

Presentation of the ODC Regional Director  
To  
The WFP Executive Board  
First Session, February 2007

- Thank you Mr. President
- Mr. President, with your kind permission, I would like to start my presentation by paying a special tribute to a beloved friend, mentor and colleague: Mr. Khaled Adly who was the first Regional Director of a decentralized bureau. He established ODC in Cairo in 1998, worked hard and succeeded in putting the Regional Bureau on solid foundations. We are capitalizing on his good work and accomplishments; Khaled's legacy will remain with us on both professional and personal levels. We continue to work hard to raise the Bureau's goals and performance to a higher level, guided by his wisdom and vision. Khaled Adly has made it clear and proved that decentralization works. It puts WFP closer to the people it is helping and positions us to make decisions more efficiently.
  
- Since the last Board meeting in November, for the ODC regional bureau, it has been a period of intense reflection,

planning and preparedness to face the many challenges, a period during which we've been particularly vigilant and attentive to emerging crisis in an increasingly fragile and politically unstable environment. Our context in the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus is replete with shifting political sands, pushing vulnerable groups into further misery and sometimes to the brink of destitution.

- As you know Mr. President, many countries in the ODC region are characterized by civil strife and largely man-made disasters. We work in countries whose economies and public institutions are increasingly exposed or threatened to collapse.

The words of the Representative of the Russian Federation, at the last Executive Board in November, still ring very true. He said, and I quote him: "it is very difficult to work in areas where there were some natural disasters, but I think it is twice more difficult to work in areas where there were some armed conflicts going on." And in this region, we are challenged by protracted conflicts in Palestine and Iraq and the repercussions these conflicts have on the wider region.

- In oPt, the crisis metamorphoses day after day as poverty levels increase and security restrictions and internal tensions move us towards an economic and humanitarian abyss. In fact, closures and check points in Gaza and the West Bank are currently 40% higher than in 2005, significantly reducing economic activity and the movement of people and goods. As a result, poverty rates are dramatically increasing; over fifty percent of the population in the Palestinian territories (Gaza and West \bank) are on the verge of the poverty line, living with less than 2 dollars per day.
  - A food security assessment study undertaken by WFP and FAO has just been released. While the level of food insecurity remains high affecting about 35 % of the population, the report shows that provision of food assistance to targeted beneficiaries contributed to averting a humanitarian crisis. Under the current PRRO, we are providing assistance to some 600,000 people in the territories to address the nutritional and food security needs of the poorest segments of the non refugee population. We are also preparing a new PRRO to tackle

this fast changing situation. This new operation will be brought to you for consideration and approval at the next Board session in June.

- In Iraq, a growing humanitarian crisis is throwing a very long shadow over the region. Of special significance for our work is the growing number of refugees and IDPs. UNHCR estimates that inside Iraq, there are 1.8 million internally displaced persons. An additional 2 million refugees reside outside the country's borders, many in Syria and Jordan.
  - Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis are fleeing various threats, leaving their villages, towns and cities and searching for safety in other parts of Iraq or abroad. While many have fled with resources to sustain them for a period of time, others are poor and vulnerable and have little to fall back on. They should not be left alone. In Syria WFP, together with UNHCR, and the Government, is now providing food to some 6,600 Iraqi refugees who have been temporarily

accommodated in social centers in the capital and in camps near the borders.

- As the number of Iraqis fleeing into Syria has dramatically increased over the past weeks, WFP conducted another needs assessment and is preparing a new operation to cover the food needs of some 30,000 Iraqis for a period of 9 months.
  - While the security situation in Iraq has made it increasingly difficult to implement operations inside of the country, WFP, in collaboration with the Iraqi Ministries of Health and Education, is striving to provide food assistance to some three million vulnerable people including malnourished children, pregnant and nursing mothers and school children.
- The situation of Western Saharan refugees in Algeria is still a cause for concern as these people have been living in camps for over 20 years in harsh, isolated conditions. Many were born in the camps and know no other place than the surrounding desert. There is very little employment or income-generating

