

2026 annual session of the Executive Board

Opening remarks by the Acting Executive Director

C. Skau, Acting Executive Director: Thank you, Madam President and, really, thank you for your leadership, for your commitment and for your devotion. It has been critical to have your support in these past few weeks of transition, and I highly appreciate that. It was amazing to come into the room this morning.

Like you said, Madam President, great vibe, a lot of buzz, a lot of conversations. With this good energy, I think that bodes well for the week ahead for a productive meeting and I really look forward to that.

I guess you could say, how could it not be with the brilliant day that we had yesterday with Pope Leo's visit. Really inspiring, brilliant words from His Holiness, focusing on putting people at the centre of everything we do, but also that message of hope that he spoke to, not least in his engagement with our staff. That is really something we took away. So, it is an unforgettable experience for all at WFP.

You should know, yesterday afternoon there was a great spirit in the building. And of course, now we are all blessed. So, for this week, we have no excuse not to achieve success. It was also wonderful to have Cindy back with us. I think it was a true reminder of her commitment to WFP, to our staff. The discussions ahead, our input will really build on her legacy, her strategy and her focus on our front-line teams.

And I maybe should apologize in advance to the interpreters, because against the advice here of Madam President, I have not prepared a statement, but I will speak from a bunch of notes. And you might look worried because there is a lot to say, but I promise to try to be as structured as possible going forward. And I want to start with the Executive Board week.

It is not any week, like we have pointed to this morning. It is the 30th anniversary of this Board, and I think it provides an opportunity to reflect on what has changed, how far we have come and where do we head next. It is truly a milestone, and I am grateful to you, Madam President, that we will have the opportunity to mark that milestone later today. And I hope all members will be able to join us for that special moment.

But it is, of course, also a week ahead of a lot of work. The annual session, as we know, puts a lot of focus on what really is the core of WFP governance, and that is the oversight.

There are items and reports, including from the Independent Oversight Advisory Committee, from the Inspector General, of course, and also the annual evaluation. I hope that we will have engaged discussions on this to ensure that we have the strongest possible policies, systems, going forward to ensure our operational integrity.

But we, of course, also have five CSPs. The CSPs are really at the heart of WFP – Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Liberia, Somalia and Türkiye – and we are really happy to see also senior participation from those governments. Really appreciating now, the strong efforts that I know are being deployed to try to reach full consensus, full agreements, on all those five CSPs.

I encourage you to continue those great efforts because, as you heard also from the video this morning, it matters a lot to us and it matters to our front-line teams to have that support from Member States, to know that you have our back. Whether it is engaging on access in these complex emergencies, in this complex context, but also as a signal that when it comes down to it, Member States agree on the need for food security, on the need for food assistance, and that we are able to make this a non-political issue and focus on what needs to be delivered operationally.

I would like to, at the start, also share some personal reflections on our front-line operations. As you know, Matthew will be updating you in-depth in the afternoon on operations. But I have had a chance to, over the past few weeks, visit a few operations that I would like to touch on.



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The overall picture here is that the situation is getting worse overall. Needs keep growing, funding keeps coming down, and it is getting ever more complex on the front lines at the checkpoints. But at the same time, WFP is getting even better, and I think that is important. We are trying, as far as we can, to narrow that gap between growing needs and shrinking resources. I am seeing remarkable results, and we will be able to speak to those also this afternoon.

Frankly, that is thanks to our brilliant teams on the front lines. I think that is the greatest benefit in this job. I get to go to many of these country offices and sit down with our country teams and, I have told you before, these are the best and the brightest there are. I do not know what it is that brings all of these brilliant people, genuinely brilliant people. I guess it is the operational nature, the clarity of our mandate, the clarity of purpose of what we do, but we truly have amazing teams out there, and they deserve all our support. That is why we also gear the organization to do everything we can to support those front-line teams. And I really now look to the Board to do the same. They deserve and look to your collective support. Now I come back at the end with some more specific asks on how you can support those teams.

