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OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES**

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It is an honour to address this distinguished group of members of the Foreign Affairs and Agriculture Committees of the Parliament of Italy. This is my first visit here, and I hope the beginning of a partnership and continued dialogue about the world food crisis.

Today we come together to address one of the most pressing global issues of our time – the impact of soaring food prices on the world's most vulnerable and the hungry. Without unified global action, the world's bottom billion could become the world's bottom two billion, as their purchasing power is cut in half from soaring food and fuel prices. This is a silent tsunami hitting the world's most vulnerable; 80 percent of whom are women and children.

Of course, we are all consumers when it comes to food. Food is so basic to human survival that its denial is a denial of life itself. Some say there are only seven meals between civilization and anarchy – at the seventh meal lost, all begins to fall apart as people are reduced to fending for survival. Ensuring access to adequate, affordable food and nutrition is certainly one of the fundamental roles of government, and, indeed, of civilization itself.

Today, the global food supply system is groaning under the strain of sky-rocketing demand, soaring cost of inputs, depleted stocks, crop loss due to drought, floods and severe weather, and increasing demand on the use of food for energy and other supplies. Last June, I warned we were facing a perfect storm for the world's most

vulnerable. Today, I believe we are in the eye of that storm.

News reports and images from deadly riots in Haiti, triggering the collapse of the government, and elsewhere throughout the globe, are stark reminders that food insecurity threatens not only the hungry but peace and stability itself.

And when that crisis hit, the world looked to Rome, home to the three United Nations agencies devoted solely to food and hunger: the World Food Programme, FAO and IFAD.

The dramatic escalation in global food and fuel prices has added urgency to our efforts to deliver life-saving assistance to tens of millions of the world's most vulnerable. What I did not predict last June was the speed at which the storm would hit. In fact, starting last June global food and fuel prices started the most aggressive pattern of global increases perhaps ever recorded. Most food commodities rose a startling 10 percent on average a month between June and January, eroding about 40 percent of WFP's – and the world's – purchasing power.

And these increases are not just a thing of past months. On 3 March, WFP was buying rice in Asia at US\$430 a metric tonne, five weeks later at US\$780 a metric tonne and two weeks after that at US\$1,000 a metric tonne. As Italy knows well, this is pinching consumers hard even in highly developed nations. But imagine the more than one billion people in the world living on US\$1 a day, already spending most of their income on food, trying to keep up. Not even the best governance on earth can overcome such odds. Stock and cash reserves in these nations are being drawn down to all-time lows as in Liberia, Senegal and other countries. And just when the world needed WFP most, we were able to reach fewer people than ever.

Let me illustrate the impact that soaring food prices has had on WFP. WFP reaches up to 20 million children a year with life-saving meals at school. For many, if not most, it is their only cup of food a day. Many thousands are served their porridge in a cup like this red one that belonged to a girl named Lillian in Rwanda. I assure you, these cups, that they scratch their names on, are one of their most precious possessions, and some children bring half of their food home at night to share with their brothers and sisters. Due to the soaring cost of commodities between June 2007 and January, we could fill the cup with half as much food just because the cost of food had doubled.

During the past three months, we have gone through an unprecedented resource mobilization effort to cover the soaring cost of food, and to ensure these cups could

remain full. Our rations also include three million people in Darfur a day that rely on us for their only source of food. Those rations were also cut in half. I wrote to Heads of State and governments and travelled the globe urging action, testifying before parliaments and raising awareness. And the world came together to stand with those most vulnerable among us. Last month, with the historic US\$500 million donation by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, we were able to announce at the High Level Meeting at FAO, that we had raised – from Saudi Arabia and a number of other generous nations – more than US\$1 billion in new money to cover the gap in the cost due to soaring prices and to help keep this cup full.

At the United Nations Millennium Summit of world leaders in 2000, the international community committed in the first Millennium Development Goal to cut the proportion of hungry in the world in half by 2015. A number of nations are on track to reach that goal such as Ghana, Malawi and others. Until the food crisis hit however, this was the forgotten MDG.

We must not forget. The World Health Organization calls hunger and undernutrition the number one threat to public health, killing more people than HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB combined. And we now have irrefutable evidence that if a child is denied adequate nutrition before their second birthday, the mental and physical damage will stay with them for a lifetime.

Now the world looks to the Rome UN agencies – FAO, IFAD, WFP and Bioversity – for solutions to one of the major challenges of our time: how to ensure that all people on earth have adequate and affordable access to adequate nutrition and food.

Let us decide that hunger is no longer an acceptable part of the human condition. We actually know how to end hunger – many countries have done so. We have the science and technology to end hunger – do we have the moral and political determination to do so?

