

# 2024 annual session of the Executive Board

## Hybrid session

### Opening remarks by the Executive Director

**Ms C. McCain, Executive Director:** A very warm welcome to all of you for this Executive Board. I want to thank all of you who have travelled from your capitals, as well as all of our friends and partners here in Rome for joining us today.

I also thank our special guests, Dr James Mwangi, CEO of Equity Group, who will join us this afternoon, to discuss how to scale up innovative financing to fund investment in food systems, and my good friend, Martin Griffiths, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, who will join us on Thursday to share his reflections as he steps down from his post.

Let me start by congratulating all of the women here today. June 24 marks the International Day for Women in Diplomacy: it is why many of us are wearing purple, to celebrate this special occasion. When women are all at the table, when our voices are heard and our contributions are valued, we make better decisions and deliver better outcomes. To all women working in diplomacy – thank you for your public service and your leadership. You are truly an inspiration to young women and girls everywhere, and I hope many more will follow in your footsteps.

Excellencies, since we last met, I have been on mission to South Sudan, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Philippines; Zambia, and Jordan. I have visited donor capitals, including Stockholm, Paris, London, and Washington, DC. I have also met with senior European Union officials in Brussels and attended the International Conference for Small Island Developing States, where I had talks with a number of national leaders.

My pride in this unique organization, and our dedicated global team, only grows stronger each day. In all of my meetings and conversations, one thing shines through: WFP's partners trust us to deliver for them, and the people we serve trust us to deliver for them.

You have my word that we will not let you down, and I say this with confidence, even though WFP is navigating an unprecedented dual challenge. First, needs are surging in many parts of the world, while our resources are failing to keep pace. Second, we are operating in ever more complex political and security environments. WFP's leadership is laser-focused on ensuring the organization is equipped to respond swiftly, effectively and safely to these challenges.

The past year has been a period of significant change but I believe it was vital, to enable us to adapt and survive in the new financial and operating environment. Having made some very difficult decisions, we are now consolidating the reforms we have introduced, and we can already see this paying off.

Our new structure is bringing a sharper focus to corporate efforts to maximize efficiency and effectiveness, and target precious resources to the frontline, where they will deliver the greatest impact for the people in need. We have reduced the number of WFP divisions by 26 percent. This has contributed to a 24 percent reduction in the number of D-2 posts at headquarters, and a reduction of 10 percent in the number of D-1s.

We have also removed an ASG position. In addition, we have streamlined the number of internal committees to speed up decision-making processes and make the organization more agile – going from 38 to 27 committees at senior leadership level. It is still early days, but we are starting to receive positive feedback from some country teams. They are telling us that they are getting the support and guidance they need more easily, thanks to the stronger cross-departmental collaboration and coherence.

This work continues, with the review of WFP's regional configuration, which is being run in the same spirit of consultation as our headquarters restructure. Since March, there have been extensive



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consultations with all six bureaux. More than 60 country directors, and over 100 heads of unit, have shared their insights and ideas with the project team.

Next month, a working group with members drawn from across the organization will get to work to refine the division of responsibilities and accountabilities between headquarters and the bureaux. Its objective is to ensure that we all collaborate as one team to support our country operations.

Excellencies, at WFP we are not discouraged by the challenges we face. Instead, we are more determined than ever to fulfil our vital mission. We exist to bring hope where there is none, to assist as many hungry people as possible, and to work alongside them to build a better future.

This is why, time and time again, our people step up and show the world why WFP is the largest and most respected humanitarian organization. No matter what obstacles are in our way, we have the resolve and the global reach to get the job done. We are working hard to protect, diversify and grow our funding base, including tapping into new sources of capital, such as the private sector and climate finance.

We are also continuing to step up our engagement with international and regional financial institutions. Over the past year, I have spent a lot of time building strong relationships with senior leaders at the World Bank and the IMF. In fact, Kristalina Georgieva and I celebrated International Women's Day together in March. And two weeks ago I met the Executive Board of the World Bank Group to explore new ways to deepen our growing partnership and put it on a more systematic footing.

We are also steadily reinforcing and expanding WFP's position as a partner of choice for programme countries, collaborating to design and implement high-impact food security and resilience programmes which deliver national development objectives. These programmes are increasingly backed with finance that governments have obtained from IFIs. We are focused on growing these three-way partnerships to deliver impact around the world.

