Speech by HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, United Nations Messenger of Peace and Chairperson of the International Humanitarian City, on the occasion of the 2018 Annual Session of the WFP Executive Board

President Mohammadou,
President Kálmán,
Executive Director Beasley,
Members of the Executive Board,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests and Friends

In 2004, I was invited to become a Goodwill Ambassador for The World Food Programme. I cannot begin to describe to you what that meant to me personally. All my life I have believed deeply in the United Nations. Growing up in a developing country in the epicentre of conflict, I recognised the importance of the UN as a symbol of undeniable hope, a body that holds in its hands the moral authority of our planet.

I have worked so closely with – and for – the World Food Programme for nearly 15 years now, and I have always wanted the chance to meet you all and thank you personally, for all that you do. It is truly a great honour and an enormous privilege to be here with you today, and I sincerely hope that my humble perspective on the challenges and opportunities of the sector can contribute to the important discussions you will have.

I have been deeply moved by the stories of every person I have met during my travels on behalf of WFP, the most tragic of which resonate long after I return home. There are two stories I would like to share with you today. One is about a recipient of emergency aid, and the other is about a situation in which development aid was desperately needed.

Some time ago, I met a lady in Ethiopia, ten days after she and her children had fled their home in neighbouring South Sudan to escape ethnic violence. They had walked the 15 km without food or water, under the constant threat of attack, to seek shelter in an overflowing UN refugee camp outside Gambella. She had no clue where her husband was, or whether he was alive.

As she talked, she squatted in the mud among hundreds of other women, with a child in her lap, waiting for a bucket of food. She told me, "I am a normal person, like you. I had a normal life." She clung to her dignity to get her through the hell she was living in. I saw her on a good day, when she was in line for food – not really enough food, but food. What haunts me now is that she said she had to walk 10km every morning for water. I knew she faced an impossible decision every night: walk through the pitch dark to the latrines and risk sexual assault or ruin the hygiene of her tent and put her children at risk of disease.

You know what else haunts me? Every time I make this kind of visit, the people who are suffering celebrate my being there. They see me as a source of hope. They smile at me. They sing for me, they sing for me — and they are starving. Sometimes hunger shows itself in its most raw form, in its moment of utter triumph. And sometimes, that triumph personifies itself right in the midst of the bureaucratic definition of 'development aid'. I saw that side of hunger in Malawi, and she was ruthless.

There was a family I met there; hunger had already taken the father, leaving the mother to struggle at home alone with her five children, until finally, hunger led them on their

final journey to the hospital. When I saw them, they were not so much children, but more like skeletal beings stretched out on four metal beds around their mother. None of them had the strength to speak to me. A little grip and a soft, welcoming look in the infant's eyes told me she was aware and waiting for the mercy of death. The mother showed no concern that she was dying from AIDS; she waited patiently to see her baby into the next world before her. As I moved to the next room, I heard the sound of the deepest pain that any mother would understand. And when I came back, I saw the doctors carrying the dead child away in a black plastic bag. The mother moved to the next bed to cradle her next youngest, hoping again she would endure the pain of their passing before her time came. It was as if that little girl, that tiny, emaciated little soul with the enormous expressive eyes, had never been there. Meanwhile, hunger continued to stalk the ward deciding whom she would take next.

As a human being, I cannot differentiate between emergency aid and development aid; all lives can only be measured equally. I firmly believe that WFP and UNHCR are the two most effective UN agencies in the system. Your prominence is due in part to the undeniable fact that you are the two agencies that deal with the greatest threats in our world today: those of hunger and poverty and those pertaining to displacement and migration. Specific trends in the humanitarian landscape complicate your task and seem set to continue.

Crises are more protracted than at any time in memory. The Syrian civil war is now in its eighth year, and the insurgency in Afghanistan has lasted longer than World War I, World War II and the Korean War combined. Violence continues in South Sudan, and the Central African Republic, and the political situation in Iraq remains fragile. Where conflict endures, people continue to suffer, and the need to help them continues to be present.

All told, there are currently at least 16 countries where political violence has damaged economies, decimated food production and health systems, and left millions poor and starving. These political conflicts are not only tragedies in their own rights; they are now also seriously threatening the progress we have made in development. Not only are tens of billions of dollars being diverted away from development to conflict areas, but we are also losing ground on critical global goals. As you well know, after years of progress, the number of hungry people is starting to rise again. The majority of them are living in countries wracked by conflict.

