

**Opening remarks by  
Executive Director  
Mr David Beasley  
on the occasion of the  
2019 first regular session of  
the Executive Board**





Thank you Mr President. It is good to have you in the seat. And Zoltán (Kálmán), Ambassador, we certainly appreciate all your extraordinary leadership and your friendship and your kindness. This is the type of camaraderie, this is the type of family that we believe, going forward, will continue to make WFP the best of the best. We must hold each other accountable and this is what families do because Mr President, as you said, the world is in turmoil. There are more hungry people today because of conflict, primarily, but we know the extreme hunger rate has spiked, has skyrocketed from just 80 million to 124 million. As you have heard me say, when I arrived here, we were facing four famines, we were facing substantial and serious concerns about our monies, what would happen if major donors cut back for political reasons. As you well know, the politics of the world are in transition. These are unsettling times. But what is also very clear is there is uncertainty in countries all over the world driving up the hunger rate, driving up migration, driving destabilization and driving people to question their hopes, their dreams. This is where the World Food Programme, in my opinion, is the best positioned to help the world, in a multilateral context, and help the United Nations be stronger. I do believe that the United Nations has a challenge before it. I do believe that the United Nations is needed now more than any time period in world history. And the World Food Programme needs to be the model for moving forward. The status quo will not get us where we need to go.

If we are content with the status quo, if we are content with the hunger rate going up, if we are content with oppression of women, if we are content with these types of things, then we should stay as we are. But if we want to be better and we want to be stronger ... and I have said clearly we are the best in emergency humanitarian operations but it does not mean we cannot even be better because we can. We have a special guest with us today, the Vice-President of Côte d'Ivoire. Why is that important? Because the status quo is not acceptable to Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr Vice-President, you are a leader and our leader in zero hunger. You are a leader in reducing stunting. You are a leader helping challenge, multilaterally, countries around the world to work together, to come together. When he and I were in my office just chatting about how they were transitioning their economy, I said I remember facing these challenges in my economy. You have heard me mention this, when our unemployment rate in my state was the worst in the United States and then within two years we were tops in the United States. We did not make it happen by status quo. We made it happen by challenging the status quo, by making the reforms necessary.

And here at the World Food Programme, we have been making those changes. In fact, let me just touch upon a few because I think you and I believe that we can be better. And when I look at the fact that, yes, we have achieved certain extraordinary successes. On the funding side, we were just a little over (US)\$3 billion, less than \$4 billion just five years ago. We were system-designed on a (US)\$3 billion system but now we are now (US)\$7.4 billion. Not only did we not go backwards a couple of billion, we have actually gone forward a couple of billion, so a net swing of almost \$4 billion and we are spread thin.



Our teams right here are spread thin. We have got L3s all over the world. We have turmoil, controversy and bubbling controversies. Every day and every night our team is working hard, as hard as they can, and you will hear more about Yemen. We will get into the details of that. May we pray and hope that the issues with DPRK will move forward after this coming week. May we pray and hope that Venezuela will calm down and we will not have issues there, but we are prepared. We are prepared in our neutral objective way to do what we know how to do best. But with all of the funding increases that we have been successful at in these past few years, 80 percent of it goes to just a few countries in war and conflict, to the neglect of 40–50 countries. We know what happens when you do not have food security. When you do not have food security migration, destabilization, conflict. That is why we were able to convince the United Nations Security Council to adopt Resolution 24/17 because the world has come to recognize that food security is a critical component. When we fail to address the root cause in sufficient time we pay a horrible price, at least a hundred if not a thousand times fold. We know in the world today that (US)\$14–15 trillion of money are devoted towards war and conflict impacted by war and conflict on the world's GDP.

You see this humanitarian–development nexus is real. This is very real. And this is why we have been working so hard to make the changes at the World Food Programme. Only just a few years ago we were I think about (US)\$500 million on cash-based transfers. Today, this year (US)\$2.2 billion. That did not happen by status quo. It happened because the members of this Board and the leaders around the world were recognizing and understanding that cash-based transfers can be a vital part of change, more efficient, more effective. Yet at the same time we need all available modalities to us, whether it is cash, whether it is commodities, because in a world where you are short of the funds you need we want to do everything we possibly can to address those concerns which are out there. When we made those changes, we had to make institutional structural changes inside, which is why we had the risk management division; which is why we bolstered up many of the other operations within WFP.

