacts of the changing climate. The Nutrition Policy expands WFP's focus to address all forms of malnutrition, including obesity, to promote access to healthy diets. The Environmental Policy will improve the sustainability of WFP's operations across the board.

Excellencies, yes, we are working in tough places around the world with partners including UNHCR. Working to save lives and to change lives. To deliver the right programs with the right partnerships. Yet, I ask you all – as you write back to your capitals – to underscore that without peace and access to opportunity our work will do no more than act as a Band-Aid. Because conflict is the antithesis to resilience and development.

Without Climate justice, including multi-year investments in adaptation, mitigation, climate smart agriculture, disaster risk reduction and mitigation there is hunger. And a hungry man or woman is an angry man or woman, resulting in an angry community, resulting in unrest and too often conflict. Giving people no other choice than to move. A vicious circle, a cruel cycle. All the good humanitarian or development work will not keep us on the path to achieving Zero Hunger without concerted political action to break this cycle and end it.

Until then, WFP must, like our colleagues across the humanitarian community, WFP must work to meet unprecedented levels of need at a time of resource constraints. WFP must continue to maintain the trust of those we serve and the trust of those who financially invest in our organization.

It is therefore essential that we build on our core strengths, ensure our business processes are streamlined, and exert discipline over our cost base. That we stay on this road to developing a more Fit for Purpose WFP. This is not just an initiative, it is part of our culture.

We have come a long way since I launched the *Fit for Purpose* initiative soon after I became Executive Director in 2012. It has become not just a mantra, but a mind-set. Fit for purpose is now firmly established in the UN lexicon.

WFP's *Fit for Purpose* ended, as an initiative, last year – but as a mind-set it will continue moving forward. You will recall that in total, 58 investments worth USD 72 million were made, which generated estimated efficiency savings of over USD 122 million.

In addition to cashable savings, the initiative improved corporate processes and systems, enabling WFP to become more agile, adaptable and flexible.

The Cost Excellence initiative, launched as part of *Fit for Purpose*, continues to deliver improvements across five functional areas, and this program will move forward in 2017. Because, as I said, this is not just an initiative or program within WFP – it is written into our corporate DNA.

In Finance, we will pilot the Global Payment Factory to deliver invoice processing and payment services, freeing up field staff to focus on operational matters. Making us ever more effective for those we serve.

I reported at the last board that, in Management Services, we planned to introduce global travel policies, including a preferred hotel program, to save an estimated USD 1 million per year. In fact, the savings are higher and the first round of policy updates, due in place by March 1, will yield as much as USD 1.7 million per year. In addition, we will introduce a new self-service travel system later this year, allowing staff to search and book travel, obtain necessary security clearances and process invoices online, which will result in further efficiencies.

By building WFP's corporate capacity and structures, *Fit for Purpose* has paved the way for implementation of the Integrated Road Map, or IRM.

So having spent much of 2016 consulting this Board on the proposals, 2017 is the crucial year for the Integrated Road Map implementation. WFP faces the urgent task of transitioning all countries to the new model over the next two and a half years. In order to realize the full benefits of the IRM, manage costs and avoid running two operating models in parallel, we will discontinue all legacy systems as of January 2018. Ensuring we bring everyone on board and maximizing the value of the investment.

A new integrated management structure to oversee IRM implementation is now in place, led by Deputy Executive Director Amir Abdulla – welcome back to Rome, Amir. I am proud to report that implementation is well underway. The Regional Bureaux, led by the Regional Directors and their deputies, are working with every Country Office to operationalize the IRM. Each country team has undertaken a review to determine when its Country Strategic Plan or Interim CSP can come before the Board for approval.

Excellencies, Management recognizes that the timescale for completing the transition to the IRM is nothing less than ambitious. The Board will have a full workload scrutinizing CSPs and ICSPs, as well as considering amendments to the General Rules and Financial Regulations. But WFP fully commits to working with the Board to ensure you have sufficient time to fulfil your oversight and governance responsibilities.

Since November, we have worked tirelessly to ensure our people, processes and IT systems are ready to go live on April 1 – subject to the Board's approval, of course, of the first eight pilot CSPs which will come before you during this session. These eight plans coming before you – Bangladesh, China, Columbia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Indonesia, Laos and Zimbabwe – will open a new chapter.

Each one is closely aligned with national government plans and targets. We are also working carefully with our donors to facilitate a smooth transition to the new IRM model. Taken together, the pilots encapsulate the range of assistance that WFP provides - from supporting national capacity-building with technical expertise, to providing humanitarian assistance to address urgent food security challenges.

