

2019 Annual Session of the WFP Executive Board

10 June 2019

Opening remarks by Executive Director

D. Beasley, Executive Director: I want to thank our special guest, His Majesty King Letsie III of the Kingdom of Lesotho, who is more than just a king; he is also a friend, a colleague and, quite frankly, he is one of the greatest advocates we have in the continent of Africa promoting nutrition throughout the African Union, throughout the continent, throughout his country. He and I just had another personal conversation on what can we do more in his country, what can we do more with school nutrition, what can we do with the climate changing that is taking place and droughts and impacts in southern Africa, especially in his particular home area and how can we work together more strategically, taking advantage of our expertise and taking advantage of his heart and leadership capacity, we believe that we can do many, many things together. So it is good to have my dear friend and brother here.

I would like to back up just a little bit as we start this week because it dawned on me that almost half of you or more are new this year on the Board. In the List meetings we went into a lot of details that we will not go quite so much in this initial presentation – but we will get into issues like Yemen extensively as the agenda calls for it – but I want to paint a picture though of the reality of where we are, where we have come from.

As I have mentioned before, it is easier to lose sight and scope of the successes that have been made in the last couple of hundred years, especially the industrial revolution, have impacted society globally. You and I, our governments and those before us have built systems that have dramatically impacted every human being on earth. I say that because as for food security and poverty, 200 years ago there were only 1.1 billion people on earth. Ninety-four percent of those people, of all people on earth were in poverty. Eighty-five percent were in extreme poverty. Today, 7.5 billion, less than 8 percent are in extreme poverty. Should we congratulate ourselves and say well done? Yes, I think so but is the job over? No, it is not. We have made a lot of progress. More wealth is being shared today than at any time period in world history. However, having said that, as of two years ago the number of hungry people had dropped from over a billion down to 777 million but in the last two years, we have seen that number spike up and those in extreme hunger have spiked from 80 million to 115 to 124 million.

What is happening? Are the systems failing us? I do not think as a whole they are but people are still falling in the cracks. We know what is driving this spike is man-made conflict. Compound that with weak governance, climate extremes and many other issues, extremists exploiting these environments: we are seeing the numbers go back up. And it is our responsibility not to turn our back on those who we have not yet met their needs. While we should not tear down the systems that have given us this great success, we should also understand that our systems continuously need to be upgraded. We continuously need to tweak what systems are working and working well. We need to strengthen them: what systems are working fairly decently, how do they need to be tweaked, reinforced and what systems are not working at all, that need to be thrown in the trash can. And we should not let our egos and our relationships defer us from taking advantage of every dollar we have, to use it in the most effective way possible. And when I arrived here two years ago, yes, we were facing four significant famines. We were facing the number one donor talking about zeroing out. It would have been a dramatic impact upon us.



And so, where are we? What have we been able to achieve in the last two years just in this regard? When I arrived here two years ago, I expressed extreme concern about WFP being spread too thin. Because we are like the fire station of the United Nations and all of our trucks are out. Last year, seven L3s, nine L2s. Ten years ago if we had had two L3s and three L2s and a couple of L1s, we would have been in a dead panic. So you see with all the extreme conditions that we are facing today, the World Food Programme is spread extremely thin.

I also expressed deep concern over the fact that I would have assumed that the World Food Programme, the United Nations would have been a leader in gender parity, sexual harassment, discrimination, exploitation, et cetera, only to find out that it was just as bad as everybody else on earth.

Another area that I was a little bit surprised at the United Nations was I would have assumed that the United Nations would be the leader on digitization only to find that it was not, even though WFP was leading in this regard in the United Nations system. So, we knew there was a lot of work to do. And there is no question that WFP is perceived as the best of the best in emergency. No doubt about that at all. But, today, we run over a (US)\$7 billion, between (US)\$7 (billion) and (US)\$8 billion operation. In the year 2000, we were a (US)\$ 1.6 billion operation and our structure and our system was based upon a (US)\$2 (billion) to (US)\$3 billion operation. Sixty-seven percent of all of our expenditure go to between 5 and 10 countries. What does that mean? When you take out the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen and a few others like that, that means that about 70-something countries are not getting the support they need to achieve zero hunger. These are people that are falling in the cracks. These are people that are easily exploited for destabilization, migration by necessity. These are the groups that ISIS and Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram are exploiting in the Sahel region, very effectively as I may say right now. So, this is why we have been talking about how do we tweak our management system?