Digitization is a critical component, a critical part of the future. How do we take advantage of digitization? How do we take advantage of biometrics? We have scaled up from about 16 (million) to 32 to 35 million digitized beneficiaries. When I got here, I said we wanted to make sure that we would try to digitize every single beneficiary in the system because we know when we do that, especially when it is coupled with biometrics, my goodness, the savings, the efficiencies are remarkable. In fact, we can quantify that just this past year alone over 50 million additional rations as a result of just changing our ISC rate from 7 to 6.5. Now, I would like to see it go lower. We are supportive of United Nations reform, but as I have said all along, the United Nations reform is extremely important but we must make certain that it helps us be more efficient but not be efficient alone because we also have to be more effective.



So, digitization, biometrics, cash-based transfers, this is also why we said we needed change in the Inspector General's department. And Kiko Harvey who is here, we boosted up her budget from (US)\$1.3 million per year to what will be 10-point-some-odd million dollars in just two more years. Why? Because when you are putting (US)\$2.2 billion worth of cash, when you have got billions of dollars' worth of commodities and some of the most complex environments on earth, we cannot assume the status quo systems are sufficient because it is much more complex. We are spread thin. We are spread thin all over the world and headquarters has got to be stronger. It must be restructured in a way that we give the regional directors and the country office directors the support that they need. There is one thing we saw in the General Staff Survey was the field feels like headquarters does not listen. And headquarters must be more attentive to the needs of those on the ground and in the field. This is why we are making these changes.

We believe that yes, we are great at emergencies, but we can be substantially better, in my opinion, in the humanitarian-development nexus. We must give the country office teams and the regional office teams more support to attract more funds from donors with the type of programmes that will address food security and stability, the root cause. We know, not just parenthetically, not hypothetically, but experientially for every 1 percent increase in hunger, there is a 2 percent increase in migration and the costs of supporting a citizen of a nation inside the country because stable versus migrating is a 100-fold. And so, we have been in discussions with you as well as internally, what we need to do to be better; what we need to do to challenge the status quo and so we have been working with you to make these plans. We have been working along in change for the last two years. We are waiting now on the ACABQ to provide a date for their meeting and their advice to the World Food Programme and the Board and then when we have that, we hope that you can review it and we can move forward to the next step of approving the management plan.

But the status quo is not going to do it. We expect you to hold our feet to the fire. We expect you to challenge us. We expect you to be a part of the team of asking the tough questions but begging for better solutions that will address the problems of the world today because the world needs us. And it is not just a world of numbers. It is a world with little girls and little boys who have names, who have moms and dads, who are looking to us. This is why we have been fighting for changes. The status quo is not going to do it. Status quo with women? Are we content with where women are today in the world? Are we content with gender parity, sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse? I do not think we are. I believe that we have got the greatest footprint on earth around the world that can do more to showcase change, of challenging the status quo that women in power can truly help us move the world forward.

For example, we know with women, they do not get the financial access, credit, support and tools they need in the smallholder farming community. You talk to many people in the west, they ask: what have you got to do with smallholder farmers? Well, when you travel where we



travel, you will see very well that women are the fundamental building block for the future and when women get the same resources as men, you will see an increase of one third in the (crop) yield and you will see 150 million people no longer in hunger. That is why we have been aggressively challenging our structures and systems inside, making certain that gender is a critical component of every programme we have. It is not just gender parity. It is not just having one or two women in key positions. It is having women's engagement involved throughout the system and out in the field. And this year alone, in our country strategic plans, we plan to empower 6.9 million women just through strategic programmes there alone. That does not even get into the 10 million people in food-for-asset programmes. I think every able-bodied beneficiary ought to be in a community improvement project, rehabilitating land, planting trees, building roads, whatever it may be, education, technical education, job training. Last year, out of that 10 million, guess what, 5 million or more were women. Why is that relevant? I will tell you why it is relevant. Because those food-for-asset programmes are by and large in countries where women otherwise did not have the opportunity. And I have seen, first-hand, and many of you have travelled out in the field and I beg you to go to the field more with our teams to see these programmes so you can be inspired as I have been inspired. When these women get the same resources as men, whether it is cash-based transfer, vouchers or a food-for-asset type programme, it is amazing to see their dignity, their pride, owning their land, feeding their family, selling into the marketplace. You see we have got 5 more million women just in that alone.

What about school meals? We support directly over 16 million children in school meals, another 40 (million) indirectly, through providing expertise and support to countries. Well, out of that 16 million, 8 million of those, give or take, are girls, girls who otherwise would not be in school, not all of them, in cultures, in communities that have not advocated for girls' equality. You see we are changing culture. With food we bring hope and values and these little girls, we know what happens when little girls are in school meals programmes: teen pregnancy rate goes down, marriage rate goes down, education empowerment goes up, incomes go up. We know the GDP impact – the World Bank has given us those numbers when children get the education, are not stunted, are not wasted. It is a powerful formula for success and the World Food Programme is the best positioned in this regard.

