

ODC REGIONAL PRESENTATION

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

ODC is a region characterized by civil strife and largely man-made disasters. Since the last Board Session in June, we in the ODC Bureau have been particularly vigilant and attentive to emerging crises in an increasingly fragile and politically unstable environment.

Mr. President, the humanitarian challenges before us in this region seem daunting. Yet, at the same time, in the midst of so much conflict and tragedy, we also see some glimpses of hope and new opportunities for the way forward.

WFP in this region is engaged on two fronts: addressing complex humanitarian operations and preparing to hand over programmes in other countries.

As we prepare for the Strategic Plan, our greatest challenge is the growing humanitarian needs, resulting mainly from conflict and violence in the region. There is an increasing number of internally displaced and refugees in need of

assistance. These needs are growing and persisting at the same intensity while there is little progress on the political front. Aid can never replace politics, as you all very well know. Successful political solutions, however, can obviate the need for aid intervention.

In Iraq, UNHCR now estimates that there are some 4 million displaced people due to violence, of which 2 million have fled to neighboring countries primarily to Syria and Jordan. The return and repatriation of these refugees are contingent on a political solution that is not yet on the horizon.

On the operational level, it has been particularly difficult to target and deliver aid to those Iraqis currently in Syria as most of them are hosted in urban areas.

Reaching the needy displaced inside Iraq is another challenge that we have been working very hard to overcome. Insecurity, attacks and commandeering of humanitarian supplies have all made it increasingly difficult to work inside the country.

Within these constraints, WFP is working closely with the Government, UN agencies and NGOs in the preparation of new emergency operation (EMOPS) targeting some 750,000 IDPS in need of food assistance.

In the Palestinian Territories, the tense security situation combined with a dramatic decline in economic and commercial activities particularly in the Gaza Strip have resulted in people losing their incomes and main sources of livelihoods. This in turn has led to an increasing number of people becoming highly dependent on humanitarian assistance.

WFP and UNRWA are now providing assistance to 75% of the total Gaza population. WFP alone provides food rations to 665,000 non-refugee Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. WFP continues to closely monitor the situation on the ground, updating needs assessments and taking necessary measures to address an emerging crisis.

In other countries, (Algeria, Yemen, the Caucasus) simmering low-intensity conflicts continues to force families from their homes, thus increasing the number of displaced of people in need of relief assistance

Restricted access to meet humanitarian needs in several parts of the region is also a challenge. Increasing insecurity for aid workers – both national and international – and limited or restricted access to people in need – is hampering our operations.

We also have a different kind of challenge facing vulnerable people across the region and that is of the dramatic increase in the prices of basic food commodities. From January to September of this year, the price of wheat has increased by over 40 percent in Gaza, the West Bank and also in Egypt. In some remote localities in Yemen and Tajikistan, this rise has gone up as high as 80%. This is having a severe impact on access to food, particularly for poor and vulnerable people. It is also hampering government efforts to expand social safety net programmes – particularly food-based interventions.

Mr. President, I will turn now to the opportunities for this region. I have just returned from the South Caucasus, where I visited Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, where I also the chance to see first-hand our operations. We are on track on schedule with our roadmap to hand over WFP assisted food-based programmes by the end of 2008.

Government, district leaders and partners in all three countries expressed their strong appreciation for WFP's work over the years. They have requested WFP to

provide capacity support in emergency preparedness, vulnerability mapping, and household food security and special projects targeting HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis patients.

This provides WFP with the opportunity to build additional capacity at regional and country levels to monitor the impact of major market changes on vulnerability. This includes establishing systems that would identify openings for WFP to support local farmers and producers through increased local and direct procurement. In this regard, I would like to highlight the innovative tools that WFP is using in the Gaza and the West Bank to support local producers and millers through maximizing local purchasing under difficult circumstances.

These are indeed opportunities to consider as we collectively move forward in the development of the Strategic Plan.

As part of this transition, we are extremely grateful to Russia, which has become a steadfast donor to operations in our region, providing critical resources to our operations in Armenia and Tajikistan.

Similarly, in Jordan, Syria and Egypt, economic growth and improved social indicators provide opportunities to hand over existing programmes and to identify new forms of partnership to support capacity-building and advocacy activities.

In Egypt, WFP is piloting an innovative programme to support government efforts to address child labour in urban areas. The programme is funded by the US Department of Labor and is being jointly implemented with UNICEF and national NGOs.

Indeed, we are at a turning point in these countries. As we are gradually phasing out of classical food aid delivery activities, we are exploring new partnerships with the governments and civil society, thinking creatively and realistically about what WFP will do next and what WFP can do best.

In Least Developed Countries such as Yemen, WFP is working closely with the Government, UNICEF and other partners to support girls' education. We have had some very good results. Within two years of implementation, the enrolment rate for girls in schools supported by WFP increased by 60%. It is a success story, thanks to our tremendous efforts to reach poor households in remote rural communities and to the integrated incentive package, which also includes take-home rations to encourage poor families to send their daughters to school.

Also at the country level, there has been significant progress in strengthening partnerships with other UN agencies. While none of the eight pilots of the “Delivering as One” are in the ODC region, there is significant progress in developing joint programmes and activities with the UN agencies within the context of the UNDAF.

Important in this work is the increased collaboration we are developing with Resident Coordinators and the Regional Directors Team. Their increased engagement in our activities is growing and is already demonstrating results, particularly in our ability to respond and work together in the region. We look forward to strengthening our cooperation with UN partners and governments as we address the challenges and opportunities ahead.