

2021 annual session of the Executive Board

Virtual session

Opening remarks by the Executive Director

D. Beasley, Executive Director: Mr President, thank you very much. I hope this is going to be our last session in this virtual format because it makes such a difference when we are together. We can see each other and we can talk to each other in person.

I wish I had a lot of good news to tell you but I do not. One piece of good news is that we averted massive famine, we averted massive destabilization and mass migration last year because the world responded swiftly. The problem is that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have rippled and rippled and cycled and cycled and in 2021 the consequences are looking devastating. I am going to share those numbers with you in just a little bit.

We have got a very busy week ahead, as the President has said. We have lot of documents to consider, 47, I think, covering a lot of good stuff that we have worked on to help us be more strategic, more accountable, more effective. We have got special guests joining us this afternoon - the Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed, and Agnes Kalibata, Special Envoy for the Food Systems Summit – to discuss preparations for the food systems summit. In the coming days we are going to be talking about a lot of the things that we are working on, a lot of things that we are doing.

One of the things that we have been working on is the Global School Meals Coalition. We all understand the critical role that school meals play in the development of a nation, as the health of a child helps determine the future of a nation. We know, for example, 73 million children living in extreme poverty are not getting any school meals. Last year COVID-19 forced about 1.6 billion children out of school – and even as of now there are about 370 million children that are still continuing to be impacted. We need to be all hands on deck in these nations as we continue to work through COVID-19 because we hope that by 2030 every child on the planet that is in school can have a healthy nutritious school meal.

I am not going to get into the details of all the different items on the agenda this week, because we have got time set aside for many of them, such as the WFP strategic plan. This plan is extremely important, because it is our opportunity to consider - where are we going, what is the future, what do we need to do differently, what do we need to do better, what do we not need to change?

When I arrived at WFP we had just come out of maybe USD 15 million to USD 100 million of cash-based transfers. Now we are doing over USD 2.1 billion and that is USD 2.1 billion that goes into local economies, helping stimulate marketplace activity.

Look at what we are doing in local purchases now, we are helping stimulate local economies by local purchases throughout the continent of Africa and other places, literally hundreds upon hundreds of millions of dollars in food assistance for assets programmes. But at the same time, we need to up our game even further, be the best of the best and not be stuck in silos in the old way of thinking. But at the same time, let us still get the job done.

The anti-fraud and anti-corruption policy will also be considered this week. That is very, very important, as you well know, because we are no longer a USD 2 billion operation like we were a few years ago. Now we are at USD 8.9 billion in revenues as of 2020, for example, and I can only hope, because of the calamities that we are facing out there with the number of people that are hungry, that this number will go up even further, which means we have got to be the best of the best out there with our teams.

This starts with a healthy workplace culture. I brought in Gina for the simple fact that, as I have mentioned to you before: we come into our office at seven in the morning, and you deal with a crisis in Syria. By nine o'clock you are dealing with a crisis in Somalia. By 11 o'clock it is Yemen, by three o'clock it is somewhere else. By the end of the day, we are so busy fighting fires we have



2021 annual session of the Executive Board

Virtual session

failed to give the attention we need to make certain we have got the best workplace culture on the planet.

The global staff surveys, which you are very familiar with and are very supportive of, are an essential tool. Let me just run through the numbers from the 2021 survey. It is positive news with regard to our efforts in the past couple of years. I have said all along that one of the great pillars of WFP's success is our people. People have to be front and centre so that we empower them, we inspire them so that we can maximize the dollars that you give us to maximize the number of people we reach around the world.

In total, 16,653 employees took part. That is the largest number in the history of the World Food Programme - 84 percent of the WFP family. Unprecedented. 92 percent of respondents said they are proud to work here, up from 88 percent. 82 percent said their teams collaborate to get the job done. That is up from 74 percent in the 2018 survey. 76 percent are encouraged to propose better ways to work. That is up from 63 percent in 2018. You see, the teamwork and the inspiration and the workplace culture programmes and the messaging are taking heart and making a difference.

But there are also some other areas I want to touch on. 73 percent say their team is led effectively. That is up from 65 percent from 2018. 68 percent say career development is encouraged. That is up from 57 percent in 2018. But I want everyone to feel that they have a chance to learn and to grow. And so you will also hear from Gina later in the week as we talk about the people policy, which is the first of its kind in the United Nations system.

We will also be talking about racism and discrimination, diversity and inclusion, and these are extremely important issues. Now, at WFP we do not shy away from addressing issues that need to be addressed. We did it with gender parity, for example. When I came here, I was shocked that the United Nations was not the leader in gender parity around the world, only to get here and see that, quite frankly, the numbers were dismal for the United Nations system. And so what we have seen take place on gender parity alone has been remarkable. From 42 percent to 46 percent on internationals. From 30.3 percent to 38 percent on nationals. That is remarkable and just since 2017 when I arrived.

