

2023 second regular session of the Executive Board

Hybrid session

Special address by H.E. Majid Al-Suwaidi, Director-General of COP28

H.E. Artur Andrzej Pollok, President of the Executive Board (President): Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, it is now an immense privilege for me to welcome H.E. Majid Al-Suwaidi, Director-General and Special Representative of the United Arab Emirates, COP28 Presidency. Excellency, allow me first of all to warmly thank you for accepting our invitation and for taking the time to attend our session.

As we know how busy your agenda must be with the preparation of the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference, which takes place from 13 November to 12 December 2023 in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, the Board is truly honoured with your presence with us today.

As we meet at this session, we are aware that the climate crisis and its impact on food security is unfolding in a context of an already overstretched humanitarian system with limited global resources. Such impact is further exacerbated in the case of countries in fragile and conflict-affected settings, where extreme weather events affect three times as many people annually compared to other countries.

WFP is therefore particularly interested in the discussion and outcomes of COP28 and we look forward to hearing from you on the actions that are needed to scale up climate interventions in a protracted crisis to support vulnerable communities and reduce rising humanitarian needs. Excellency, I now have the honour to give you the floor.

H.E. Majid Al-Suwaidi, Director-General of COP28: Your Excellency Mr Chair, thank you so much for giving me this opportunity to speak with you today.

Excellencies, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to be here with you, and I want to thank the World Food Programme, its Executive Board, President Artur Pollok, and Executive Director Cindy McCain, for providing me this opportunity to address you. I also want to acknowledge the tremendous support from the World Food Programme for COP28's priorities and action plan in the past year.

Part of our action plan centres around a just and orderly energy transition, favouring decarbonization and the tripling of renewables by 2030. It also focuses on the need to overhaul climate finance, to make this transition possible. Both are absolutely necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and keep 1.5 degrees Celsius within reach.

The impacts of climate change on food, nature, lives and livelihoods, and our Presidency's focus on full inclusivity, are also themes that are core to our agenda. Indeed, climate change has become a key contributor to hunger, humanitarian needs and growing inequity. Our climate crisis is a hunger crisis, a water crisis, a humanitarian crisis.

This was clear when I visited the Dadaab refugee complex in Kenya earlier in September. In one of the world's largest refugee camps, I saw a striking example of the interconnectedness between climate change, food insecurity and conflict playing out in real time.

The camp was established 30 years ago, predominantly to house refugees fleeing conflict in neighbouring countries. Today, most arrive escaping drought and famine. Conflicts are compounding the issue and not just in the Horn of Africa. Currently, over half of the 25 countries considered the least ready to adapt to climate change are affected by conflict.

The OECD estimates that 2.2 billion people, or 26 percent of the global population, will live in fragile states by 2030. Each year, climate disasters affect three times more people in fragile and conflict-affected settings than in non-fragile ones. Climate change is exacerbating global hunger and triggering devastating humanitarian needs, not just in sub-Saharan Africa, but also in other



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regions of the global south, such as South Asia, the MENA region and small island states in the Pacific and the Caribbean.

Last year, climate extremes pushed 56 million people in 12 countries into acute food insecurity. That same year, climate extremes led to the displacement of 32 million people. By 2050, this number could rise to 216 million people.

The risk of inaction is grave. If we do not act now, it will not only become more expensive and increasingly difficult to adapt, but we will also see permanent losses and damages.

Stakeholders such as WFP play a crucial role in assisting countries experiencing protracted crisis. This is especially true in hard-to-reach countries and climate-vulnerable communities. Humanitarian assistance is bringing prediction, protection, adaptation and resilience building. It is preventing losses and damages from extreme weather events and other climatic disasters.

But humanitarian assistance should be the last resort. It should not be a default option to absorb climate risk in fragile contexts. And we are seeing climate impacts unfolding against the backdrop of an overstretched humanitarian system and diminishing global resources. The situation is dire, but there is hope if we act now.

The COP28 action agenda includes a series of initiatives aimed towards climate adaptation, mitigation, development, and sustaining peace. The need to take urgent adaptation mitigation measures and to transform food systems to prevent more communities from falling into the hunger trap has become essential. We must strengthen coordination, collaboration, and partnerships across humanitarian, climate and development actors. We must restore soil, water, forest and other natural ecosystems.

Climate actions to address food insecurity need to be better resourced and fully supported. Climate actions to accelerate assistance need to be adequately funded from climate and development finance. This is why we need to scale climate finance and make it more available, accessible, affordable and predictable. We must see to it that the Loss and Damage fund and funding arrangements are operationalized, along with early pledges. These actions would significantly reduce humanitarian needs and help people and communities build resilience and a more hopeful future.

But we need your continued support and we need actions now. I invite Board members to endorse the COP28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace. This was made available since November and will be officially launched on 3 December, the COP thematic day on Relief, Recovery and Peace.