Now, gender parity. I have told you two years ago when I got here a little less than two years ago, I was shocked by two things in the United Nations: one is the lack in my opinion of digitization that was necessary to take the United Nations to the next level. We are moving in that direction, clearly. And now we are getting into artificial intelligence and blockchain technologies. But the second thing I said was gender parity. It was shocking that the United Nations was not the leader in the world in gender parity, now I understand as you do, too, some of the countries where we had the most employees are very difficult countries for women. That might explain it, but that does not excuse it.



In the past eight months we have already increased gender parity by 1 percent. In the last 18 to 20 months we have increased gender parity by almost 2.5 percent, more than we had done the five/six years before. And my regional directors back here, my country office directors, they know I have gotten you doubting that. I have got tools that break down every country. How many do you need? You have got benchmarks. Every six months you have got to reach these benchmarks. But I also know how many people are on short-term contracts, how many are retiring, how many new jobs.

This team quite frankly is excited about the opportunities. We want to meet the benchmarks. In fact, 45 countries have met their benchmarks in just the past few months. Now, we have got more to do. But I am going to be meeting with every regional director, who I am holding accountable personally, to every country office director because we have to go through the numbers and break them down. 'Well, you had 15 new employees this time. How in the world did you not end up with 50 percent of them being women?'

You see it is not just about gender parity for the sake of having gender parity. We know when you have equality, empowerment, women will bring to the table what is needed to help the world be a better place. So, help us. This team back here – yes, this is what I love about the World Food Programme. The World Food Programme will embrace change. Oh, it shakes us a little bit when we start talking about it. It is just like when I shook up South Carolina first few months and then people started saying, "Well, I see where we are going now." We are going to get there. We are going to be stronger. We are going to be better for it.

I could go on and on and actually I would love to. There is so much to talk about. But we have got our plate full. We need you to help us make certain that we have the people in place, the structures in place because we are not going to solve the problems of the world today in the status quo context. And we are not going to solve hunger and poverty in the world today by the United Nations alone and we are not going to solve it by governments alone. It is going to be solved when the governments embrace the changes necessary to bring the private sector to play in helping address hunger. When I took South Carolina from the bottom to the top, I empowered the private sector, I empowered the women.

The private sector – we must open up doors of opportunity. I do not see the private sector is just a context of more money. I think that is nice, that would be good. But I do see the private sector strategic in helping us address economic development, sustainability in the food and agricultural sectors as we partner more strategically with FAO and IFAD. That has been a status quo change. Many of you remember two years ago. We have got more United Nations agencies cooperating, collaborating with us than any time period I know since I have been here. UNICEF and UNHCR and the others, we are having dialogue constantly now. We are having team meetings not just at headquarters level but also at the country office level, challenging our teams. Do not worry about the silos. Do not worry about egos. Do not worry about who gets



credit but worry about how do we make change for children and families in these countries that need our help.

The United Nations, in my opinion, is in the crosshairs for proving its viability. I have heard many people say that the United Nations has been in some of these countries for decades and have nothing to show for it and there is donor fatigue. But I can tell you when I go to the capitals, as I have done in the last two years, I have gone to the field and I have listened to the field. I have heard from our leaders out there, what works and what does not work and what type of funding needs to take place and how we need to be more strategic. Then going back to the countries and the capitals with many of you in this room explaining why we must not neglect these areas and the consequences of food insecurity but yet the opportunities when we break down silos and put the funding necessary to achieve the successes. We have proven experiences, whether it is food for assets, and I could keep going on and on about the type of programmes. That is what we have been doing all along. We just need to scale them up. And this is why Ute (Klamert), who comes from Germany, who has strategic strength in an area that we have been weak in, to help us solve what we do very well and scale up and especially in the countries in this room and not in this room, that have been neglected for lack of funding. And I have great confidence that Ute will help us and help our teams think strategically a little bit differently, so we can attract the dollars and be more collaborative with other agencies out in the field. And by the way, when I got here, of the AEDs, it was 20 percent women when I got here, it is now 50 percent. It was one to five, two to four but still, you get the point.

But I need your help in bringing in young, bright talent, especially women, at all levels, not just at the highest level. And so, Mr President, I want to say thank you. We are looking forward to your leadership with you. It is the same remarkable leadership we had with the past President. This team behind us, we are at your disposal. None of us are perfect but we, working together to make this a better world, I believe in the World Food Programme and I believe that this Board will hold us accountable, challenge us to be better. We have nothing to hide. We have every desire to be the best. When we make mistakes, tell us. Let us move on and move forward. We want you to be here with us. We want you to be out there with us, but it is us as we come together for the people in the world who need our help.

So, Mr President, that ends my remarks and thank you very much.