

# 2023 second regular session of the Executive Board

## Hybrid session

### Opening remarks by the Executive Director

**Ms C. McCain, Executive Director:** Thank you, Mr President. Before I begin I want to acknowledge the moment of silence we held this morning. I mourn for all the United Nations employees who have lost their lives in Palestine, and for the civilians on every side of this conflict who have lost theirs. I also want to pay tribute to WFP's extraordinary and courageous team in Palestine, who are doing everything they can to respond to the desperate crisis now engulfing the region. They are true humanitarians and I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

Excellencies, a warm welcome to this second regular session of the Executive Board.

I want to thank all of you who have travelled from your capitals. And also our special guest, Ambassador Majid Al-Suwaidi of the United Arab Emirates, who will join us in his capacity as Director-General of COP28.

The upcoming meeting in Dubai is a unique opportunity to shine a spotlight on the devastation the climate crisis is inflicting on many places where WFP works, especially in fragile and unstable settings. It is increasingly destroying livelihoods and fuelling hunger among the people we serve. We must not waste this opportunity to demand global action and showcase WFP's innovative solutions.

Excellencies, when we met in June for my first board session as Executive Director, I warned of the widening gulf between global humanitarian needs and the resources available to meet them. I sounded the alarm about the plight of millions of people who were due to be cut from WFP's distribution lists.

Unfortunately, in the months since, many of our country teams have had to make painful decisions about who they can and can no longer assist. Almost half of our operations have already cut, or will soon reduce, the size and scope of their food, cash and nutrition programmes.

These tough decisions are not unique to WFP. They reflect the new and more challenging financial landscape that the entire humanitarian sector is navigating.

Last year, the international community stepped up to provide an extraordinary level of funding in response to the global humanitarian crisis unleashed by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. WFP received USD 14 billion – a completely unprecedented level of funding in our history.

These resources allowed us to stabilize the rising tide of global hunger and stop millions of people falling victim to starvation. We could not have done this without the strong support of all of you, our donors and partner governments.

But in 2023, the picture is very different. Acute hunger remains at record levels in today's post-COVID-19 world. Yet humanitarian funding has returned to pre-COVID-19 levels. WFP's operational requirements for 2023 stand at USD 23.5 billion, while our funding forecast is USD 10 billion – leaving us with a historic funding gap of almost 60 percent.

Meanwhile, WFP's operating costs have soared as global commodity prices have spiked, while access constraints often force us to adopt more expensive methods to deliver essential aid. We also face increasing complexity – geopolitically, and in the operational environment in the many countries where we serve.

Excellencies, we successfully halted the upward spiral in the numbers of people facing starvation. But there is a real danger we are about to see another global surge.



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Already this year, WFP has been forced to end support to 10 million people in Afghanistan, 3 million people in Somalia, and 2.5 million people in Syria. We have cut rations in half for refugees in Jordan and Uganda, among others. Millions more will be removed from our distribution lists in the months ahead.

These are not just numbers, they are real women, children and men, and they cannot afford to lose the lifeline WFP provides.

Women like Marzia, from northern Afghanistan, a mother of six whose husband was killed in the war. As a woman, she is of course banned from working. She is one of the countless women we have had to turn away in the past few months, because we simply do not have enough money to feed her family. But WFP will never give up on people like Marzia. We will not turn our backs on the vulnerable people who need us now more than ever.

We exist to bring hope where there is none and we do it because our mission is clear: to assist as many vulnerable people as possible and support them to build a better future. This is why WFP's dedicated women and men are using their creativity and resourcefulness, every single day, to overcome every challenge and deliver for the people we serve. Time and time again, our people step up, and show why WFP is the world's largest and most respected humanitarian organization.

We will continue doing everything in our power to raise the resources needed for our work. In recent months, we have met with the leaders of a number of international and regional financial institutions, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank.