This declaration is based on a year-long consultation with governments, fund providers and key agencies from the humanitarian, climate and development sectors. It recognizes that climate action is possible and effective in crisis settings and aims to rally support and action around the enhancement of technical and institutional capacities, financial resources, data and information to build climate resilience and leave no one behind.

I invite you to come forward with concrete pledges to support the operationalization of the Declaration through a package of solutions. These pledges can take different forms, be it financial or focused on technical capacity support. I also invite you to endorse our Emirates Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Food Resilient Systems and Climate Action. It puts food at the heart of the climate action, mobilizing political commitment to drive positive changes in the food systems, enhance food security and promote sustainable agricultural practices.



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On 3 December we will host the first ever Health Day and climate-health ministerial. Events will focus on building consensus on the health system's response to climate change and securing financing commitments for implementation.

The COP28 Presidency, WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization will also co-host an event that showcases proven integrated actions in support of resilient agricultural food systems, livelihoods, adaptation and social cohesion in a fragile context. This event will be a bridge to our Food, Agriculture and Water Day that will take place on 10 December. I look forward to seeing many of you in a few short weeks in Dubai and welcome your continued support to drive successful outcomes at COP28.

I thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to speak to you.

President: Excellency, thank you so much for this powerful address and the invaluable insights on COP28 that you have provided to the Board. Board members, I will now open the floor for statements. As agreed with the Bureau, each list will have the opportunity to deliver a statement of three minutes. The floor is open. On behalf of List A, Morocco.

The representative of Morocco (original language French): On behalf of List A, I would like to express our appreciation to WFP for having invited the Honourable Majid Al-Suwaidi, the Director-General of COP28, to join us today. We extend our sincere gratitude for his insightful and stimulating statement. Furthermore, we have unwavering confidence in the success of COP28, which is going to take place in Dubai.

Recognizing the urgency of addressing the immediate global challenge of climate change and its devastating impact on African countries, List A emphasizes the critical importance of implementing measures to adapt and to mitigate the consequences of droughts, floods and other increasingly frequent and severe extreme weather events. These occurrences significantly disrupt agriculture and food production, resulting in widespread hunger and malnutrition.

Beyond the immediate impact on food security, climate change presents a long-term threat to our water resources, which are fundamental to our continent. Clean and safe water is essential for both human consumption and agricultural production. Nevertheless, climate change is inducing water scarcity and resource degradation, adversely affecting millions of people across the continent.

In our endeavours at the World Food Programme, we are dedicated to promoting innovative climate actions and initiatives aimed at bolstering the resilience of African countries. We firmly believe that through collaborative efforts, we can develop sustainable solutions to address the challenges posed by climate change.

COP28 presents a critical opportunity for African countries to unite, share experiences and formulate collective strategies to mitigate and adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. It is imperative that we collaborate to enhance resilience, refine agricultural practices and safeguard our water resources, the cornerstones of food security in Africa.

On this occasion, we reaffirm our commitment to actively participate in global efforts to combat climate change. We call upon developed nations to fulfil their financial and technological commitments, ensuring Africa's capability to adapt and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Together, we can chart the course for a more sustainable and resilient Africa, ensuring not only food security, but also readiness to confront the challenges of the future.

President: Italy on behalf of List D.

The representative of Italy: I have the pleasure to deliver this statement on behalf of the Member States of List D. We would like to thank you for your words. Sustainable agriculture, resilient food



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systems and climate action are interlinked, and this nexus needs to be systematically taken into account in order to achieve a more equal world for all.

Besides that, climate and conflicts are closely interrelated. The impacts of climate change might fuel existing conflicts. The recognition of this linkage is at the heart of the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations, initiated by the ICRC, and subscribed to by several United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors.

WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025 explicitly indicates the role of the climate crisis as one of the three key drivers of hunger emergencies and suggests that, working closely with national counterparts and other partners, WFP's risk-informed and integrated programmes can contribute to improving and adapting the livelihoods of the most vulnerable.

We believe WFP, with its experience of working in fragile settings and its mandate to both save and change lives, can make an important contribution to the international effort to respond and adapt to the effects of climate change.

We urge WFP to continuously monitor climate risks and increase focus on anticipatory action. WFP plays an important role here, for example by contributing to expanding social safety nets and creating resilient food systems where it has a clear added value and is within its mandate. Social protection offers great potential to support the population in adapting to the consequences of climate change and to cushion short-term shocks.

Resilience programming is critical for climate adaptation. We see climate-resilient programming as a new standard for international cooperation that needs to be considered even more strongly during design and implementation of all multisectoral programme components. If we want to break out of the endless cycle of crisis and response, we need to address the root causes of hunger by multi-year long-term projects in collaboration with partners, using resources in a complementary and cost-efficient way to shield communities from the impacts of the climate crisis.

We believe that to fully achieve the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement, any path must include agriculture and food systems. We therefore encourage the RBAs to work closely together to that end. There are several tools to pursue the above-mentioned objective, but here we would like to recall the importance of school feeding. The Research Consortium of the School Meals Coalition will present at COP28 a research paper on how school meals can climate-friendly advance development goals.

