

World Food Programme
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Mr President, between your speech and Jeff's I think you said all. I will say that, thank you John and thank you Jeff for having me here. I feel more at home here than in many places, because I am with people who are impatient, and the World Food Programme is filled with very impatient people. Sometimes I compare us to soldiers who come back from war and become campaigners for peace, and once you have seen hunger the way we do, every day, you will not meet more passionate people than the WFP team to eradicate hunger; and it is why we do everything to leverage the food we have to help create solutions.

Last year when the food crisis hit with a vengeance, and I put out a call to the world for help, Malawi called, but they did not call to ask for help, they called to donate food [applause]. And I want to thank you, Mr President, because that act of solidarity to help your neighbours, and the real miracle that has been created in Malawi gives us hope. Thank you.

I am in the hunger business; it is what we do exclusively, 24/7, and I am sorry to tell you that business is booming. Today we are not only in an economic crisis, but a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions. We must, as the Secretary-General has said, as we worry about Wall Street, and as we worry about Main Street, worry about those places with no streets. Hunger and food security are the most threatened MDG.

We have just experienced a huge reversal in the past 24 months. Today, an astonishing one billion people on earth will wake up and not be sure – this is a cup from our Rwanda school-feeding programme owned by a girl named Lillian; we gave her a new one



– but they will wake up and not be sure how to fill this cup. This is tremendously destabilizing, when one out of every six people on earth wake up not sure that they can fill a cup of food.

Last year we lost the Government in Haiti; this year the Government of Kenya has declared a national emergency; Guatemala has declared a national emergency, and we are seeing hunger numbers that we have never seen before: more people than ever before recorded in human history.

Hunger, and the experience of it, and the epic efforts to overcome it unite all people. All faiths have a central tenet of reaching out to the hungry, and Muslims throughout the world just celebrated Ede yesterday, after Ramadan – a month of fasting to remember those who do not have enough.

I am just going to ask you right now to think in your own family: how far back do you have to reach to come up with an epic tale of hunger? It is amazing that almost every individual can reach right back in their own family history.

I was speaking in the European Parliament. I held up this cup and the Head of the Development Committee got all emotional and he grabbed the cup and he said: “After World War II, my village was starving in Spain, and that cup came and saved my life.” This happens all over the world. My Deputy, Sheila Sisulu, who is Head of Hunger Solutions for us, told me that, as a child, this cup would be on her belt and her most precious possession.

One of my regional directors told me that, of the twelve children in his family, six were lost, and they went to school every day, and at the Christian school he was in, you had to pay 10 cents to get a meal, and he could never afford it, and he thought: “Is it tomorrow that I will be the next child in my family to die from malnutrition?” Half the children died from malnutrition.



But how far back do we all have to go? My ancestors in Ireland experienced many famines, and in the 1860s my great-grandfather migrated to America, never saw his family again, was put on a 'death ship'. When I went to the Famine Museum, just five kilometres from our home, there is a big quote there, at the time from government leaders saying that if these people were not so lazy, they would not be hungry.

So what is food security? I define it as universal access to adequate nutrition. That sounds like a simple statement, but within it is a need for customized approaches: where what works for Singapore, which does not grow anything, is going to be a different solution than what works for Malawi.

But we know now that hunger is a set of conditions that deprive people's access to food: Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's incredible work on how famines occur not just from the lack of food, but from lack of access to food. It could be that there is no food growing; that climate change is putting extraordinary pressure on some countries. It could be that people cannot afford food; it could be that it is too expensive or that they have too little income. It could be a natural disaster: floods, storms, or it could be all of these coming together, which is being experienced extraordinarily by so many nations right now, including Kenya, that reports that 10 million people are near the brink of starvation. And, by the way, the World Food Programme has to cut its Programme in Kenya in half, starting next month, due to a lack of funding, because the whole world is feeling pinched right now.

So, the three Fs - the food crisis, the fuel crisis and the financial crisis – are unleashing a tsunami that has not yet stopped. In Kenya today - it used to cost one goat to buy you 90 kilos of grain - now it is four goats, but with the drought, many people are losing even those goats.

If people are denied access to food only three options happen: they migrate, they revolt, or they die. This is not an action plan. But the Millennium Development Goals are an action plan. And the Millennium Platform that Jeffrey and all of you have built is an action plan. We should not forget that nearly a decade after the world pledged to end and eradicate extreme poverty and hunger at the Millennium Summit just how bold and game-changing the concept of the MDG's was. Amina Ibrahim pointed that out, where governments all over the world now organized around a common set of principles.

