

# 2024 first regular session of the Executive Board

## Hybrid session

### Opening remarks by the Executive Director

**Ms C. McCain, Executive Director:** Good morning, and a very warm welcome to all of you for this first regular session of the Executive Board, especially to all of our high-level guests who are here with us today.

President Balla, congratulations on taking over as President of the Executive Board. All of us in the leadership group look forward to working with you closely in the coming year. I also want to thank outgoing Board President, Artur Pollok. Your advice and collaboration have been invaluable in the ten months since I took the helm at WFP.

Looking around this room, it inspires me to see so many friends and partners coming together, each one of us committed to WFP's vital mission to end hunger. As we begin our meeting, I would like to officially welcome Ms Rania Dagash-Kamara to WFP's global team. Rania joined as our new Assistant Executive Director for Partnerships and Innovation earlier this month, and I am excited about everything she is going to achieve.

Excellencies, we are seeing significant changes in this Board room, and it may seem that change has been the only constant for WFP in recent months. Both externally, as we navigate the new, more challenging landscape now facing the entire humanitarian sector, and internally, as we implement an ambitious agenda for change, to ensure WFP continues delivering on its vital mission in this new environment.

But while change is never easy, it is necessary. And after much hard work, we can now look forward to a period of consolidation. I am proud of everything we have achieved in a few short months, and I am grateful to everyone at WFP for their professionalism and their collaborative spirit during this period of transition. The truth is WFP had to adapt. Business as usual was simply not an option.

As an organization, we needed to be more efficient, strategic and have a more focused approach to our work, an approach that supported greater integration and collaboration, and ensured a laser focus on delivering for our teams in the field.

Last week, WFP's new headquarters structure came into effect. Getting to this point has involved some tough decisions. But in everything we do, we are thinking first and foremost about the people we serve, our national staff, our country teams out in the field, and our people here at headquarters.

We are guided by a clear vision: to make sure WFP is as efficient and effective as possible, and equipped to stretch every donor dollar as far as possible for the benefit of the vulnerable people who rely on us. The new structure was designed following extensive consultations with colleagues at headquarters, and in country offices around the world. We also drew upon external expertise.

Our new configuration will bolster coordination and collaboration across teams and break down silos. It reinforces efforts to cut bureaucracy, boost agility and provide more strategic and focused support for our frontline teams. And it refines roles, responsibilities and accountabilities to ensure headquarters is providing effective guidance, technical support, and oversight to our country offices.

Importantly, it also strengthens our emergency response capabilities, embedding this core function across all divisions, with direct oversight from the Deputy Executive Director.



# 2024 first regular session of the Executive Board

## Hybrid session

The review of the regional bureaux, which launches later this week, will also ensure the new global headquarters structure delivers maximum benefits to the field. It will identify and analyse duplications and overlaps in functions, and clarify the division of responsibilities, and accountabilities between headquarters and the bureaux in relation to country operations.

In recent weeks we have also run a senior reassignment exercise to appoint directors to lead the new headquarters divisions. The results, announced two weeks ago, have been shaped by WFP's commitments to gender and geographical diversity, to fair rotation between the field and headquarters, and to nurturing the next generation of talent. We have made these changes as quickly as possible to try and reduce the period of uncertainty for our team.

Excellencies, I am confident these structural reforms will also enable WFP to maximize the impact of the precious resources we receive. As I have said to you previously, we are still dealing with post-COVID-19 levels of hunger but have returned to pre-COVID-19 levels of funding. While we continue to target USD 10 billion in contributions for 2024, the latest forecast suggests that we may be looking at a total nearer USD 8 billion for the year.

The ongoing prioritization exercise, in which country offices are revising their 2024 plans, with support from headquarters, is therefore vital. They are carefully balancing caseloads against available resources, while factoring in updated data on needs and operational constraints.

For large emergency operations, which make up the bulk of WFP's work, budget revisions are either complete or being processed in the next couple of months. We are also updating prioritization guidance for country teams and working to streamline and simplify the budget revision process. Our aim is to ensure that future country operation budgets are more in line with funding forecasts, but without compromising the rigorous resource mobilization efforts to meet real needs.

In a time of funding constraints, it is important that WFP adopts equally careful and prudent planning assumptions for its own running costs. This is why we have not released the 2024 PSA budget in full, with only country offices and the oversight functions receiving 100 percent allocations.

We are also undertaking a re-budgeting exercise based on very cautious assumptions. The aim is to bring planned spending into line with our anticipated levels of income and operations. This will ensure the organization has a realistic and achievable budget plan for 2024 while maximizing available resources. These resources will be used to deliver the priorities outlined in our management plan for 2024, which was approved by Board members at the November session.

