



UNITED NATIONS WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME



**Statement by
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(Delivered by Sheila Sisulu, Deputy Executive Director)**

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues

I want to thank Ambassador Carsten Staur of Denmark and Ambassador Paul Badji of Senegal for co-facilitating this important process and this session today. I also want to thank the Secretary-General for his incredible leadership and commitment to keeping us all focused on the Millennium Development Goals as we prepare for the MDG Summit in September.

I want to briefly outline where we are on the hunger MDG, why it is foundational to achieving other goals, and tell you why, despite the challenges, I am optimistic because we have a robust toolbox and renewed country leadership from both donor nations and developing countries.

In a world where far too many things come between peoples of different nations, the we remain united in our desire to build a more hopeful future. The MDGs, bring the nations of the world together for what I believe is the most ambitious, and most important endeavor the world is undertaking today, nothing less than making hunger and poverty history, and to shepherd in a new era of prosperity and hope, where every child has a chance to grow up well-fed, healthy, educated and ready to reach his or her full potential.

I want to make seven brief points on hunger.

First, hunger is on the rise, making it perhaps the most endangered target.

We are living at a time when shock after shock is hitting the world's poor people the hardest. We read every day about the global financial crisis. We are not just in the midst of an economic crisis, but a humanitarian one that characterized by poverty and hunger for far too many people. After decades of progress on fighting hunger, we are now backsliding. From 1969 to 2004 the proportion of hungry people in the world was cut in half. But today, with the food, fuel and financial crises, coupled with war and conflict, and natural disasters such as we see in Haiti today, the number of hungry is over one billion.

The first Millennium Development Goal of cutting the proportion of hungry in half by 2015 – just 5 years from now – is slipping through our fingers. It is among the worst performing among the MDG targets.

We can reasonably expect that hunger will only get worse if we do not act. Food prices are expected to rise even further. Many developing countries across Africa and elsewhere are already struggling to cope with their current climate, and further shocks could mean significant setbacks. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, around 70 percent of disasters are now climate-related—up from 50 percent two decades ago.

These disasters—floods, droughts, mudslides, and hurricanes—extract a huge humanitarian toll, leaving farmland destroyed and people desperate for food. In the last decade, 2.4 billion people were affected by climate-related disasters, compared to 1.7 billion in the previous decade. And almost without exception, the countries struggling to feed their people are those most at risk from advancing climate change. Staple crops like maize and rice are highly susceptible to rising temperatures and extreme seasons. Widespread crop yield declines in Africa could leave hundreds of millions without the ability to produce or purchase sufficient food.

So clearly, hunger is today, and will remain, a seriously endangered target, and one that will threaten the other MDGs if we do not take concerted, coordinated and proactive action to reverse the backslide.

Second, hunger is foundational to other goals. Missing it puts other MDGs at risk.

Hunger has devastating downstream affects on economic development, health and education. A study by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean estimated that the cost of hunger amounts to as much as 11 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in some countries.

More importantly, each day we are losing lives for the youngest, and putting at risk the future for their families, communities and nations. We know that even a few months of inadequate nutrition can have long-term consequences. As a 2008 *Lancet* series found, the key to reducing undernutrition is to focus effective interventions on children less than two years old. This puts health, education and economic development targets at risk, and threatens to compromise the potential of an entire generation of young people.

But when we take action on hunger through the incredible toolbox of programmes available within the UN system, from school meals to child and maternal health and nutrition programmes, to programmes that put people to work and improve community infrastructure, we can create win-win situations that curb hunger while helping to achieve other important goals. Anti-hunger programmes have a multiplier effect that can support the other MDGs.

Third, the stars are aligning and we have a once in a generation opportunity to make real progress.

Despite these challenges, I am optimistic because we are seeing new momentum around the world. I am very encouraged by the G8 leaders' commitment in L'Aquila to provide \$22 billion in new funding for food security. The G20 leaders, the African Union and so many others are stepping up to take action. In fact, the African Union's Chairperson Dr. Bingu Wa Mutharika has made food security and nutrition the focus of his tenure, and has called on nations to support his vision for a hunger-free Africa in the next five years. (AU press release)

Fourth, we know what approach works – marrying country-led food security strategies with the support of the world.

We know what approaches can work because many nations have already broken the hunger and poverty trap. Just a few generations ago my Irish ancestors were starving. Just 18 years ago China was WFP's biggest programme; today they help other nations. Nations as diverse as Brazil, Ethiopia, and Mali are all making progress as we speak.