So at the turn of a new Millennium, after a century that saw the biggest famines ever on record, horrors, but also incredible, inconceivable achievements, one thing was clear: we humans are capable of anything. We can explore space; we can develop vaccines that eradicate polio, smallpox and other diseases. We can turn deserts into farmlands, as Jeff was just pointing out. We can produce a Norman Borlaug, who we all just lost; a farm boy from rural America who, through his passion for people, was able to save more lives perhaps than anyone in human history. Yet we are also capable of sitting by, as our fellow man is consumed by genocide, hunger or deprivation.

The MDGs recognize that the choice is our shared destiny and ours to shape, and the new memo on our desks that is clearer than ever before, is that we are all in this together. I was reminded of this during the food crisis, when I went to a stall in Ethiopia, and there were goats all over, and no electricity, and I asked the seller: "How do you set your grain prices?", because they had tripled over night. He said: "I go on the internet. I look at the Chicago Board of Trade" [laughter] and he said: "I discounted 10 percent for import parity and the like."

But we also see it when the poverty and misery comes home and affects the security of all. It is in our self interest to act. For example, the study that WFP did under the leadership of Pedro Medrano, the Head of our New York Office and Latin



America, showed that countries – Pedro and Sheila, my heroes [applause] - sacrifice up to 80 percent of their GDP annually by not eradicating undernutrition for under two-year olds. This is a case for finance ministers, not development ministers. The investment pays off, as Malawi is seeing. Children under two are condemned for life, unable to reach their full mental and physical potential. We now know that. So the benefit is huge.

Last year, when riots rocked over 30 nations and the Government of Haiti fell, we learned an ancient lesson all over again: that a hungry world is a dangerous world. But through global action we were able to cool things down last year; we worked closely with Millennium Villages, the World Bank and others, to put in quick safety nets that turned things around and helped stabilize the world. We can act and do, as Jeff has pointed out. There are plans of action that work. Food security, adequate nutrition for all is totally achievable. Hunger is beatable, but climate change, as the President pointed out, is presenting us with a challenge perhaps unequalled, and we therefore now have a window of opportunity to act.

So, I will borrow a phrase from President Obama, who has become a powerful leader on these issues, to say: “Yes, we can.” In fact President Obama and Hilary Clinton’s key role in the historic US\$20 billion commitment in L’Aquila shows a new force and power behind these issues. We must not miss this chance. This plan includes all three critical pillars: production of food, access to food, which includes not only roads but safety nets. Today, one out of every five Americans is on food assistance. People need help during hard times. Eighty percent of the world has no food safety net. Where do they go?

When one out of five Americans are on food assistance, what do we think is happening in places like Kenya that are getting hit with these storms. And the final pillar is the utilization of food: adequate nutrition, de-worming – critical, so that we are not



feeding the worms, we are not losing the effort. So, we must remember in all of this that the nations are the central actors. There is no more powerful force as we have just seen than when a leader decides: not under my watch. And again, thank you, Mr President.

China was WFP's biggest programme 20 years ago; today we feed not one person in China. Brazil was one of our biggest programmes; today, under President Lula's eradicating hunger – zero hunger, we do not feed anyone in Brazil. Malawi, Ghana, the African Union and CAADP's leadership turned things around, so just as Sweden, Ireland no longer face the threat of famine, and Japan, so is a whole new generation of nations coming up.

Individuals can make a huge difference. I mentioned last night at an event, one guy in Indiana who decided to help fight hunger; he put a word game on the internet, so if a kid picks the right definition of a word, ten grains of rice fall from the sky into a bowl. Advertisers all over the world support this. It is very good for their image. So, so far, John Breen – one man in his home – has raised 68 billion grains of rice that have reached over 12 nations, and helped people from Bangladesh to Bhutan, to Africa and others, to deal with the crisis of hunger.

Jeff Sachs, a force of nature, an individual completely dedicated to a life of action to connect people with solutions and hope.

Organizations: the Gates Foundation, I mentioned the African Union, NEPAD and CAADP, the partnership between WFP and the Millennium villages - all these things. We look at the World Bank shifting now, to focus on agriculture and how that can rock the world. But make no mistake, when we unite the nation and the individual and the organizations behind a government dedicated to action, hunger does not stand a chance.

In fact we turn humanity's greatest blight - where one-third of our children are stunted; something that should be relegated to the dustpan of history. Malawi is determined not to worry about



hunger, but determined to feed the Region and to export its crops elsewhere, and so are other nations. This is a huge opportunity for Africa. So not only will we defeat hunger, but Africa will help the world meet the challenge of doubling production, which we must do, in the face of climate change, by 2050.

So, eradicating hunger and poverty are totally interlinked. I want to give you three quick examples because Jeff loves success stories, and these are the kinds of things we are unleashing with the Millennium villages throughout the world.

First, old-style food aid: as I say, this is not your grandmother's food aid. Today, we buy from local farmers. Just one example: in Senegal there is no extra food to buy; it is a food-deficit nation, but there is a lot of salt. So WFP today buys all of its salt from 7,000 women village producers, who never before had a guaranteed income, but today they do; they do not need food aid any more.

