Remarks by the Executive Director of the World Food Programme

On “Addressing the Immediate Situation: Status of Current Crises, Resources Available, and Unmet Needs”

G-8 Contact Group Meeting, March 5, 2003

Why are we losing the battle against hunger?

The number of food emergencies is skyrocketing. In 2003, the World Food Programme faces the daunting task of finding $1.8 billion to meet the needs of operations in Africa alone – a sum equal to all the funds we received last year. Never before have we had to contend with potential starvation on the scale we face today.

At the World Food Programme, eight of our ten leading donors, including several of the governments represented here, boosted their contributions last year. Yet with all this generosity, we are falling behind. We lack the funds to meet the all the needs of people at risk of starvation, forcing us to engage in an exercise in “triage” among those threatened by starvation. Who will we feed? Who will we leave hungry? In North Korea we have had to cut off rations for 3 million women, children and the elderly. In Afghanistan we have delayed and cut rations. Refugee camps in Kenya and Tanzania are always teetering at the edge, about to run out of food for people who simply cannot help themselves. And now, a task that could dwarf all our earlier relief operations may well await us in Iraq if no political solution is found to the current impasse.

My remarks in this session will focus on the immediate situation facing us at the moment. I will try to put the current humanitarian crises in context in order to give you an idea of the magnitude of the food emergencies we are likely to see in the coming year, as well as provide a few thoughts on how we can begin to meet the demand.

Why are we Seeing More Food Emergencies?

What is driving the explosion in food emergencies? The most recent crises have been fuelled a combination of four factors, including failed economic policies, political and ethnic violence, HIV/AIDS, and a sharp rise in natural disasters.

Failed economic policies
North Korea provides a good example of how failed economic policies have led to acute hunger. The severe contraction of the industrial base in North Korea after the fall of the Soviet Union, the lack of structural reform and cyclical drought and flooding have combined to create major food shortages and claimed enormous numbers of lives. Despite relatively benign weather in DPRK this year, the country is still one million metric tons short of needs. DPRK needs structural reforms in the industrial sector to overcome its reliance on food aid.

Failed economic policies have also aggravated the crisis in southern Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe. Despite its past history as a food exporter – WFP used to procure sizeable amounts of food there – a mix of politics, bureaucracy and bad economics have conspired to damage food output and slow down the aid response. The Government’s land redistribution played a big role in reducing food production to 40 percent of normal levels last year, and the harvest doesn’t look much better this year. Combined with poor weather and restrictions on private sector food marketing,
food needs in Zimbabwe are immense as seven million out of the country's twelve million people are living with the threat of starvation. Ironically, the situation in Zimbabwe, with its tremendous agricultural potential, is still more precarious than in neighbouring countries, where famine has been averted. Zimbabwe is dependent on the donors for 1/3 of its resources.

**Political and ethnic violence**
are also serious triggers for food shortages.
Northern Uganda, Chechnya, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are some leading examples.

Violence and hunger also go hand in hand now in West Africa, Liberia is now the epicentre of a conflict that engulfs the whole region and will impede economic recovery in Guinea and Sierra Leone. Significant new influxes of Liberian refugees have been recorded in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire and 135,000 people are displaced within Liberia itself. The ongoing civil unrest in Côte d'Ivoire has displaced 180,000 people and that figure may go higher. Further delay in resolving the underlying political problems there could lead to another major food crisis in Africa.

While the end of the civil conflict in Angola is an extremely positive development, WFP's caseload has actually gone up by more than a half million as we have access to areas we could never reach before and we have begun to distribute food to help families return home and feed soldiers as they demobilize.

Hunger persists amidst a number of intractable conflicts such as southern Sudan.
Some refugee feeding operations, such as those in the Western Sahara and Bhutanese refugees in Nepal have also dragged on for more than a decade. And the civil war in Colombia shows no signs of ending and the pervasive insecurity has brought some of the highest food delivery costs anywhere in the world.

