

2021 second regular session of the Executive Board

Hybrid/virtual session

Opening remarks by the Executive Director

D. Beasley, Executive Director: Mr President, thank you, it is good to be with you this morning. This is the first time we have been able to come together in a hybrid session. Dr Al Rabeeah, we are so grateful to have you. This is not our normal configuration. It is a little bit unusual but this is a little sacrifice and inconvenience that we have to pay compared to those around the world who are struggling to survive. And so we should appreciate the many blessings that we do have, even with these small inconveniences.

Thank you to all of you for being here. I think it is going to be a good week. I believe we have got a very challenging year ahead of us. We have a lot of plans and proposals before you this week, which I think we are all in sync on - a few little modifications here and there have been made, but I think the strategic plan, the management plan and the other documents are in good shape.

One thing I would be remiss not to mention now is the internal project lending mechanism and the global commodity management facilities, which are already at their ceilings. We do need to get on top of that over the next few weeks and months, given how much monies we are needing to advance because of the crisis.

Let me also mention one other item, which is important, before I really get into the depth of what we face in the next year. You remember when I got here four and a half years ago? I talked about gender parity, and I was surprised that the United Nations was not the leader in the world. The United Nations is the leader in the world in talking about things but sometimes not the leader in the world on doing things.

But what we have seen at the World Food Programme, in some of the toughest countries on earth, is that we have succeeded in moving our gender numbers. In fact, we have now hired over 2,976 additional women since I arrived. Now, what that means in percentages, is that for national hires we have gone from 30.3 percent to 38.4 percent. For international hires, from 42 percent to 46 percent. Globally, as you merge all that data together, we have moved from 34 percent to 41 percent.

And I want to really pay tribute to our teams out there because, on one hand, it is not that difficult, folks, to identify talented women who can get the job done, even in the most difficult places on earth. But, at the same time, it is not always that easy to make sustained progress. And so I am proud of our teams for what they have achieved because we have seen, with that, extraordinary successes. When you have gender parity, women and men together help build the systems that we need to project the reality of what we want for everybody - that we are all equal, that we all have a role to play and together we can build a better place.

When I arrived here four and a half years ago, I also said my goal was to put the World Food Programme out of business because we would achieve successes, we would build sustainability and resilience against hunger. I am so unhappy to say we are going backwards. We are absolutely going backwards at an astonishing rate. What the World Food Programme would like to be focused on is resilience and sustainability, but with man-made conflict and climate change and COVID, the outlook for food security is just getting worse and worse.

Over the past many decades around the world we have achieved great successes in reducing the overall rate of hunger. Food systems have been built that are reaching more people than in any period in world history. But now, because of conflict, compounded by extreme weather and COVID, we see the food systems are now disrupted in ways that are causing havoc.

Four years ago, there were 80 million people marching towards starvation. Now, that number has reached 270 million during COVID and it is rising as we speak to 283 million people in IPCs 3, 4 and even 5. These people do not know where their next meal is coming from. Of this number, 42 million, now rising to 45 million people, are in IPC 4 in 43 countries.



2021 second regular session of the Executive Board

Hybrid/virtual session

When you have 45 million people knocking on famine's door across 43 countries, that is as serious as it is going to get. And if you do not feed these people, you are going to feed, war, conflict and crisis.

We have got the solution to the problems we face. It is food. We have enough food to reach these people. We just need the money. Obviously, if we can find ways to reduce war and conflict, it substantially reduces the financial demands on all of you. But I want to thank each and every one of you for your commitment and work over the past many years, as our funding has substantially increased. In return, we are committed to being accountable and transparent. We make certain that every dollar from your taxpayers is put to use in the most efficient and effective way.

Now, having said that, we know that we have a funding gap – last year's gap, this year's gap – but this coming year is the year that I am most concerned about. Because in the last year and a half, as I rang the alarm bells about this perfect storm, and the international community stepped up with economic stimulus packages and more funds for WFP and other critical humanitarian actors, we were able to avert famine in 2020 and 2021. But now COVID has recycled again.