Not only that, in Senegal there was not the equipment to iodize the salt, but with that guaranteed contract from us they were able to get the training to iodize the salt. For the first time those villages have iodized salt, in a country that suffers from iodine deficiency epidemic.

Not only that, they are so proud that they are helping to feed their own people and people in the region who need the help. So we have taken one food aid dollar, which would save a life – not a bad thing – but now think of the win, win, win, win: the women win; they are no longer on food aid. The children win; their iodine deficiency disorders are being addressed. The nation wins, and those who need our help win.

This type of thing we are doing with Jeffrey and the Millennium villages throughout the area. Local purchase with the Gates Foundation, thank you, and the Buffett Foundation helping us.



Second is the type of food-for work, so leveraging rather than a hand-out, using food which is worth more than money in many places, where people were deprived access to any food. Southern Sudan, if I could just mention: WFP – a 100 percent dependency four years ago on our food aid, but rather than just hand it out we worked with an able-body population to rebuild 3,600 kilometres of roads, hospitals, schools; now today, only 20 percent dependency because farmers can get their food to market. Like the Ethiopia story, determined to utilize that food to transform nations into self-sufficiency.

In Mali, Timbuktu, where we were working with the Millennium villages and the Government: I was there. In 1994 WFP planted, with the Government, 40,000 trees to protect the rice fields from the ever-encroaching desert. All the other farmlands being taken over, those rice fields are so successful today that their only request from me was not for food aid, but for a packing machine to export the rice, and the women told me that their husbands, for the first time in their memory, do not have to leave the village to go and look for work in the cities because business is booming there. But all around, the desert is swallowing up everything. Those trees – WFP has planted 5 billion trees – 5 billion trees – in the past 30 years – get us out of the hunger business. So, as Jeff said, often people will say: “Trees? What does food aid have to do with trees?” Well it has to do with how you end the need for food aid, and how we leverage this.

Just the third thing I will mention is the red cup. I want to thank you Mr President for making universal access to food for schoolchildren one of your goals. And we are working very closely with you on that. When this cup is filled with local produce nation after nation are joining with what the US and Japan and Europe learned, which is that you have to be sure your children have enough to eat.



And we know that if you give a cup of food to girls in school even in places like Pakistan, where traditionally girls do not go to school, there will be equal attendance between girls and boys. So for one euro or a week – let me just tell you the win/win here – the local farmers have a guaranteed outlet for their food. Number one: they do not need food aid; they do not need help. You are developing a business structure that governments eventually take over. Secondly, girls are going to school; it is the most powerful human rights programme I have ever seen. You do not need an ideological debate: the kids need food, so they were sent out to either beg, or worse, to find food, but now they can go to school to find food. How brilliant is that?

Third, have you ever tried to concentrate when you are hungry? It is impossible. Mr. President, I think you are the son of a schoolmaster, are you not? And I am sure your father saw that those children if they are hungry and weak, they cannot concentrate.

One of the ministers from Nigeria was telling me that some of the kids cannot lift their heads up from the desk; they are so weak from that. So you have that powerful win/win. If you give girls an extra ration at the end of the week, just a bag of beans or oil, it is guaranteed that they will stay in school, just for perfect attendance, until 16, and will not be married off younger, because it is such a powerful contribution.

So we are now with the Millennium villages feeding 80,000 schoolchildren, filling it with local produce, and working to help communities be self-sufficient in that.

WFP has been through a total revolution. We now buy 80 percent of our food from developing world farmers. It is not easy to buy from 7,000 women villagers; it is much easier to sign a contract with a big agricultural producer, but this revolution is helping to be a solution to that hunger.



So, if I could end by saying that we are not out of the woods, as I have said, it is a very difficult year; WFP has about half the funding it had a year ago, and we are peeling back programmes all around the world. It is going to be a difficult – I think – 18 months for the world just dealing with basic getting out of the emergency zone on issues like hunger and extreme poverty, in addition to the long term plans. I have been turning my cup upside down with my staff, saying that until we start reversing these hunger numbers backwards, it is my distress signal.

The world has got to get serious about this, and we can do it; and Jeffrey we really pledge to you our support. I loved it when your video said in Malawi that hunger is a thing of the past. This is achievable; it is doable; we do not need any new discoveries; we need to unite together, and I am completely convinced after seeing Amina Ibrahim and the Foreign Minister and the President, the iron will I am seeing in Africa: not to be victims; not to be telling the world to save Africa but to revolutionize suffering into opportunity and hope is what is going to drive this, and we pledge our support to you.

Mr President, as a representative of all those nations, and Jeffrey, we pledge our partnership to you in helping the Secretary-General to pull this all together on these.

Thank you.