**HIV/AIDS**
is a major cause of vulnerability and hunger in an increasing number of countries for individuals and entire communities. In my entire life I do not believe I have ever seen anything as disturbing as the impact that AIDS is now having in southern Africa. In modern times, we have never before seen a disease with the capacity to cause such large-scale social breakdown and destroy societies.
Zimbabwe has a prevalence of HIV/AIDS of 31% and has the highest school drop-out rate; Swaziland has a prevalence of almost 40%;
The disease affects people in their most productive years most severely, leaving the burden of producing food to the elderly and to children. Women and girls are disproportionately affected because they are the majority of farmers and they bear the primary responsibility for taking care of those who are sick. In some of the villages I visited as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the crisis in southern Africa, fields lay unattended with no one to work them. In a home I visited in Zambia, a 70 year-old grandmother was looking after over a dozen children. In other instances, households of children were fending for themselves in any way possible. There are over 11 million AIDS orphans in Africa – and the number is rising.

To give you an idea of the impact that the disease has on food security, more than 7 million agricultural workers have died of AIDS in 25 African countries in since 1985. Skilled and educated professionals are also dying at an alarming rate – the President of Zambia told me that 2000 teachers are dying every year in his country. The impact is so severe that the Prime Minister of Lesotho has spoken publicly of the extinction of the Basotho people, unless urgent actions are taken.
By 2010, life expectancy will be an estimated 27 years in Mozambique, and 34 years in Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Tackling the impact this disease has had on hunger will not be easy, but the connection is crystal clear. Peter Piot, who heads UNAIDS, has said that in many poor communities he has visited the very first thing AIDS victims ask for is not medicine, not money - it is food for their families, food for their hungry children. For those AIDS victims lucky enough to receive medical treatment, nutrition is critical. For the HIV positive, good nutrition is crucial in helping them ward off opportunistic infections and stay productive for as long as possible. Unfortunately, donors have not yet recognized that fact fully and WFP certainly is struggling to get resources for the operations we have begun for AIDS victims, their families and orphans. We are working with the Secretary General and the most affected countries on this issue and on getting access to the Global AIDS Fund for more nutrition interventions. Southern Africa is only the first region we have seen gripped by an HIV-related food emergency. Given rising HIV prevalence rates in other parts of the world, we can expect more emergencies to follow the pattern of southern Africa, unless immediate and drastic action is taken.

**Weather.**

Beyond HIV, violent conflict and economic policies, the weather remains perhaps the largest threat we face. The past two years have brought the highest number of weather-related disasters over the decade. We are seeing abnormal weather phenomena on a scale no one has ever imagined that are causing massive needs in terms of food aid. Agriculture in developing countries simply cannot cope. In the last few years, we delivered emergency food aid in response to the largest floods in China in a century and to drought victims in over a dozen countries stretching from southern Sudan to Pakistan. The number of victims of natural disasters has tripled compared to the 1960s, averaging 136 million a year and the poorest among them need food assistance.

One-sixth of the main harvest in Ethiopia has been lost to drought, six million people are already in need and that figure could more than double after the first of the year. The worst-case scenario will require two million tons of food aid at a cost of 700 million dollars. Ethiopia has suffered from cyclical droughts for years and has not managed to build up a capacity to withstand them. As is the case in much of Africa, state control of agriculture has failed to provide the food output needed with high population growth rates and Ethiopia -- a net food exporter in the 1960s -- is now chronically dependent on food aid.

Nearly 60 percent of the population of Eritrea - more than 2 million people -- have also been hit hard by drought and will need food aid this year. The effects of recent war with Ethiopia remain -- thousands of soldiers are yet to demobilize and 1 million people in major grain producing areas were dislocated.

**What can we do?**

When we add up all the estimated needs for food aid in the coming year, the picture that emerges is frightening. It is clear that WFP’s programmes will need to expand. Last year, we asked donors for about 4 million tonnes, and we received about three-quarters of that, around 3 million tonnes. So far this year, we are projecting that we will need to raise 4.8 million tonnes, but we are certain that our requirements will go much higher.\(^1\)

\(^1\) 4.8 million Mt represents WFP’s net resources requirement, after carryover stocks from already approved operations and late-arriving contributions from 2002 are applied to 2003. Gross needs for
Clearly, we will need to ensure that food aid is carefully directed to the most vulnerable segments of the population to ensure its maximum effectiveness. In times of great need and relatively few resources, donors must be confident that food aid is being used appropriately and effectively. We must also be careful that food aid does not distort local markets. Massive transfers of untargeted and unmonitored food aid are often destructive to developing country agriculture and an invitation to corruption. We must be sure that we are feeding those truly in need.

