

Closing remarks to the First Regular Session of the WFP Executive Board 2017

Check against delivery

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for what I hope you will all agree has proved a productive and successful session of this Executive Board.

You will recall that on Monday we were honored to welcome to the World Food Programme as our special guest, His Excellency Filippo Grandi, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Mr Grandi spoke passionately and persuasively about the need for a renewed focus on building the structures and programmes required to support refugees and forcibly displaced people and those in need, wherever they are, when they require our assistance.

The High Commissioner reminded us that displacement is occurring in an extremely complex and dynamic environment. This requires agile responses, flexible funding, and a new and renewed push for innovative solutions.

His words take on a new urgency with the declaration this week of famine in Unity state in South Sudan. A man-made famine, the product of protracted conflict, insecurity, displacement and ultimately a lack of access; a protection crisis endangering millions of lives, preventing adequate humanitarian access and limiting food deliveries.

As you are all too well aware, famine means that, despite our best efforts and your financial support, babies will die. But as I highlighted in my opening remarks to this Board, the travesty of modern day man-made famine may not end with South Sudan because, for the first time, we sit on the precipice of four simultaneous famines. South Sudan, Yemen, Northeast Nigeria and sadly once again, Somalia, where a climate-related crisis is compounded by lack of access as a result of the insecurity created by al-Shabaab.

Excellencies, as we sit here discussing what to do, people are dying of hunger. The question is how many people will die of hunger in 2017. We must take action now. Think about it, a headline which reads - 2017 the year for famines. Even during this time of rising global nationalism, a global failure of humanity on this scale will signify epic heartlessness by us all.

The presentations you heard, delivered by our WFP regional and country directors, articulated our comprehensive response plans. We are ready. We have the tools available, the people available. In each of these situations, we are already performing the work. But they also articulated the substantial obstacles our country teams are confronting as they perform this ongoing life-saving work.

I implore you, please convey these challenges to your Capitals with a sense of urgency. We need all your political support to ensure, not just the financial resources, but the access that is required for us to avoid this calamity which is all too possible. Avoiding this calamity is also possible. But silence and delayed action and lack of access will make this calamity our shared reality.

Excellencies, WFP will play its full part in these four countries, as well as in every other country we serve across the globe. And, as you know, we will never prioritize the needs of one hungry child over another.

You also know that WFP will continue to re-engineer for the future, making this organization's work ever more efficient and transparent, operationalizing our commitment under the 2030 Agenda to fulfil our obligations to the world's hungry poor.

Implementation of the Integrated Road Map, already underway, will now shift up a gear with your support and your approval of the eight Country Strategic Plan pilots. Yes, our timetable is ambitious but it is definitely achievable. The IRM team is fully focused on transitioning every country office to the new model on schedule.

This week, you have heard that the work we began under Fit for Purpose continues under the IRM and the Cost Excellence Initiative. Fit for Purpose is no longer just a mantra and definitely not just another initiative. Fit for Purpose is truly a mind-set, motivating every team member in this organization.

Excellencies, every intervention you delivered this week offered Management constructive and wise counsel. You raised probing yet instructive queries while often delivering the requisite support that we so depend upon from you. Let me assure you that Management appreciates your support, even when that support is tinted with scepticism. We listen and we heed your guidance.

For instance, Management clearly heard the Board's advice concerning the need for flexibility once the pilot CSPs get underway. In response, the IRM team will ensure lessons are learned as they emerge and that our approaches are adapted accordingly in real time as we move forward. The Board will, of course, receive regular updates as work goes forward.

So on behalf of Management, I thank you for endorsing our continued efforts to live within our means. Your support for the addendum to the Management Plan affords us the opportunity to continue the administrative strengthening work required to ensure we perform ever better, while also performing the operational work that is necessary to address the challenges facing the people we serve.

With your approval this week, WFP will also now begin implementing the ambitious new policies on nutrition, climate change and the environment. Thank you for your support on all three of these documents.

Excellencies, we also very clearly heard this Board's appropriate direction mandating that WFP maintain rigorous controls to guard against the misuse of funds; that WFP support policy compliance; and that Management ensure every action taken delivers value for money.

