

2020 second regular session of the Executive Board

Virtual session

Live address by the United Nations Secretary-General

A. Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General: Dear David Beasley, Excellencies and dear colleagues, it is an enormous pleasure to join you and I would like to start, if you allow me, on a personal note. The best years of my life were the years I spent as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and one of the reasons why they were the best years of my life was because I was able to work so closely with multiple programmes, providing protection and assistance to the most vulnerable of the vulnerable people around the world.

And I would say that WFP colleagues were everywhere where we were working, in the most remote locations, in the most dangerous situations, in the most challenging contexts, they were there. They were there delivering with enormous commitment, with enormous generosity and with enormous competence.

With human need all around and at times with bullets and bombs shrieking through the air, you brought life-saving assistance to vulnerable people in a way that is an example for the whole world. And you provide hope, not only by helping people to meet their immediate food and nutrition needs but also enabling people to change their lives and the way you have been working and the way you have been working in partnership with countries, with the communities where you serve is absolutely outstanding.

We have, of course, forged a strong bond and so you can imagine my happiness when I saw the World Food Programme was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. And the Peace Prize is given for diplomatic achievement such as a peace agreement. The Peace Prize is given to reward different personalities in different moments. But this prize is special because it sends an important message and the message is that food is peace, that hunger is an outrage in a world of plenty.

An empty stomach is a gaping hole in the heart of the society, a stunted child's growth in the mind is progress, for her and for everyone. Congratulations to you David, congratulations to all the staff, congratulations to the members of the Board.

You really fully deserve this prize. You have built a robust global backbone infrastructure and a formidable operational capacity. The World Food Programme is today an extremely solid organization. In many politically charged settings you have maintained your neutrality.

You have kept your humanitarian principles in an exemplary way and I want to express also my appreciation to the governments and the partners from those north and south that have invested in the World Food Programme and that support your life-saving and your life-changing interventions. And that backing is particularly important today.

The COVID-19 pandemic is creating an enormous impact all over the world and of course, an enormous impact on the state of global food security. Hunger is rising again. I could never imagine that this would happen in my mandate as Secretary-General.

According to your figures, 130 million additional people risk being pushed to the brink of starvation by the end of the year. This is totally unacceptable. And this is on top of 690 million people who already have not enough to eat. Famine is again threatening several countries.

I remember just how we worked together two or three years ago when famine was a big threat in poor countries and we were able to mobilize together the international community in order to avoid it.

Now, the impacts of food insecurity are profoundly gendered. Women are those that suffer more and women are those that can be more important in overcoming this challenge. I would like to reaffirm my work, my strong support to our work and to highlight some of the dimensions of our common efforts.

First, the pandemic recovery. We have been working together in asking for a massive rescue package for the most vulnerable people and countries. We must make sure that recovery



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addresses inequalities and fragilities and your role is essential for that. We must strengthen health systems, social protection and we must have food systems as a key part of the future. On the other hand, we need to ensure healthy diets for all and to minimize food waste. And we need food systems that provide decent and safe livelihoods. Clearly the question of food is central in a sustainable and inclusive recovery. Then gender equality, this is something that is very dear to our hearts and I believe that the role that you play is absolutely crucial in this regard. I hope also that next year's food systems summit will be an important opportunity to address all the different challenges that we face in this recovery.

Then climate action. We are now totally committed to build a global coordination for net zero in 2050 and to make sure that all states, all cities, all businesses, all companies establish their own transition plans to net zero and I believe that food systems will be essential in bringing us to net zero and I believe that what you can do as World Food Programme is essential. Then you are messengers of peace, so essential messengers for our global ceasefire and, when we look at the future of multilateralism, the needs of an inclusive and network multilateralism, you are the very symbol of this. It is global multilateralism in line with the 75th anniversary declaration.

You can be proud of what you have achieved and I am sure you will be even more proud with the fantastic achievements in the years to come. I am very grateful to the Board and to the donors for financing WFP but I know that you have huge gaps and I know that it is the absolute must for the international community, and absolute must to fill those gaps. I believe that your funding shortfall is around USD 5 billion. Maybe you have already managed to some part of it but you can count on me to be a better advocate to support WFP.

I remember when I was in UNHCR in the terrible moments of our life together. I was advocating more for the funding of WFP than for the funding of UNHCR because I fully understand that not to fund WFP is a disaster for an international community at the present moment.

We need to make sure that you have the resources to be at the right place at the right time, supporting people, and I know that your work is also more effective, thanks to your partnerships with the NGOs and I want to express my very strong admiration for all the partners that you have around the world that help you deliver to the people we all care for.

And I know that you have been so well supported by our friends of the international financial institutions by the IMF and World Bank and I am very happy to see the IMF and World Bank with us today and I want to say how much our partnership is essential and I count on you to support WFP.

So, dear David, congratulations, once again. Move ahead, full speed ahead and count on us to fully support your action and congratulations. This was an enormous joy for the United Nations system and I believe for the whole of the humanitarian community around the world.

