

2020 annual session of the Executive Board

Virtual session

H.E. J. Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Crisis Management, European Commission

H.E. J. Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Crisis Management, European Commission: Thank you, very much, Mr President, Mr Executive Director, Ambassadors, distinguished participants. It really is a great pleasure for me to be part of this panel and I thank you for your invitation. Before I continue, I would like to make a technical early warning, for some reason my connection to Rome gets cut every 16 minutes, so if it happens at any point during this panel, please bear with me, I will call back, we will be reconnected in a few seconds.

I would like to start by expressing my deep appreciation for WFP, for the tremendous efforts WFP and its staff have been making in responding to the numerous emergencies around the world and since a few months ago, on top of everything, to the COVID-19 crisis. This crisis has shown us how complex our challenges are and it has added additional layer to the challenges that we face, challenges to our societies, economies and health. I will not dwell on the various effects, as they have already been eloquently described by David (Beasley), whose opening statement I can fully associate myself. I would like to make a few remarks on what has worked and how we should chart the way forward. For example, we have, for the very first time, a global humanitarian response plan made by the United Nations and this is a tangible and effective sign of the United Nations working together as one, with clear, unified strategy, supporting the work of all United Nations agencies, in particular in the field. Also, we have the first global common service plan within this same framework, in addition to the impressive food assistance, which was put in place by WFP. I think this is a very important enabler for the entire humanitarian and development community to continue the delivery of the assistance to those most in need and this is particularly important in the current context of the travel restrictions and severe logistic constraints due to the COVID-19 crisis.

The European Union, on its part, has also very quickly adopted a strong and joint approach to address the pandemic. We have launched in early April the global response plan by the European Union and that was the time of the height of the peak of the COVID-19 crisis in Europe and we already were fully aware of the need to look beyond our borders, to tackle this challenge as a global one and that is why we developed this global response, also in the spirit of a Team Europe package, meaning we mobilized all our instruments, humanitarian, development and peace instruments. We mobilized all European Union institutions, including the financial ones, and we also mobilized the Member States and altogether since then we have mobilized beyond EUR 36 billion to address the immediate needs caused by COVID-19 pandemic, but also more longer term social and economic consequences.

I think that this pandemic has clearly demonstrated the need to follow this joined up approach. We have to combine short-term response in sectors such as health, water, sanitation, but this has to be coupled with efforts to alleviate the social and economic impact of the crisis and to build up the resilience of the most vulnerable. This, we can also call the triple nexus between humanitarian, development and peace dimension of our work. This is a silo breaking exercise that needs involvement and contributions of all actors, including our Member States, by that I mean both United Nations and European Union Member States, international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the European Investment Bank and other regional development banks and the peace and security actors.

Our Team Europe approach to the COVID-19 crisis will pave the way also to future European Union responses to global challenges. We will try to build on this whole of European Union approach. We would also like to further strengthen our strategic partnership with the World Food Programme and other United Nations agencies. This is key if you want to be successful. We count on WFP and sister agencies to follow a team United Nations spirit and put it consistently into practice. We really encourage you all and other actors to pool expertise and solidly work together for the truly joined up response, a response to which everyone contributes in line with their core strengths and added value because only together will we be able to address effectively this pandemic and its effects on vulnerable populations.