We are seeing the face of humanitarian aid itself changing as new donors become important players. China and other emerging donors like India and Brazil are taking on increasingly significant development roles in areas such as infrastructure, technical assistance and food aid. Similarly, private foundations are expanding their roles. It is notable also that in both conflict areas and in natural disasters, militaries are taking on greater roles in humanitarian aid. If you look at the biggest emergencies in the last two decades, the role of militaries stands out. The bottom line is that only large militaries stockpile enough food, tents, medicines, and other critical items to deal with the largest emergencies. Collaboration between all players – including the military – remains essential if we are to ensure effective and timely humanitarian responses.

Another trend worth noting is that, overall, donations for both emergency and development aid have continued to rise and field operations are being designed better to support resilience after crises. But donor behaviour is uneven and increasingly unpredictable. Countries like the UAE, Sweden and Norway consistently give around 1 per cent or more of their Gross National Income to aid programs, well above the UN target. But many traditional donors – usually the largest sources of aid - have been flat or even cut back to levels as low as 0.2 per cent of GNI.

It is worrying to see a growing wave of political nationalism and xenophobia in many parts of the developed world frequently include calls to cut foreign aid. And yet, if all OECD donors matched the generosity of the UAE and the Nordics in terms of percentage given, we would have more than enough money to really tackle hunger and poverty in our lifetimes.

I cannot talk about the current humanitarian landscape without acknowledging the challenging climate of scrutiny facing humanitarian agencies themselves, some of which have been rocked to their cores in recent months. I believe it is absolutely vital that issues of integrity be identified, faced head-on, and dealt with. I also feel that it is crucial that we as an industry do not get distracted, in this important process, from the vital work we must continue to do. People's lives are quite literally in our hands and in the hands of the brave men and women in the field.

The whole humanitarian system is carried on the shoulders of good people on the ground who dedicate – and risk – their lives to make the world a better place. It is important that while the spotlight is shone on those less noble in deed or intent, we do not forget the vast majority of unsung heroes upon whom the spotlight of negative publicity would have no cause to shine.

So what does all of this mean for WFP? In 2015, the UN and NGO's had an appeal for $25 Billion for Humanitarian Aid to cope with crises fuelled by religious and ethnic conflict in Syria, Iraq, Myanmar, the Central African Republic, Yemen and South Sudan. Twenty-five billion dollars is ten times the level of emergency funding the UN needed back in 2000 when we set the Millennium Development Goals which preceded the revised, Sustainable Development Goals. So tens of billions of Dollars we may have spent on development have been swallowed up by these bloody conflicts. And today the numbers are even higher.

But despite the fact that millions are spent on emergencies, our fundamental problem has not been solved. Development must remain a priority as the ONLY viable solution to achieving any kind of meaningful peace. The bottom line is that we cannot pat ourselves on the back for saving a life, only to leave that life isolated and stripped of both hope and human dignity. We have to recognise that, in failing to invest equally in addressing emergencies as well as development aid (through programmes like school feeding) we may fail to address the kinds of fractures and divisions within which extremist messages can thrive. Terrorism, violence and displacements are as old as mankind. History is littered with examples: religious battles, colonisation, genocides in virtually every continent in the world. The fact that these issues persist may be part of the human makeup, but the fact that we allow them to continue without finding or repeating a simple, clear-cut, hard-hitting solution that deals with the root causes is both tragic and unforgivable.

In a world in which the forces of evil are perhaps more organised than ever, we cannot afford for the forces of humanity to be disorganised and fragmented. And we must recognise that, while emergency aid is a vital piece in the humanitarian aid puzzle, development aid might be the single most effective way to build peace. Your determination, unity, clarity of purpose and the forcefulness of the messages you deliver are imperative in this fight. There can be no cracks in the paintwork.

As your UN Messenger of Peace, I feel unequivocally that today my obligation is to demand that you recognise that peace needs to be fought for… and that now is the time to fight…and that perhaps the best way to fight is to give people something to live for.