We have committed to work together at the country level, with WFP acting as a delivery partner for government-led priorities and programmes in key areas, such as climate action, implementing social safety nets, and supporting sustainable livelihoods. We have a real opportunity to expand and scale up partnerships between WFP and the IFIs – I am determined to ensure we grasp this and think big.

Unlocking new opportunities with the private sector, embracing both funding and knowledge partnerships, is another key focus. This will encompass the full spectrum, from businesses, to philanthropic foundations, to high net-worth individuals, to individual giving by members of the public. Our ShareTheMeal app, which allows individuals to support our work with a few touches of their iPhone, has just paid for 200 million meals – a fantastic achievement.

But we must also be pragmatic about our ability to close the funding gap WFP currently faces. It is the new normal for the entire humanitarian sector, and we must respond and adapt to it. This is why I have set out an ambitious agenda for change, to ensure WFP is equipped to face the future with confidence.

Everything we do as an organization must serve our country teams, who lead WFP's efforts to reverse the rising tide of hunger around the world. This is our first priority and means channelling resources to the frontline to the greatest extent possible. The programme support and administrative budget for next year, outlined in the management plan before the Board this week, proposes a 24 percent increase in funding for country offices.

But we know we need to go further. So, second, we are embarking on a rigorous programme to further prioritize WFP's funds, driving efficiencies throughout the organization to ensure every donor dollar is stretched as far as possible. As part of this, headquarters teams are supporting country offices to revise their 2024 plans.



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We are working together to carefully balance caseloads against available resources, and using updated data on needs and operational constraints, such as security and access restrictions, to ensure they achieve maximum impact within available budgets. While we strive for even greater efficiency, we must not compromise our teams' capabilities or our ability to deliver.

But just as importantly, you must have full confidence our assistance is reaching the right people, in full and without interference. So, third, we are accelerating implementation of our Resource Action Plan. By the end of 2023, all 31 countries identified as higher risk must have completed a review of their operations and have finalized a costed and comprehensive action plan to address gaps and risks.

In 2024, we will move forward with the phased rollout of our end-to-end assurance framework. This includes digitizing identity management systems for all distributions; launching a comprehensive track-and-trace project spanning the entire supply chain; and stronger monitoring and community feedback mechanisms, to identify issues at a very early stage. By the end of next year, every WFP operation will have a plan in place to implement these stringent safeguards and controls.

Excellencies, in the new and challenging landscape we are now navigating, WFP must be crystal clear about our mission and mandate. So, fourth, we are initiating work to refine and focus our suite of programmes to ensure we concentrate our efforts on what we do best and harness the power of partnerships to maximize our impact.

WFP has the tools and expertise to pull people back from the brink of starvation, build resilience by supporting the transition to climate-smart agriculture, run integrated school feeding programmes which benefit not just the children, but also their families and their communities, and partner with governments to help them scale up their social protection programmes. This is how we will combat hunger and reduce needs over time.

But we must also ensure we have a more strategic and streamlined corporate structure, which encourages closer collaboration and better supports our people in the field. So, fifth, we are presenting a new departmental structure to the Board this week. A second phase of work is examining changes to be made at the divisional level and will be shared with Board members once completed.

I intend to bring all employee-related functions together in a new workplace and management department. I also want to establish a dedicated operations department, to serve as the centre of gravity for comprehensive, end-to-end programme delivery. The partnerships department will continue to focus on deepening our traditional relationships, while also seeking new opportunities for collaboration. Under my proposed structure, WFP will have three Assistant Executive Directors who report to the Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer.

Finally, the Chief Financial Officer will oversee and manage the full financial cycle, from corporate planning, through budgeting, to corporate reporting, and will report to me.

Our agenda for change will enable WFP to adapt to the new reality of sustained humanitarian needs and falling aid budgets. However, many country offices have already started reducing the size of their teams, in addition to cutting rations for beneficiaries. This is not an easy process, so we are examining what more we can do to ensure we fulfil our duty of care to our employees, particularly our national team members, who are the backbone of our operations.

