

# 2025 annual session of the Executive Board

## Hybrid session

### Opening remarks by the Executive Director

**Ms C. McCain, Executive Director:** Thank you, President Golberg, for your continued interest and activity on behalf of WFP around the world, but also on behalf of this Board.

Good morning, excellencies. I am very happy to see you, and a very warm welcome to this annual session of the Executive Board. As always, we have a busy schedule, including many items related to oversight and accountability.

WFP never takes the support and trust of our Member States for granted, so please know that we are here in the spirit of openness and transparency. This is the bedrock of our strong partnership. I am delighted we will be joined this afternoon by our special guest, Tom Fletcher, the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator.

He will share his insights on the scale of the global humanitarian challenges we face today, and the importance of the humanitarian reset. These issues were front and centre when I spent five days last week with WFP's team in Ukraine, traveling from Lviv in the west to Kharkiv in the east. They are delivering exceptional impact, reaching 1 million people each month with food and cash, running school feeding programmes for institutions in front-line areas, which have literally gone underground to avoid falling bombs, and supporting livelihoods by clearing mines and buying from Ukraine's farmers and businesses.

Yet every day they must confront the dangers and complexities that come with operating in a conflict zone, with constantly shifting front lines. They have to cope with a dramatic fall in resources, down by 70 percent since 2022. And they must tirelessly advocate for the people they serve, when there are so many global crises requiring political solutions.

Similarly, in DRC three weeks ago, I saw how WFP's selfless, dedicated team are staying and delivering. Even though conflict has exploded in the east, hundreds of thousands have been displaced, access restrictions are common, and hunger is rising relentlessly. Many of our front-line team members have suffered personal hardship and pain in DRC and Ukraine, and in so many other places like Gaza, Sudan, Afghanistan and Myanmar.

They have been forced to leave their homes, lost loved ones to violence, or have to endure separation from their families. But despite everything, they never give up on serving others. Their courage and commitment are humbling to witness. Every day they bring dignity and hope to communities living with hunger, conflict and fear, and I thank each one of them from the bottom of my heart.

Excellencies, I have said it before, but it is important I say this again today. It has never been harder to be a humanitarian. It is more difficult and sometimes impossible to access people. It is more difficult to plan and predict future needs, and where new crises will emerge. And it is more dangerous than ever for aid workers to fulfil their life-saving mission.

We were reminded of this three weeks ago in Sudan, where a joint WFP–UNICEF convoy was attacked on its way to Al-Fashir, killing five people. It was an appalling and unacceptable act. Humanitarians are not targets. We are not targets.

At the same time, WFP, along with every other international organization, is navigating a new and unprecedented funding and geopolitical landscape. Global needs are rising. Resources are shrinking. Operating environments are riskier and more complex, and the multilateral system is being eroded. Meanwhile, political tensions and volatility are increasing, as we have seen in recent days in the Middle East.



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The entire humanitarian sector is underfunded. It is overstretched and being challenged like never before. WFP is facing a drastic funding gap, which has forced us to cut aid to millions of people for whom we are the only critical lifeline.

The impacts are severe and wide-ranging. In Afghanistan, a lack of funding meant we could not run a single general food distribution last month. This month, we are resuming very narrowly targeted feeding in hunger spots, aiming to cover a maximum of 1 million people. But this means we are turning away 8.5 million needy people each month.

In South Sudan, where 7.7 million people, over half of the population, are acutely hungry, and over 80,000 people face catastrophic hunger, we will be forced to end life-saving assistance to 2.3 million people by August. And just days after marking World Refugee Day on Friday, I must warn you that WFP is reluctantly slashing support for these extremely vulnerable people.

We have had to end assistance to 1 million refugees in Uganda. In Kenya, we have already halted all cash assistance, and rations to refugees are now less than one-third of the full amount. Meanwhile, desperate families who escaped Sudan's bloody civil war by fleeing to the Central African Republic, Chad, and Egypt could lose all WFP assistance in the months ahead.

These are just three examples. Sadly, the list of impending pipeline breaks is much, much longer. They are occurring even as global needs continue to climb, driven mainly by conflict.

Excellencies, there is no doubt this outlook is sombre, but this only makes me more determined to raise the support and resources WFP needs to continue feeding the vulnerable people who depend on us. This is my number one priority, and I am determined to deliver on it.

