



ODDAKAR INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT: EB 1/2010

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we last met at the November session of the Executive Board, WFP in collaboration with Governments and partners was evaluating the harvest outcomes across the region. Today I would like to advise you that overall the agricultural and pastoral conditions in the humid coastal areas of West Africa and in the western and central areas of the Sahel are not worrisome. However, our concerns for drought conditions adversely affecting agricultural and pastoral conditions in the eastern Sahel have turned out to have been well founded..

Today, we have strong evidence demonstrating that we are heading towards a major food crisis in southern Niger, western Chad and northern Cameroon. WFP with Governments and partners are stepping up assistance for the most vulnerable populations despite major logistical challenges.

- Deficit rainfall for the second year in a row has led to overstretched resources and a more than 30 percent harvest deficit. Pastoral movements have started much earlier than usual and increased animal deaths have been reported. In addition, global acute malnutrition levels and mortality rates have increased to alarming levels according to a December 2009 survey conducted in Kanem Eastern Chad.

In some areas, the lean season has already started, creating a longer and more difficult gap until the next harvest in October. Many households have exhausted their normal coping mechanisms and may start selling assets, withdrawing children from school or reducing the number of daily meals unless assistance is made available in a timely way.

Recent joint monitoring missions reveal that availability of cereals (maize, sorghum and millet) in areas which enjoyed good harvest like for example in Ghana, Benin and most likely Nigeria, could mitigate the impact of market tensions in Niger and Chad by improving the offer on local markets. At the same time, prices remain 15 percent below the average in all areas of the subregion, thus rendering access to these commodities more difficult, particularly for the more vulnerable households.

- In Niger, the Government's mitigation plan for 2010 indicates that 3.4 million people need assistance based on the national vulnerability assessment conducted in December 2009. Within the framework of this plan, WFP has scaled-up its current PRRO to address the

needs of 850,000 additional beneficiaries from March to October. We will proceed with a new budget increase to cater for the needs of 700,000 additional beneficiaries.

- The Chadian Government has estimated that 2 million people on its territory are already food insecure. Upon Government's request, WFP has launched an 11month Emergency Operation in Chad to provide emergency food and nutritional assistance in the western and central Sahelian belt. The operation will target more than 730,000 people with a major focus on malnourished children and pregnant and lactating women.
- As mentioned in the beginning, WFP operations in the sub-region face tremendous challenges, as the normal lead-time to bring food to Chad and Niger is 4 -5 months from procurement up to arrival. In many areas, commodities need to reach our warehouses before the start of the rainy season (July) as roads become impassable. We are however only able to achieve this if immediate contributions are received. (photo truck in Chad)
- I would like to highlight that even beyond this particular food crisis, both chronic and acute malnutrition rates in children under five are alarmingly high throughout the region. Approximately 16.9 million children under five live with chronic malnutrition – with an average stunting rate of 35.6 percent. 5 million under five children suffer from acute malnutrition, representing 10.7 percent of the children population. We are exploring the most adapted ways to address this challenge, through strengthened strategic partnerships (for example REACH, piloted in Mauritania and now also in Sierra Leone), through the use of appropriate nutrition products as well as through a contextualized policy framework. (slide nutrition)
- Besides the challenges which I just mentioned, the region continues to suffer from political instability. During the last Executive Board session, I explained the preparedness measures being taken by WFP in case of a deterioration of the situation in Guinea and potential spill-over effects to the surrounding countries. Over the past months, WFP was heavily involved in preparedness planning which led to a better analysis of logistics and ICT capacity. In the process, WFP, Government and partner staff capacity was built in the area of emergency preparedness and response as well as rapid needs assessments. In close partnership with major partners, WFP is following the establishment of a transition Government which has the task to lead the country through democratic elections within 6 months.
- Central African Republic continues to face complex humanitarian challenges with WFP, in collaboration with the Government and partners, effectively responding to the needs of the various beneficiary groups, targeting more than 652,000 beneficiaries. The situation was recently compounded by the influence of DRC refugees (18,000 people) into CAR. In March, the Regional Bureau will organize an EPR training for WFP and partners that should result in sub-regional contingency plan for Chad, Cameroon, CAR and DR Congo.
- Finally, let me share with you a very positive and encouraging encounter which I had during my January trip to the Central African Republic. I visited Mongoumba and Zinga,

where Congolese refugees are being hosted in CAR after fleeing violence in neighboring DRC villages. While talking with refugees, a local official came up to me and stressed how important WFP food assistance was in not only saving the lives of the newly arrived refugees but also in setting the basis for peaceful cohabitation between refugees and the host communities. Without this support, he added, many lives would have been lost as a result of fighting over the limited resources. (slide 'refugee registration').

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, with our joint commitment, we can take up the challenge and respond to the basic food needs of vulnerable people together with concerned Governments in eastern Sahel as well as across the entire region. At the same time, we need your support in a concerted effort to alleviate the impact of future food crises and improve long-term food security through effective partnerships.

Thank you.