

CHIEF EXECUTIVES BOARD (CEB) CONSULTATION:
UN SYSTEM RESPONSE ON CLIMATE CHANGE
REMARKS BY
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“WFP: Adapting to Climate Change on the Front Lines of Hunger”

I am pleased to join my colleagues today from many of the UN agencies and other international bodies to discuss UN response to the critically important issue of climate change.

WFP is on the front lines of climate change. For WFP, climate change is not a theoretical debate--not something we are studying to avoid and to mitigate for the future. Adaptation to climate change is not a choice, but a reality for us as the world's largest humanitarian organization on the front lines of hunger. Every day we feed millions of the world's most vulnerable people, many left destitute due to floods, droughts and other natural disasters, some of which are caused or spurred by climate change.

In parallel step to our critical emergency response work, WFP must look ahead of the curve to help vulnerable populations to adapt and mitigate the risks of climatic changes which create a tremendous strain on local food supplies, economies, and livelihoods.

While scientists continue to study the effects of global warming on changing climate patterns, WFP must respond whenever and wherever droughts, floods, cyclones, tsunamis hit--and such natural disasters have doubled in number in the past decade alone. We are responsible to respond when all other systems collapse. When growing desertification and floods displace whole populations, we must be there.

Yesterday, I met leaders from Madagascar who are reeling from the impact of seven cyclones in the first six months of this year alone. I asked when the cyclone season ends and was told such questions are becoming more difficult to answer in today's world. Farmers throughout the world know that predictable patterns in weather are more and more becoming a thing of the past. How does the global food supply system deal with such changing risk?

In just one assessment, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts yields from rain-dependent agriculture could be cut in half by 2020. FAO estimates that 95 percent of agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa is rain-dependent. Anything even close to a 50 percent reduction in yields would obviously pose huge new challenges for hunger.

This is hitting the world's most vulnerable at the same time as soaring demand for agricultural commodities, especially crops used for biofuels production. Based on WFP's actual purchases during the past five years, WFP shipping rates are up 40 percent due to rising energy costs, maize and wheat are up 45 percent, rice is up 65 percent. That means that at a constant contribution level, we are able to feed fewer and fewer people each year as demand grows.

According to the latest assessments coming out of the International Food Aid Conference held in Berlin last month, climatic challenges and demand for biofuels are helping to push us into a post-food surplus era. So our reality is that demand for food assistance is increasing while available food is decreasing due to the loss of crop land from climatic changes and natural disaster, rising prices, and an overall reduction in food aid. The stark reality is, while we are able to meet emergency food needs of 90 million people each year, FAO estimates that still more than 850 million people are undernourished. And still, every five seconds, a child dies from hunger. We must--and can--do better.

For WFP, the key climate change issue is adaptation now. We must examine closely how we can help mitigate risks for the world's most vulnerable people. The UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) Report, "Sudan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment" published this month, and the Secretary-General's recent *Washington Post* editorial, highlight that climate change is one of the key factors in the civil unrest that has led to mass death, destruction of land, and displacement of people in Sudan. And now, in our largest emergency operation in our history, WFP feeds more than 2 million hungry, conflict-affected people in Darfur alone. Our work in emergency and crisis situations such as Darfur is vital, but we must get ahead of the climate change and hunger curve or we will always find ourselves responding to crises, which possibly could have been avoided.

At the World Food Programme we must--and do--aim to do much more than meet the emergency needs of hunger. We can only accomplish this in coordination with national governments, other UN agencies, NGOs, scientists, and farmers. The plight of the small-scale African farmer--two-thirds of whom are women--is that she bears almost all of the risk, and receives only a small part of the financial benefit of her labors. She has not had access to the risk mitigation tools, inputs, technologies and markets that have revolutionized the lives of farmers over the past few centuries--from Sweden, to the United States, to Ireland, to Mexico, to Korea, to China and beyond.

Nowhere are the causes and consequences of climate change more evident than in Horn of Africa region. This is also the region where WFP has our largest field operations. Aside from emergency relief, we focus on prevention recovery and rehabilitation--concrete projects to strengthen the resilience of communities, reduce the risks of droughts and floods, thus laying the basis for the prevention and mitigation of recurring crises, as well as for longer-term food security.

Together with FAO and the Special Envoy of the Secretary General, former Prime Minister Bondevik, we had a successful meeting this week in Nairobi, where six countries of the region--Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Uganda, Djibouti and Somalia--agreed on a Road Map with concrete steps to reduce vulnerability to future crises and to tackle the root causes of hunger and food insecurity in the region.

WFP now buys 77 percent of its food from 70 developing nations. In Ethiopia we purchase locally one-third of the food we distribute. These purchases can benefit small-scale farmers and help to break the cycle of hunger at its root. During my trip to see our operations in Ethiopia, I met with grain traders, farmers and officials, to explore new and innovative ways of using WFP's purchasing power and storage and distribution power, to promote development, food security, and supply stability for small-scale African farmers.

Ethiopia is our pilot country for developing new solutions to climate and disaster risk. We partner with the government to implement the MERET project which targets food-insecure communities in degraded fragile eco-systems who are prone to drought-related food crises. The project uses food as an incentive for labour to help regenerate vegetative cover, which increases soil water capture and helps reduce the risk of drought and flooding.

Building on our 2006 weather insurance pilot, we are also working with the Ethiopian government to design a comprehensive disaster risk financing project to provide timely and effective resources to protect poor peoples' livelihoods in the face of disaster risk for the next three years. This would provide contingency funding throughout the country, including agricultural and pastoral areas, across the spectrum of risk from the more frequent medium impact droughts to the less frequent high impact catastrophic ones--like 2002. The 2002 drought in Ethiopia destroyed the livelihoods of as many as two million poor farmers despite a generous and effective food aid intervention. To protect livelihoods in the face of climate change we need to move beyond emergency response to pro-active risk management.

WFP has also supported the Ethiopian government's effort to introduce the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). The Safety Net Programme shifts the emphasis from a system dominated by emergency assistance to longer-term food security activities. Currently, around 7 million chronically food insecure people are targeted with cash or food transfers in exchange for labour-intensive public works, and people unable to work, receive "direct support" transfers. WFP participated

fully in the formulation of the Safety Net Programme in a remarkable example of collaboration between the government, a committed group of donors, the World Bank, WFP and NGOs.

Our approaches in Ethiopia--a country where it's believed that 1 million people lost their lives during the 1984-85 famine--are ones that can be deployed more broadly. WFP will continue to fight on the front lines of hunger by using our toolbox to help vulnerable populations adapt to the challenges they will inherit due to climate change. We will use all of our tools--early warning systems, needs assessment, risk mitigation, preparedness and rapid response. And we will employ innovative thinking to determine new ways to use our purchasing power to support poor, local farmers to help boost local economies, food supply and markets to break the cycle of hunger at its root. These are commitments we reaffirm today. And we look forward to working with our UN partners in Rome, and throughout the UN system to get ahead of the curve and ensure we are ready to respond whenever climate variability creates challenges for the world's poor and hungry.

Thank you.