WFP must show our partners and donors that we are equipped to fulfil our vital mandate, effectively and strategically. We have to prove that we can achieve maximum efficiency and results with every dollar we receive. And we must demonstrate that as an organization, we have a realistic but ambitious plan, one that leverages our extensive expertise, comprehensive operational capabilities, and unrivalled global reach to combat hunger and address the causes of food insecurity.

WFP's new strategic plan, currently being finalized with the Board, is an invaluable opportunity to respond to the seismic shifts reshaping our world and chart a confident course for the future.

It sets out the organization's vision and direction for the next three years, and it will enable WFP to navigate the new humanitarian landscape and ensure our resources and efforts are targeted where they will achieve the greatest and most durable impact.

The strategic plan will guide us as we put all our energies into being even more focused, strategic, and impactful in our operations and our programmes. It is designed to deliver on three strategic outcomes.

First, we will remain laser focused on doing what WFP does best, providing effective emergency food assistance at scale wherever it is needed. Going forward, we will provide better and more tailored assistance using cutting edge data, analytics and technology to identify hunger spots, improve supply chains, and support and empower local partners.

Second, to address the causes of food insecurity, reduce needs and build long-term resilience, WFP will invest in large-scale, sustainable programmes and solutions to support communities facing reoccurring crises.

Third, we will continue building and expanding innovative knowledge and resource partnerships with governments, the private sector, and other United Nations agencies and NGOs. This includes



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supporting the entire system through the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service and our global logistics network.

These strategic outcomes are also shaping our review of WFP's country presence. Where we think a different operating model may be more appropriate in the future, we are having discussions with governments to explore the various options. We will, of course, keep the Board updated and consult members on any issues related to budgets or country strategic plans.

Finally, WFP's new strategic plan draws together the work we have been doing on organizational structures, financial management, workforce planning and resource mobilization, and creates a coherent blueprint for the future.

As we have discussed previously, we have redesigned WFP structures to direct maximum funding and corporate support to our country offices. Our one global headquarters model is intended to reduce duplication, fragmentation, and reinforce integration and collaboration. We are also strongly committed to prudent financial management, which is reflected in the latest management plan.

We have implemented a wide range of corporate efficiency measures and made savings on costs wherever we can. WFP already has the lowest overheads in this United Nations system. We are now reducing the PSA budget by a further 15 percent in 2026 to USD 365 million, over USD 200 million less than the original 2024 budget. This brings our running costs into line with our forecast revenues of USD 6.4 billion. And as before, we are prioritizing allocations to country offices, including by seeking your approval for a USD 40 million replenishment of the country office safety net.

As WFP adapts to our new operating and funding model, it is more important than ever that we have the right people, with the right skills, in the right places.

Unfortunately, in the current climate, we have had to make the extremely difficult decision to reduce the size of our global team. I know how hard this uncertainty is for our team. Everyone is concerned about what it means for them and their families. We are committed to fairness and transparency, and we are doing everything we can to meet our duty of care and provide a range of well-being support during this difficult period.

We are also committed to making these changes in a dignified manner. This is why we are running an agreed separation exercise, which has received just over 1,000 applications. We are also seeking approval to allocate USD 40 million for implementation of these measures.

As I have said before, our people are our greatest asset, so it is critical that we maintain the breadth of technical, operational and specialist knowledge that exists at WFP. This imperative will guide us as we move forward.

Just as importantly, we will continue working to increase protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. This work is not optional, and it cannot be paused when funding gets tighter. I hope you will all join me for the launch of the PSEAH exhibition tomorrow.

Finally, I also want to be crystal clear that we will continue doing everything we can to mobilize the support and resources needed to support WFP's work. Working closely with you, our donors and partners, we are making progress to protect and diversify our funding base. We are maintaining longstanding relationships with many governments while forging new ties with others. I am especially grateful to the growing number of partner countries who are investing their own resources in essential social programmes like school feeding.



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We are also working hard to tap into new resources of financing. As part of WFP's resource mobilization strategy, we are developing an ambitious five-year plan to chart growth opportunities across key business sectors and fully leverage the potential to expand our private sector partnerships.

Excellencies, we are facing unprecedented challenges, but the leadership team is determined to ensure WFP is able to meet this moment with the right priorities, people and partners to continue fulfilling our vital mission.

It means a huge amount to me and to the entire WFP team that you share our belief in a future free from hunger, and that you are willing to step up to help the most vulnerable communities. Even in today's deeply polarized world, we all agree this is the right thing to do. So, united by our common purpose, let us work together even more closely to ensure we deliver for the people we all serve.

Thank you for your partnership and collaboration. I look forward to spending time with all of you this week.