COVID is continuing to compound with economic deterioration in countries around the world and the amount of financing and available funds we had for 2020 and 2021 are just not available for 2022. This gap that we are talking about, based upon our projected revenues, is about USD 7 billion. This is why I am asking for the world's billionaires to step up in an unprecedented one-time ask – to help us with USD 6.6 billion to reach 42 million severely hungry people.

I do not think it is unreasonable to ask. It is a one-time ask. My goal and objective for the private sector is to have them strategically aligned with us on sustainability and resilience so that, long-term, we can put humanitarian programmes like the World Food Programme out of business. But right now we are facing a one-time unprecedented crisis, a perfect storm – conflict, climate change, COVID, and now our costs increasing as well.

Take fuel costs. Container shipping is up 400 percent. Fertilizer costs are up substantially. And I could go on and on and on. I think someone in my team told me the other day that last year alone there were over USD 300 million worth of increases in shipping costs. So, you can imagine, if we have the same amount of monies, more people hungry, and the cost of food is substantially up, we have a very serious crisis.

And if we cannot reach the 45 million people, you will have famine. You will have destabilization of some nations. And we certainly will have mass migration. And we have seen from our past experience, the cost of failing to act in advance.

Germany just had a report that said that in the Syrian crisis USD 125 billion was spent over five years for one million refugees. Do the maths. That is 68 euros, by the way, per day, and maybe more, actually, in many cases. That is versus the World Food Programme assisting a Syrian in Damascus or Aleppo at 50 cents a day.

And, guess what, the Syrian is happier being at home and the German taxpayer sees their euro being used more strategically. But this is not just an issue for Europe - in America, too, we have seen people in the Dry Corridor of Central America migrating because of conflict and particularly climate change. The Washington Post published analysis while I was in Guatemala showing that the United States was spending USD 60 million a week on shelters, at a cost of USD 3,750 per person per week, to look after unaccompanied migrant teenagers and children.

At WFP, we can support a resilient, sustainable programme for between USD 1 and USD 2 per week. What do you think a liberal or a conservative taxpayer would prefer? This is where we have got to focus on the icebergs versus the broken teacups on and in front of the Titanic - being strategic in our decision making so that we take limited dollars and we are as effective with them



2021 second regular session of the Executive Board

Hybrid/virtual session

as possible. Because what happens in one region of the world surely impacts another region of the world. We have seen that first-hand over and over and over again.

You have been so gracious in stepping up in these past few years and for that I am so grateful to each and every one of you. As we are voluntarily funded, your support is critical so that we can avoid a global crisis.

This is why I am challenging the billionaires. When I look at the numbers, at how much money was made during COVID - a large part because taxpayers funded stimulus packages - it is only right that those who have made billions of dollars should help in this one-time crisis. I was running some numbers this morning and for the top ten billionaires, whose net worth is USD 1.5 trillion - it would take just 0.4 percent of their net worth to give us USD 6.6 billion.

In America alone, the top 400 billionaires made over USD 1.8 trillion net worth increase. 0.36 percent of their net worth increase would give us the funds that we need. It is not in my interest to play games or pick on any one individual with regard to this matter, but it is, I think, an opportunity for those who have made so much wealth to help us in this one-time crisis.

I would like for many of these wealthy, successful entrepreneurs to engage with us long term as well. In so many ways they can make us more strategic and end hunger around the world. But in the meantime, I am asking that those who can, to step up for those in great need. It is not too much to ask.

I think if anyone with a heart at all could just travel with me and see the horrors and the atrocities facing the little boys and the little girls and the desperate mothers and fathers, as I have just in the last week, their heart would be broken. They would, in fact, realize what we are facing. In Afghanistan, to meet with a mother and talk with her, not just about the lack of jobs but about having to sell her child to someone that she thinks might take care of her child so she can take that money to survive with the other children. Can you imagine what would cause any human being to be that desperate?