opportunities and most refugees remain highly dependent on external assistance; while very few are receiving remittances from families abroad. The irregularity and delays in aid deliveries, due mainly to the remoteness of the camps, is affecting over period of time, the health and nutrition conditions of the refugees, especially women and children. -Since November 2006, the regional bureau has intensified its efforts and work to help the country office staff in Algeria and partners to improve implementation of the humanitarian operation at the camp level. A WFP logistics mission recently visited Algeria and the camps. It reviewed transport and logistics operations and proposed new measures to overcome delays in deliveries and ensure continuity of the pipeline. Last week a joint WFP-UNHCR assessment mission visited the camps in Tindouf. The mission examined the management and distribution modalities of relief assistance and assessed the food security and nutritional requirements of the camp population for the coming period.

- These operations, and the many others in our region, point to an eventful year ahead. Our challenges for 2007 are many and the

- risks are abundant, foremost among them is trying to judiciously use limited resources while keeping the same level of output and optimizing the performance of activities. This will be largely an exercise in stretching resources and prioritizing what needs to be done.
- Our priority for this year is to continue updating contingency plans and to expand and upgrade emergency preparedness and response measures in the 14 countries covered by ODC and also in neighboring countries, mainly in Central Asia, where WFP does not have an office. We need to do that to ensure a suitable and thorough understanding of precarious situations in various parts of the region so WFP can intervene fast and efficiently when the need arises.
  - At the same time, and on the other end of the scale, we are looking at developing new forms of partnership with governments and civil society where WFP is phasing out of traditional food aid programmes. In the three Caucasus countries of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, we are implementing a strategy for our



- operations in such ways as to ensure that local capacities are developed and the needs of vulnerable groups are increasingly met by Governments that have already shown great commitment to providing social safety nets to those in need .
- In Jordan and Syria, WFP is currently exploring new partnerships with Governments and civil society to provide capacity and other support to tackle food insecurity.
  - The Executive Director James Morris has worked tirelessly to advocate for the plight of hungry, poor and undernourished children. In 2006, he helped us consolidate our fund-raising gains in the Gulf when he toured this area visiting Bahrain, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. He also visited earlier in the year, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia with the aim of strengthening partnerships and collaboration in support of WFP activities particularly in Africa.
  - I met yesterday with delegates from the Near East Group, we had an interesting discussions on events and priorities for this region; we agreed to pursue our efforts to increase resources for activities in the ODC countries and to raise WFP profile as an advocate for the hungry poor particularly among civil society

groups particularly in the Gulf states, and who are involved in humanitarian work worldwide.

- Mr. President, we are very grateful to you and the other members of this Board (US, China, Slovenia, Ethiopia and Mexico ) who took the time and interest in November to come and visit our work in Egypt where we have just begun to implement the new five year country programme.

You and the other members of the team had the opportunity to travel within the country visiting project sites and to meet with Government officials, UN partner agencies and donor representatives. The report before you provides insights and perspectives that are challenging and thought-provoking as we consider how WFP can best support national programmes to tackle malnutrition and food insecurity as part of a phase out project in a middle income developing country.

- Given all of the challenges in this region over the year ahead, we are thankful that we are not handling these issues and

challenges in a vacuum, but rather in close collaboration with other UN agencies, governments and NGOs. At the regional level, we can see the benefits of decentralization as assessment officers and regional advisors from various UN organizations put their heads together to draw up important strategies and partnerships on regional issues. ODC is working with the FAO Regional Bureau in Cairo on a Food Security Advisory Group to look at regional dimensions to cooperation and partnership. We are also cooperating with UNICEF and WHO on regional nutritional strategies and programmes.

- At the country level, in light of harmonization and simplification efforts under the UN reform, WFP country directors are working with resident coordinators and/or humanitarian coordinators and other heads of agencies, within the UN country team, consulting and exchanging information to ensure efficiency, avoid duplication, and maximize outputs. These partnerships strengthen the impact of our work and the level of support we are able to provide to those we serve.

- In conclusion, while our challenges are great in this time of uncertainty and instability, we are always grateful for your support. This comes to us in many ways, including through your active interest and engagement in our projects, your generous contributions to our operations and your insights into how we can strengthen and improve our work. We deeply appreciate your solidarity and know we can count on you during these times of transition and great change.