And just as we must show that we are responsible stewards of the funding provided by donors, we must also demonstrate that we are effectively implementing WFP's strategic plan, which outlines how we will fulfil our mandate and mission.

The mid-term review of WFP's strategic plan for 2022–2025 is now underway. For the first time it will be led by the Office of Evaluation to ensure it is fully independent and provides a 360-degree view of all the factors that support, or hinder, effective implementation of our strategy.

The evidence and lessons drawn from the review will be invaluable as we develop a more focused programme offer. They will enable us to harness our strengths and forge new partnerships so that in key areas, such as resilience, school feeding, social protection and climate adaptation, we deliver the expertise and support that our partner governments say very clearly they want WFP to provide.



# 2024 first regular session of the Executive Board

## Hybrid session

We are committed to ensuring our programmes deliver lasting benefits and reduce humanitarian needs. Our forthcoming discussions with members on the new resilience and climate policies will be an opportunity to ensure we deliver on these shared objectives.

Excellencies, as always, we rely on our dedicated men and women serving in country offices around the world to deliver on our vision of a world free from hunger. They work tirelessly, day after day, on the frontlines of the struggle to end global hunger. I am so impressed by their dedication and commitment, and I am in awe of the sacrifices that they are prepared to make, and the risks they are willing to take, to reach the millions of people who rely on WFP to keep them afloat.

Our frontline teams bring help and hope to some of the world's most vulnerable communities. They are true humanitarians. Like our incredible team in Palestine, who are doing the impossible every single day. In Gaza, the entire civilian population requires food assistance, and half a million people are at serious risk of famine. WFP is ready to expand operations quickly if there is a ceasefire agreement. But the chaotic and dangerous environment is preventing the distribution of aid at scale.

WFP sent two convoys to northern Gaza last Sunday and Monday. Sadly, the breakdown in civil order there is such that during the distributions we were not able to ensure the safety of the local population. I deeply regret that as a result we have had to temporarily pause our operations in the north.

The convoy teams report catastrophic conditions: food and clean water are scarce, malnutrition is soaring and disease is rife. I want to assure Board members that we are urgently exploring all options to get aid to the north so we are able to resume our operations as soon as possible. It includes the feasibility of air drops.

It is clear that immediate action is required to enable a huge increase in the volume of food and other humanitarian supplies going into northern Gaza. This is the only way to calm tensions and restore some semblance of civil order. For it to happen, we need the Port of Ashdod to function and the Karni crossing to be opened.

In addition, we need a working humanitarian notification system, and a stable communications network to keep our people safe – and this is my absolute priority. If nothing changes, a famine is imminent in northern Gaza. We must all live up to our responsibilities to ensure it does not happen on our watch.

Excellencies, the painful truth is that conflicts and instability are driving millions to the brink of starvation all around the world. Many of these crises have long since disappeared from the news headlines.

In DRC, the resurgence of violence in the eastern provinces, and the imminent risk that the M23 armed group may seize Goma as the United Nations mission withdraws, is deeply troubling. Almost 1 million people have been displaced just since the end of last year. Despite being one of the most urgent hunger crises, DRC is routinely neglected.

I have been to the country numerous times over the past 30 years and I am going again next week to remind the world of its plight. When I think of the many people I know in DRC, my heart breaks for the suffering they are forced to endure.

Severe funding shortfalls are forcing our team to make impossible choices about prioritizing assistance. In the eastern provinces, 5.4 million people are acutely hungry, and over 6 million people are displaced. Yet we have had to pare operations to the bone, assisting just 1.5 million of those in need.



# 2024 first regular session of the Executive Board

## Hybrid session

Before I arrive in DRC, I will be in South Sudan, where the devastating impacts of the violence in Sudan are spilling over, as they are across the wider region. Within Sudan itself, the extensive lack of humanitarian access, and a serious shortage of funding, threatens to send this crisis spiralling out of control.

Currently, WFP is able to reach just one in ten of the people who need food assistance – in a country where over 18 million are acutely hungry. This number is expected to climb in the coming lean season. Political solutions are urgently needed to carve out humanitarian access, set up cross-border supply routes and – above all – end the violence that is fuelling this hunger crisis. Until such an agreement is in place, Sudan's neighbours will continue to bear the brunt of the crisis.

Chad is among those paying a heavy price. It now hosts nearly 1.2 million refugees, most of them from their neighbour, and a further 250,000 are expected to arrive this year. The people of Chad are being asked to shoulder the burden of a crisis which is completely outside their control.

From March, our country team will have no funding to feed any of the refugees from Sudan. And the money is about to run out just when Chad has recorded its highest number of people suffering severe hunger – at 2.9 million. I appeal to your governments to bring forward urgent funding to avert this unfolding calamity.

