

**Intervention of the President of the WFP Executive Board,  
Ambassador Ulrich Seidenberger,  
at the Joint Town Hall Meeting of the Executive Boards of  
UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP  
on 21 April 2020  
“The UN System response to the COVID-19 pandemic”**

As the representative of the Executive Board of WFP and as German Ambassador to the Rome-based United Nations (UN) Agencies of FAO, IFAD and WFP it will not surprise you that I am going to add a **“Nutrition and food security dimension”** to this discussion. Perhaps I should also mention at the outset that I had the privilege to serve my country also in the Security Council 2003 and 2004 and in Geneva from 2015 to 18 dealing then particularly with Global Health issues and with the WHO.

**From such a personal “Rome + perspective”, if you allow, the following 4 points of action seem to be the most urgent ones and should be addressed immediately by the UN System and the membership from my point of view:**

- 1) **The Security Council should accept its responsibility to deal with this pandemic and its multi-dimensional effects as a standing and action oriented item on its agenda.** Furthermore, I believe it is necessary to create a mechanism that ensures an engagement of the Council in such global crisis scenarios like a pandemic or in case of global food crises with instant regional and global security ramifications and to take the decision to deal with that in the Council away from the usual political turf battles in this forum.
- 2) **The analyses of the socio-economic and the security effects of COVID-19 and how best to translate them into the operational work of the UN should also be coordinated system-wide.** From a Rome perspective it seemed a bit too New York focused when the food security and the food systemic risk dimension of COVID-19, which is of course of huge relevance to many countries in the global South, did not play a role in the risk analysis of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on 9 April, nor did it figure prominently or actually at all in the

report on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. I believe there is room for a more comprehensive and system-wide risk and action analysis.

- 3) **It needs now a coordinated approach of all parts of the UN system and likewise a coordinated financial approach in the system-wide response to COVID-19:** with a clearly defined division of labor relative to the respective comparative advantage of each UN Agency, a central chain of command and regular external system-wide accountability checks. Call it a **temporary centralized crisis management structure** if you want. Perhaps even more centralized than has been the practice so far, notwithstanding the “joint work” and the “Delivering as one UN”, described eloquently by the Principals earlier. Of course such a structure has to keep the **WHO** in the lead in the coordinated health related response to the pandemic, whereas the lead for the logistical support of COVID-19 emergency related UN operations and for the service delivery of food to the countries of need necessarily has to be with the **WFP**, both in close collaboration with each other and with other UN agencies at all time.

As regards the necessary coordinated response of the UN System in the field, and thanks to the implementation of the UNDS reform, the new UN country teams under reinvigorated RCs should now be well prepared to deal with this multidimensional crisis synergistically and effectively. It is very reassuring to hear from the Principals that the RC system is rising to the challenge. **Definitely COVID-19 will be the litmus test for the reformed UN System in the field.**

A review of the existing inter-agency coordination mechanisms at HQ and regional level and further streamlining in this regard may also be necessary given the existential and unprecedented challenge posed to the UN system as a whole. Perhaps we can come back to this important point later in the discussion.

What about the necessary coordination of the financial approach of the UN System in response to COVID-19 ? **Generally speaking** central solutions introduced by the Secretary-General recently like the Global Humanitarian Response Plan and the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund seem now to be exactly the right way to go and are clearly

more realistic – given the massive economic impact of COVID-19 on all countries – than setting up Funds and launching financial appeals in each and every UN agency and starting basically a race for resources.

**As regards WFP specifically:** as has been mentioned by the Deputy ERC and by WFP DED Amir Abdulla, the WFP component in the GHRP totals to 350 million USD. As the logistical backbone of the UN System WFP now needs urgently additional funding up to this very amount, in order to remain able to provide the logistics common services for the whole UN System. As the ERC has rightly said in his urgent call two days ago: all elements of the GHRP are crucial and need continued funding, but without the logistics common services the global response would come to a halt.

- 4) **An important question is whether a UN system-wide response to COVID-19, even if organized and coordinated in the best possible and most synergetic way, could be sufficient at all to respond to COVID-19 adequately. My answer to that is: I am afraid “no”.**

However, I believe that the challenge of COVID-19 might offer to us in fact a good opportunity now to **start developing multi-stakeholder governance structures within and beyond the UN System as the only adequate way to deal with and respond to the enormous global challenges of this century.**

A good start could be e.g. to establish a joint coordination and consultation structure between the UN System and the International Financial Institutions, particularly the World Bank and the IMF, as the key Global Financial Mechanisms.