By 28 February, we will complete and deliver to donors as well as to this Board an action plan addressing every finding and recommendation from the completed Proactive Integrity Reviews, the PIRs. The plan will clearly assign responsibilities and set out a timeline for the resolution of each finding, because we must solidify - and where necessary - reclaim the trust of every WFP donor.

Without listing every action, please note that Management plans to comprehensively and expeditiously address weaknesses in our internal controls, any questions regarding our staffing capacities and our operational competence - not just for PIRs but also for other audits or investigations, including the JIU reports.

We are looking at every detail because your trust, your confidence, in the work we perform is essential. We are 100 percent voluntarily funded. We know if we lose your confidence, no matter how good we are, people will suffer because we cannot perform our work.

I will share, very quickly, an observation with you that I shared with my colleagues on the leadership group earlier this week. There are 14,000 people in WFP, and every day 13,900 of them get up with the express purpose of asking: "What can I do to ensure that I meet the mandates and needs of those we serve, that I perform my job ever better?"

But in every organization there are those who say "I can cut a corner". Or even worse, those who may have nefarious objectives in how they perform and what they do. Every WFP employee must know it is their responsibility to speak up when they see something wrong, and must realize that person jeopardizes not just our ability to serve that child, but the entire organization's, and so we are all responsible.

I am committed to ensure that - in the short time I have left in this organization - we will do everything Management can reasonably do within this period of time to make sure everyone understands their responsibility. Not just for themselves, but for the entire organization, because every action has the potential to present a reputational risk far beyond that one action.

So we are committed as individuals and as a team to overcome what is, as I see it, a black shadow over the efforts of a group of people who, over the past five years, have done nothing but try to serve. People who work to serve, and who have served in the best interests of the hungry poor around the world. I am proud of this team and we will work to re-establish your pride in this team as well.

Excellencies, before we close, I would like to acknowledge our staff and the service they have given to WFP. I want to put on record my pride in the entire WFP staff, and I want to specifically acknowledge a few staff members.

First of all, unfortunately and with great sorrow, I must inform you of the passing of one of our staff members in January - Mr Innocent Kabalisa, our Senior Regional Finance Officer in the Nairobi Regional Bureau. Innocent first joined WFP in 1999. He is sadly missed by all who knew him. I have been told so many stories about his dedication. He was one of the many people who work every day to serve people in need.

I also want to offer my very best wishes to the staff who are retiring or separating from WFP. Although, unfortunately, for various reasons, they are unable to join us in person.

Lubna Alaman is retiring from WFP in June after 21 years of service, most recently as Country Director for Egypt. Lubna's commitment to humanitarianism is an inspiration to us all.

Sadly, we must also say goodbye – I think it is more *arrivederci* than goodbye – to Martin Bloem who is retiring as WFP's Senior Nutrition Advisor after 11 years of service. I want to acknowledge the excellent job he has done as WFP's Global Coordinator for UNAIDS and as my advisor on nutrition. He taught me more than I thought I could ever know about what we must do, as a global community, to address the challenges of undernutrition around the world. But I say *arrivederci* because Martin has more followers on Twitter than any other member of the WFP team, so I am sure he will not be very far away.

Douglas Broderick, who is currently serving as the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Indonesia, is on secondment from WFP. But because I get almost weekly suggestions on my performance from Douglas, he is very much a member of the WFP family. Doug will retire in May, and we are fortunate to have had him as part of our family for 25 years. Throughout that time, he has given his all for the people we serve.



Getachew Diriba will retire in March after 20 years of loyal service with WFP. Most recently, Getachew served as the Deputy Director of the Policy and Programme Division. Getachew has mentored many staff members at WFP and leaves behind him a lasting legacy. But like most of our policy people, I expect that Getachew will be a resource for WFP who will be regularly called upon to assist us. So get ready, Getachew.

Finally, we bid farewell to GianPietro Bordignon who will separate from WFP in July after 30 years of service, most recently as Country Director in Cambodia. I was with the Asia Pacific team about a month or so ago and GianPietro said to me "I love the direction WFP is moving. This is exactly the work that we need to do." The IRM represents the exact work we need to do to ensure that we help the world achieve the 2030 Agenda. He added: "But I'm just too old to learn what is going to be required for us to move forward. So I am going to retire and watch you all get this done from afar while I applaud." Thank you, GianPietro.