We set goals, we set benchmarks, we set measurables and we executed and things happened. We now have over 2,700 more women today than we did in 2017. And they are at all levels of the organization, from the top to the bottom. And that is what happens when we focus and that is why I know we will also address strategically and effectively any other issues that come our way. Why? Because we want this organization to be the best of the best.

Yes, we received the Nobel Peace Prize, which is an extraordinary success story on its own, because the Nobel Peace Prize Committee recognized the incredible work that the women and men at the World Food Programme do in putting their lives on the line, risking it all to help people around the world to bring stability, to bring hope, of course, to bring food to them. But the Nobel Committee was also sending the message our hardest work is yet to come.

Being a Nobel Peace Prize laureate also means we need to be the best at everything we do, and that means not just helping people on the outside but also respecting our people on the inside, and this is why the people policy and all the documents that you are working with us on are extremely important, so that we can maximize the effectiveness of every single person that works in and with the World Food Programme.

I say this especially now because in 2021, we just do not have the monies we need, which means every dollar has got to be used as strategic and as effective as it possibly can be.

What I would like to focus on for the next few minutes is what we are facing. I honestly am heartbroken at what we are facing in 2021, the second half of this year and probably a good way into 2022, and it saddens me. When you turn on the television you see everything except what



2021 annual session of the Executive Board

Virtual session

is critically important right now. It is like the world is talking about all the teacups on the Titanic. No one is talking about the iceberg - the famines, the starvation, the possibility of destabilization and mass migration.

When I arrived here in 2017, there were 80 million people marching towards the brink of starvation in IPC levels 3, 4, 5, - 80 million. The number had been dropping, dropping, dropping, dropping. But pre-COVID-19 that number had spiked to 135. You know why. We have talked about this. Man-made conflict primarily, compounded by climate change. And coupled with fragile governance, etc.

COVID-19 comes along, dynamically devastates the world, crippling economies, destroying economic opportunity, especially in the poorest countries in the world, and that number now stands at 270 million people. In IPC level 4, there are 41 million people. That is 41 million people knocking on famine's door. And as of now, 580,000 are in IPC level 5. The price tag to reach the 41 million about USD 6 billion.

Now, if you remember, when I spoke to the United Nations Security Council last spring, in 2020, I said we were heading towards famines of biblical proportions unless we properly handled the health pandemic and the hunger pandemic at the same time. And I warned that, if we did not, the cure would be worse than the disease. But the leaders around the world heeded our call, understood the significance. Debt was deferred for low-income developing nations that could put those monies on a short-term basis into safety-net programmes, working with the World Food Programme and others. Economic stimulus packages, over USD 27 trillion, helped jumpstart the economy. But we thought that 2020 would be the end of COVID-19 and it was not. It cycled back and we are still seeing a tremendous deterioration in nations around the world. We have got to be there for a lot of people. If we are not, we will have mass famine. We will have destabilization and we will have mass migration. And so we have got a lot of work to do.

Looking at these numbers over the past few days, it is just heart-breaking to see what we are facing. Just this past week, I was in Mozambique, Madagascar and, as you know, I have been to Ethiopia probably 10, 12 times in the last few months. When you look at the numbers, we must remember that these are real people.

I was up in Northern Mozambique, and on the ground there I was seeing thousands upon thousands of people who had been internally displaced, having lost it all. And compound that with climate change and COVID-19, it is heart-breaking. We were on the island of Ibo. Normally there are about 10,000 people there, it's almost like a tourist paradise island. Well, tourism is gone. Now 40,000 people, give or take, have gone there for refuge. There is no tourism, there are no jobs, and we are the only show in town now. Devastation upon devastation and talking to the mothers who cannot feed their children, it is heart-breaking.

From there we went on to Madagascar. This is a nation that economically was moving in the right direction, it had a lot of positive opportunities and then drought upon drought upon drought in the South, coupled with COVID-19-induced economic devastation, have set it back years. Now we are looking at famine conditions down in Southern Madagascar - in Ambovombe, for example. Several of our WFP family were with me on the trip and said that this was the worst they had seen since the 90s in Southern Sudan, now South Sudan.

Can you imagine? It is that bad. I saw women and children holding on to dear life. Hundreds upon hundreds of these families who came to our food distribution and nutrition points, some of these women had walked seven hours, five hours, two hours. These are the ones that were healthy enough to actually make it.



2021 annual session of the Executive Board

Virtual session

And when you see these children, the reality of why the World Food Programme is out there hits you in the face. It was really upsetting to me. As we talk about climate change and the industrialized nations creating climate change, here is an area of the world that has contributed nothing to climate change and yet they are paying the highest price for it.