In Afghanistan, a nation of 40 million people, 23 million now are marching towards starvation. 22.8 million in IPC 3/4/5. Out of that number, 8.7 million are knocking on famine's door. The cost of reaching 23 million people with just 50 percent rations for those in IPC 3, and 75 percent rations for those in IPC 4, is USD 233 million per month. Where are we going to get that money from? Are we going to take it from the children in Syria? Lebanon? Ethiopia? The Sahel? Yemen? The Dry Corridor? Where is it coming from?

When I met with the Taliban, I emphasized to them that we do not have any wriggle room for games. They must give us complete operational independence and neutrality and impartiality. It is critical. As I said to them, and I said to the Syrian Government as well a few days ago, donors do not have enough money and they are looking for places that are going to be less effective and efficient to say no to. Please do not play games with our operations. The commitments have been clear and the follow-through has been as well.

In fact, meeting with the Governor of Kandahar, a very, very conservative province, before I could say a word about women and girls in schools, this Governor said, please tell us what you want us to do. We want the girls back in school. We want the women back to work. Prove us wrong. What can I say? I said I will. I will challenge you on this. We know that if we get the funding that we need, we can put little girls back in schools. And we are working from province to province. What happens in Kabul does not necessarily happen in a province. I say it is similar to where I am from in the United States in the South. We do not like Washington telling us what to do.

People in the provinces in many countries around the world like to be independent. Well, we are meeting with each provincial leader, as we have done in the past decade before the Taliban took over. The progress we were making is more than I would have anticipated but yet, at the same



2021 second regular session of the Executive Board

Hybrid/virtual session

time, it is not perfect. But we do have operational independence, impartiality. What we want to do with the funds that we receive is a mix of in-kind assistance, which will be the majority - but we also want to put liquidity into the marketplace, especially through cash-based transfers, which will help the economy for those other struggling families that we cannot reach.

As you well know, there is about USD 8 billion to USD 9 billion in frozen assets. The Taliban has assured me in my conversations with them last week that they would allow any assets that are unfrozen to go directly to organizations like us, because they understand the hesitancy, the reluctance with regard to funding the Taliban and the Government. And so our interest is not the Government, our interest is not the Taliban, our interest is neutrality so that we can reach the innocent people who need our help today as we speak.

It really is heart-breaking to be in the hospital speaking to the mothers and seeing the little girls and the little boys literally die before my very own eyes. It is bad enough to see one child, it is another thing to see another child and another child. I went from room to room talking to the doctors, and the rooms were getting more and more crowded by the day. They are the lucky ones, the ones who make it to the hospital and hopefully see their child recover. But what then? They go back home where there is no food and no jobs. Afghanistan is truly, in my opinion, going to be hell on earth in a few months from now.

We run out of money at the end of December and we have got a real challenge ahead of us. If we do not respond to the immense needs in Afghanistan, we know the consequences will be mass migration at an extraordinary cost, and there will be a lot of political manipulation by many around the world who exploit migration, exploit refugees, exploit those who are vulnerable.

I was also in Syria just a few days ago, after I left Afghanistan and, quite frankly, it is frightening what is happening there. It is sad to see the economic deterioration continue to take place. In fact, the food insecurity situation is worse now than it was at the height of the war. That is unbelievable. The entire region is suffering. Out of the nation's population of 20/21 million people, 60 percent or 12.4 million people are, in fact, in IPC 3 or above, marching towards starvation.

I spent some time, not just in Damascus, but also in the Aleppo and Idlib area and I met with different groups and families there, speaking to mothers, and our teams. People are coming from all over to the distribution points who are not on a list, begging to be added. I have never seen anything quite like it because there are just no jobs. You can imagine, a teacher who makes USD 30 a month, when a basic food basket is now over USD 60 a month, just about enough to feed a family. So, if a teacher, one of the few rare people that does have a job, cannot afford to eat, just do the maths, it does not add up.

A lot of the children are not in schools. I talked to many of the mothers and I talked to many of the teachers. Of course most of the schools have been destroyed, but the school meals programmes that we are implementing in places like Syria and Afghanistan are helping bring the children back into school. Very often it is the only meal they will get. But some of the children, I am talking 8, 9, 10-year-olds, are being pulled out of the classroom so they can do chores in the neighbourhood, trying to make any money that they can for their family to survive.

