

2024 second regular session of the Executive Board

Hybrid session

Opening remarks by the Executive Director

Ms C. McCain, Executive Director: Excellencies, good morning, and a warm welcome to the second regular session of the Executive Board. I am grateful to see so many WFP friends and partners in headquarters today. We are all here because we believe in WFP's mission to end hunger and food insecurity, and I am proud that our commitment is shared by WFP friends and partners across the globe.

Since the last Board session in June, I have attended the G20 development meeting in Brazil and the G7 development and agriculture meetings here in Italy, where I had very good discussions with many of the ministers who attended. I visited donor capitals, including Oslo and Seoul, to hold talks with political leaders. At the United Nations General Assembly, I spent time with WFP's partners from governments, the private sector and NGOs. And just last month I joined the ministerial meeting of the School Meals Coalition, generously hosted by the Government of Kenya and co-chaired by Brazil, Finland and France.

Everywhere I go, our partners share our belief in WFP's mission and express confidence in our ability to deliver on it. And they share my deep admiration for the selfless women and men who make this unique organization all that it is. Our people are truly our most precious resource.

In recent months, I have joined WFP's frontline teams in the Caribbean as they helped others cope with the aftermath of Hurricane Beryl, without having running water or electricity themselves. I have been with our team in Sudan, many of whom have endured personal loss and pain from the war, as they work around the clock to stop famine from engulfing the country. I visited our team in Nigeria to see how they are fighting back against the rising tide of hunger in the north, and forging creative partnerships to build resilience all across the country. And I spent time with our teams in Jordan and Lebanon, and from Palestine, as they give their all to prevent the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe from destabilizing the wider region.

WFP exists to bring hope where there is none, and I thank every member of our global team for fulfilling our mission every single day. But, Excellencies, even as our teams excel themselves, the risks and dangers they face are growing all the time.

It is harder for humanitarians to negotiate access to reach people in need. It is more difficult to plan and predict future needs or where new crises will emerge. It is more dangerous than ever before to operate in conflict zones and other challenging environments.

Yet WFP's dedicated women and men stay and deliver, risking their safety to serve others. But they should not have to. Humanitarians are not and should never be a target. I am determined that we as WFP leaders will do everything we can to support and protect our global team.

Our duty of care to them is a top priority of the organization and a personal commitment for me. We are introducing measures to ensure that duty of care is built into all corporate policies and decision-making processes. We will increase the efforts to evaluate risks, reinforce the measures in place to reduce them, and strengthen cross-functional collaboration on all aspects of this issue.

These commitments to strengthen WFP's duty of care come with financial costs, so I ask Board members to help us meet them. On my watch, WFP will always do our utmost to give our people all the protection and support we possibly can. This is my promise as Executive Director.

Since day one I have been focused on ensuring our teams have everything they need to deliver life-saving assistance and solutions to hunger for the people we serve.



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To drive progress on this agenda, I have set out three initial priorities: i) to expand and diversify our funding base, including more contributions from the private sector and international financial institutions; ii) to further increase WFP's efficiency and effectiveness, targeting resources where they will deliver the greatest impact and ensuring every donor dollar feeds as many people as possible; and iii) to scale up partnerships and innovation, so we design and deliver even more effective solutions to hunger.

This is why last year I launched a comprehensive review of WFP's organizational structure. The results of the BOOST review were clear. Services to country offices are too fragmented and sometimes duplicated. Internal bureaucracy is excessive and there is a lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities. This has to change.

I have now defined WFP's strategic direction of travel. We are going to fully empower our country offices so that they can deliver with maximum efficiency for the people we serve. To achieve this, WFP will adopt a One Integrated Global Headquarters model, laser focused on supporting our country offices.

Moving forward, our regional bureaux will be an integrated part of global headquarters, while still being located around the world. And to ensure headquarters provides more efficient, streamlined support to the front line, while reducing bureaucracy, we will also consolidate enabling services via a network of global hubs. Such hubs already exist for some services, like shipping and vendor management. Others expected to adopt this model include tech support, some aspects of supply chain and the finance function.

Finally, we are going to clarify delegated powers and authorities, respective roles and responsibilities and lines of accountability. This exercise will begin at the most senior level, including those I delegate as Executive Director, and work down through the management tiers.

I have formally delegated to Stephen Omollo the task of operationalizing these changes. He and his team are consulting widely across the organization as they develop detailed implementation plans. We will keep you updated on this work, highlighting the efficiency gains we achieve as well as the results and impact we deliver. We aim to hold an informal briefing in early 2025.