When I stepped back the other day, I went back to some of the old documents. It was interesting. I was talking to one of the legends in the World Food Programme, Jean-Jacques Graise. He and I sat down in New York the other day and he said you know that 80 percent of our expenditures historically were in development? And I said well, my goodness we are totally unlike that now. So I went back and read some of the original documents when WFP was founded. We had three tasks, our mandate: one, to use food aid to support economic and social development; two, to meet refugee and other emergency and protracted relief needs; three, to promote world food security. That is a very noble mandate. I do not think there is any operation on earth more effectively situated than the World Food Programme to address these needs. We are the world's largest but just because we are the world's largest and in my opinion we are the best and there is no issue about whether we are best in emergency operations but I think we have got a lot of work to do with regard to root cause and development in the humanitarian-development context that you and I are experiencing the results of what happens when we do not address root cause. And the cost is a hundred-fold when we do not address it effectively. We have got to have the right structure, we have got to have the right people and we have got to have the right support.

So this is why Amir (Abdulla), his division as he is the Deputy Executive Director giving general oversight but at the same time making certain that we do not take our eye off the ball in emergency operations. We will continue to be the best of the best in that. Valerie's (Guarnieri) department. Well, here is how it has worked in the last two years: You walk in the office and at 8 o'clock you are working on Yemen because there is a crisis of some sort. By the time you finish that it is 10:30. Well, OK, we have got to work on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Well, by 11:30 you are working on the Syrian Arab Republic. By 1:30 you have finished that, you get lunch brought in to you at the table and we talk about the Sahel. Then by 3 o'clock you are on it might be Venezuela, it might be South Sudan, it might be DRC, Ebola, it might be anywhere. Well, by 7 o'clock, wow, we need to work on the humanitarian-development nexus. In other words, those other 73 countries that we never get around to. So you see why it is critical that if we are going to achieve zero hunger, if we are going to help those who have fallen in the cracks, if we are going to make sure that system that has given us such success globally – down to less than 8 percent in extreme poverty – but we cannot turn our back on that 8 percent. This is why, in my



opinion, the World Food Programme is the most effectively positioned but not the most effectively structured and this is why we are tweaking our system so that we can get the sufficient time necessary to do several things, come up with the solutions working with you and we have been working with you and we have been helping change the paradigm of discussion throughout, the systems of silos that have been created by many of you in this room including us. We all have our own silos, the United Nations has silos, the United States has silos, Germany has silos, we all have silos on funding. And we have been pushing I would like to think very strategically and effectively, asking the donors to rethink silos, to be more fluid, to be more flexible so that we can address the changing needs out on the ground because what worked 50 years ago does not necessarily work today. I have asked this question, you have heard me say this, when I see a United Nation system has been in a country for 40 years and you have nothing to show for it after 40 years, do you not think you should step back and say, what do we need to do differently? Because our goal is to put ourselves out of business. We should have an exit strategy in every single country. When I look at the beneficiaries that we were supporting two years ago, about 91 to 92 million, last year about 85 or 86 million. Even though we raised a lot more money, the United States did not back down, in fact it went up, Germany went up, the United Kingdom went up, the Netherlands, almost every one of you in here, went up. And donors who would have traditionally not given but a little, have given a lot more. So we are making a lot of headway but even though we spent more money last year, we actually reached less beneficiaries. And you would say, well, gosh, how did we do that?

Well actually, El Niño in 2016 played its course and 2017/18 was a better year in terms of harvest in southern Africa so we had a 7.5 million people reduction, Iraq, 1 million reduction. In school meals, Kenya, Bhutan, completely took over the programmes, millions of children so we dropped from 18 million to 16 million. But we actually think we need more children in other countries in school meals programmes because we know what happens when we have school meals programmes with effective programmes. And one of the things that we did, because when we are short of monies, we have to cut rations and this past year we were able to not cut as much rations so we were able to give more full rations to people in more countries because we actually delivered more metric tonnage, or as equal as the year before. In cash-based transfers, you remember we were about at (US)\$ 600 million about four or five years ago in cash-based transfers, when I got here I expressed my concerns about the cash-based transfer system and now we are at (US)\$ 1.8 billion. This year we will be at (US)\$ 2.2 billion but last year alone, we were at (US)\$1.8 billion, more people being impacted by this (US)\$ 1.8 billion cash transfer system. And that is good news.