I would like to start with Sudan. The urgency in Sudan really hit me in my latest visit where I also had a chance to spend some five days in Darfur. The Tawila displacement camp, which is about 60 km from El Fasher, and many of you know about El Fasher and what happened last year. There are 700 000 people in this camp. I have never seen anything like it. There are grass huts to the horizon, you drive for hours around these grass huts.

These are the people who escaped the siege from El Fasher. They have absolutely nothing. They have gone through the worst atrocities that you can imagine and, frankly, we are not delivering on their basic needs right now. We are doing our best, there is no doubt. That is nothing on our teams who are working there, and the other partners and NGOs who are trying to do their best. But it is simply not enough.

It is not at the scale that you can expect and, frankly, I think we have the obligation to deliver to people that have gone through so much and have nothing. So, we need to really step up in Sudan. It is a brutal conflict that continues. You may have seen the Secretary-General putting up warnings about what is happening in the Kordofans and in and around El Obeid. Civilians keep being killed and we are seeing further funding cuts. When I updated you last, we were able to reach almost 5 million people monthly. We are now down to 3.5 million and we are cutting rations to around 70 percent even in famine-conditioned areas.

That is not due to access challenges. There are many access challenges and security challenges as well. But that reach is not due to that. That is due to the cut in funding. As I said, our focus right now is really on El Obeid and the Kordofans because of the displacements, because of the fighting that is taking place, we are extremely worried.

There has already been massive displacement. But we are worried that the situation may get even worse so we are doing everything we can to step up, to pre-position, to work through cash, finding creative ways to reach people who are in the worst-hit areas. And we are now front-lining also internal resources to be able to do that scale-up before the rains hit. But again, the operation is not funded to the degree to meet the moment and to the needs.

I have also seen some of that mix of challenges in some other operations I visited. Ukraine, if I start there, on the front lines, the fighting is getting even more intense, and it is getting more dangerous for our teams. We have seen a dramatic uptick in incidents on humanitarian assets, on distributions, and as you heard a few weeks ago or in May, we also had a serious hit on our Dnipro warehouse.

If there is one place where the funding cuts are hitting really hard, it is Afghanistan. We are really at the bare bones there and it is a malnutrition crisis that is playing out. It is the place in the world with the worst malnutrition crisis. Five million children malnourished and we have the systems, we have the know-how, but we simply do not have the funding. So, I would really like to point



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attention to Afghanistan. We were this morning speaking to civil society organizations who were saying, what I am not worried about is the authorities that are putting pressure on our women's group, but really about the lack of funding. So I think this, if anything, should be a call for attention and for stepped-up support.

Lebanon, which in some way became the epicentre, the humanitarian epicentre of the crisis in the Middle East that we have seen over the past few weeks, over a million people still displaced. Some 20 to 30 percent of those are in temporary shelters where they will not be able to remain, these are schools where also Lebanese children need to go back to schools. And their communities, they are not able to return to. Many of their towns or villages have been destroyed.

So there needs to be attention to find a solution to this. Of course, there also need to be an end to the fighting completely so that people can return. But certainly, Lebanon is an operation to pay attention to.

I am just back also from Jerusalem, partly triggered by the cyber-attack that we have informed you about, which I think is being managed as well as it can be. But it is another reminder that IHL is breached on many fronts at the moment. The situation on the West Bank is going from bad to worse and the situation, despite the fact that we have managed to stabilize somewhat the food security situation in Gaza, remains brutal.

I think going forward, the focus really needs to be to scale up in the other sectors: water, sanitation, education. But on the food side, for WFP, what we would like to see is an increase in commercial so that markets can pick up and we can do more on cash and start the little early recovery that in this situation should be possible.

Like I said, Matthew will speak more in detail to these operations later today, but I wanted to give a flavour of what we are seeing playing out.