Just as importantly, WFP has always been an advocate for effective South-South cooperation and we will be exploring its future potential at our side event on Thursday. A wealth of agricultural and food systems knowledge, capacities and technical expertise exist all across the Global South. If they are harnessed effectively, they can power our collective progress toward a world free from hunger.

I am honoured that I have been invited to Brazil, the current President of the G20, to attend next month's meeting of the G20 Development Ministers. I will also take part in the ministerial meeting of the Global Alliance against Poverty and Hunger, an important initiative launched by the Brazilian Presidency. I am excited school meals will be a priority of the Alliance: a commitment shared by many on this Board.

Brazil, France and Finland have powered the success of the School Meals Coalition, which now has 98 members. I cannot wait to reach 100 – so if you have not signed up, do it! I also want to thank Kenya and Mexico for their great leadership on this issue. The G20 meeting is a real opportunity to bolster South-South cooperation, focused on designing effective, long-term models of sustainable development, which can be implemented at scale, and backed with project finance from IFIs.

As we strive to close the gap between global needs and resources, we remain focused on unlocking new opportunities with the private sector to embrace both funding and knowledge partnerships. Our Partnerships and Innovation division have begun work on a new and pragmatic partnerships strategy, which will bring together public and private partnerships, to ensure WFP is better equipped to respond to current global challenges.



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This forward-looking strategy will enable us to meet three important goals. First, it will ensure we protect our relationships with long-term partners. Second, it will allow us to grow existing collaborations where there is potential to unlock more resources or knowledge transfers. Third, and most importantly, it will guide our efforts to fundamentally expand our private sector donor base. This will encompass working with new foundations, expanding our advertising and branding to attract more individual giving, and stepping up efforts to tap into philanthropy and high net worth individuals.

At the same time, work is well underway on WFP's first Innovative Finance Strategy, led by the Chief Financial Officer. New financing mechanisms offer significant scope to diversify sources of funding, enhance financial efficiency and link financial flows to measurable impacts. Within this developing field, key areas of focus include expanding the use of innovative financial mechanisms, such as debt swaps, blended finance to attract commercial capital for development projects and climate risk finance. These initiatives are all intended to help mobilize the resources we need to fund our lifesaving and life-changing work.

WFP's operational requirements for 2024 stand at USD 18 billion, while our latest funding forecast is USD 8.9 billion – thanks in part to the supplemental package passed in April by the US Congress. Nonetheless, we continue to make cautious planning assumptions on our own running costs. This week, as part of the update to the management plan, the Board will be asked to approve a reduced Programme Support and Administrative (PSA) budget of USD 528 million for 2024.

Excellencies, every day we strive to fulfil our duty to be responsible custodians of your precious taxpayer contributions. Everyone at WFP is truly, truly grateful for them. We understand that, just as important as what we do, is how we do it. As I have said before, we are strongly committed to transparency and accountability with all of our partners. And we will always live up to our humanitarian principles.

WFP's candid and open approach – combined with the partnership of you, our Member States – will enable us to navigate the growing political and security challenges we face, while protecting our operational integrity.

Trust is the bedrock of our partnership. This is exactly why our assurance controls and processes have been placed front and centre of the operations. Later today we will be giving you a full update on the substantial progress we have made to strengthen our assurances, and our ability to identify recipients and track the assistance we provide from beginning to end.

We finalized a Circular to codify the assurance standards each WFP operation must meet. These standards are not just aspirations, they are essential requirements, and we are investing in building our capabilities, designing new systems, developing clearer guidance, and offering country offices more tools to use. Members can be confident our lifesaving food and cash assistance end up in the right hands.

It is also a personal priority for me that WFP's partners and, critically, the people we serve can be confident we distribute assistance purely on the basis of need. Since January, we have served as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's champion for protection from sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment. It is a responsibility that I take very seriously. We are working to drive progress against three priorities during the championship.

First, to operationalize a survivor-centred approach by ensuring that people receiving assistance know their rights, and consulting them to identify risks and better understand their needs. Second, to promote culture change by firmly establishing PSEA as a priority for the sector's senior leaders. And third, to support capacity-strengthening across the humanitarian sector, by sharing best practices and developing PSEA expertise and frameworks among partners.



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I also recognize that change starts at home. This week the Board will consider the PSEA strategic evaluation report together with the management response. I thank the Office of Evaluation for conducting such an in-depth assessment. It shows that rigorous evaluation is the first step in any improvement journey.

