

World Food Programme
Executive Director Josette Sheeran
A Call to Action on Nutrition Forum
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AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Thank you Alonso, Franklin, Valerie, and Joy, your remarks are music to our ears.

Make no mistake: President Obama's historic and bold commitment to food security, nutrition and hunger is moving the world. This Administration's united front with Secretary Clinton leading the effort, Secretary Vilsack and USDA fully behind it, is ensuring that this is a movement that will have a lasting impact.

It gives me hope, because we are in a world today where an astonishing one in every six people go hungry. Some of you know my red cup. This is one that belonged to Lillian and I use it to illustrate that when we are talking about hunger, we are talking about children who do not even get a cup of food every day.

Yet, amazingly one out of every six people in humanity will wake up tomorrow morning and not be sure of being able to fill this cup. This is a time when the question has to be not only 'is the cup filled?' but 'what is it filled with?'

We now have knowledge based on a ground breaking *Lancet* series in 2008 which tells us that it is irreversible if a child under two does not have enough nutrition. And to me this makes it nearly criminal for us not to act together. As Ken Powell put it to donors last year: 'All hands to the wheel.'



We need to be sure that we do not lose a generation of children whose brains are much smaller than they should be. But not only that, there were a couple of other ground breaking studies that have moved me to say that the World Food Programme had better understand exactly and precisely if our interventions – and we do have five billion individual food meal deliveries a year – are the best nutrition and the precise nutrition needed for the needs of that child.

Is there Vitamin A in there if the children are getting night blindness? What is the content of it? I really want to praise USAID who is reviewing the entire food basket to ask, for the first time since the 1980s, is it nutritionally packed, is it the best we can deliver for the investment that we are making? This alone will reach up to one hundred million of the world's most vulnerable people. We want to thank you for doing that because we need the information and studies.

Another study I want to mention was done by the World Food Programme called 'The Cost of Hunger: the social and economic impact of child undernutrition,' led by Pedro Medrano, our Regional Director in Latin America, and what it found out is that it costs up to 11 percent of a country's GDP if they do not invest in undernutrition. What I love about this study is this makes this an issue for finance ministers, this is not just 'do better' stuff.

It is in the interest of nations, of the private sector and all of us to solve this problem. This was followed by a powerful study by IFPRI in Guatemala that studied two groups of children, one that got interventions, and others that did not. Later when they were adults the group that had the interventions had incomes 46 percent higher than those that did not. And so we now know in terms of human potential that the investment in undernutrition is absolutely critical.



This is one we can solve, we can do this. The good news is that many nations have already done it. It is really compelling to me to remember that the United States of America came out of World War II, so this just for me, my parents' generation, this is not ancient history; with half the recruits being undernourished.

Half the recruits came in with rickets and were undernourished and this was the United States' big first effort, nutrition was a national security effort because the undernutrition was so massive. So I think the fact that the United States, China, Brazil, Sweden, Ireland – where my ancestors are from – and others have been able to tackle this and are getting the numbers down, or have defeated child stunting and undernutrition, is very powerful.

There are just four steps that we are focussed on at WFP and in joining Joy and others in coming up with a united effort. We think the single most powerful thing is a leader of a nation who says 'not under my watch'. When that happens, like when the President of Malawi or Ghana or China or Brazil says no, and that I am going to make it my personal business to make sure that no child has a brain twenty percent smaller than it should be; I am going to organize our nation behind it and this will move the world.

And we think that it is one reason why it is so critical that President Obama is such a powerful voice on this. I also want to applaud the African Union which talks not only about agriculture but also about adequate nutrition, and adequate access to nutrition by all.

Secondly, we need to invest in nutrition technologies and delivery mechanisms in the four countries and the work Mark does and others on fortification is so critical. But we need to ensure that this last mile can happen and I just want to give one example for the World Food Programme when children in Myanmar were deprived of nutrition for up to six weeks. A bowl of rice was not going to cover it. We had produced this product in India with



chickpeas and dried milk, it is a sweet paste but it does not require water and it does not require refrigeration and it is highly fortified, something like Plumpy Nut, but it costs about one twentieth of it.

There is just nothing in the toolbox, so when you are dealing with kids highly vulnerable in emergencies or in droughts, when I showed this to Prime Minister Melanson in Ethiopia, he said we need this in Ethiopia. If a mother sees her child falling ill in a drought there is no tool, there are no products that they can take to make sure that the child is getting adequate nutrition. Again, I want to applaud USAID and USDA, who we are working with in really looking at the United States food basket and whether there are types of products that can make these more powerful for specific groups like the under two-year-olds.

The third thing I want to mention is countries must harness the skills and expertise and resources of the public health community to establish evidence-based necessary proof to ensure that the interventions are effective and are the best use of the funding we have. Right now, I am not one hundred percent sure whether it is a better investment to fortify the food for four million people a day in Darfur, or to target the under two-year-olds with a power pack package. What we need are efficacy and effectiveness studies. We are really asking for their help. The knowledge is important.

And the last thing is the partnership situation, which Joy spoke about. Involving the private sector, NGOs, and the many champions that are here, so many people who have been for years lonely voices on the frontlines of undernutrition. We need to pull together, as Ken Powell said: 'All hands to the wheel'.

For WFP's commitment, I have just signed our nutrition strategy policy paper, a new one which has been in the works for over a year. We are focusing on this because our job always is to prioritize among the one billion hungry people, who we will target, we will prioritize the under twos. This is a revolution in the



way we do business and we are already even on the frontlines of extremely dangerous situations, like Somalia, reformulating our entire programme to make sure those under twos and the pregnant, lactating mothers are reached first.

Secondly, we are really looking for the efficacy and the effectiveness studies and partnering with those who can help us understand how to make the case. Canada has been such a leader on these issues. I want to really make sure I can make the case that we need this instead of that and really be able to give you the facts and the science and the evidence that is so important.

So again, thank you, you have inspired us, thank you for calling this meeting.

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