

WFP Executive Board: High-Level Segment on Fighting Famine

Communiqué

12 June 2017

1 On 12 June 2017, the Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) hosted a *High-Level Segment on Fighting Famine* during the WFP Executive Board at WFP Headquarters in Rome. Participants at the meeting included the Executive Director of UNICEF (via videoconference), the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, the Minister for Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management of Somalia, the Minister for Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management of South Sudan, the Deputy Minister of Planning and International Cooperation of Yemen, and the Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture of the African Union Commission. The meeting was chaired by the Vice-President of the WFP Executive Board.

2 Given the 20 February 2017 declaration of famine¹ in parts of South Sudan and large-scale food insecurity in Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen, participants came together out of grave alarm at the hunger crises unfolding in the affected countries. With the lives of 20 million people at immediate risk across the four countries, the meeting called for greater global action to address the urgent humanitarian needs while stressing the need for peaceful resolutions to the conflicts that underlie these crises.

3 Famine has been declared in parts of Unity State in South Sudan, where thousands of people have already died of disease and hunger. Right now 20 million people across Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen are at risk of famine. More than 5.4 million children are dangerously malnourished. Of these, 1.4 million children are at risk of starvation, with some 600,000 children at imminent risk of death in the next three to four months unless they receive urgent treatment and care. Conflict, displacement, drought, floods and disease converge to threaten the most vulnerable, particularly children and women.

4 Where it has sufficient funding and humanitarian access, WFP and its partners have been able to prevent famine and save lives in the four affected countries. WFP and its partners have acted swiftly, scaling up the delivery of assistance in challenging and often dangerous environments. Yet the situation remains dire. In addition to severe funding constraints, three countries – Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan – have entered the hunger season, the period each year when food from the most recent harvest runs out and children are more susceptible to disease and even death. To prevent a more widespread catastrophe, it is critical that WFP secures adequate resources now in order to reach the 17 million people targeted for life-saving food assistance.

5 Due to reduced funding, WFP has had to take drastic measures to reduce the number of people it supports. In Yemen, for example, WFP is only able to provide 3.3 million people with their full entitlement in June whereas the targeted caseload is 6.8 million people. Irregular resourcing results in a constant fluctuation in the number of people that WFP and its partners are able to reach, the amount of food assistance that they receive and the results that can be achieved. From June to November 2017, WFP requires USD 1.04 billion to save the millions of lives on the line across all four countries.

¹ Famine is declared when three conditions are met. First, at least 20 percent of a population face extreme food shortages. Second, at least 30 percent of children under five suffer from global acute malnutrition. Third, daily deaths are occurring at double the normal rate (more than two deaths per 10,000 adults per day or more than four deaths per 10,000 children per day).

6 UNICEF underscored the value of its partnership with WFP and other agencies in response, while highlighting the needs of 22 million children in critical need of assistance. In 2017, UNICEF has vaccinated 4.6 million children against measles, treated 250,000 children affected by severe acute malnutrition, and supported more than 2 million children with safe water in the affected countries.

7 The African Union Commission is confronted by the humanitarian and developmental challenges presented by the crisis, and spoke to the need to build resilience to prevent such calamities in the future. The Commission highlighted its initiatives to end hunger on the African continent along with its efforts to treat malnutrition, support agriculture, increase livestock production and mitigate the impact of climate change.

8 While voicing deep appreciation for the efforts of United Nations agencies and the international community working to save the lives of millions at risk, ministers from the affected countries presented the gravity of the crisis in stark and foreboding terms. Despite noting the resilience of their respective populations, the ministers spoke to the dire humanitarian situation unfolding in each country and the need to act now, not later.

9 In Nigeria, due to ongoing conflict, 5.2 million people have been displaced from their homes, of whom 80 percent are subsistence farmers. This has led to extensive food insecurity, malnutrition and severe health challenges. In its response, Nigeria articulated its efforts to scale up food assistance to its affected population, restore social services and address the root causes of insurgency in the northeast of the country.

10 Somalia spoke to the poor rains and subsequent failed harvests which have rendered more than half of its people in need of urgent food assistance. The situation is particularly dire for children and women who are at greatest risk of violence, hunger and disease. Somalia emphasized the value of sustained partnership between its Government and humanitarian partners to deliver life-saving programmes to the most vulnerable.

11 Describing the appalling situation facing its people, South Sudan voiced concern about the 3.8 million people displaced internally and externally as refugees, in addition to the 5.5 million people in need of emergency food assistance. Ongoing conflict and drought have disrupted food production, triggered loss of lives and high levels of poverty. Addressing the limited humanitarian access due to poor infrastructure, insecurity and administrative delays, South Sudan expressed its resolve to improve such access and extend greater efforts to protect aid workers.

12 In Yemen, poverty and food insecurity is rampant, affecting all parts of the country. Eighteen million people are malnourished, with ten million suffering from acute malnutrition and in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Recalling the April 2017 High-Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen and the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan, Yemen stated that the exceptional nature of this disaster requires an exceptional response, particularly among United Nations agencies, the international community and countries in the region. Yemen also called for a comprehensive solution to end the ongoing conflict and restore its state institutions.

13 A common thread binding the four countries together are the conflicts that have devastated lives and decimated livelihoods. FAO stressed that peace is the most fundamental element to bring an end to these crises. Yet the international community cannot wait for peace to take action. Efforts must be redoubled to save lives, but more funding is needed. In this, FAO reinforced the need for partnership and coordination among all agencies working to prevent the spread of famine. Even amid conflict, there is much we can do to save lives and give hope to those affected.