We must ensure nations themselves are in the drivers' seat, and leaders must make food security and nutrition a priority. National leadership is essential. I applaud African Union leaders and CAADP for developing a country-led approach that brings domestic and international resources to bear on country-led, strategies, so that nations themselves fully own and operate their plans. This is essential, and it is heartening to see that G8 leaders are committed to supporting these approaches.

Fifth, we must support a comprehensive approach

Strategies must be comprehensive, spanning from the farm to the food-insecure household. We know we cannot grow our way out of hunger. As Nobel Prize economist Amartya Sen noted, famines occur when people can't access food – even when sufficient food exists. We therefore need to not only grow more food, but ensure that everyone has sufficient, affordable and nutritious food.

This brings me to the sixth point: We must strengthen social protection.

The bridge between available food and hungry people is social protection, including safety nets. School feeding, nutrition support for mothers and young children, and linking feeding programmes to health, job training, community development and other national priorities are all ways to ensure that people can access sufficient food. These programmes also have multiplier effects, support health, education and economic development.

School meals programmes have proven one of the most powerful food-based safety nets ever implemented. They sometimes are the only assured source of food for the children of desperately poor households. And they can deliver much more in the bargain. According to a recent World Bank study, school meal programmes can supply about 10 percent of household expenditure for each child who participates, and even more when schoolchildren are given "take home rations" for their families.

School meal programmes increase school attendance, cognition, and educational achievement. Early results of recent studies in Bangladesh and elsewhere particularly show that such programmes dramatically increase enrollment of girls relative to boys.

Another safety net are food-for-work programmes. These programmes offer food in exchange for valuable labor on rural infrastructure projects necessary for long-term food security including feeder roads, dams, and wells. A food-for-work programme in Laos has helped small farmers boost longer-term local rice production by providing food for their families while they prepare additional land for planting. Food-for-work programmes in southern part of Sudan are assisting returning refugees to reintegrate into their communities, build livelihoods, and plan for the future.

My seventh point is we need to be ready for disasters, which put millions at risk for hunger each year.

We must work with nations to reduce the risk of disaster by improving resiliency, developing plans, and being ready to act.

One of the lessons learned in Haiti is the need to have ready-to-eat food and specialized nutritional products to ensure that people affected by disasters receive adequate nutrition, especially when access to clean water and cooking facilities is limited or non-existent.

I have with me two of products that really save lives– high-energy biscuits and Supplementary Plumpy – a fortified peanut paste. Both of these products are critical in an emergency like Haiti, where people lack the means to cook, and access to safe drinking water is severely limited. We need to ensure that the world is ready to support nations with the deployment of products like this at a moment's notice.

Another element of being prepared for emergencies is working with nations to build resilience and promote adaptation and risk reduction. An excellent example of a successful programme is in Ethiopia, where WFP has been working with the local authorities on a project we call MERET (Managing Environmental Resources to Enable Transition), involving construction of dams, rehabilitation of land through terracing, reforestation and other measures. MERET has helped turn dusty, dry lands into productive assets, and communities benefitting from MERET have seen the food security of households increased by 50 percent. This project provides jobs, income, food, and improves the land, so that the risk of flooding, landslides and erosion is reduced, while the productivity for food and other agriculture is greatly improved.

We must also look at developing and deploying risk management tools to offset the negative effects of climate change and other natural disasters. In developed countries, livelihood and asset losses sustained in natural disasters are often covered by international insurance, capital markets, or government budgets which act as contingency funds. Such tools protect livelihoods by facilitating timely support and limiting the economic damage of disasters. But they are seldom available in developing countries, many of which are particularly exposed to natural disaster risk.

The World Bank, WFP, and Swiss Re have partnered on a drought insurance project in Ethiopia that is leveraging market mechanisms and a sophisticated new rainfall index to respond faster and more effectively to shocks. Together with the Rockefeller Foundation and with the African Union, WFP is also looking at opportunities to expand this programme and build larger and more sustainable risk pools.

Conclusion

As the Secretary-General has noted in the “Keeping the Promise” report: "Our world possesses the knowledge and resources to achieve the MDGs." Falling short of the Goals "would be an unacceptable failure, moral and practical."

This could not be more true than of the hunger target. We know what works, we just need the continued focus, determination, and support of the nations of the world to do this. We face significant challenges, but I know we can do it if the nations of the world come together to support our efforts. I thank all the nations for their support to WFP, for their dedication to hunger, and for their determination to carry forward.

Thank you for listening and I look forward to our discussion.