

ED's Opening Statement EB – 4 June 2007 - as prepared for delivery

Excellencies, delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to address the Executive Board for the first time. I am proud to be part of the World Food Programme, and to follow such excellent champions of the hungry as Jim Morris, Catherine Bertini, James Ingram, and the many who helped build WFP into such a vital part of the international system.

I have had the pleasure of meeting most of you already. I have had a wonderful and warm welcome here. My thanks to each of you.

Today, I especially welcome my friends and colleagues Lennart Bage, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and David Harcharik, Deputy Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization, who have been so kind as to join me on this important occasion. Jacques Diouf who is on long planned travel overseas wanted to ensure that FAO was here so that the three Rome-based agencies could greet you together on the occasion of my first Board meeting.

During my work as a member of Kofi Annan's High-Level Panel on UN reform, I became convinced that when we pull together – member states, fellow UN agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations and other partners such as our excellent private sector partners – the multilateral system can be a much more powerful and effective force for peace, humanitarian assistance and development in the world.

WFP is a global public institution, fulfilling a global public need. We play a crucial role in the UN system. We work closely with partner agencies, not only in Rome, but in New York and Geneva and in all the countries and capitals we operate, to deliver the results that the peoples of the world expect and deserve. Nothing but best-practices of partnerships, governance, and management can be good enough.

Since my first trip abroad, to visit my Panamanian godmother, as a 12-year old, I have visited almost half of the world's countries. I have followed the tracks of my father, who fought to liberate Europe during World War II, my grandmother, who was from a small village in France and my grandfather's family, who came as refugees to America after the famine and poverty of Ireland at that time. In my work, I have made friends with people and leaders in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. I am proud to now be leading an organisation representing the whole world, in terms of membership as well as its tremendous staff. Our diversity is one of our great strengths and I will work to make WFP even more representative, in terms of region and gender, in the years to come.

On my travels with the High-Level Panel, I was deeply impressed – and moved - by the quiet, can-do work of WFP – a UN agency better known on the front lines of human suffering than in the capitals. I talked to people who had never heard of the UN but who had been saved, in a moment of desperate need, by WFP. I met village women in Pakistan, who lost their village buffalo in the earthquake, and who only wanted the UN to provide a buffalo for milk. We don't usually do buffalos, but we do provide practical help, on the ground, in the deepest field, in dangerous and difficult conditions, in a way that few other institutions in the world can, or do.

I want to pay tribute to WFP staff world-wide who work, often at extreme risk, to achieve our mandate. In April, a WFP national staff member, Mr. Ellings Maseko, was stabbed to death in an attack by robbers in Malawi. In May, the Head of a WFP Sub-office in Sri Lanka, Mr. Vijendran Paramasamy, was the victim of a serious assault. In May in eastern Chad, two WFP national employees, Oumar Wany and Klamady Kody, were attacked and badly hurt and wounded. In Afghanistan, a contract worker was killed in one of an increasing number of attacks on transports. And last week, a WFP driver, Mr. Richard Achuka, was killed in an ambush in north-western Uganda. Off the coast of Somalia, a guard on a contracted ship delivering WFP food supplies was killed by pirates. Our hearts go out to their families and friends. Increasing insecurity and instability are among the challenges facing WFP. Let me give you an overview of the strategic environment, as I see it:

Today, we are standing at the threshold of a new era in our work in breaking the cycle of hunger. We are also at the halfway mark of the Millennium Development Goal One - of cutting hunger in half by 2015. We have made progress – and I applaud the many nations that have made great gains against hunger. And yet, every five seconds, a child dies from hunger. We must – and can do – better.

We – the WFP and its staff, and the board – are in this together. You, the member states, are the owners, donors and beneficiaries of this unique agency. You work with us to create the political and financial support and provide the guidance to do the job you want us to do. And it is up to me and WFP staff world-wide to produce the results that you, your constituents and our beneficiaries, rightly require.

WFP must continually analyze and adjust its strategies in a rapidly changing world. Climate change, rising commodity costs, and conflicts over resources, are among the growing challenges facing the world and WFP. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, an international consensus body representing the work of hundreds of scientists, yields from rain-dependent agriculture could be cut in half by 2020. Our friends at FAO estimate that 95% of agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa is rain-dependent.