I think it is also important to speak to the Middle East crisis, and we have updated you through Rania on our response there over the past few weeks. We really hope that the deal holds, that this will bring a lasting ceasefire, that it will also bring a lasting ceasefire to Lebanon.

But the shock on global food security has already done damage and will remain. I have spoken to this before with you. What we saw were food prices pushed up because the correlation between energy price and food prices, especially in developing countries, is very tight. And the poorest in those countries are already spending everything they have on food, hence when prices go up 20/30 percent, they eat less.

Also, our costs of doing operations went up. We saw shipping jump from some 15 to 25 percent due to insurance premiums and rerouting. And also, of course, fuel for our trucks and other parts of our operations. So that means when we are already in a tight space between funding and needs, that that gap grows even further.

I must also here flag that we are prepared for the lag effects of this. Many of you have heard also the constraints on fertilizer. I think we fear that that will have an impact on production, not least in Africa, in the next six to nine months.

We know that when fuel prices come up, that also has an impact on the irrigation and all other kinds of aspects to agriculture, so we need to keep an eye on this and as early as possible, of course, try to mitigate the impact.



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I think it is important to recall that this is the third global food shock that we have seen in the past six years with the war in Ukraine, COVID-19, and now the crisis in the Middle East, so I think it is important to also see that these are building on each other. It is really stretching capacity, especially for the poorest countries who do not have the margin. I think it is also a good reminder that we are all tied together. Something that happens in one place impacts others and, of course, always hits hardest on the most vulnerable.

I also wanted to mention the Ebola outbreak. Obviously health is not the mandate of WFP, but it is another one of these polycrises that we are seeing and it is taking place in the Eastern DRC, where there is already a humanitarian crisis due to conflict, and where there are some 10 million people who are acutely food insecure and hundreds of thousands of people who have been displaced, some of them as recently as in the past few months.

Conflict and insecurity continue to be a major challenge to access in the areas that are impacted now by Ebola. But given the fact that WFP is the biggest international actor on the ground with its logistics capacity, we have had an important role in this effort – government effort supported by the international community.

We have lent our logistics support, including making sure that we bring PPE out to the front lines, also offering MEDEVAC. UNHAS, of course, has been a critical component in that, moving both goods, but also front-line responders, staff. We have seen some 1,500 passengers in that effort already and some 30 tons of cargo have so far moved by UNHAS.

I want to point here to the importance of the airports in Goma and Bukavu. They remain inaccessible, and here is really an area where we would like to look to Member States to step up and support and see what can be done for those airports to resume in operations. That would be important for the broader effort as much as for the Ebola response.

We have also provided direct response, food, some 10,000 meals provided to patients, to caregivers, to health workers. And so that is one of the more direct kinds of support that we are providing. But it is also important to say here that, again, this is a crisis on top of a crisis and unless we provide a broader set of support, also the health response will not be effective. People are hungry, people are struggling with other basic healthcare challenges, like treatments of malaria, for example, and unless we step up on all fronts we will not have the trust in the communities to also make progress on containing the Ebola outbreak.

We have an absolutely great team working around the clock, from Kinshasa to Bunia to all of them who are responding to this. And of course, also our regional team, because this is a regional effort now with Rwanda, Uganda, and others also being involved.

I will leave the operational flavour there, and turn more to some of the institutional issues. Like you have heard me say before, we are not launching any new major initiatives, of course, in this transition period, but we are determined to continue to consolidate and implement the reforms that were launched in 2023. We continue to move forward on the four management priorities that were set out for 2026. Everything we do is done in the spirit, as I said before, to really ensure operational excellence and impact, how we support our front-line teams, our country offices, that is the north star of everything that we do on the institutional front.

Among those four top priorities, let me start on the implementation of the strategic plan. This really is now the road map for us, and it provides fortunately, and thanks to you, a clear road map for us. We should focus on high-scale impact programmes in emergencies, but in addition to that, build resilience where we are best placed and where we can do so.

