

Executive Board- June 2010
ODC Statement

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, Deteriorating food security, limited resources, fluctuation of market prices, climate change, water scarcity, political instability and the lingering impact of the financial crisis are all defining elements in ODC region in which we operate.

During the previous board session, I provided you with an overall analysis of the food security situation in the region, specifically in the Middle East. We have alarming statistics in the region, in the occupied Palestinian Territory (oPT) for example, 25 percent of the population in the West Bank and 60.5 percent in the Gaza Strip are food-insecure, with food representing 70 percent of imports. In Iraq, pockets of extreme vulnerability remain, with stunting as high as 40 percent in certain areas and yet due to funding shortfalls, WFP has not managed to start the implementation of the new PRRO in Iraq which was launched in April.

On the Arab world, I only wish to add that the aftershocks of the financial crisis are still hitting the poorest households, with the most vulnerable spending up to 65 percent of their income on food.

Central Asia is constantly facing new challenges. In Kyrgyzstan, the economy, which was in recovery following the financial crisis, has been severely affected by the April 7th event, which has cast the Kyrgyz republic into a period of instability and put a severe strain on public finances. WFP had to scale up ongoing spring Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) distribution from 215,000 to 250,000 beneficiaries; however distributions have been delayed due to the events.

I will present later today two new operations in Tajikistan and Armenia.

In such a period of increasing challenges, and in line with the spirit and commitment made by the international community in Copenhagen and L'Aquila, ODC is continuously focusing on expanding its network of partners in the region as well as strengthening relations with Governments. Over the last few months, during my bilateral visits and discussion with the Governments in the region, I have noticed their strong commitment, support and appreciation to WFP's role in their respective countries. We are increasingly perceived as partners in their national development plans and drivers in the process for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Recipient Governments are emerging as donors; for example the Governments of Azerbaijan and Jordan have both requested WFP's continued presence and have agreed to cover WFP operational costs and to fund new programmes to provide technical support in the areas of safety nets, nutrition and food security and to improve the targeting and efficiency of national food-based safety nets. Just last week, the Government of Syria agreed to partially fund the school feeding programme which provides assistance to approximately 38,000 schoolchildren and girls' families with the aim of preparing the Government to fully manage the project after 18 months. In my morning meeting with the Ambassador of Kazakhstan, he mentioned that they are looking forward to strengthening the partnership with WFP as donors in light with the new strategic plan.

WFP is becoming a strong partner in the planning and implementation of Government plans and priorities to achieve sustainable impact.

In Yemen for example, WFP is actively engaged in the development of a national food security strategy in conjunction with the Government, World Bank, and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). The new PRRO in Yemen, planned to start in September 2010, will continue to provide technical support during the elaboration of a national food security strategy to ensure that hunger,

food security and nutrition are reflected on the national agenda while strengthening government efforts to enhance ownership, capacity and accountability, institutionalizing support for vulnerable groups as a national safety net.

Given the complexity of the assessment work and the lengthy consultation process with the Government and partners, the PRRO document could not be presented to the board. However, the results of the survey are alarming; with 7.5 million Yemenis suffering from food insecurity (one third of the population) the population), WFP is urgently expected to address food and nutrition needs of the most vulnerable. Due to the urgency of the situation, we count on your support to endorse the document by correspondence as we hope to finalize and circulate it for approval in the weeks following this Executive Board session.

WFP ODC seeks to support the Governments through an inherent safety net component of its food assistance. More than 1.7 million beneficiaries benefit from our school feeding programme in nine countries across the region.

The voucher programmes in the region have also proven to be a success in offering a safety net alternative. In 2010, 156,000 beneficiaries will benefit from these programmes in six countries. Expansions of ongoing projects are planned, for example, in the West Bank, the programme will gradually expand to reach 61,500 beneficiaries by the end of 2010. Following in the footsteps of the successful electronic voucher programme in Syria, the programme in the West Bank will switch from a paper voucher to an electronic voucher transfer mechanism, allowing WFP to have real time information about the redemption of vouchers.

The impact the Voucher programmes have on the beneficiaries, their nutritional status and the local economy is truly impressive. In OPT, there has been a significant improvement in the diet for 90 percent of the beneficiaries. The project has been instrumental to ensure that the food is actually consumed by the beneficiaries with monitoring report indicating that beneficiaries consume 98

percent of the food they get in exchange of the voucher; up from 78 percent of the GFD beneficiaries.

Shopkeepers have been able to increase the volume and the diversity of their stock , increase their equipment , expand the size of their shop and have been able to employ more people . 29 percent of the shops have hired permanently additional staff. The impact of the project is reflected on all stages of the supply chain.

But the true value of the voucher programme is felt when one talks to the beneficiaries. I would like to quote Ali from Syria, "When I first came to Syria from Iraq, I could afford to buy cheese, rice and canned fish, but after some time, I could no longer spend my money on those food; I ran out of savings and became totally dependent on WFP's in-kind donation. When I learned about the voucher project, I felt blessed! Now, I can have cheese, eggs, rice and canned fish again." This new mode has given our beneficiaries more dignity, something we cannot quantify in monetary terms!

Be it through the provision of technical or direct food assistance, WFP has an obligation to meet the daily needs of around 410,000 refugees and 349,000 IDPs in seven countries in ODC region. Thus, WFP places refugee operations as a top priority. Yet, given the general financial challenges, we have struggled with shortfalls and pipeline breaks for some of the operations supporting refugees.

WFP's operation supports 280,000 persons displaced as a result of the Sa'ada conflict in northern Yemen. Thus far, the regular and widespread assistance provided by WFP and partners has contributed to stabilizing the levels of acute malnutrition and morbidity among the IDP population, particularly in the camps. However, the major ration cut in May due to shortfalls will reverse this progress and lead to a major humanitarian crisis. Without further funding, even distributing half-rations, the Sa'ada EMOP will be required to suspend operations from the end of August.

Since the beginning of the year, we have conducted oversight mission to three countries and four more are planned. More emphasis is being placed on training of WFP and counterpart staff on the targeting criteria and monitoring of our operations. As requested by the USA and Japan during the discussion of the Iraq PRRO 200035 at the February Executive Board, the Iraq Country Office has developed targets for the PRRO's log frame and a detailed monitoring and evaluation tool kit.

While more effort is exerted to meet the needs of more than 8 million beneficiaries in 2010 in an effective and adequate manner, we are burdened by funding shortages. On the regional level, ODC requires US\$ 160 million to meet its 2010 obligations.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, your support is much needed to fill in the widening gap; to effectively meet the increasing needs. We are confident that with your unwavering assistance, we will manage to step up for our obligations towards those who depend on us. Thank you.