Mr President, if you will indulge me, I would also like to express my thanks to the parting Board members who are here with us today, who have demonstrated their unwavering commitment to WFP in our role in ending hunger.

First, Her Excellency, Ms Stephanie Hochstetter Skinner-Klée, the Ambassador of Guatemala. Stephanie, my friend, your service as Board President has steered us through some challenging and difficult discussions, both in the Board room and outside. We wish you all the best for the future. We know we will continue to count on you to fly the Zero Hunger flag. Thank you for your leadership. Please join me to receive your certificate of appreciation.

And Her Excellency Ms Valentina Muiesan. Counsellor and Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy. Nobody talks about Rome-Based Agency collaboration like Valentina. Nobody is as strong on ensuring that WFP is a fixture in this community of Rome. She is our advocate on the outside and our critic on the inside when she needs to be. We appreciate your leadership and the determination which you demonstrated on a daily basis in not just representing your Government but in helping WFP. Thank you.

And I know Her Excellency Ms Evgenia Denisova, the Alternate Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation is not here with us today, but we will have her certificate for presentation to her at a later time.

To each one of you, we greatly appreciate your wise counsel and tireless service to WFP and to the Zero Hunger movement. Please join me again in giving a round of applause to all of those who have served as Board members.

Excellencies, ending hunger will require everyone around the world having access to available, nutritious food all year round. Too often countries suffer from the double burden of undernutrition and obesity. At Davos this year, we launched Healthy not Hungry, a campaign to showcase our vision of the Zero Hunger world where nutritious food, diverse diets are the rule rather than the exception for everyone.

So, throughout 2017, renowned chefs all over the world will host Healthy not Hungry dinners, serving menus designed to promote diet diversity and the use of foods that might otherwise go to waste. This campaign is a partnership with Project Everyone and UNICEF. We are working with Ms Muiesan to create a partnership with FAO and IFAD for the G7 to hold Healthy not Hungry dinners.

We are harnessing the power of social media to mobilize the mass movement defining progress on the 2030 Agenda around diet diversity. So I would like to take a few moments now to show you the video of our Healthy not Hungry chefs in action.

Excellencies, you all need to join the Healthy not Hungry movement. As you can see, you do not need a WFP program in your country for us to support a dinner in your country. We are hopeful that this movement will continue to build throughout 2017. Right after we adjourn here today, with the support of the President, I ask you to join us for a glass of wine and some healthy food to see how we are using the Healthy not Hungry movement to drive the required change in diet diversity.

Excellencies, in a few weeks I will reach the end of my journey with WFP. After five years, while I am sad, I depart with few regrets because together we have made a difference. A read of my life story presages my future direction. I celebrate my 60th birthday in May, which means more of my career is behind me than ahead of me. But I assure you I change chairs but not my commitment. I consider myself a lifelong warrior in this battle.

As I said in my opening remarks, we may not have reached our destination yet, but we know where we are going. I remain steadfast in my belief that we will achieve Zero Hunger. For the first time in history, we possess all the tools and all the technologies required to eradicate hunger, but we also need the public, political and individual will.

Let us not allow individualism, populism and the rising notion of “any country first” to limit our humanitarianism. We share a very small planet. Let us continue to deliver the clarion call for worldwide recognition that equitable opportunity, justice, peace and prosperity everywhere offers the only - the only - guarantee of sustainable, durable, equitable opportunity, justice, peace and prosperity anywhere.

Excellencies, in closing, I urge you to continue providing this organization and whoever next sits in this chair with the oversight, the counsel and the support required to not just perform adequately but to boldly lead - ensuring WFP's distinguished, yet always humble, role on this journey, this journey towards Zero Hunger.

All of us together, all of you remaining, owe nothing less to the people who depend upon each and every one of us.

I thank you for your support and I appreciate every consideration that you have given to me as an individual, and most importantly, for your generosity of spirit, in your advice and your unwavering commitment to our shared mission of Zero Hunger.

Mr President, with that, I thank you.