The report demonstrates that WFP has more to do to ensure we have the strongest safeguards in place. We are going to do it. We have a 45-point action plan to address the six recommendations in the report. Senior leaders are clear on the role they need to play. They will be set down in a cross-departmental strategy with deliverables, timelines and responsibilities to ensure we fully operationalize the 2023 Circular on PSEA.

We are committed to increasing capacity and resourcing for PSEA activities, despite the current funding restraints. The Championship is an opportunity for WFP to lead the humanitarian system by example, and I am determined that WFP will be a beacon of light on this critically important issue, one that shows other organizations the way forward.

Excellencies, as WFP leaders, we take our duty of care to our global team just as seriously as our responsibilities to the people we serve. We have selfless women and men all around the world, who work on the frontlines of the hunger crisis every single day. I thank them for their tireless work, and their commitment to ending hunger.

Many of them are serving in difficult and dangerous places. They deserve all the support and protection we can give them. So, I will do everything I can to help our global team succeed as they help vulnerable communities build a future free from hunger. I said earlier that WFP has undergone a lot of change in recent months, and change is never easy.

That is why we implemented the reforms as swiftly as possible, to reduce the period of uncertainty for our team. We have also tried hard to limit the impact. For example, the budget processing exercise has prioritized the protection of employees' positions over non-staffing costs.

And we have introduced a range of special measures to offer extra support for national employees who have been hit hard by the painful reductions in many country offices. These include increased notice periods, exceptional end-of-service grants, and after-service medical coverage. But the truth is we cannot fully insulate our team from the impacts of WFP's significant funding shortfalls. So, counsellors have been available to provide high levels of support and workshops have been offered on a range of topics, such as managing stress and building resilience.

I am also pleased to share with the Board that we have appointed our new Assistant Executive Director for Workplace and Management. Stephen Omollo will officially join WFP on 1 July but I am thrilled he is here this morning, and he will be with us all week. Steve, would you please stand up? Thank you. Welcome.

Stephen has joined us after serving as CEO of Plan International, and I am delighted to welcome him to the WFP team. I know Stephen shares my belief that our people are at the heart of everything we do – and our job is to give them the tools to succeed. Stephen will lead our change management initiatives, and ensure our global team have the corporate support and resources they need to deliver even more effectively for the people we serve.

This will be our focus in the months ahead. Because as I look around the world, I see how our dedicated teams are saving lives, while sometimes risking their own. They are true humanitarians. Like our extraordinary team in Haiti, who are determined to stay and deliver, despite the risks they face on a daily basis. In fact, they are scaling up our operation there. We have reached over 1.1 million people this year. This includes people in the toughest neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince, which had been inaccessible due to rising lawlessness.



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But as families flee the violence, the number of displaced people is rapidly growing, and now stands at almost 600,000 people. Any attempt to restore law and order in Haiti must be matched by an equally effective humanitarian response. This is essential to tackle the rising tide of hunger.

Elsewhere, in Yemen, the risks are just as great – as the recent detention of one of our team members has shown. WFP condemns this totally unacceptable threat to the safety of humanitarian workers, and we join with other agencies in demanding the immediate release of all employees. General food assistance has been paused in northern areas of Yemen since late last year. The needs are now huge, with millions urgently needing help and starvation fast approaching. But we cannot restart this programme until we can operate in line with humanitarian principles.

Meanwhile, in Gaza the offensive in Rafah has displaced an estimated one million people – most of them women and children. They have no shelter, no health services, and are living among mountains of garbage, rivers of raw sewage, flies and mosquitos. The Rafah crossing is closed, and only very limited supplies are making it beyond Kerem Shalom to our warehouses. Our main warehouse in Rafah now stands empty. Rafah was a key artery for getting aid into south and central Gaza, so its loss has significantly impacted our operations.

Despite these immense challenges, last month WFP managed to reach an estimated 1 million people in Gaza with reduced rations of basic food commodities, including in the north. Thanks to this limited support – just enough to pull people back from the brink of starvation – we have been able to relieve the worst of the catastrophic hunger seen there previously. But this limited progress is incredibly fragile – and there is now every danger that the south will soon follow the north's slide into famine-like conditions.

To avoid this we need safe and predictable access across all of Gaza. We need a safe and secure operating environment for our team, but they have faced increasing risks to their safety and security recently. WFP warehouses have been hit twice in the past two weeks, despite our efforts at deconfliction. Humanitarian workers and spaces must always be protected.

