

# 2019 Annual Session of the WFP Executive Board

## 10 June 2019

### Statement by His Majesty King Letsie III of the Kingdom of Lesotho

**President:** It is an immense honour to welcome again our special guest: His Majesty King Letsie III of the Kingdom of Lesotho. Your Majesty it is a great privilege to have you with us today. The Board members are well aware of your extraordinary leadership in supporting food security and nutrition not only in your own country but also across the entire African continent. Allow me first of all to praise the excellent cooperation which has taken place under your guidance between the Kingdom of Lesotho and WFP for the elaboration of the country strategic plan for Lesotho which we will consider later today. I would also like to particularly highlight your leading role as Champion for Nutrition of the African Union and your vision and great impetus in pushing forward and supporting the implementation of nutrition programmes across Africa. On behalf of the WFP Board let me express our deepest gratitude for your personal engagement and commitment in the fight against hunger and malnutrition and your invaluable contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Your Majesty, it is now my honour to give you the floor.

**His Majesty King Letsie III of the Kingdom of Lesotho:** Vice-President of the Executive Board, Honourable Ministers here present, Permanent Representatives of the Executive Board, Executive Director, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure for me to be back in Rome and to participate in this important gathering which among other things addresses a subject that has become very close to my heart, the subject of nutrition and its impact on human development.

I would like to convey my gratitude to His Excellency Hisham Mohamed Badr, the President of the Executive Board and to my good friend David Beasley, the Executive Director for extending this kind invitation for me to address the opening of this 2019 annual session of the WFP Executive Board.

At the very outset I wish to commend the World Food Programme for its unrelenting efforts to rid our planet of the scourge of malnutrition and all its related consequences. The global scale of malnutrition is simply too large and devastating to be ignored. Malnutrition in all its forms is reported to be affecting a third of the world's population. In other words, one in every three people, although over the past decade the momentum around the fight against malnutrition has been steadily building, the pace at which we are tackling chronic malnutrition has been regrettably slow. This has resulted in a condition remaining a deadly threat to 51 million children a year. To sustainably reduce the global burden of chronic malnutrition there needs to be a greater emphasis on prevention. It is imperative that the focus is not only simply providing food for the most vulnerable populations but ensuring that they have access to the right nutrition at the right time enabling individuals and countries to thrive and reach their full potential.

The prevention of chronic malnutrition requires people to have food security, access to adequate diets, good health and optimal caring practices. Our goal must remain to eliminate poor nutrition early on, particularly in the first one thousand days from conception to two years of age as this can cause stunting, a condition that cannot be reversed but can only be prevented. It has been proven that malnutrition and diet constitute the number one driver of the global burden of disease. National nutrition and development policies and strategies must ensure that these issues are recognized as integral to reaching development targets and are budgeted for as per their significance. The economic consequence of malnutrition represents losses of 11 percent of GDP every year in Africa whereas preventing malnutrition delivers USD 16 in returns on investment for every one dollar spent. Nutrition's central role in sustainable development is clear.



The majority of the Sustainable Development Goals contain indicators that are highly relevant for nutrition. It can be successfully argued that progress in health, education, women in parliament, employment and poverty and inequality depend upon improved nutrition. In turn, water, sanitation and hygiene, education, food systems, climate change, social protection and agriculture all have a significant impact on nutrition outcomes. The Cost of Hunger in Africa study which a number of our African countries have undertaken, including my own, has revealed the harrowing effects of hunger and malnutrition in our countries. Among other things the study estimates that the child mortality associated with undernutrition has reduced workforces by up to 13.7 percent in some countries. As for Lesotho, the study has revealed that the country is losing 7.2 percent of GDP because of reduced productivity brought about by malnutrition. All of this highlights the requirement for a commitment by all stakeholders to address the direct and indirect underlying causes of malnutrition. In order to achieve this, it is most important that we pursue a well-coordinated participative and multisectoral approach that will ensure we realize a sustained positive impact in our efforts to reverse the debilitating effects of malnutrition.

Distinguished Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, in recent times I have had the honour in my capacity as the African Union Champion for Nutrition and FAO Special Ambassador on Nutrition to witness and indeed be inspired by some innovative initiatives on the African continent aimed at bringing lasting solutions to the problem of malnutrition.