The same focus on delivery also underpins the 2025–2027 management plan, which enshrines our ongoing commitment to targeting funds as efficiently and as effectively as possible, and living within our means. We are implementing the revised programme support and administrative budget for 2024, set at USD 528 million, and we are making good progress on achieving the PSA utilization plan of USD 483 million by the year end.

We are also working harder than ever to mobilize more funding for our work. The forecast for total contributions in 2024 now stands at USD 10 billion. In significant part, this is thanks to our success in securing funds from the supplemental package passed by the United States Congress.

But as WFP navigates the more complex landscape confronting the humanitarian sector, our financial forecasts indicate that 2025 will be challenging, as you will hear at the launch of our global appeal on Friday morning. Following the recent US elections, I am speaking to bipartisan congressional leaders to make the case for their continued support of WFP's work. Rest assured, this will be a key priority for me in the weeks and the months ahead.

At the same time, WFP remains committed to accessing every potential source of funding. For example, at the G7 development ministers' meetings, WFP proposed debt swaps as a way to finance investment in sustainable development and resilience building programmes. I am delighted our proposal was included in the final communiqué.



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Debt swaps address two vital development challenges: they incentivize productive investments to support long-term economic growth, while also creating the fiscal space to ensure governments can afford them. With debt distress rising across the Global South, swaps are an innovative, practical solution to unlock investment in programmes that can reduce humanitarian needs over time. I urge every donor government to embrace swaps and other forms of innovative financing.

Excellencies, every day we strive to repay the trust that you show in us, and we understand that your trust depends not only on what we do but how we do it. As you know, I currently serve as the Inter-agency Standing Committee's Champion for Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment. This is a critical issue that I feel very strongly about. I can announce today that I am extending my Championship for another year and will serve until the end of 2025. This will ensure we embed real and lasting change across the humanitarian sector on the priorities I set out at the start of my term.

At the June Board, I also pledged that WFP would be a leader on PSEA, and we agreed on a comprehensive action plan. This requires dedicated leadership at senior level, so I am pleased to tell you that we have appointed a new director to lead WFP's work on PSEA. Isabella Castrogiovanni has joined us. Would you stand up, Isabella, please? Welcome. Thank you for doing this. Isabella joins us from UNICEF and has deep expertise on protection issues. I am delighted to welcome her to the WFP team.

We understand that maintaining your trust is essential because your support has never been more important. Three months ago, famine was declared in the Darfur region of Sudan. It is a collective failure that shames all of us. Across the country, 25 million people are acutely food insecure, and 1 million are, frankly, starving. Our Sudan team continues to face widespread constraints from all parties to the conflict. This is severely hampering our ability to deliver life-saving aid at the scale needed to halt the famine and stop it from spreading. We need all cross-border routes to be open so we can ramp up the flow of aid across Sudan. And we need more people on the ground throughout the country so we can run distributions and target and monitor delivery.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, the escalating conflict is driving mass displacement and stoking hunger. In Lebanon, WFP was well prepared, and we are rapidly scaling up to meet rising needs. We have directly supported over 400,000 people and reached a further 800,000 with cash payments through government programmes. Over 500,000 people have fled from Lebanon into Syria. We are scaling up to support them, but it is adding further pressure in a country where there are already 3 million people facing severe food insecurity. Funding is desperately needed to ensure that we are able to meet these urgent needs.

Meanwhile, the recent IPC alert on Gaza warns that famine is most likely already occurring or imminent in the north. As winter looms, the situation in southern Gaza is little better. Despite the exceptional efforts of our team on the ground who seize every opportunity to deliver life-saving aid, the number of people we have managed to reach has fallen substantially over the past two months. Continued restrictions, obstacles, and the breakdown of law and order pose severe risks to our team and make our work nearly impossible.

Excellencies, as I have said to you before, we count on our many partners to fund WFP's vital work. We urge your governments to deliver political solutions to the conflicts driving so much of the hunger seen in the world today. And we need you to ensure humanitarian access and keep WFP's dedicated women and men safe. Our people should always be able to carry out their life-saving work without danger or fear of harm. Yet in too many places, they cannot.

WFP's senior leaders are working hard to ensure our global team have all the support, resources and protection they need to reach the millions of people who desperately need our assistance. But we cannot do it alone. It is a team effort - it always has been and always will be.



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I am grateful to all of you for your friendship and partnership. I know it is not easy. Government budgets are under strain everywhere and sometimes it seems the crises not only never end but they continue to grow. I want everyone here to know I am more committed than ever to WFP's mission, the people who rely on us, and our dedicated global team who serve them.

I am not going anywhere and we are not going anywhere. We will continue to be the best at what we do in the places that need us most. Together we must deliver on the promise of a better future for the vulnerable people we serve. Thank you as always for your support, your guidance, and your collaboration.

I look forward to spending time with all of you this week.