One of the ways that we can do that is to find new and effective development methods and models, and embrace the idea that the innovation we all talk about in the sector is not just a catch phrase – it is an opportunity to find grassroots ideas that might already be making a

difference. And those kinds of ideas can be found within stories like that of Nonhlanhla Joye, an award-winning social entrepreneur from KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

Joye pioneered an innovative farming method that uses ordinary plastic bags to create suspended vegetable gardens that hang from custom-made structures. It is a homegrown solution for subsistence and commercial food production. It is cost effective and requires limited inputs: no chemical fertiliser, weeding or pesticides, very little water and almost no physical labour. It can be done by the old, the young and the disabled. Joye contracts local micro-farmers to grow for her 'Umgibe' project and is on a mission to replicate it in households across South Africa to help create food security throughout the nation. It is smart. It is innovative. And it is duplicable.

I know that there can be no one single solution to the complex problems we face, but perhaps through better sharing ideas and developing a patchwork of innovative solutions which apply to both emergency and non-emergency situations, we can make better progress towards our goals of achieving peace and eliminating hunger.

The landscape that you as an Executive Board operate within is incredibly difficult. You are located within an aid community that has too many actors, too much bureaucracy, and too little trust. You are operating against a backdrop of distrust also among the business community, NGOs and academics. You are confronted daily with a struggle for control among the UN Agencies, NGOs and bilateral donors and a ferocious scramble by aid providers to get into the media as they compete for resources and credit.

Many years ago, Secretary-General Kofi Annan was facing similar issues when he published what he called "UN Competencies for the Future." All of these competencies were aligned with the UN's core values of integrity, respect for diversity and professionalism. They included communication, teamwork, accountability, vision, creativity, empowering others, building trust and client orientation. These concepts were and remain the foundation for effective partnerships. No team can function if the players do not share basic information and strategies. Yet, until recently, globally we still had no single, comprehensive system that tracked all flows of public and private aid. The most detailed aid reporting still came mostly from just the traditional donors and the system desperately needed to be expanded.

It has long been clear that we need a more inclusive global tracking system that reports all government and private aid -- and shows in detail where it is going and how it is used, and this need has underpinned the development of Dubai International Humanitarian City's recently launched Humanitarian Logistics Data Bank, which we've designed to facilitate the real-time collection of data for the deployment of aid in impacted regions.

The realisation of the humanitarian logistics data bank's potential will depend on the ability of organisations within the humanitarian sector to work together, and ultimately, we very much hope that the data bank itself can become the wind beneath the wings of the sector it was designed to serve. The data bank is one way we can start to work together; it is a small step, but a crucial one to ensure we are coordinated, efficient and effective in our humanitarian responses.

It is only when you take action that the lost souls I spoke of in my opening will attain the rights they deserve. Unless you decide to act, unless we decide to act, we face a fate of joining the ranks of that cruel, cold, draft of wind that was so ruthless and called herself hunger. We will be her hand and her instrument.

I tried to learn the name of that little girl in Malawi because selfishly it would have offered me some comfort to tell her mother that I would never forget her name. But the answer

that hunger gave me through that mother's lips was terrifying. She said, "I wanted to name her, but what was the point? She was just my baby, and I knew she would not live."

I would like to pause for a second to consider the wisdom of nature as we reflect on what it might look like to work together more effectively. The UAE has been a migratory hub for birds since long before it became one of the busiest human travel intersections in the world, and the cooler breezes of spring and autumn are still marked by silhouettes of v-formations in the sky, as an estimated 3 million migrating birds break their long journeys with us.

If there is one image I hope you will carry forward from my time with you today, it is that of birds in flight. Here's why: The V-shaped flight formations of migratory birds rely on a sort of reciprocal altruism, an understanding that by working together, the power of the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It works something like this: all of the birds - except the one at the front - fly in the upwash from one of the wingtip vortices of the bird ahead. That up wash assists each bird in supporting its own weight in flight, in the same way, that a glider can climb or maintain height indefinitely in rising air. The birds flying at the tips and at the front are rotated to spread flight fatigue equally among the flock members: by co-operating, migratory birds all benefit and increase the possibility of reaching an audacious common goal which, quite simply, would be impossible to reach alone.

I very much hope that in some small way, my words can be the wind beneath your wings in your discussions.

Thank you all, especially President Kálmán and Executive Director Beasley, for allowing me the great honour of addressing you today.