We must also ensure there is an appropriate balance of employees. This is why we have introduced a recruitment pause for headquarters, global offices and the regional bureaux, which will remain in place until our organizational restructure is finalized. It does not apply to country offices.



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Excellencies, I said earlier that everything we do as an organization must serve our country teams. As I look around the world, I believe this more strongly than ever. I have already touched on Palestine and our extraordinary team there, who are determined to serve others, despite the risks they face. They are true humanitarians.

Last week I went to Egypt to meet with President El-Sisi and other senior government officials, to discuss how WFP can support a logistics base in El Arish capable of serving the entire humanitarian system. Corridors have been established on land and sea in Egypt and in Jordan. Since the conflict began, WFP has reached over 760,000 people with food and cash, and we plan to scale up to reach 1.1 million in the next 60 days.

But first, we need increased, sustained and regular supply corridors into Gaza. While we welcome the convoys entering through Rafah, they are a fraction of what is needed. WFP has food pre-positioned and ready, but the opening of an additional entry point is crucial to bring in humanitarian assistance at the required scale. Second, we need safe humanitarian access in Gaza, to assist people in need wherever they are.

Yet even as the eyes of the world are on Palestine, there are so many other crises around the globe where the innocent are suffering, and where our frontline teams are doing everything they can to get them the help they desperately need.

In the weeks since the crisis in the Middle East erupted, over 200,000 undocumented Afghans have been expelled from Pakistan, and many are now living in camps on the border. During the same period, over 450,000 people have been displaced in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo due to an upsurge in violence there.

Meanwhile, other emergencies continue, not receiving the attention and support they deserve, such as Haiti, where increased kidnappings and armed violence have now displaced over 200,000 people. Despite the worsening security conditions, WFP has reached 1.7 million people with food and cash assistance so far this year but we are only 20 percent funded for the next six months, and we will not be able to maintain this level of support with existing resources.

In Sudan, the civil conflict is still raging, away from the headlines, fuelling a national hunger crisis. Over 20 million Sudanese people – 42 percent of the population – are acutely food insecure, while more than 5.6 million people have been displaced by the fighting. This includes 1.2 million people who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, threatening to destabilize the wider region. Political solutions are urgently needed to secure humanitarian access and end the violence.

In neighbouring Chad, the influx of 500,000 Sudanese seeking safety has added to one of the largest and fastest-growing refugee populations in any African nation. While WFP has raced to respond to the dire humanitarian situation, we are looking at cutting 1.2 million people from our distribution lists in January due to lack of funds.

Over in Myanmar, the conflict continues to worsen. Recent clashes in Northern Shan State have sparked a new wave of displacement, bringing the total number of people forced to move since the February 2021 coup to a staggering 2 million. With humanitarian access still severely constrained, hunger is on the rise.

This is just a snapshot of the harsh reality confronting our frontline teams, who work in challenging environments around the world. There are so many more – too many to mention – but this is not a reason to give up. It must inspire each one of us to step up, and increase our efforts to tackle the scourge of hunger around the world.



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Excellencies, members of this Board, WFP needs your commitment and dedication, your partnership and support, now more than ever. We urgently need resources, so I ask all government donors, old and new, to do more. We need your support to reverse the cuts we have already implemented and avoid those that are fast approaching.

We also need Board members to leverage your diplomatic influence, to find political solutions to the conflicts and crises responsible for so much of the hunger we see today. Whether your government belongs to the G7, the G20, the European Union, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or any other grouping – please also use your networks of influence to put food security high on the global political agenda.

We need your insights and wisdom, to help us manage and respond to the complex environments that every humanitarian organization must confront today. We do not have all the answers – nobody does. I want today to mark the start of a new strategic dialogue, where we pool knowledge and resources to overcome challenges together.

We live in deeply polarized times but we should all be able to agree that no child deserves to starve. So let us unite around our common cause, rally our resources, and work as one united global team. Together, we can navigate our way through this challenging landscape and continue delivering for the people we serve.

Thank you and I look forward to spending time with all of you over the next four days.