Anything close to a 50% reduction in yields obviously poses huge new challenges for hunger. These types of predictions indicate that the capacity of FAO, IFAD and WFP to analyze and respond to droughts, disasters and emergencies will be even more crucial in the years to come. Here at WFP, we must integrate risk mitigation, preparation, adaptation and coping strategies into our long term thinking.

The rising demand for biofuels presents both opportunities, and urgent challenges, for our battle against hunger. Biofuels demand is providing important new opportunities for farmers in developing countries. While grain production is reaching record levels, grain markets are tighter than in decades. Many commodity prices are soaring – for example corn prices have doubled since 2000 and futures markets show continued pressure upwards. The rapid growth of major countries like China – where hundreds of millions have been lifted out of poverty in a few decades, in one of the biggest gains against hunger in human history – has also contributed to unprecedented demand for commodities.

According to the latest assessments coming out of the International Food Aid Conference held in Berlin last month, we are entering a post-food surplus era. The implications of this for WFP, in terms of both cash and commodity contributions, remains to be seen.

What seems clear is that given we will face challenges as food markets tighten like a drum. Coupled with sky rocketing fuel costs and a 50% fall in the dollar to euro rate in the last 5 years, we face a real need to rethink our resources despite the almost unprecedented levels of support and generosity from our donor countries.

Today, WFP provides food and nutritional assistance to about 10 per cent of the world's over 800 million hungry people, over 80 per cent of them women and children. Other UN agencies, faith-based groups and NGOs, deliver food assistance to about another 10 percent. But this still leaves over half a billion people in need of food and nutritional support.

As we face these daunting challenges, let me assure you that WFP will work closely with FAO, IFAD and all our partners to try to get ahead of the hunger curve. Our strength has always been to focus on “walking the walk” – getting the job done in the field. I think there is a strong consensus that WFP must not diminish our core capacity to do the heavy lifting when crisis - and hunger - sets in. We must continue getting food to the most vulnerable people in the deepest field, often where no other international agencies are equipped to go.

At the same time, we must streamline our overhead structures to ensure we retain the ability to meet hunger on the frontlines. We must carefully match staffing and setup in Rome and the regional bureaus with resources available.

When I went to Sudan last month during my first field trip as Executive Director, I met staff members in Southern Sudan who had been living in tents for years, many of them coping with malaria, and yet who were still one hundred per cent committed to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable.

How can our staff go so strong and so long under such strenuous and stressful circumstances? Our President and Bureau members who have visited Sudan last month, can confirm that an important part of the answer can be found in the concrete results they see of their work: in Darfur, we feed more than 2 million people every day and all of us working together have – in the face of the most adverse conditions - managed to cut severe malnutrition in half in the past three years. This demonstrates the transformational power of the international community coming together to alleviate human suffering in the midst of crisis and conflict. Working together, we can and do save lives every minute of every day. In South Sudan, recovery is starting to take root after two decades of war. Now Southern Sudan, through a generous donation of \$55 million presented to me in April in Juba, has become one of our biggest donors. Our post-emergency operations there have allowed us to reduce general food distribution by 50 per cent - while we help build the local community capacity to address food needs.

As Executive Director, my first stop outside Rome was to the Brindisi Humanitarian Response Depot. The HRDs are the successful result of an earlier round of UN humanitarian reform and I want to underscore this achievement. The concept – that WFP would coordinate, on behalf of many bilateral, UN and NGO-partners, emergency preparation, warehousing and delivery – bore fruit in Lebanon when we were able to use the Brindisi base - along with great help from Cyprus -to deliver food, water, and other resources to the frontlines within days. The network includes four HRDs – and a fifth HRD is currently under negotiations – operating in four different regions around the globe. The HRDs now service 11 partners – and we seek to double that number by the end of this year. During the past few years, HRDs were a "key feature" in the response of the humanitarian community to large calamities including: Darfur, the Indian Ocean Tsunami, and the Pakistan earthquake. With this important tool, I believe we – all of us – have created a legacy gift to humanity. I thank the board for their support for this vision.