WFP plays a vital role in the global architecture of food security. We are the world's largest humanitarian organization, and the United Nation's largest agency, with 10,000 staff worldwide and 1,000 here in Rome.

Today, from Rome, WFP manages a global lifeline that can reach any corner of the world within 48 hours – as we did during the war in Lebanon, and after cyclones hit in Bangladesh and also in Myanmar, and now during the drought in Ethiopia. WFP uses thousands of planes, ships, helicopters, barges and, if needed, donkeys, camels and elephants. We deliver not only food, but an array of life-saving goods

for dozens of partners, including medicines for WHO, from our global network of Humanitarian Response Depots which are headquartered in Brindisi here in Italy.

Our Humanitarian Air Service brings 400,000 humanitarian and development workers in and out of disaster zones each year, including 10,000 every month into Darfur alone.

WFP is a crucial global public good, providing global public services that otherwise would not be provided. When all else fails, we are the food access safety valve. If WFP did not exist, you would have to create it. Our motto is that nothing gets between WFP and a hungry child.

We are also standard setters in efficiency and effectiveness, using only 7 percent – a global standard – of each Euro you provide us with for administrative overhead. We are the most field-based, operative UN agency, working on the frontlines of hunger and climate change.

We have state-of-the-art controls on food distribution, from purchase to consumption. WFP is 100 percent voluntarily funded; receiving no core or assessed funds from any source. We are unique in the UN system in this.

When WFP was founded back in the early 1960s, it was a surplus food program with nations sharing their extra bounty with the world's hungry. Since then, we have seen a revolution in food aid. Times have changed; there are no surpluses available globally. This is not your old style food aid anymore. There is no more dumping of surplus food – in fact, there is no more surplus food available – that can distort local markets.

Today, less than 1 percent of our food is surplus donation, and I think the biggest part of that last year were dates from Saudi Arabia. Today, more than half of our budget is based on cash contributions, allowing us to purchase food from local farmers throughout the developing world, to link local farmers directly to the donations provided by you and Europe.

In all of our operations, WFP asks how we can use food and food assistance to not only meet critical emergency needs, but, whenever possible, to work with governments and other organizations, such as the World Bank, UNICEF, UNHCR and of course, FAO and IFAD, to ensure urgent hunger interventions help strengthen local food security and local markets and permanent solutions on a more lasting basis.

WFP is one of the largest purchasers of food from farmers in the developing world. Eighty percent of our cash contributions for food we receive from Italy and other European nations are spent purchasing food in 69 developing nations.

For example, during the recent floods in Mozambique, the people affected by the floods had no access to money and could not access food, but farmers had food in Mozambique so we purchased 80 percent of the food from those farmers to connect with the victims of the floods – creating a win-win solution.

And in Senegal, for example, there are no food surpluses but there is a lot of salt. But the salt for local consumption is not iodised. So WFP contracted with 7,000 village salt producers – most of them women – to help them learn to iodise the salt and then we purchase it creating a business incentive for investment in technology. Today, that salt that they sell locally is also iodised; addressing what President Wade has called one of the biggest health challenges in Senegal – goitre, which is due to the lack of iodised salt.

WFP has transformed food aid to be an investment in nations that helps bring lasting solutions to hunger, and that is sensitive to local markets.

This is part of what I call our 80-80-80 solution: as I mentioned, 80 percent of our cash used for food purchases is invested in developing countries; 80 percent of the local transportation we use is procured in developing countries, building in transportation knowledge and capacity for delivering food; and 80 percent of our staff in the field is hired locally in developing countries. This is an investment of more than US\$2 billion a year in developing world economies and in capacity building.

WFP provides concrete help, on the ground, in often dangerous and difficult conditions, in a way that few other institutions in the world can, or do. Our staff feeds five million people a day in Sudan which is our biggest operation, as well as in places like Somalia and Afghanistan, delivering food and nutrition, while risking their lives in the line of duty. So far this year, in Darfur alone, 83 of our trucks have been hijacked and 41 of our drivers are still missing in action. So far this year, 12 people have lost their lives in service to WFP – seven in Sudan, four in Somalia and one in Kenya.

Ships carrying our food are attacked by pirates off the coast of Somalia and unless we have naval protection from nations we cannot get that life-saving food into Somalia. We call on Italy to join other nations, including France, the Netherlands and Denmark, to provide these escorts.

This is the daily reality we are dealing with at WFP. But there is no alternative. We must provide humanitarian food assistance to those who are in need. This is one of the oldest, most basic humanitarian instincts the world has – that if someone does not have enough food, to reach out and help those in need. We have seen that hunger can be defeated and local food security can be restored and achieved. The world knows how to do this. As we have witnessed over the past two generations spanning the globe – including where many of my ancestors are from in France and Ireland – countries can graduate from the hunger trap and provide food security for their people.