And as winter comes, as many of the mothers in Syria told me - and same thing in Afghanistan - is that they have so little money they have to make a choice. Do I let my children freeze to death or starve to death? I cannot afford food and I certainly cannot afford both fuel and food, because fuel prices are up, food prices are up. In Aleppo we feed with rations about 30 percent to 50 percent of the population. Why? Because we do not have enough money. Another one third of the population, because we work with local providers, help them rehabilitate the bread factories. So, at least one third of the population is getting bread, and bread alone. Can man live by bread alone? It is not so easy.



2021 second regular session of the Executive Board

Hybrid/virtual session

I saw the desperation in the eyes of all the men and the women there. The men would be in a line over here, the women would be in a line over here, begging for the bread, knowing that that is the only thing they are going to be able to provide for their children. In Aleppo, a food basket today costs seven times what it was just two years ago. Can you imagine having very little money and now a loaf of bread is now seven times more? Fuel is now four times more.

In Aleppo it is not 60 percent food insecurity, it is 80 percent. One of the reasons I went to the Aleppo region is because the United Nations Security Council is trying to promote cross-line operations. Our cross-border operations are moving strongly for the Northwest sector, and for our cross-line operations we have been able to move our first convoy. It went smoothly, though there was an explosive landmine that tragically killed a soldier shortly after it passed through. The convoy is now in a warehouse and we are hopeful that we will get approval by the local authorities to distribute that food as necessary.

We are hopeful that the next convoy will receive the approval that it needs from the authorities, who I hope will not stand in the way because we cannot afford to see food used as a political weapon in any way, shape, fashion or form. We need to be able to reach the people inside the Northwest sector, regardless of which side of the corridor or line they are on.

In terms of the funding requirement for our Syria operation, USD 80 million a month is what we are talking about. We have, in fact, received from many of you substantial support for our operation, but unfortunately we are still short of what is needed.

I then went to Lebanon and met with the President and the Prime Minister, and our team there. I also talked with families about their daily lives. Before, we were feeding just refugees, about 1.2 million. Now we are assisting about 800,000 Lebanese as we are ramping up our food assistance. Working with the World Bank, we are looking at, hopefully, by spring reaching around 1.6 million Lebanese people throughout the country.

The fact that we are discussing having to give the Lebanese people food assistance has got to be just shocking - that the economic deterioration is so severe. It is a very unstable environment and the World Food Programme, working with our partners is there to do everything that we possibly can.

Let us also talk about Yemen, where 16 million out of 30 million people are in IPC 3 or above, marching towards starvation. But because of your support, we have been able to avert famine because of the commitment of many of you in this room. It is one of the reasons I love seeing Dr Al Rabeeah with us, along with many of you who have stepped up in so many ways. There are, as you know, 5.1 million people in IPC 4. There are 50,000 in famine-like conditions. We have been able to protect the pipeline, stopping breaks through November, but yet we are running short again. The support needed for the next six months comes to USD 1 billion and we only have USD 286 as we speak. So, you see what we are facing there.

I want to also comment on our UNHAS operations, how they continue to do extraordinary things, not just in Yemen but also in the Middle East, in Afghanistan, as you well know. I think many of you have been keeping up with our operations on UNHAS and their work in Afghanistan has been extraordinary.

The Sahel, where 8.7 million people are food insecure. This is particularly of interest to the European community because we know what happens with proximity when there is destabilization, when there is severe food insecurity, such that you have mass migration or any degree of migration, with infiltration potentially by extremist groups. We must not take our eye off the Sahel region.

We must not take our eye off DRC either. Quite frankly, when you look at the numbers for DRC - 27 million people in IPC 3/4/5 - they are extraordinary. Unprecedented economic deterioration, climate, COVID, rebel groups, have all come together to fuel this hunger crisis.