The IRM model allows WFP to respond nimbly and flexibly, whatever the national context, to meet the needs of the people we serve.

Excellencies, the IRM establishes WFP as a leader within the UN system in terms of fulfilling the requirements of the new Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, by explicitly orienting our corporate strategy in response to the SDGs.

We fully acknowledge support Member States' desire for clarity on how each UN entity contributes to achieving Agenda 2030 with coherence and effectiveness, and without competition.

WFP is now participating in the United Nations Development Group's work-stream setting out how each organization's strategic plan aligns with the objectives of the QCPR, as part of the mapping exercise which the Secretary General has asked us all to join. This will ensure that what we say matches the reality of what we do. In addition, WFP's Strategic Plan is serving as a model for some of our sister UN agencies as they align their activities with the SDGs.

As we stay on this road and as we begin the implementation of the Strategic Plan, as well as the IRM, we are working to ever strengthen our partnerships closer to home, with the other Rome based agencies, so we maximize our collective impact. This commitment is reflected in the pilot CSPs: in Indonesia, for example, FAO and IFAD were closely involved in the strategic review process to ensure WFP's activities complement theirs.

The Rome agencies have also agreed the next steps for implementing the RBA joint paper, and will design a roadmap with performance indicators to be presented to each of our boards. These tools, this roadmap, will serve to monitor, track and report progress on the commitments made by each of the agencies. This issue will remain an area of focus for WFP in 2017 and beyond.

Excellencies, in the context of the IRM, I would like to briefly mention the addendum to the 2017 Management Plan. In 2015, the Board endorsed the use of the PSA Equalisation Account for Critical Corporate Initiatives, subject to its approval. Thanks to WFP's efforts to live within its means, there is now a surplus available to fund CCIs, and we propose to draw down USD 13.5 million from the fund.

The majority of these funds, USD 8.2 million, will fund IRM implementation. The incremental funding requirement for 2017 is USD 30.4 million, of which, USD 22.2 million will come from the reprioritization of existing financial resources already approved by the Board. Let me say clearly that we are managing IRM implementation primarily from within these existing funds. And this reallocation of funds will not disrupt ongoing operations. We were very clear, in working with each department and division, that we would not cut into the marrow of the organization to support implementation of the IRM.

The remaining funds from the PSAEA will support three other priorities. We will invest USD 3.3 million to support the Cost Excellence initiative. A further USD 1.5 million will support the development of decentralized evaluation processes. Finally, USD 0.5 million will boost the operational readiness of the Emergency Preparedness and Support Response Division.

These proposals focus on business process transformation, helping WFP deliver improved services and cashable savings, which we can reinvest in our work to change lives on the road to Zero Hunger.

Allied to a laser focus on efficiency, we must ensure the most robust controls are in place to safeguard the use of WFP resources and protect against fraud or mismanagement of any money invested in our organization.

Management recognizes that without the confidence of our funders, as a 100 percent voluntarily funded organization we must become ever more vigilant stewards, responsible for the donor dollars invested. The Proactive Integrated Review (PIR) pilots were launched last year as an additional risk management tool with that goal in mind. What Management now realizes is that we must implement the appropriate protocols for quickly, efficiently and of course effectively addressing recommendations and findings from each PIR.

So what we are doing is this: for those completed PIRs, Management has now convened a special cross-functional task team, which will begin today developing an action plan for addressing the recommendations and findings.

The team will deliver that action plan to Management, which we will communicate to WFP donors and any other interested members of the Board by February 28. This team will also deliver new protocols for how we respond to future PIR recommendations and findings. These new protocols will be developed as an instructional booklet which Management will deliver to all members of the WFP team by April 1.

This journey requires us to have the right programs for risk elimination, risk reduction and risk management. We must have the right processes and we must communicate our actions related to risk issues to this Board on a regular basis.

Excellencies, it is just as important as we continue our journey for WFP to invest in its staff. As Executive Director, I have always believed that any organization's greatest asset is the people it employs.

Our People Strategy, launched in 2014, continues to help WFP attract, retain – and, critically, develop – our committed and talented employees. We have made great strides in building the capacity of our workforce, and equipping our employees across the organization with the skills they need to perform in complex environments around the world.

As part of the strategy, we have strengthened our performance management systems. Today, our PACE completion rate is 97%, one of the highest among UN bodies.