This is key, not only to prevent crises, but also to reduce needs and to break that cycle of dependency that Madam President spoke about in this video. We are now determined to make sure that that is an integrated part in everything that we do.

Also, as part of this is the focus on strong partnerships. There is a clear direction in our strategy ahead to work with national and local systems, local communities, local authorities, and to build



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their capacities from the start. As Matthew always says, the goal should be to put ourselves out of business. That is really the mantra, but that is not one of leaving responsibility, but on the contrary, to make sure that in everything we do, we build capacity from the start with that objective that once the job is done communities can mend for themselves.

At the heart of this is really strong locally led responses that we support. We are also determined to collaborate even more and closer with partners and to align. I think we have a good example of that also lined up for this afternoon, where we have come together with FAO on the planning for the El Niño, an El Niño that we think, with the data we have, is going to be a very hard hit on many countries.

And so it is even more important that we come together with others, and this afternoon Matthew and our colleagues from FAO will speak together and jointly on this.

The second priority is around aligning our model and our staffing to make sure that we are fit for future. We have made massive efforts on this, and I think we have significant progress to report. But we will continue to make sure that we are leaner and sharper in our operating model, pushing more of our resources to the front lines where it matters most, have more predictable global headquarters support to our country offices, and ensure that we have really clear roles and responsibilities, less fragmentation, more coming together as one team and with clear accountabilities.

One of the big efforts over the past two years, of course, has been to make sure that we are realigned with new funding environments. We have downsized our global workforce by some 5,500 employees since 2023. We were then at some 24,000, we are now at 18,500. This has been a very painful and very difficult exercise. As you can imagine, it was something done out of necessity, given that we had a 40 percent drop in our funding last year.

But in all of this, we have really kept focus also in making sure that we are now building the teams with the right skills, with the knowledge, with the values that we need to deliver on this strategic plan. And also, teams that reflect the diversity of the places and the people that we serve. Next steps in this will be to make sure that we embed this new logic of a two-layer organization into all the practices, systems and regulations that we have.

We still have some work to do on that and I think our oversight bodies might point to some of those throughout the week. Delegations of authority make sure that the committee membership is what it is. But I think that is more now fine-tuning and making sure that as we move along, we adapt and we adjust as needed.

We are also working on a clear standardized service catalogue, as we call it, from global headquarters, so that country offices can really know who to call, who to contact for the different support that they need. And we are also fine-tuning in terms of our global headquarters team configuration and office locations.

That brings me to our third priority, which is on Rania's desk and Ally's, I should say the Chief Financial Officer, to calibrate our funding model going forward. We are working through this model, and the objective is really to make it easier for us to diversify and grow our resource base, to make us attractive to new donors and lower the barriers for entry. And we are looking at expanding eligibility for twin donors' contribution.

I know this is a discussion that we will have to continue and we want to listen also to concerns and proposals from all members on how to do this best, so we look forward to consulting you on this and other ideas with this objective of growing and diversifying.

And finally, another priority is to scale up the benefits of AI and new technologies – greater use of AI and tech to support planning, decision-making and unlock front-line impact, that needs to be the focus here.

I am excited about the possibilities. I had the privilege to attend the AI Summit in Delhi earlier this year and at that summit, we also were able to showcase how we at WFP have embraced this.



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I must admit that it was quite good to see that we are far ahead in terms of how we are applying these opportunities to our operations. There is certainly much more that we can do but we are now already in this place where we are sharing with others. And I know that there will be opportunities to brief you on this moving forward.

We have also set out as a leadership team a few other priorities that we will be working on and I will basket them in three, I will put them in three baskets.

The first one is to tap any opportunity to channel more resources to our front-line teams. We want to identify what we can do more cheaply, not to save money for anyone but to put more of that resource into programmes, the people we serve and to be able to support staff. That is an ongoing process. We are working on some ideas, and we will revert with more concrete proposals in that regard.