Meanwhile, in Haiti, the latest IPC analysis shows that over 4.3 million people face acute food insecurity, a level not seen since the 2010 earthquake. There has also been a significant increase in the number of people displaced by violence – over 300,000 by the start of this year.

We have not been able to reach schools in the west and southeast of the country since last November – depriving around 300,000 children of nutritious school meals. Despite all of these challenges, WFP has managed to scale up our assistance programmes, reaching 2 million people last year. But we will have to reduce our rolls again, unless there is a significant increase in donor support.

On the other side of the world, in Myanmar, the civil conflict has intensified since late October – cutting off even more people from humanitarian assistance. Since then, we have had to relocate 50 of our national staff from towns gripped by intense fighting, ending our work in those areas and leaving over 200,000 people without support. There needs to be collective action from all global and regional leaders to secure peace and restore humanitarian access, so we can reach the 2.5 million people in Myanmar at greatest risk.

Finally, here in Europe, instability in Ukraine has increased during the winter months, pushing up humanitarian needs. WFP aims to assist 2.4 million people in affected regions near the frontline. We are also working with FAO to support farmers running mine-action initiatives to clear agricultural land, and providing key agricultural supplies to support food production.

Excuse me, these are the harsh realities facing millions of innocent people caught in the crosshairs of conflict - or trapped on the frontlines of the global climate crisis, despite doing nothing to cause it. But I refuse to give up hope or give in to despair.

Food security is not just a humanitarian imperative – it is also a vital investment in our collective global security and stability. And I firmly believe humanity has the ingenuity and the compassion to solve these huge challenges.

This is why I am determined that WFP will lead the way in harnessing the immense power of science, technology and innovation to transform the lives of the most vulnerable communities. I have been clear since day one this is a personal priority for me.



# 2024 first regular session of the Executive Board

## Hybrid session

WFP's information and technology strategy, launched late last year, set out a framework to modernize our IT systems to boost our operational agility, while also building in the strongest safeguards on security, privacy and governance. I am pleased we are now ready to launch WFP's new global data strategy, which is the next step on our innovation journey.

Huge advances in data analytics, artificial intelligence and machine learning have limitless potential to transform humanitarian operations. WFP generates a treasure trove of data every day, and we are now going to use it to generate new insights and improve operational decision-making.

Data-driven insights can cut the time it takes to deliver life-saving aid, help our teams design smarter ways of working and deliver creative solutions to hunger. Our new strategy will ensure we grasp these opportunities to maximize our impact. This work will also complement the groundbreaking research being done at WFP's Innovation Accelerator in Munich. I visited last week and I was hugely impressed with what I saw.

I learned about our exciting collaborations with the German Aerospace Centre and the CERN laboratory in Geneva. And I saw smart inventions such as plugPAY, a digital payment platform that transfers cash payments to people's bank accounts or mobile wallets. Already being used by our teams in Sri Lanka and Zambia, we are rolling it out to five more countries in the months ahead and mapping the feasibility of expanding plugPAY across WFP's operations.

Innovation always has been – and always will be – part of WFP's DNA. It is the engine that drives us forward, allowing us to reach the most vulnerable people, even in the most challenging and remote areas. We are going to build on this proud tradition by developing the organization's first-ever innovation strategy to take this cutting-edge work to a whole new level.

But we also know that we do not have all the answers – nobody does. We will develop an ambitious new approach to expanding the range and scale of WFP's strategic partnerships. This will include a strong focus on forging new relationships with business, benefiting from their resources and specialist expertise, and collaborating to find lasting solutions to hunger.

We are also going to put a lot of energy into unlocking new opportunities right across the private sector: not only companies, but also philanthropic foundations, high net-worth individuals and individual giving by members of the public. Their donations are the fastest-growing source of private money for WFP, and we are going to invest to grow them even more.

Nor will we overlook the huge untapped potential which exists in the private sector across the Global South. In a world where climate change demands radical transformation in numerous sectors, from agriculture to energy to transport, these challenges are being embraced by smart entrepreneurs determined to lead change in their own countries. Through new partnerships and innovation, WFP will play its full part in developing the ingenious tools and technologies required to power our collective progress.

Excellencies, as I said at the start, while change is never easy, it is necessary. I ask each one of you to be the change you want to see in the world. I know that, like me, you want to see an end to global hunger.

Now, more than ever, WFP needs your partnership and support to achieve this. We need you to continue advocating with your capitals for the resources to fund our vital mission. We need you to work towards the political solutions that will create the humanitarian space for us to do our work in fragile and complex places.

And we need your insights and your wise counsel, your friendship and collaboration, to help us navigate the new humanitarian landscape, and ensure we continue delivering for the people we all serve. Thank you - and I look forward to spending time with all of you in the coming days.