We have also made training our employees a priority within WFP: in 2016 alone, 75% of employees accessed online learning systems to complete over 46,000 courses – almost 50% more than in 2015.

We are committed to offering training and promotion opportunities to all of our staff. We are prioritizing this work with our national staff, who are the backbone of this organization.

The *National Staff Project*, launched last year, is designed to ensure that as we implement the IRM, we harness the skills of all colleagues.

We began by asking national staff for their honest views on a range of issues including their contracts, career opportunities and staff wellness. The findings were not good: they revealed that the use of short-term contracts is limiting staff engagement, and driving 60% of locally recruited staff to look for opportunities beyond WFP.

We simply cannot afford to waste this amount of talent. So, in addition to examining the issues regarding contracts, we are developing tools to help country and regional managers better understand and manage staffing challenges.

We are prioritizing opportunities for national staff to access international posts. But even more importantly, we are looking at offering the right training tools and opportunities for us to nationalize posts that today are held by international staff.

In many countries, that would reduce the cost of our operations and also provide more leadership opportunities for our national staff. We are committed to getting this right. The agility and responsiveness it will create will be invaluable as we move forward on our journey.

Excellencies, in my first Board speech as Executive Director, I pledged to make the drive for greater gender equality a personal priority. I am proud of the progress achieved. But we need to do more.

Gender inequality is both a major cause and effect of poverty and hunger. To systematically tackle these inequalities, WFP launched its *Gender Transformation Programme* in 2016, building on our existing *Gender Policy*. We are one of only two UN bodies – along with UNDP – with a corporate initiative to mainstream gender issues at Country Office level across policies, programs and operations.

WFP Country Offices are taking concrete steps to strengthen their leadership on gender; build skills among staff for a more gender-aware workplace; and integrate gender into programs and operations to ensure equality. The Programme runs in 11 WFP Country Offices and will extend to all Country Offices no later than 2020.

This month, WFP also launches its comprehensive *Gender Toolkit*, which provides staff – and WFP partners - with detailed information and fast guides on integrating gender into our programs and operations.

Excellencies, I am proud that WFP's leadership on gender equality was recognized by UN Women in their assessment of our 2016 performance against UN-SWAP, the system-wide action plan for gender equality and women's empowerment. WFP is judged to exceed 11 of the 15 benchmarks and to meet three of them. We are still not making sufficient progress, I must admit, against one indicator, gender architecture, but we are committed to improving on this in future by working towards equal representation of women at all levels.

WFP embraces our responsibility to lead by example. In the past five years, the proportion of female Country Directors has grown from 33% to 41%.

The proportion of female international staff, which had stagnated at the same level for over 10 years, has risen from 40% to 42% since 2012. This is due to the significant increase in recruitment of women international staff. In 2016, 54% of new international recruits were female, up from 42% in 2012. Overall, at the senior staff level – grade P5 and above – the proportion of women has risen from 36% to 40% since 2012.

There is still work to do before WFP achieves gender parity. But we have made great strides – and I welcome the strong commitment to gender equality demonstrated by the WFP family

throughout my tenure. With the Board's encouragement, I know that the work we have begun to achieve gender parity will continue under my successor. With that in mind, before I close I would like to say a few words about that process. Management is now working towards a smooth transition, to ensure that we hand over with no gaps in the performance of this organization. My staff have begun the arduous but necessary task of planning the handover process including preparing adequate memos for the new Executive Director.

Excellencies, in conclusion, let me assure you that – whoever sits in this chair – the 14,000 dedicated men and women of WFP will continue with the hard, exhausting, challenging work of saving lives and changing lives. Of staying on this road of ensuring that children and their families get enough to eat.

And they will continue to pursue our common ideal: A Zero Hunger world, our agreed destination. No matter who sits in this chair we know where we are going and we must stay on this road.

Ladies and Gentleman: no road is too long for those who equip themselves with the right tools to stay the journey, including the patience and discipline required to ignore the easy off-ramps before the agreed and worthy goal is attained.

With courage, and boldness, we *will* ensure that in future no one has to live through the pain of hunger. Each one of us who believes in a fairer, more equal world must lend our time, our energy, our support, our patience, our discipline, our voice to the global movement which refuses to accept that hunger must always scar humanity.

From wherever we sit now or in the future we as a global community must stay this journey to achieving Zero Hunger. Those we serve, the displaced, the hungry poor, the world they need, and the world we want, demands nothing less.

I thank you.