2021 second regular session of the Executive Board

Hybrid/virtual session

Madagascar, the one nation on earth where conflict is not driving famine conditions. 1.3 million people in IPC 3/4/5. Half a million in IPC 4, meaning they are knocking on famine's door and there are hundreds of thousands in famine-like conditions as we speak. The long-term answer is not philanthropy, it is not food assistance on an annualized basis, though that will help them survive while we work on long-term solutions. We need to support resilience and adaptation. And this is why what I heard at COP26 is to some degree very encouraging. Mitigation, mitigation, mitigation. That is good. But in the meantime we have to have adaptation for people on the frontlines of climate change to be able to survive for the next weeks, months and years ahead.

We saw last year that out of 40 million people additionally internally displaced, 30 million was caused by our changing climate. 30 million. The projections for the future are through the roof. So, again, the World Food Programme, we have got solutions. We have talked about this. No one is better than the World Food Programme in emergency operations and delivering food efficiently and effectively. But the reason why we restructured a few years ago was to make certain that we did not take our eye off the ball of emergency operations while also giving much more attention to sustainability and resilience programmes.

Just in the past five, six, seven years, 10 million beneficiaries on an annualized basis have participated in food for asset-type programmes and rehabilitated over 3 million acres of land, land that otherwise was not usable. People living in an area that would require nothing but our assistance year after year after year, are now able to grow their own food and take care of themselves. You see, it is a lot cheaper to invest in programmes like this.

Roads and bridges. Over 81,000 roads and 2,400 bridges built. Creating economic opportunity and supporting resilience because feeder roads and bridges provide physical access to marketplaces. We, with our beneficiaries, have also built over 107,000 ponds, reservoirs and wells. So communities are now able to grow their food, take care of their family and get to local markets to sell their goods, which means they no longer need our support or they need a lot less of it.

I do not know of a taxpayer anywhere in the world that will not support that type of investment, and that is what the World Food Programme is all about. We know how to get it done.

You have heard me say this before, in places like the Sahel - when we can come in with land rehabilitation, along with a school meals programme, and support for livelihoods, what happens? Migration drops, teen pregnancy drops, marriage rates of 12- and 13-year olds drop, recruitment by ISIS or Al Qaeda, extremist groups, drops. Just compare the economic costs of those compared to the cost and the efficiency of the World Food Programme stabilizing communities.

So, adaptation is important. And to support it further, we have developed climate insurance programmes that are providing substantial pay-outs and helping smallholder farmers. Advance payments. Many of you have been working with us on advance payments, so we can go in in advance. And we know when we do that, when there is a hurricane or a cyclone or floods or droughts, we can advance monies and food, it saves us up to 50 percent in terms of humanitarian response. And of course it avoids a lot of misery for vulnerable communities.

I also want to thank you for the support you have given to the School Meals Coalition. Over, I think, 60 governments and 50 organizations have joined. I saw a disturbing number the other day from the World Bank. It said that now, 70 percent of all children under age ten in lower income countries struggle to read a basic text. That is up 20 percent in just a year. COVID has had a devastating impact on schools and the education of children all around the world.

School meals help bring children back to the classroom. At the height of the pandemic, over 1.8 billion children were out of school. 370 million or more were not receiving the school meals that they normally would have received. For many of the most vulnerable children, that is the only meal that they would get per day. This is why we are pushing school meals and we are



2021 second regular session of the Executive Board

Hybrid/virtual session

determined to get back on track, because the future of a whole generation of children depends on it.

There is USD 430 trillion worth of wealth on earth today. Shame on us that any child around the world should go to bed hungry, much less die. I am relying on you to help deliver this message back to your capitals.

At the same time, keep our feet to the fire so that we are the best of the best in delivery, in efficiency and in effectiveness. Stay on our back. As I have told you before, if you see us doing something that we can do better, let us know. Because we know that for every dollar saved, that is four more meals for a child. That is how we see things.

And maybe one day we will achieve that long sought-after dream, that the World Food Programme is no longer needed around the world. But in the meantime, my colleagues, there is a global hunger crisis and right now it is all hands on deck. Mr President, thank you.