With Valerie's (Guarnieri) shop though, is how do we make sure that partnerships is more strategic and more effective. And this is why we have Ute (Klamert) who comes with a development background. How do we articulate and equate a more successful approach working with you donors integrating our teams on the field with the experience of Amir (Abdulla), with the experience of our numbers, with Manoj (Juneja) and with Valerie? How do we help bring all this together more strategically, less silos at WFP, more strategic thinking and partnering and like yesterday we had about an 8, 10-hour meeting with the leadership group and our operations management group with all the regional directors because we are bringing them in to be more strategic because I am holding them accountable.

If you are going to achieve zero hunger, tell me how you are going to do it in this country? What do you need? Put out a map, show me that area right there. I want to know what you are going to do this. When I was sitting in New York about a year and a half ago and they were talking about United Nations reform, I said well show me how that United Nations reform is going to work and I was going to pull out a map, show me how it is going to work right there. Well, everybody started talking about the Dallas Cowboys all of a sudden or something, changing the subject.

In WFP, we pull out the map and say tell me how what we are going to do is going to achieve zero hunger in that community right there. Let us talk about it, the practicality. Who do we need to partner with more effectively, with FAO and IFAD and UNICEF and other partners. Quite frankly I do not know how this United Nations reform will work. I am hoping that it will work. I am hoping



that it will move forward. I have hopes and I think that WFP should help drive it to be successful but regardless of what comes out of New York, the most significant reform for the United Nations system, the effectiveness is going to come from the top-level managers. And that is what has got to drive reform because I have sat down with Henrietta Fore at UNICEF, sat down with Filippo Grandi, the things that we are already doing collaboratively more so today than five years ago, is extraordinary.

It is not easy tearing down old silos of mindset. I have struggled with my own team but at the end of the day we get there and we are going to continue to work to get there. In my opinion, there are many funds out there that we are not tapping into, (such as) climate funds. I have heard it said that rich people cause most of the climate issues, I do not know, I am not an expert in that field, but I know the poor people pay the biggest price. We see the impact of climate change all over the world and as I have said before, I will let others debate what causes it, but I do know because we see it every single day. The weather is changing out there and the poor people pay the price. When I look over the past number of years of the World Food Programme, did you realize that we have planted over 6 billion trees? We are rehabilitating annually over half a million acres of land, land that otherwise was not productive, land that would be impacted by droughts or flash flooding. We are rehabilitating land so that the poor people will have hope in their communities. I have seen it. I have heard it first hand when tribal leaders, for example, in Mazar-e-Sharif, will tell me, Mr Beasley, our children before were leaving and joining extremist groups of the Taliban or this or that, but today, because of this rehabilitation the droughts and the flash flooding, we have been able to now garner the systems and make it work for us. And the children are not leaving as they were before.

There are climate funds in your countries that we should tap into because we are impacting the environment more strategically with the world's largest operation. If you want it to affect the world, why not work with the world's largest operation? In terms of the humanitarian sector, we are the best situated. This is why when I got here with 80 or 90 million beneficiaries, I said every able-bodied adult that I have met out in field wants to be involved in a community improvement project because they do not like getting outside support. They want to be self-sufficient. They want to be free and independent. The last thing they need is charity. But how can we take support and turn it into economic opportunity because you and I know without food security, there is no other security. Without food security it is the building block for all other security and this is why we were able finally to get the United Nations Security Council to adopt resolution 2417 with the help of many of you in here to be very clear to the world that food security is critical for peace and stability on earth.

Ute has got a lot of work to do on women's funds because why? Because quite frankly we do more to impact women on earth than any operation. Well you say, how can that be? I will tell you: one, we are assisting 85/90 some million people, over half of them are women. By the way, 62 percent of them are children, but when you break it down and quantify it – something I do not think we do well at the World Food Programme, I do not think the United Nations does it well at all in terms of explaining it in English, well, I mean I am probably not politically correct but explaining it in common language that people will understand, all these acronyms and all these things. I do not understand still to this day what they are talking about half of the time.

But with women, with cash-based transfers in areas that historically the men controlled the finances. Well, today, this year with (US)\$ 2.2 billion, over half of that is going to be controlled by women, women who otherwise were not controlling the finances, women who otherwise were oppressed in their cultures, in their communities but our studies show amazing impact when women control the finances with the cash-based transfer system. It is remarkable what takes place.

Well, what about food for asset type programmes? We have 10 million people in food for asset programmes. Well, guess what, those were all men historically and now they are half women. Half women. You have heard me tell the story of standing in the Niger with the woman who said I no longer am receiving food aid just for my family. I am now supporting because of my entrepreneurial spirit with the help of the World Food Programme and FAO and others. I am now



not only feeding my family but my village and I am now selling to the marketplace. That is a woman. And we have 7 million women in direct women's programmes designed by the World Food Programme. You see we have got a lot to do with women.