Second is to try to alleviate as far as possible the administrative burden on our country offices. In my engagement with country directors, this is often what is raised. They feel that there are too many layers, there are too many processes, too much progress. And in a time when resources are down and we are fewer, they need more flexibility, more space to be focused on the core job.

So we are also reviewing that to identify what could be done in that regard to make sure that we have colleagues who are spending more of their time on the core task and how we can simplify and cut down on unnecessary processes. Of course, always bearing in mind the assurance that is required and the oversight that is required.

The third is, not least, led by Rania's team, to be even more targeted and prioritized in how we mobilize resources. We have managed to mobilize some USD 3.3 billion so far in 2026. And an additional USD 800 million has just been confirmed from the US, which we are deeply grateful for. So, in a way, we are on track for the forecast for 2026, which is USD 6.4 billion. But there is no time to rest here. We need to stay at it. And not least how we can grow and diversify.

I was at the World Bank Fragility Forum where I had the chance to see the World Bank President. I think here is a prospect for further growth, not only with the World Bank, but also with the regional development banks, and of course in the private sector where we have seen impressive growth, but where we think there is more space to gain.

We of course also welcome the OCHA pooled funds and how they have been repositioned. This is a great complement in the humanitarian system. It really helps also for a well-coordinated and prioritized response.

But let me also point to the fact that we will need to continue to have bilateral funding and bilateral flexible funding. This is absolutely critical in the big emergencies in order to get to scale. We are assisting all the Palestinians in Gaza. We are, as I said, reaching millions of people in Sudan. That scale can only come also from that direct investment in us.

Also, the speed in which we act. When the Lebanon war broke out, within 48 hours, we were assisting hundreds of thousands of people. That is also not possible unless we have that direct funding.

Finally, being that backbone to the system, that direct funding is critical, whether it is to keep Port-au-Prince open for the international community, or now the example of Ebola, our presence in Ituri and what we are now able to facilitate for WHO and other actors comes from that direct investment.

So, I also want to make that very clear, that we are looking here at complementarities, and the direct funding that we receive and that flexibility in large part of that funding is absolutely critical for us.

Now turning to UN80 and RBA collaboration. We are pushing forward with a lot of energy, and we have very creative and strong colleagues working on this who are really leading the charge inside



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the system on this. In all the different working groups that are established, we are determined to be the one around the table that looks beyond individual mandates and looks to the collective delivery, the outcomes that we are wanting to achieve at the global level, but also at the local level.

That is the marching order for all our colleagues who are engaged in these partnership discussions. Supply chain, of course, is maybe the top priority here where we are determined to make this serve a faster and a cheaper delivery system. It is on track and it is highly prioritized by the Secretary-General, as you may know.

We are confident that by the end of August, we are going to be able to have this new operating model in Afghanistan, in Haiti, in Palestine, in Somalia and in Sudan. And, by the end of the year, we are then going to be able to draw lessons from that to be able to roll out more broadly.

We have already tested this approach now in the Ebola response and so there are now results coming out of this and we are looking to bring lessons learned quickly so that they can also inform decision-making going forward.

Another area where we are deeply engaged, not least through Sara Adam, our head of Management Services, is on the common services. And given that we are often the largest player in many of the places, not least in the field, here we have an opportunity to share some of that capacity with others to make the collective cheaper and more effective.

We have introduced also an innovation, which is what is called the United Nations System Service Hub, which is online-based, marketplace-based, easy to use, where United Nations agencies are able to offer services, and others are then connected to buy them. And it is already up and running. The estimate is that it is already proving some USD 18 million in savings annually, so it has become the glue and a driver for that jointness that I know that Member States are looking to see, whether it is guest houses or cars or other services that are needed.

Finally, on the RBA collaboration and increasing efforts to also clarify mandates and roles and draw lines. I think, again, count on us to be determined in moving forward on that. As I mentioned, we have a good example this afternoon and the way that we have been working on the El Niño response, but we want to go further and not least operationally. We hope that the blueprints, the pilots that we are now putting in motion in fragile settings will be a way of bringing energy to this. And we, of course, look forward to updating you in September, together with FAO and IFAD, on progress made and setting the plan and the road map for the future.