On the margins of the 32<sup>nd</sup> African Union Summit in February this year I officiated at the launch of the Nutrition Accountability Scorecard under the auspices of the African Development Bank working alongside the African Leaders for Nutrition Initiative. At the end of March, I participated in the opening ceremony of the Regional Centre of Excellence against Hunger and Malnutrition in Côte d'Ivoire, a centre which was established with the support of WFP. These innovative and ground-breaking interventions are encouraging and will be important tools in our struggle against malnutrition because they are evidence-based and grounded on data collection and detailed analysis and this will help us build the capacity of our own government systems. In addition, these interventions will also help us to achieve our regional and global objectives as stipulated in the Malabo Declaration, Agenda 2063 and indeed the SDGs themselves.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen to address challenges of malnutrition and hunger in Lesotho we have embarked on a number of programmes. In addition to the Cost of Hunger study that I have alluded to earlier, in 2018 the Government commissioned the zero hunger strategic review. The purpose of the review was to conduct a comprehensive diagnostic analysis of the nutrition and food security situation in Lesotho. The study has identified deficiencies that need to be addressed in order to reverse the situation of poverty, food insecurity, hunger, stunting and malnutrition. I have been informed that the costed action plan that will address these deficiencies that were identified is at an advanced stage. This review has coincided with the development of the Second National Development Strategic Plan for 2019–2023 that has singled out strengthening human capital as an area of focus. It is worth mentioning that some of the recommendations emerging from our zero hunger strategic review illustrate that it is essential that all stakeholders are involved across all sectors covered by the zero hunger pillars. Bringing all stakeholders together requires strong and empowered coordination mechanisms. This means policies and programmes of government ministries and partner institutions should be aligned with the national priorities that aim to address hunger. The successful implementation of the recommendations will depend on the commitment, cooperation and partnerships of all stakeholders and sectors.

At a regional level Lesotho is in the process of domesticating the African Union agenda that commits member states to end hunger by 2063. Globally Lesotho is working to meet the global targets of the United Nations and its organs to address food security and hunger elimination. In this regard mention can be made of the resolution of the World Health Assembly to reduce wasting to under 5 percent by 2025 and of course we remain committed to achieving the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 2 that aims to end all forms of malnutrition and attain zero hunger for all by 2030.



Let me take this opportunity to register on behalf of my Government and the entire nation our gratitude for the support that Lesotho has received over the years from WFP on the national school feeding programme. This programme is and will continue to be an essential component of our nutrition strategies. I would like to believe that school feeding has acted as an incentive for children to stay in school allowing us to register reasonable levels of attendance and enrolment in our schools. In addition to contributing to improved school attendance, school meals have also been proven to improve the performance of children in school as the children's concentration levels in class are enhanced. This has long-term economic benefits because improved performance at school leads to higher and better individual productivity throughout a lifetime. It is for this reason that Lesotho and her people will remain eternally grateful to WFP for its unwavering commitment to support this valued programme. A programme that is contributing in a significant manner to the development of our human capital.

I am aware that during this annual session the Executive Board will discuss and hopefully approve the WFP Country Strategic Plan for Lesotho. I am greatly encouraged to see that under this strategic plan among other things, WFP aims to improve nutrition outcomes for all Lesotho by providing technical assistance and advocacy for evidence-based nutrition interventions that contribute to the achievement of SDG 2 targets.

WFP will also strengthen the institutional structures of the food and nutrition coordination office and the ministries of health and agriculture and food security and strengthen their capacities to convene and coordinate multisectoral responses that include engagements by the private sector and civil society.

I have no doubt that if this plan is approved and then effectively implemented, my country will go a long way within a short period of time towards reducing the high prevalence of chronic malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and even the newly emerging burden of overnutrition.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude my remarks by stating a fact that you all know which is with today's complex and unprecedented challenges no one or no single organization can end malnutrition alone. It is essential that all stakeholders, including the private sector, come to the table and lend their support to enhanced multisectoral efforts being made by governments and development partners to achieve reduction in malnutrition and stunting by 5 and 10 percent in line with the African Union Malabo Declaration.

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to the United Nations agencies and all development partners who with enormous dedication and sacrifice contribute their time, efforts and resources to achieving zero hunger. I do hope that this 2019 annual session of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme will have fruitful deliberations. Deliberations which will produce only positive outcomes.

I thank you for your attention.

[applause]