Well, how about gender parity? I was shocked that the World Food Programme and the United Nations were not further ahead than it was. We have achieved more in the last year than we achieved in the five years before. We have gone from 28 to 30, now we are at 33 percent. My goal is to be at 41 by the end of 2021, but I want to mention a couple of countries because out of the 83 countries we are in, we now have 45 countries that have met our quarterly benchmarks. One thing that I have found out when I was Governor, you can set goals and dreams but if you do not put together a management plan and execute that plan with benchmarks, you will not achieve, you will not maximize the chances of success. And so, starting last year, we began designing working with Human Resources and John Aylieff's team, John Aylieff and his team have done a remarkable job. We have actually got a software programme and it creates a lot of anguish to country directors because I can be on the phone with them and I will punch Burkina Faso, where is it today? It has got numbers broken down in so many different ways but out of the benchmarks that we established from the end of March of this year and then we got new benchmarks for the end of June, but as of the end of March, 45 countries out of the 83 met their benchmarks. Let me just cite a few examples: Nigeria went from 28.6 percent to 33.7 percent; Burkina Faso from 31.7 percent to 38.5 percent; Yemen 19.6 percent to 25.3 percent; Colombia from 43.1 percent to 49 percent; Kenya Regional Bureau from 43.1 percent to 50 percent; Zimbabwe from 43.4 percent to 51.3 percent.

Now, that is just some of the good ones but I have got the list of those who were not so good and you can ask them: did they receive a letter from the Executive Director and they will say yes and in that letter I did not quite say shame on you but I did say you give me a plan of action, how you are going to meet these goals and I do not want you to go work harder at it. Get me a definitive plan of management how you are going to do that. The responses coming back are extraordinary because in fact there are a country or two that had the justification for not going up. For example, one country put on 19 drivers that were outside the system that were all male, brought them inside the system well it skewed them in the wrong way. All right, I get that. That might explain it but that does not excuse as to going forward.

And so our teams are being held accountable. There is a policy that is driving it in part but more importantly it is management that is driving it with the leadership group and the regional bureau directors and the country directors, driving it and this is why, in my opinion, sexual harassment, discrimination, exploitation while policy is important, it must be driven aggressively by management and systems in place that deliver. As I have mentioned to you I was shocked that the women here did not believe us when we said we do not tolerate this. But why did they not believe it? Because they have heard it for how many decades now. Well, the number of complaints that we received in the past year, doubled. Why? Do we think there is more harassment and discrimination? No we do not. The women are now feeling confident that management and senior management not only care but will respond. When they see very important budgetary changes that you have approved, because talk is one thing, action is another thing. When we increased OIG budget, Kiko's (Harvey) budget increased 4.2 million over three/four years and there is more to be done. This gets into the importance of why we need you to continue to keep the pressure on us in terms of accountability because, yes, we have gone from a (US)\$ 1.6 billion operation to a (US)\$ 7.4 billion operation in countries, I mean you can imagine raising the gender parity in some of these countries where women have been oppressed for as long as earth. You do not change these places so when you get Stephen Anderson doing the numbers that he did in Yemen, my gosh the countries that are not achieving needed calling Stephen, (asking) "How did you do that in Yemen? You can do it in Yemen and Burkina Faso?" That is one of the things that we have got to do better. We have got to cross-pollinate better, across our systems, so exploitation, harassment, these things, gender parity in my opinion is very important to resolving some of these issues because the more women you have, the more facial recognition you have with the woman sitting in front of you that makes you understand that women are equal. Women are our



sisters. We are a family. We need to respect each other. Gender parity helps increase those opportunities in my opinion.

Now, other areas in the last two years that we have been restructuring, OIG and risk management, oversight, systems which are very important. We have got over a thousand NGOs that we work with. How are we going to be more strategic with them to make certain that they, while we drive down management impact in our own sphere, but what about the NGOs, the thousands that we work with on a daily/weekly/monthly basis? What are we going to do to hold them accountable? What type of systems need to be in place for due diligence, monitoring, management controls? There is a lot more that needs to be done.

