



World Food  
Programme

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Opening Remarks by Mr. Staffan de Mistura,  
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ECOSOC Operational Segment  
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**“The current economic, food and climate change crises and their effects on the  
achievement of the Millenium Development Goals: the role of United  
Nations system’s support to national efforts”**

We are living in turbulent times. The number of hungry is increasing and the extent of hunger is deepening. The number of hungry people has reached 1 billion and more than 2 billion people suffer from micronutrient deficiencies. The vulnerable of this world are facing several crises at the same time: a food crisis; a global economic and financial crisis; and while not a crisis as such, the intensifying effects of climate change. Last but not least, there are fears of an escalated H1N1 pandemic.

Communities are still reeling from food and fuel price rises witnessed in 2008; food prices remain stubbornly high. The financial crisis is accelerating hunger and we worry that the worst is yet to come. The biggest impact of the global financial downturn is an increase in the caseload of the hungry, particularly among urban populations that depend on remittances from abroad. Thus, vulnerable households are now being hit from two sides: through high food prices and lower incomes. As a result, these households are taking children out of school, reducing expenditures on health and eating less and eating less well, including less nutritious food.

WFP is monitoring the effects of the global financial crisis and seriously deteriorating household food security on lower and middle income countries, using its newly developed Economic Shock and Hunger Index (ESHI). The ESHI analysis considers key financial and economic factors as well as broader food security indicators to understand the food security implications on 126 lower and middle income countries. Five case studies have been released, finding clear evidence of the transmission of global events to food security at the household level. Lower export volumes and prices are leading to job losses. Remittances are declining, reversing a process through which remittances have reduced poverty and hunger and provided important coping mechanisms.

Troubling is also the increasing number of climate-related disasters and the impact that these may have on vulnerable people. Between 1980 and 2006, the number of reported climate-related disasters has quadrupled –most of them floods, cyclones and storms. Over the same period, the number of those affected by these disasters has increased from 170 million to over 250 million a year.

WFP fights hunger in the frontline of complex humanitarian crises. Some of these crises, such as droughts, floods, degradation of natural resources, or conflicts over access to natural resources, will be increasingly linked to, or exacerbated by, climate change. Thus, environmental degradation and hunger seem inexorably linked.



Climate disasters have nutrition, health, and education implications, perpetrating poverty and hindering human development. For example, in Ethiopia and Kenya, two of the world's most drought-prone countries, children aged five or less are respectively 36 and 50 per cent more likely to be malnourished if they were born during a drought; in Niger, children aged two or less, born in a drought year, were 72 percent more likely to be stunted.

With the compounded effects of all of these crises, progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals become, thus, suddenly compromised. Each of these crises is a threat to the achievement of the MDGs.

Joint efforts need to be reinforced to address and meet these challenges head-on.

### **WFP's Role in Assisting National Efforts**

WFP is using food assistance programmes in innovative ways to address these urgent hunger needs. We are devoted to hunger solutions and a wide range of measures have been applied, in a number of countries, to respond to the needs. WFP works as an implementing partner, both at the local and national levels, on safety net and capacity development programmes that enhance food security.

A wide range of measures have been applied in a number of countries, such as short-term safety nets, which are sometimes seasonal, social safety nets targeting the nutrition of vulnerable groups, productive safety nets, food for work, school feeding, or vouchers to facilitate access to the market. In countries with no safety net, WFP is a vital lifeline.

In 2008, WFP scaled up its direct response to high food prices, including through new projects, to support 31 million people in 26 countries. This was perhaps the largest emergency scale up in human history reaching over 100 million people, and mobilising over US\$5.1 billion. This included scaling up food assistance to fill gaps in existing social or other livelihood protection programmes, including nascent safety net programmes, where access to food is difficult or unaffordable and there is risk of persistent social disruption. WFP also rapidly scaled up school feeding programmes, which allowed children to stay in school, increased their food security during a critical period, and increased enrolments relatively quickly.

WFP adjusts programmes to make sure we have the proper response in the right context and, when necessary, expands programmes. In Burkina Faso, for example, in response to the high food prices, WFP launched its first food voucher operation in Africa, deploying a new tool to address hunger in an urban environment where food is available. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, following an increase by 70% of basic food commodities (families were spending about 60% of their income on food), WFP launched a 12-month voucher operation to assist 30,000 people. The project is expected to improve people's access to food, while at the same time providing a financial stimulus to the local economy. In terms of school feeding projects, in 2008, these were expanded to an additional 7.4 million beneficiaries (children and their family members) in 13 countries. The largest activities being carried out in Bangladesh, Haiti, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal and Tajikistan.

### **Closing Remarks**

The UN system has a dual role as, both advocate and implementing partner, when it comes to the challenges that the economic, food and climate change crises pose to the voiceless and vulnerable.

As an example of the role of UN system's support to national efforts, the United Nations High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis has recommended that US\$25–40 billion per year is required for food assistance, social protection, agricultural development, budget and balance of payment support. The Task Force's Comprehensive Framework for Action, foresees a "dual track approach", by supporting long-term agricultural production and addressing short-medium term food assistance needs and this is where WFP can definitely play its part.