My first trip to the field started in Ethiopia, our second largest operation in the world. I knew I wanted to start there to send a message regarding my commitment to use our power of local purchase – we now buy 1/3rd of the food we distribute there locally—to benefit small-scale farmers and help to break the cycle of hunger at its root. I also wanted to give a boost to our food security safety net capacity building programmes where we are partnering closely (along with FAO and others) with the government of Ethiopia with FAO and others to get ahead of the cycle of hunger and famine. I also sought

to highlight our HIV/AIDS programme, where life saving food, partnered with others supplying medicines, are enabling those with HIV/AIDS to reclaim their lives. I met with grain traders, farmers and officials, to explore new and innovative ways of using WFP's purchasing power in local and regional markets to promote development, food security, and supply stability for small African farmers. The plight of small-scale African farmers -- two-thirds of whom are women – is that she bears almost all of the risk, and receives only a small part of the financial benefit of her labours. Globally, WFP now buys half of our food from the least developed and low-income countries, up from one-third only two years ago.

Last week, thanks to your support, I opened a food procurement conference – the first of its kind – here at WFP Headquarters in Rome. Our aim is to develop a framework for pilot projects on how WFP, together with FAO, IFAD and other partners, can help prepare small-scale farmers for better interaction not only with WFP tenders but with markets in general. Jacques Diouf and Lennart Bage could not be more supportive partners in this effort.

In fact, each and everyone of these life saving projects – and many others- are dependent upon deep cooperation and execution between WFP, FAO, IFAD, OCHA, UNICEF, UNAIDS and other partners. I pledge to you my commitment to coherence and cooperation on all possible fronts. WFP is an active participant in five of the eight “One UN” pilot countries where we have a country office – Cape Verde, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda and Tanzania. We are also actively engaged with the countries concerned to follow their lead in New York, where we have a leading role in helping the UN Development Group shape the models.

A quick overview of our major operations show that the role and work of WFP continues to be crucial, in the Horn and Central African regions, as well as in other crisis and hunger-afflicted areas around the world:

- First, to touch on some major accomplishments – that should be a source of pride for nations and the entire WFP family. We have seen a number of countries take full responsibility for programs previously supported by WFP. Jordan, for example, has taken over school feeding joining 28 other nations that graduated from WFP school-feeding programmes and embedded them in the fabric of government programmes.

-Indonesia, among other tsunami affected nations, and Pakistan have made major progress following apocalyptic scale disasters. This has enabled WFP to scale down – and hand-over or shutdown—a large number of projects. In fact, we expect our food operations in Banda-Aceh to be handed over early next year.

-A number of nations—including Chile, Brazil and Ghana – are close to or have achieved MDG one of cutting poverty and hunger in half. WFP

programmes have been able to be greatly reduced – or ended – in these nations.

- Eastern European and Caucasus nations have seen great gains and most are now donors to WFP.

- In fact, more and more recipient nations are now becoming donors. We applaud and thank you, along with our stalwart major donors from US, Canada, Europe, Japan and elsewhere who are great champions of the hungry.

- As already mentioned, in Sudan, we are reaching many more than before thanks to the innovations of WFP and its partners. In Darfur despite deteriorating security, we are reaching all but a monthly average of 50,000 of our targeted beneficiaries during the first quarter of 2007, down from almost half a million not reached last July. In South Sudan, WFP is making a major shift from emergency relief to recovery. WFP's efforts in road rebuilding and demining encourages this and we have been moving from general food distribution. We plan to triple our school feeding coverage to reach 450,000 students in the South.

- The situation in Chad where I also visited is extremely worrying. When I travelled there, I saw a major emergency developing, primarily as a result of spill-over from Darfur, internal conflicts and displacements. Our people in the region are working hard, in dangerous circumstances, to keep the food flowing. The Government pledged during my trip and has delivered greater security protection for our convoys. We continue to have challenges keeping our corridor from Libya open, which is crucial for us.

- In Somalia we have a dramatic increase in IDPs. Attacks on vessels by pirates have increased sharply. A Danish flagship was attacked just yesterday. The sea is the fastest and most efficient way to move large amounts of food into Somalia, but we must now review alternative routes. We have called for high-level international action to restore security and access.

- We are concerned about the drought situation in Southern Africa. In Zimbabwe, there is a looming food crisis. The preliminary findings from the soon to be released Joint FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission estimate that 350,000 m.t. of food assistance will be required for up to 4 million people at the peak of the coming lean season. These needs will create a huge challenge in resourcing and logistics for us.

- WFP is also concerned about the continuing violence in Gaza. We assist about 665,000 beneficiaries in both Gaza and the West Bank. WFP Gaza staff and cooperating partners are continuing food distributions despite the fact that international staff movement is highly restricted. Our national staff team in Gaza have been crucial in keeping the operations going.