Now I want to touch on that other area that I mentioned was digitization because digitization is critical. The first industrial revolution took place or started in the late 1700s or early 1800s, steam, coal, the first industrial revolution. The second industrial revolution – basically mechanical and electrical – late 1800s and early 1900s, like with Ford. The third industrial revolution was micro-processing and computers, late 1960s early 1970s when it really became more prolific. But today we are facing a fourth industrial revolution. In every industrial revolution those who embraced moved forward and those who did not, did not move forward. We now lead the United Nations without any question at all in this sphere. Yes, cash-based transfer systems, we are at 2.2 billion this year. The number of identities now is that we have digitized is 35 to 37 million compared to where we were just a few years ago at 15 million. We plan to reach 60 percent by the end of this year. Biometrics we are knocking off the roof. Because you understand, when we do biometrics and do digitization, the savings of efficiency and effectiveness and the integrity of the systems is second to none. But a lot of people talk about this fourth industrial revolution. We are not talking. We are action-oriented and we are leading the charge. We are ahead of the curve. We are in fact shaping the future with this particular sphere, that is critical, in my opinion, to making the World Food Programme the most efficient and the most effective. So, Google, Facebook, Alibaba, Palantir, Amazon and others that we are partnering with strategically, learning from one another, how to be more strategic internally and externally: internally in terms of more efficient operations inside. We are looking to saving hundreds of millions of dollars in better efficient operations in software management, et cetera with supply chain. And what we are doing with Google and artificial intelligence and others in drones and satellite imagery, what we are doing in blockchain technology. We are not just haphazardly in these issues. We are leading the world in this. And we are learning as we go but as we enter into the digital world, that means that we have got to have more controls over cybersecurity and information technology, data protection. These are complex issues that we will be working through. And I think we all understand the significance of this and this is why Rehan (Asad) will be given laser-like focus in this particular area, internally and externally. It is absolutely essential.

Well, we have got a lot of work to do and we are not going to do it by ourselves but I think working together we can, we will because what is at stake is the future of the world. The world is more destabilized we know than at any time period in our lifetime. I cannot speak to thousands of years ago. I do not know. I have read some bad times way back then but we know we have made a lot of progress but we also know that we facing more destabilization and uncertainty than a long, long time and I think the World Food Programme is best positioned. So, a year and a half ago when we said with great clarity, we have five corporate priorities: leadership in emergency; humanitarian-development nexus; transform and lead digitally; simplify and efficiency – because I continue to hear in the field, more paperwork, more of this, more of this and headquarters has got to be more supportive of the field and less of a burden – and the fifth with partnerships. We created within our structure the five workstreams: resource management led by Manoj (Juneja); programme policy and development led by Valerie (Guarnieri); emergency supply chain, et cetera by Amir (Abdulla); partnerships by Ute (Klamert). And the Executive Director and the Chief of Staff and our team to help pull everybody together and make it happen.

And there are four pillars that will help us achieve that: that is our people, organizational effectiveness, people at the centre, strategic positioning, digital transformation. In this context



I do believe we can maximize the chances of zero hunger but no matter how hard we work without ending some of these wars, we will never achieve zero hunger. We have got a lot of work to do as leaders around the world. We know that. We understand that. All of us face this reality but we need to continue to ask the tough questions. What are we doing to achieve zero hunger? What are our exit strategies? What do we need to do to re-tool and get our people the support they need? We need the hard questions from you.

I laugh with Hans (Hoogeveen) many, many times because he scares some of our staff. Yeah. But I love it. He asks, as many of you do, the hard questions. It is not personal. I expect each of you to ask us the hard questions. I expect you to hold us accountable, not on a personal, vindictive way but in a professional way because you want us to be better. And when we have our differences, it is positive tension that allows us to rethink what are we doing. Can we do it better?

And so, Mr Chairman, thank you. This is going to be a very busy week, very busy. But as I have said before, this is my most favourite week. I am in one bed, one office. I am not in all the different countries that we continue to travel around the world and so to be with you this week and fine-tune where we need to go, overhaul what needs to be overhauled, setting the vision and with all the new plans and all the new reports, it is going to be a very productive week.

I want to end by saying I think the World Food Programme showed its true character in the past few months. When that Ethiopian plane went down, if anybody ever doubted this was a family, Amir, Valerie and the team, how they brought everybody together was remarkable. Many of you I think experienced it first hand. I do not know how we got through some of the programmes that we did but I think that every single person that was impacted very personally and just professionally, I think they would say that the World Food Programme showed what humanity is all about. We cared for our own and while we are caring for our own, we will continue to care for those who get hit by cyclones in Mozambique, by the destabilizations just taking place here and there and around the world. We will never turn our back on any of those. We are the World Food Programme. We are all about saving lives and changing lives.

So Mr Chairman, thank you.

[applause]