On the leadership transition, I have said that before, but our focus as the leadership team in this transition are three. First is to continue ensuring operational excellence. The second is to advance WFP's mandate, brand and our standing. And third is to facilitate and secure an orderly transition to the new Executive Director as soon as he or she is appointed. I will be double-hatting and continue as the Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer as well and I am really, really happy to have Valerie Guarnieri on my side as acting Chief of Staff.

I think together, what you see here at the top of the table is a strong team that is working together. And I do not see this as necessarily me taking on this transition, but rather it is something that I do together with these brilliant colleagues, and the agenda that we set out is a joint one.

I am also pleased that Christophe Monier, as I think you have been informed, will join us as new Chief Financial Officer from 1 August. Many of you know Christophe. He spent 30 years in the United Nations system. He is the most experienced person that you can ever imagine for this job. I have spoken to him several times, he is really also excited to come on to this, so he brings energy and experience and a lot of ideas on how we can further improve.

But let me also take the opportunity to thank you, Ally, for the way that you have stepped in, not only just covering for these weeks, but really with your heart stepped in and brought all your experience and really making a mark on how we do this work going forward. You will hear more from Ally as we kick off the consultations on the management plan 2027.



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You will also see what I mean then, in terms of Ally having engaged on this in a very ambitious manner. I am really grateful for the way that you have stepped in, Ally.

Now, as I flagged at the start, I wanted to come back on what we look to you, Member States, for and I am sorry to say, but I need to start with the funding because it is so critical, but that can come in different ways, contributions in different ways. As I said, it is not all about volume. It is also about quality, but it is also about making sure that everyone is engaged and that the burden is shared, but also the opportunities are shared.

We need to find ways to narrow that gap between resources and needs that I spoke of. It is really at historic levels. We need governments to step up solidarity.

This current path of this bifurcation is just not sustainable. And if there are ways that we can help you help us, please come to us. We are reflecting every day what more we can do to make sure that we attract the necessary resources, and the door is open for good ideas.

So, it is an invitation and appeal to work with us and to see how we can also help you help us in moving forward on the fundraising. But it goes far beyond financing. Our relationship is not only one of funding. It is also one of ideas, of solutions, but it is also one of political support with diplomacy. Our WFP teams are increasingly targeted. The disregard from IHL for international humanitarian law is reaching new levels.

We have seen some thousand colleagues, not WFP, but humanitarians, killed over the past three years. And there is this sense of impunity that you get away with these unacceptable attacks on humanitarians, and that must change.

I think the declarations, the documents, the Security Council resolutions are there. What we look to you for is really to ensure implementation and to ensure that there is accountability. We still have 38 staff in detention in Yemen. There is not a day that goes by without us not only thinking about them but also asking ourselves what more we can do to have them released.

That is my main focus, but I must also say that we are deeply worried about the food security situation in Northern Yemen. Malnutrition among children is on the rise and WFP does not take it lightly. We have not been able to operate in the North, obviously with our colleagues being detained, obviously with our offices being occupied and our assets being seized. But it is something that we do not take lightly, the fact that people are starving, that people are hungry, and we are not able to assist them.

So, like Tom Fletcher, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, said to the Security Council last week, our colleagues being in detention is not just unacceptable and deeply unjust, it also directly undermines our ability to save Yemeni lives. So, we really need Member States to step up on protecting Yemeni personnel on access and I think one way to do that is through diplomatic engagement, through Yemeni diplomacy, using all the tools in your toolbox, in trying to bring attention, but also to bring action to this agenda.

I will conclude here: as Pope Leo reminded us yesterday, Member States can help not only by increasing resources to combat hunger and its root causes but also removing the obstacles that prevent aid from reaching those in need. And with those words by the Pope, I conclude my statement.

Thank you very much, Madam President.

