



ODDAKAR INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT: EB ANNUAL 2010

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we speak, the eastern Sahel areas of West Africa are in the middle of a major food crisis on top of the continuing protracted challenges of high malnutrition rates, conflicts and political instability.

Niger and Chad are the most affected countries followed by Cameroon and Mali; in total, 10 million people are affected. WFP has stepped up efforts in all the above countries to support Governments' strategies and action plans to fight the impact of the drought.

In Niger, the number of WFP supported people has more than doubled since the beginning of the year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Board members for the rapid approval by correspondence of BR 6 that allowed WFP to scale up relief efforts and increase the project's coverage from 889,000 vulnerable people to 2.3 million people.

In Chad, an emergency operation targeting more than 700,000 people has been launched to save the lives of drought affected people. In Cameroon, an emergency operation to assist 340,000 people has just been jointly approved by WFP and FAO. Across eastern Sahel, the lean season has started much earlier this year, and most households have now entered the most difficult period of the year when food stocks are being exhausted. As a result, malnutrition rates are increasing across the board, particularly among young children.

Despite advance planning and contributions from generous donors, sufficient funding for the drought response has not been sufficient to fully implement planned interventions in any of the countries. As of the 2nd of June, Niger has a shortfall of US\$ 51.4 million (41 percent). In July we have a shortfall of 8,000 metric tons of cereal which would mean that, unless new contributions come soon, only half of the planned caseload of 1.5 million people will receive general rations distributions. In Chad, due to a lack of resources, general food distributions only started last week even though the lean season started a couple of months ago. Chad needs US\$26.7 million (41 percent). In Cameroon the situation is even more dire, the EMOP has not yet received any contributions and its full budget of US\$26 million is needed.

We are grateful for the in-kind and cash contributions so far received. Cash contributions have allowed us to accelerate procurement of commodities in surplus production areas where markets are functioning normally. We are in the process of purchasing up to 40,000 metric tons of commodities in the region to support the Sahel drought operations. Humanitarian needs are

immense and a rapid response is required. If additional funds were available now, WFP could purchase another 10,000 to 20,000 metric tons in the region without any risk of market disruption - Governments of Togo and Benin (from which we are already purchasing 8000 metric tons of maize) have shown great solidarity and have agreed to support our operations by making some of their stocks available for WFP purchase. In addition, for the first time ever, the West Africa Economic Commission (ECOWAS) has announced that it will provide 450 metric tons of cereal to Niger. WFP has offered its assistance in the procurement and transport of this donation.

The window of opportunity for regional purchases is starting to close with prices already starting to increase. We need to act quickly.

The results of a recent food security assessment in Niger highlight the severity of the crisis and call for continued concerted efforts. The assessment calls for the continuation of existing activities, it will be necessary for all stakeholders to reprioritize many areas of intervention as well as address the needs of vulnerable people in urban areas.

WFP intends to prepare a small BR7 to include pilot cash for work programme that could serve as a pilot for WFP's future strategy in Niger. This approach will allow the Country Office and partners to build the capacity so that cash and voucher interventions could be considered as an option for post crisis long term interventions.

We should keep mind that in 2005 there was also a severe food crisis in Niger. Now five years later we are back again with another large emergency operation. Population growth in Niger continues to outpace increases in agricultural production. WFP is ready to contribute our share to long term interventions, in close harmony with the government and other stakeholders, to increase agricultural production, improve health and sanitation conditions and educate the young, especially girls so that in a few short years we are not mounting another large emergency operation to alleviate tremendous human suffering. The Niger example is just one in West Africa where big problems can occur if food security is not continuously assured.

Following an appeal from the Government of Chad, WFP launched an emergency operation in March that targets more than 700,000 people. An Emergency Food Security Assessment provided valuable insights on most vulnerable areas and households in need of urgent food and nutrition assistance. Six out of ten households are food insecure in the Western Sahel area of Chad, of which 42.3 percent of households are severely food insecure (some 1,102,000 people) and 18.5 percent moderately food-insecure (some 482,000 people). Malnutrition rates which were already above emergency levels in December 2009 are expected to be on the increase at alarming rates as the lean season progresses.

General food distributions and supplementary feeding are currently ongoing in three regions of Chad and will be further scaled up.

As many countries in the sub region, Chad faces numerous operational challenges, including: long lead times due to being a landlocked country, a rainy season that renders many roads inaccessible and vast territories with spread out communities. To better deal with these challenges WFP has set up three additional sub offices in Moussoro, Bol and Ati to implement this emergency operation. As mentioned earlier WFP urgently needs funding to deal with this crisis.

I would now like to turn to a few of the challenges faced by other countries in the region where WFP is alleviating the impact of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.

The West Africa region has a number of small country offices, either by the size of the population or by the size of WFP's operations. These countries, among the poorest in the world, face enormous food security and nutrition challenges which are far beyond the capacities of the government to handle. WFP is having enormous difficulty in resourcing its operations in these countries where the numbers of needy people may not be relatively high but where the suffering faced by individual people is great. We could face big problems with big costs if efforts are not made to improve food security in countries like Guinea Bissau, Gambia, Togo, Benin to name just a few.

There are also a number of countries in transition in West Africa, such as Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire where the risks of destabilization and population movements (both internal and external) are too well known. Elections in these countries are awaited (28 June in Guinea and no fixed date in Côte d'Ivoire). During this sensitive time WFP does not have the resources to maintain its presence in these countries yet alone implement operations or prepare for potential emergency needs. Due to a lack of funding WFP may be forced to close its offices in these countries at a most sensitive time. Sierra Leone is also a country in transition from years of civil war and political instability to peace and stability. We strongly feel that peace building activities now are good investments to reduce the potential need for future peace keeping operations in the future.

The Regional Bureau has been following the Executive Board discussions on project categories very closely. During the design and preparations of any project we are reviewing the entire WFP portfolio in the country to ensure that PRRO activities are focused on responding to relief and early recovery needs and development project activities are fully integrated with the country's long term development strategies and policies. We are progressively repositioning WFP so that our projects are better integrated with the efforts of governments, other UN Agencies, NGOs and other local, regional and international stakeholders.

You have before you four projects and Budget Revisions for approval:

- The Benin Development project aims to contribute to a sustainable and locally owned school feeding programme in Benin;
- The Sierra Leone Country Programme and PRRO reflect a strategic reorientation of WFP interventions following an in depth review of operations in the country.
- The extension in time of the Central African Republic development project would allow the WFP project to remain in alignment with the UNDAF cycle.

The Country Directors are here and are prepared to address and issues that you may wish to raise in connection with these projects.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, we need your continued financial support, not only for emergency operations but also for post conflict/disaster interventions. Food security is a fundamental cornerstone for peace and civil stability. As we have learned in Liberia, quick sharp sustained increases in basic food prices were historically followed by political instability and civil strife. Well designed, well implemented long term development activities that prepare populations to better deal with disasters and ensure their food security are effective ways to prevent future human misery and are more economical than large scale emergency operations.

We would appreciate your guidance on how to better address these challenges that I have just talked about.

I am pleased to note the presence of Doctor Joseph Sam Sesay, Minister of Agriculture, Sierra Leone and Mr. Ari Malla, Chief of Staff of the Office of the Prime Minister of Niger.

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you very much for your kind attention.