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World Food Programme
Programme Alimentaire Mondial
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برنامج الأغذية العالمي

Ensuring humanitarian access in fragile contexts: The critical role of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service

Side event on the margins of the annual session of the Executive Board, 2026
Wednesday, 24 June 2026, 13:30–14:30
WFP Auditorium and [livestream](#)

Context

In many fragile and hard-to-reach contexts, humanitarian operations face acute access constraints due to insecurity, damaged or non-existent infrastructure, and climate-related shocks. Ensuring safe, timely and reliable access remains a key constraint for effective humanitarian response.

The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), managed by WFP, is a key enabling service addressing this need. By providing neutral, shared air transport for personnel and light cargo, UNHAS allows humanitarian actors – including United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and national partners – to reach populations in areas where no safe or viable alternatives exist. In some contexts, it provides the only reliable access for humanitarian personnel.

Beyond physical access, UNHAS strengthens system-wide efficiency and coordination by offering a pooled service that reduces duplication and supports the entire humanitarian community. It is therefore a critical operational backbone in some of the world’s most challenging contexts.

As humanitarian needs grow and operational environments become more constrained, ensuring predictable, flexible and sustainable support to such enabling services is essential to maintain collective impact and reach those most in need. At the same time, rising demand and funding pressures highlight the need to continuously improve efficiency and prioritization.

This side event will bring together a range of perspectives to reflect on the concrete impact of UNHAS in the field, discuss key challenges – including financing – and explore opportunities to further improve its efficiency and impact.

Objectives

This side event to the Executive Board aims to:

- Demonstrate the operational value of UNHAS in enabling humanitarian access, continuity and coordination in fragile contexts.
- Present concrete field perspectives from users and partners on how UNHAS supports effective and timely humanitarian response.
- Identify key challenges, including financing and constraints.
- Explore practical options to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Agenda

1. Opening remarks

- H.E. Mr Lieven De la Marche, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations agencies in Rome
- Mr Matthew Hollingworth, Assistant Executive Director, Programme Operations Department, WFP

2. Strategic overview

- Mr Franklyn Frimpong, Chief, Aviation Service, WFP

3. Interactive discussion

- Ms Shanelle Hall, Principal Advisor to the Director General on Management, Operations and Strategy, Africa CDC – Democratic Republic of the Congo – field/user perspective
- Mr Yap Boum, Head of Emergency Preparedness and Response and Deputy Incident Manager of the Ebola Continental IMST, Africa CDC
- Issa Sanogo, United Nations Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, Cameroon – United Nations inter-agency perspective
- Donor representatives – resources and policy perspective
 - Ms Sofia Karlsson, Deputy Director and Head of Section for Humanitarian Policy, Department for Multilateral Governance and Humanitarian Policy, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden – flexible funding
 - Ms Meghan Hanson, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Disaster and Humanitarian Response, United States of America – efficiency and impact

4. Audience dialogue and Q&A

- Moderator: H.E. Mr Lieven De la Marche, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations agencies in Rome

5. Closing remarks

- H.E. Ms Josefa Sacko, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Angola