Tragically, after a year of civil war in Sudan, conditions are rapidly deteriorating and time is fast running out to avoid an all-out humanitarian disaster, which threatens to destabilize the wider region. Over 10 million people have been internally displaced by violence, and more than 2 million have fled to neighbouring countries. More than 18 million people are acutely hungry – and this is expected to skyrocket as the lean season gets underway. Millions of lives are now at stake.

Our team has already done a lot in a very difficult operating environment, reaching 2.8 million people so far this year. But we need to scale up our capacity, and resources, to avert looming humanitarian disaster. We are planning to double our emergency food and nutrition assistance in Sudan to 5 million people by the end of the year.

Betty Ka, WFP's Director of Supply Chain, has been deployed as the Regional Emergency Coordinator for the Sudan regional crisis. We urgently need greater humanitarian access and the ability to open new corridors to reach communities in all parts of the country. This includes across frontlines and across borders from Chad, Egypt and South Sudan. I urge all members here today to use whatever leverage you have to help us reach cut-off communities before it is too late.

Across the Sahel nearly 4.5 million people have been forcibly displaced in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. In Burkina Faso over 1 million people are living under siege but WFP is doing all we can to reach them, including via air drops. On the other side of the world, in Myanmar, conflict, human rights abuses and the use of food as a weapon of war have been commonplace. In 2024, WFP aims to reach 2 million people overall. But this is far fewer than we need to assist. To make a real



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difference, we need better access to conflict areas and more international focus on this forgotten crisis.

Finally, here in Europe, in Ukraine, we are extremely concerned about the intensifying conflict. We are reaching 1.8 million people each month, and 90 percent of that assistance goes to frontline communities, where humanitarian needs remain high. However, power shutdowns due to large-scale attacks on energy infrastructure, mean that some of our Ukrainian suppliers are starting to warn of potential delays to deliveries. This could impact our ability to provide communities with much-needed food before we lose access in areas where the conflict is raging and frontlines are shifting.

On a more positive note, WFP is working with FAO to clear agricultural lands of landmines, and support the revival of local food production, where possible. We have also been able to restart some local procurement.

Excellencies, these are challenging times but now, more than ever, WFP is determined to deliver for the people we all serve. Yet we recognize that we will never end food insecurity and malnutrition on our own. It has to be a shared endeavour. So, we are ready to contribute our extensive technical expertise, operational experience and truly global network as part of a common effort to deliver lasting solutions to hunger.

Take the global climate crisis as an example. It is one of the greatest challenges facing humanity and a daily threat to the food security of communities around the world. As I saw for myself in Zambia last month, this year's El Niño has sparked a devastating drought across southern Africa, made much worse by climate change. The situation across the region is serious, with up to 30 million people impacted. So, WFP is ramping up our work in this area.

Climate disasters and predictability and with effective forecasts, risk analysis and early-warning systems, it is possible to implement the solutions and financing to protect communities before a crisis hits. But we need to be smart about it. This means focusing our work where we can have the greatest impact, backed by a sharper programmatic focus and ambitious new partnerships to multiply the impact of our work.

We must base our activities on our areas of comparative advantage and expertise, lining up behind existing national or local strategies and harnessing the power of innovation to boost our impact wherever possible. So, I am pleased we have two side-events this week that will explore how we can grasp the huge potential of data and artificial intelligence to transform the lives in greatest need.

When we begin work on WFP's new strategic plan in September, these priorities will be at the forefront of our minds. We will be ready to refine our policies and programmes so they fuel our progress as we strive to fulfil our vital mission: achieving a world free from hunger. As always, we count on the continued support and partnership of everyone in this room. We must be one team and face our common challenges together.

In today's world, where humanitarian needs outpace resources, difficult decisions and trade-offs are unavoidable. We need your advice on what to prioritize and what we should leave for others to do. WFP operates in some of the most complex and fragile regions of the world. Day in and day out our people stay and deliver when others are getting out of harm's way. So, we also need an open and honest dialogue on how to share the risks and responsibilities that are part and parcel of our work.

And we need each of you, and the governments you represent, to use your political and diplomatic capital to ease access constraints, provide safety and security for humanitarian workers and,



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above all, to help broker political solutions to end the conflicts that fuel so much hunger and suffering around the world.

I am grateful for your wise counsel and your friendship and collaboration. Together, I am confident we will overcome the challenges we face and continue bringing hope and opportunity to the vulnerable people we serve. Thank you, and I look forward to spending time with all of you this week.