We also cannot forget that short-term food crises and chronic hunger are interconnected. According to FAO, 800 million people in developing regions are undernourished and chronically hungry. Up to one billion people faced a precarious food situation in 2002. People who are already hungry or are living in poverty with few assets or reserves to draw upon cannot easily withstand ‘shocks’ such as conflict, drought, or HIV/AIDS. Helping the rural poor, who are most often the victims in food crises, to establish the assets they need to withstand natural disasters and other threats to food security is one of the most important things that we can do. This is an area where IFAD and FAO have a special role to play.

The magnitude of the projected food needs for 2003 demands new and creative approaches to food aid. I would suggest that we consider a number of options to address this almost-overwhelming situation:

- **We must improve our capacity to intervene early** – Intervening early in an emerging crisis is one of the most important things that we can do to reduce food aid needs down the road. Before families sell their assets or go into debt in an effort to survive, we need to get assistance to them. Reaching people at the early stages helps to reduce vulnerability later on. A number of mechanisms exist which can facilitate these interventions. For example, WFP has a mechanism called the Immediate Response Account (IRA) which is a revolving and replenishable fund used to pay for the most crucial parts of emergency operations – the first three months. The IRA, which currently has a limit of $35 million, was created in 1991 when WFP’s emergency operations were a fraction of what they are today. You may wish to consider expanding and funding this kind of facility, in addition to ensuring full support.

- **Support to strengthen existing early warning systems** in WFP and other UN agencies.

- **Food is essential, but it is not enough** – my trips to southern Africa as Special Envoy and my field visits as WFP’s Executive Director have served to highlight for me the crucial importance of assistance programmes that are complementary to food aid. In most food emergencies, there are corresponding needs – in the areas of health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education, agriculture – that are key to ensuring that food aid makes a maximum impact and that it can be phased out as soon as possible. You may wish to look into mechanisms or facilities that would facilitate early and effective response to crises by funding critical non-food items and activities by FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, and others.

- **We need to involve new donors** – *(broadening and diversifying the donor base)* A number of what we call ‘non-traditional’ donors are ready to help address the massive food aid needs that we are seeing. We have seen some extremely

2003 are calculated at 5.9 million Mt. The number beneficiaries reached by these programs is 78.1 million.

2 A recent report from USDA’s Economic Research Service has concluded that 1 billion people in 70 low income developing countries faced a precarious food situation in 2002.
generous offers of donations in this manner – one million tonnes of wheat from India, 100,000 tonnes of maize from South Africa, 30,000 tonnes of rice from Algeria. What these donors lack, however, are the funds to cover the costs of transport and distribution of these commodities. WFP has been successfully able to ‘twin’ a number of these contributions so far – raising cash from other donors – to great effect. You may wish to consider this kind of approach to maximize the coverage of food aid.

- We need to expand local (and regional) food aid purchases – Sourcing food aid from developing countries is an effective way of building markets at the same time as assisting people in need. When WFP receives cash donations, we strive to purchase commodities locally whenever possible, and where it’s most economical. Sometimes, of course, it is not possible and then we seek to buy the most food at the best price.

- Request for greater support to the multilateral system to meet our joint challenges, including by investing in prevention and mitigation of humanitarian crises and longer-term development

- Need for a G-8 diplomatic leadership in conflict resolution

- Need to assist in replenishing African governments’ human resources

- Need to focus on micro and macro investments in small communities

- Need a greater support to the EFA goals achievement, in particular through the expansion of school feeding programme as WFP’s new commitment to NEPAD

Conclusion

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address you on this issue. I am not surprised that the G-8 is holding a special session on food security, since all of you have been incredibly generous supporters of WFP and providers of food aid in general. This session just reinforces for me the importance of your global leadership on some of the issues that matter the most to humanity. We have a difficult year ahead of us, and it will take the best that all of us have to give to help the many millions of people in the world that are on the edge of starvation.

Thank you.