

**World Food Programme**  
**Executive Director Josette Sheeran**  
**Remarks to the USAID Nutritional Round-Table**  
**22 September 2009**

*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 and USAID 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 1 billion people are 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 will wake up tomorrow morning and not be sure of being able to fill this cup. But this is more than filling the cup. Now is the time when we have to ask not only 'is the cup filled?' but 'what is it filled with?'

We now have knowledge based on a groundbreaking Lancet series in 2008 which tells us that damage 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, head of General Mills, 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 bodies and minds are permanently stunted because they were deprived of adequate nutrition. That is why the World Food Programme wants to maximize the nutritional value of every meal we deliver. We want these 27 billion food interventions each year to be the best the most precise nutrition needed for the needs of that child. For instance, is there Vitamin A in there to prevent children from getting night blindness?

I really want to praise USAID, who is reviewing the entire food basket and asking, 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. We want to thank you for doing that because we need the information and studies.

Undernutrition also has a devastating economic impact. The World Food Programme published a study, "The Cost of Hunger," led by Pedro Medrano, our Regional Director in Latin America, on the social and economic impact of child undernutrition. It found 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 nutritional interventions and others that did not. And 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.

The good news is this is one we can solve; we can do this. Many nations have already done it and it is really compelling to me to remember that the United States of America came out of World



War II with half the recruits for the military being undernourished. The United States undertook their first big first nutrition campaign because it was seen that nutrition was a national security concern. So I think it's very powerful 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 malnutrition numbers down or have defeated child stunting and undernutrition.

I'd like to outline four steps that we need to advance this issue in a united effort.

First, we need leadership. The single most powerful thing is a leader of a nation who says 'not on my watch'. When that happens, like when the President of Malawi or Ghana or China or Brazil says no, I am going to make it my personal business to make sure that no child is doomed to a diminished mental capacity. I am going to organize our nation behind it and this will move the world. That is why it is so critical that President Obama is such a powerful voice on this. I also want to applaud the African Union with the CAADP strategy, which talks not only about agriculture but also about adequate access to nutrition by all.

Secondly, we need to invest in nutrition technologies and our ability to package and deliver supplies. The work Mark does and others on fortification is so critical. We need to ensure this last mile – that the right product is delivered to the right person at the right time – can happen.

I just want to give one example. When children in Myanmar after the cyclone last year were deprived of nutrition for up to six weeks it was clear that a bowl of rice is not going to meet their nutritional need. 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 a fraction since it was created by WFP for the public good.



We need this in our toolbox, so when you are dealing with highly vulnerable kids in emergencies or in droughts, when they don't have water or ability to cook food and when they are too old to breast feed and too young for fortified biscuits, this product can save lives.

When I showed this to Prime Minister Meles 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. I want to applaud USAID, working with USDA, in really looking at the United States food basket and if there are the 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 proof to ensure that the interventions are both effective and cost-effective. 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-packed package. We can't know this until the efficacy and effectiveness studies done.

And the fourth thing we need are effective partnerships, which Joy spoke about and I think that are also being led by Franklin and Alonso. There is so much potential when we involve the private sector, NGOs, governments and international organizations, like WFP. There are so many champions here, so many people who have been lonely voices on the frontlines of undernutrition. This is the moment to pull us all together, to really put, as Ken Powell said, "All hands to the wheel."

WFP is making nutrition a top priority. I have just signed a new nutrition strategy policy paper. It has been in the works for over a



year. Our job has always been to prioritize among the one billion hungry people who we will target. Our strategy now has us prioritizing 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 programme to make sure those under twos and the pregnant, lactating mothers are reached first.

So we know why we need to improve nutrition for all children. We know how. Now we need to unite together and do it. Thank you. You have inspired us. Thank you for calling this meeting.

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