Now, I want to discuss WFP's partnership with Italy.

Rome has been host to WFP for almost half a century. In the 1950s, the world decided that the international food agencies should be based in Rome. FAO headquarters moved from Washington, DC, to Rome in 1951. In 1963, the World Food Programme was founded as a part of FAO and later became a separate UN programme.

Today, as I mentioned, we are the largest United Nations agency. With your hospitality and help, we are able to feed some 90 million people each year, mostly women and children. WFP has more than 80 donor nations, and Italy is in the top 20 among our donors. We appreciate the increasing trend of contributions this year and hope that new donations that have been indicated at the FAO conference will come through in the near future.

Italy's commitment to the Food Aid Convention is important as it represents a significant component of Italy's contribution to WFP. Given the global food crisis, we urge the Parliament to give top priority to approving the Food Aid Convention, a process delayed due to the elections.

Italy is also the main contributor to the United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot which WFP runs in Brindisi. This has served as a model for other Humanitarian Response Depots throughout the world that we have in Panama City, in Ghana, Dubai and Malaysia and other places. The base in Brindisi provides logistics services to the Italian Cooperation and operates humanitarian flights of bilateral and multilateral purposes. On 17 May, a humanitarian flight with bilateral assistance from Italy to China carried 31 tonnes of sanitary kits, tents and blankets, to assist populations in Sichuan from the Brindisi base.

Italy also has an innovative Debt-for-Development Swap Agreement with Egypt that since 2004 has provided tens of thousands of school meals to poor children in

Egypt, in partnership with WFP. In my recent meetings a few weeks ago with the Egyptian Prime Minister and also with the First Lady, these school feeding programs were highly praised. In addition, as decided by Parliament, WFP will be one of three beneficiaries of the Italian National Lottery that was drawn on 12 June and we will use these proceeds to benefit African children.

In 2007, WFP cooperated with 24 Italian NGOs, primarily in Africa, reaching tens of thousands of hungry children and delivering more than 26,000 tonnes of life-saving food to HIV/AIDS patients and children, and in support of farmers improving crop production. Much of that food was purchased from local farmers, helping break the cycle of hunger at its roots. WFP's main Italian NGO partners are Cooperazione Internazionale and Intersos. Both NGOs are active in Eastern Chad, where in March 2007 Parliament member Casini, Ambassador Sebastiani and others saw WFP operations first-hand. We urge all of you to join us in the field – you will be moved by the direct power your contributions have to transform the life of a child from one of misery to hope.

One of WFP's major global partners is Caritas Internationalis which we partner with in over 40 nations. WFP also works closely with the Italian Catholic NGO 'Community of St. Egidio', in providing food assistance to people in Central African Republic, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Tanzania.

We also seek to deepen our ties with the Italian private sector and urge you to help us do so. In 2005, WFP established the Italian Friends of WFP Committee, to assist WFP with advocacy and private sector fundraising.

We have worked with Benetton, and most recently during the Myanmar crisis with telephone providers H3G, Tim, Vodafone and Wind to raise more than US\$350,000 to assist cyclone victims. The most recent partnership includes collaboration with Media Friends, which will contribute 500,000 Euro to WFP operations in Myanmar.

And just this February, I chose Milano to launch our global "Fill the Cup" campaign. This campaign seeks to ensure that every hungry child in the world that goes to school gets one cup of food. This would cost the world only US\$3 billion a year to say no child goes to school hungry. School feeding is not a permanent charity. Countries take over school feeding within a number of years and we have had 28 countries graduate from WFP school feeding programs.

This campaign was launched in Milan with Mayor Letizia Moratti, Ghanaian President Kufuor, and FIFA World Player of the Year, Kakà, who is also a WFP Ambassador against Hunger.

The “Fill the Cup” campaign fits well with the theme of Expo 2015 to be held in Milan: ‘Feeding the Planet, Energy for life’. We hope both at the G8 meeting hosted by Italy and the Expo 2015 to have a major campaign to connect school feeding and local farmers to bring hope to the children of the world.

As the food capital of the world, Italy has an opportunity to assume the leadership position in global hunger solutions, and to benefit not only the citizens of Italy, but also the world. I look forward to working with the Italian Parliament and the Government following the strong statement and commitments made at the G8 summit in Japan, including commitments to fully fund WFP’s emergency food interventions. As the G8 leaders for 2009, Italy will be on centre stage. We pledge our partnership with you to make the summit a great success.

At the High Level Conference in Rome, the world came together as never before, to stand together with the Secretary-General of the UN, the President of the World Bank, leaders of nations and agencies, to address the food crisis.

We need to act now more than ever and the world looks to Rome for leadership. We are proud to stand – and act – together with you. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.