The wealthy nations of the world have a moral obligation to help every single child in this area. Every single person. Because they are paying the price for everything we are talking about in climate change, and it is hypocritical to talk about combatting climate change while ignoring the impact on those people who have no hope at all and have been devastated and are now on the brink of starvation.

I want to read some numbers relating to IPC phases 3, 4 and 5. In DRC, for example, in 2017, the number of people in IPC level 3, 4, 5 was 7.6 million. Today, there are 27 million people in IPC 3, 4 and 5 - 6.7 million alone in IPC level 4. These are real people and real children.

In Afghanistan it was 7.6 million four years ago. Now it is 16.9 million people - 5.5 million of them are in IPC level 4. Yemen, of course, is a catastrophe - 16 million now in IPC 3, 4 and 5, including 5 million in IPC level 4. Ethiopia was 8.5 million, now it is 16.6 million. The Sudan was 3.8 million, now 9.7 million - 2.6 million of those are in IPC level 4. South Sudan has 7 million in IPC 3, 4 and 5. Syria, now 12 million, up from 6 million, due to the devastation of war, climate change and COVID-19. Nigeria now 12 million in IPC 3, 4 and 5. Burkina Faso is up from 257,000 people to 2.8 million people in IPC 3, 4 and 5.

I can keep going but I think you get my point. We now have four, five countries in IPC level 5. I do not expect it to get better, I expect it to get worse as COVID-19's ripple effects continue and climate extremes continue to happen and the hurricane/cyclone season is now knocking on our door once again. Last week I spoke at the United Nations Security Council in a special session on Ethiopia and Tigray. There are now over 4 million people in IPC 3, 4, 5 in Tigray - 1.9 million in IPC 3, 1.8 million in IPC 4, and 350,000 in IPC 5.

In Somalia in 2011, 260,000 people died, and half of these deaths had already occurred by the time a famine was declared.

Now, are the numbers that bad? I do not know, but we cannot sit back and debate the numbers to death when people need our help. We need to get our fire trucks out there to do what needs to be done. I hope we come back saying it is not as bad as we thought. The Prime Minister has ordered access. We have, in the last few days, had extensive discussions with the military about access, what we need and what we need to achieve to make certain that men and women do not die in the Tigray area.

In 2020, when the conflict began, 90 percent of the harvest was lost. You can imagine the impact. What we are very concerned about is this coming harvest, the planting season is now, and in addition 80 to 90 percent of the livestock are gone. So, the numbers could get worse, as you can only imagine. This is why access is critical.

Visas - we are working on this issue and I think we are making some headway. On the sat phones we are making some headway. Many other issues we are working on, we are making headway but it is not fast enough. But in my opinion in the next few days, in the next week, we can get the access we need. We are reaching about 1.3 million people now. We will scale that up to 1.6 million people in the Tigray region by the end of this month. 2.1 million next month and as we continue to work with NGOs and all others involved in food security as well as other humanitarian needs, our operations are supporting many, many others that are out there.

How much money is it going to take to meet all these needs globally? In 2021 we need USD 15.3 billion. As I said earlier, we need about USD 6 billion just for the 41 million people in IPC level 4. Now, if we put all the money to IPC level 4, well, guess what, you will have stunting



2021 annual session of the Executive Board

Virtual session

and wasting with an unprecedented impact upon the health, nutrition and lives of people around the world. At this stage we are 26 percent funded. Am I concerned? You bet I am.

We have got icebergs out there in front of the Titanic. You have heard me talk about this before. As we mentioned to the capitals, and let me tell you, we need money and we need it now. Yes, our total revenues last year were USD 8.9 billion. This year we are estimating about USD 8.4 billion/USD 8.5 billion. I hope that we can at least get to USD 12 billion. I do not know. I am jumping up and down everywhere I can. That is why I am going out to these critical places, to bring attention, to not forget about these people. They are our brothers and sisters.

Board members, we have got a lot to do. I hate to tell you but we are cutting rations right now in a lot of places, and that means lives are devastated. But if we work together to reach the 139 million people that we want to reach, and at the same time continue working on better policies, more strategic operations with the new strategic plan, I believe that the World Food Programme will continue to be the best of the best. But let us not slow down for a moment. Let us not underestimate what we are facing for the rest of this year.

I wanted to re-emphasize to you how bad it is out there - the famine conditions that are percolating and the number of people that are suffering and struggling.

Mr President, I could go on and on, as you can imagine. There is so much to talk about and we have got a busy week ahead. Thank you for allowing me to share with you where we are, what we have got to do and where we are going. Thank you, Mr President.