- In DPRK, WFP is only reaching 700,000 of the 1.9 million planned beneficiaries due to a lack of funding. The current pipeline break will result in a one-month cut from 700,000 to 300,000 persons during June.

- The humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka requires high level attention. WFP estimates that more than 400,000 displaced and conflict-affected people are in need of emergency food assistance due to the current crisis and deteriorating situation.

We must seek to address these challenges, but also seek ways to get ahead of these challenges. If we are to help create more MDG 1 success stories and to avoid recurring hunger crises and conflicts – we must build bridges between emergencies, rehabilitation and prevention to ensure that there is a firm handshake and a smooth hand-over between humanitarian action and long-term sustainable development activities.

Many member states have – rightly – expressed interest in focusing more on WFP exit strategies – which I would prefer to call hand-over. I have been encouraged, during my meetings in Brussels, Helsinki and Washington in May, and with other donors and partners here in Rome, by the deep support and engagement on the question of how we better build such bridges and handovers.

During the UN High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence, we identified not only a gap- but often a chasm – between humanitarian and long-term development. I believe WFP has considerable strengths and potential as a “bridging and hand-over” agency, with our unique operational and logistics role and capacity in disaster prevention, emergencies and recovery operations.

Our work on these issues is especially critical because hunger is not only a consequence of conflicts, but can also in itself be a cause of instability, in areas where the struggle for scarce resources can easily lead to tensions, cross-border migrations and conflicts. A medical doctor who recently entered the US Congress told me that there is a “seven-meal-gap” between civilization and anarchy – when you or your children miss seven meals in a row, desperation sets in. When whole societies are exposed to hunger for years, it is not surprising if instability follows.

Nevertheless, no person wants to be dependent on another to meet essential needs such as food. I commit to you that we – along with excellent work of FAO and IFAD -- will work proactively to help build local capacity so we can hand over food and nutrition sustainability to a nation and its communities.

As we look toward our new strategic plan, I have found wide spread support for a number of WFP’s core functions and competencies: crisis and emergency prevention and preparedness; response and recovery operations; logistics; needs and vulnerability assessments; and other services like humanitarian response depots and emergency telecom operations. Most of these are functions that WFP performs on a global basis, not only to ensure the distribution of our own life-saving food and nutritional assistance, but on behalf of the whole UN and humanitarian system, as cluster lead or otherwise. These are all critical elements on what I call the WFP “toolbox” in breaking the cycle of hunger.

As we enter the management and strategic planning process, I look forward to a thorough and open dialogue with all member states about the whole range of WFP programmes and operations, and when and where we deploy which tools, and for how long.

This dialogue should lead us to a shared vision of WFP. A vision that will enable this institution to be focused on the priorities we have collectively defined. A stronger WFP able to work closely with engaged governments that make hunger and malnutrition part of their central plans. A stronger WFP that actively plays its role within the Delivering as One UN concept, and on the frontline of saving lives.

In this context, I would in particular like to mention one of WFP tools with proven life-saving effectiveness - school feeding. In my view, school feeding, whether it be in emergency, protracted recovery or so-called development operations, is one of the most cost-effective and constructive human rights programmes ever designed. At an average of only 21USD per year, we can provide a child with a nutritious meal which serves as a powerful magnet for school attendance. With an extra ration to take home, we dramatically increase school attendance by girls. School feeding is an effective tool to combat child labour. For an extra take home ration, we have proven we can attract caregivers for the millions of HIV-AIDs orphans. Even a rich country like the United States funds the need to guarantee each child in need a school lunch. For governments not yet able, WFP can deliver all this at an average of only a few dollars more per year. I would like to propose that the world consider making such a critical tool available to all children in highly vulnerable circumstances - a safety net for school children that would be a giant step toward achieving MDG one.

In order to address all of these challenges and opportunities WFP must embrace even more intently best practices in governance – including the range of evaluation and administrative issues. I will do everything in my power to ensure continued strengthening of transparency, accountability and credibility in our work here at the World Food Programme.

My long-term hope is that we can ultimately put WFP out of business, at least in chronic hunger. Let us make chronic hunger a part of history. Advances in science and technology put this dream within our grasp. One thing is for certain: the world is changing, and WFP has to change with it. For me, this is a challenge that presents us with an opportunity. With the help of all the good forces gathered here today, I am confident we can succeed.