With a segment entirely dedicated to agriculture, food systems and climate action, COP28 will be the first climate summit to explicitly acknowledge the close interplay among those elements. We would like to commend this progress and listen from you how we can ensure that climate action reaches the most vulnerable, and where do you see key opportunities to address the climate change impacts on food security in humanitarian contexts during COP28.

Let me conclude by thanking you, Ambassador Al-Suwaidi, for your kind participation and your insightful words.

President: And the last speaker is Republic of Korea on behalf of List B.

The representative of the Republic of Korea: The Republic of Korea delivers this statement on behalf of List B. List B warmly welcomes the participation and the statement made by H.E. Ambassador Majid Al-Suwaidi, Director-General of COP28.

We wish to convey our unwavering commitment to the success of COP28 and the pivotal role it plays in addressing global challenges, particularly in the areas of food security and climate change.



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List B acknowledges the profound impact of climate change on our food systems and the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of farmers. Regrettably, these numbers are projected to rise even further. Moreover, it is essential to recognize that the adverse effects of climate change on food security hits the hardest those who are already in vulnerable and fragile situations.

In addition to being a primary victim of climate change, agriculture is also a contributor to the problem. Our food systems, from production and storage to processing, packaging, transportation, consumption and regrettably waste generation, account for a large part of all greenhouse gas emissions attributed to human activities. We must strive to make nutritious food more accessible and affordable, while simultaneously enhancing the resilience and sustainability of our food system.

In this context, List B welcomes the efforts to enhance the equity, accessibility and sustainability of our food and agriculture systems, which will receive unprecedented attention at COP28. Achieving this will necessitate global cooperation and we hope that COP28 will serve as a platform for countries to develop solutions to address these complex global challenges.

The insights provided by Ambassador's statement align closely with the dual mandate of the World Food Programme, saving lives and changing lives. List B members underscore the importance of WFP maintaining a balanced approach to its dual mandate, with a growing emphasis on building resilience and capacity in countries facing fragility due to climate change.

WFP needs to expand its support for climate change mitigation and adaptation in developing countries, to address the root causes of food crisis alongside its essential role in responding to food emergencies.

List B members equally anticipate the successful outcome of COP28 in Dubai. We hold a strong belief that COP28 will pave the way for meaningful solutions and concrete actions. List B encourages all Member States, organizations and stakeholders to unite to engage in constructive dialogue and collaborate in the search for innovative solutions that will ensure food security and climate resilience for future generations.

President: I will now give the floor back to H.E. Majid Al-Suwaidi, to react to the statements and comments made by the lists.

H.E. Majid Al-Suwaidi, Director-General of COP28: First of all, I want to thank all of the countries that have made statements, and also to thank the many partners and parties and countries who have been involved in the work that we have done so far to develop our food agenda at COP28.

Many of the items under discussion that were mentioned I will take as feedback to our team, but I will also ensure that they engage with you further in the coming weeks to ensure that your issues and concerns are answered and/or addressed in our agenda at COP28.

I hope that you will all be joining us there and really look forward to this continued discussion happening between now and then at COP. We hope that we can deliver an ambitious and creative outcome that drives our climate agenda forward and your food agenda forward in the ways that you hope.

President: I will now give the floor to the Madam Executive Director for some remarks.

Ms C. McCain, Executive Director: Thank you Ambassador for your insightful address and for taking the time to join us today. On behalf of WFP, I want to thank the United Arab Emirates and the COP28 Presidency for its leadership in highlighting the need for urgent action on climate change in fragile regions of the world. As lives and livelihoods are increasingly threatened by this crisis, it is vital that we bolster protection and ensure the most vulnerable communities are shielded from predictable hazards.



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Last year, WFP supported more than 15 million people with specific solutions to manage threats to their food security from weather shocks. WFP will come to COP28 with a very solutions-focused approach. We will showcase solutions to help food-insecure communities avert, minimize, and address loss and damage from climate change. These solutions include early warning and anticipatory action, climate risk insurance, and locally-led resilience programmes. We will also showcase how we can promote sustainability through our other programmes, for example, by ensuring school feeding programmes source their supplies from local farmers. WFP applauds the leadership the United Arab Emirates is showing during its COP28 Presidency, and the focus it has given to supporting communities in fragile places with the climate Relief, Recovery and Peace Declaration.

The meeting in Dubai is the international community's chance to make progress on this critical agenda and support the growing number of people plunged into hunger and despair by global climate crisis. WFP is committed to working with our partners to ensure they have hope and opportunity for a better and more stable future.

President: Excellency, it has been an immense honour to welcome you to our Board. Your address has enabled us to gain important insights on the expected outcomes of COP28 and actions required to support communities in fragile and conflict-affected settings. On behalf of the entire Executive Board, allow me to convey to you our deepest appreciation for your presence with us today, and to wish you all the best in the final stages of the preparation for COP28.

