

2026 first regular session of the Executive Board

Hybrid session

Opening remarks by the Executive Director

Ms C. McCain, Executive Director: Madam President, I want to commend you. Thank you for facilitating and working with everyone to make this a smooth issue today, and so we can continue. I am very grateful for that. And in the spirit of WFP, that is who we are, so thank you for that.

Excellencies, welcome to this first regular session of the Executive Board. For everyone observing the holy month of Ramadan, I wish you Ramadan Kareem.

I would like to start by thanking the 2025 Executive Board Bureau members for their outstanding service to WFP and the vulnerable people we serve. I also congratulate the members of the 2026 Bureau on their appointment. We look forward to working closely with you in the year ahead.

WFP's Executive Board was established 30 years ago last month, as was mentioned today. Since then, millions of lives have been saved thanks to the deep bonds of friendship and trust that exist between WFP and Member States. Our partnership has never been more important. We have reached a pivotal moment for the humanitarian system and the people who rely on it.

Today marks the fourth anniversary of the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine. Tragically, it is just one of many. Conflict and instability are devastating large regions of our polarized world, and trapping millions of people in hunger. Natural disasters, and economic turmoil, are also fanning the flames of this global crisis.

Demands on the international aid system are increasing all the time. WFP's analysis shows that 318 million people are currently facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity. Early-warning data indicate a rising risk of famines in 2026, with 1.4 million people now in IPC 5 – 15 times higher than in 2019.

Yet support for our vital work is being scaled back. And when it is provided, it increasingly has conditions attached. Humanitarian principles, the foundation of our work, allowing us to reach the most vulnerable, are under attack. And so are our people.

Humanitarian aid should never be politicized. Humanitarian workers should never be a target. When they are: we cannot reach those who rely on WFP as their only lifeline; and we cannot protect our brave teams who risk their lives to save others.

WFP is clear: we exist to provide life-saving assistance to people in urgent need – whoever they are, wherever they are.

Excellencies, 2025 was an exceptionally challenging year. As operating conditions deteriorated, funding shrank and geopolitics became more volatile, we faced wrenching trade-offs: cutting essential support for millions of needy people.

It is clear that the deeply concerning trends we saw last year will continue in 2026.

As an organization, WFP has undertaken a comprehensive and ambitious change programme to adapt to this challenging global landscape.

Our new strategic plan, designed in close partnership with the Board, builds on this important work and provides a road map to guide us forward. It sets out how we will target our efforts and expertise to maintain WFP's excellence in emergency response, while also working to build long-term resilience and reduce needs over time. We have a clear plan for the future.



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Now, in 2026 and beyond, our task is effective implementation. To drive progress, we will continue focusing on three strategic priorities. First, we will go all-out to mobilize resources, expand our donor base and scale-up innovative financing mechanisms.

The contributions forecast for 2026 now stands at USD 6 billion, lower than the USD 6.4 billion outlined in the management plan. Country offices will update their implementation plans, as is normal practice, when the forecast changes.

The programme support and administrative budget will be managed through my delegated authority to reduce it by 10 percent. Overall reserves ensure that the approved PSA and strategic investments are funded for 2026.

You can also be confident we will leave no stone unturned in the search for new donors and partners.

There is still so much more that WFP can do with the private sector. The individual giving strategy aims to mobilize USD 1.3 billion by 2030. And I want every WFP team to build new relationships with companies and foundations around the world.

Partner countries, and the international financial institutions, are another growing source of funding. The IFIs donated USD 950 million in 2025 – we aim to double that by 2028.

Second, WFP is pioneering the use of artificial intelligence and technology in frontline operations. They will revolutionize our work, helping us work faster, smarter and more efficiently. We are already seeing the benefits. Last year, projects using AI and blockchain delivered efficiency savings of over USD 47 million, cutting costs and allowing us to reach more people in need.

This is just the beginning. As we implement our Digital Business Transformation Plan, we are going to keep innovating to ensure we reap the huge benefits of these cutting-edge technologies. They will also underpin the United Nations-wide integrated supply chain platform, which WFP is co-leading as a key pillar of the UN80 agenda. The Board's guidance at yesterday's strategic dialogue was invaluable.

Third, we will continue striving to meet our duty of care to WFP's dedicated global team. I am so proud of their selfless determination to put others before themselves, and they deserve all our support. I will keep doing everything I can to make it safe for frontline teams to do their jobs.

I ask each of you to help use your influence to defend humanitarian access and help protect our frontline teams from harm. The arbitrary detention by the Houthi de facto authorities of aid workers in northern Yemen, including 38 WFP employees, is an egregious example of the unacceptable dangers and restrictions our teams must confront every day. But there are many others. Help us ensure our teams can do their life-saving work in safety and security.

WFP also has an absolute duty to protect the people we assist from abuse. I have been honoured to serve for the past two years as the IASC Champion on Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment. My championship may have ended, but WFP's commitment to PSEAH continues, and will fully support Jamie Munn and ICVA as they take over as champion.

Excellencies, we all know that today's world is increasingly uncertain and polarized. The challenges facing the humanitarian system are daunting. But WFP has a clear strategy for the future, and we are more determined than ever to implement it. With the partnership of our Executive Board, we will continue delivering for the vulnerable people we serve and lay a path towards a world free from hunger.

Thank you.

