

**Statement by WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran**

**World Food Summit**

**November 16, 2009**

We stand at a critical crossroads. At this moment in time we must galvanize all nations, all people, all resources to defeat hunger. Or we can watch helplessly as the first – and most foundational – Millennium Development Goal of halving the percent of poverty and hunger continues to slip out of our grasp.

This is the emergency issue of our generation. Since the food crisis started, the numbers of hungry have increased by almost 200 million people to more than one billion. One in every six people on earth wake up each morning not knowing whether they will have enough to eat. Almost 300 million people – one in three - are malnourished in Africa alone. The most vulnerable and voiceless people in the world are being hit by a combination of high food prices, financial crisis and climate shocks.

Food security is not only a matter of humanitarian assistance and agricultural development; it is a matter of national security, peace and stability. Without food, people starve, migrate or revolt, as we have seen during the food crisis last year when 30 countries saw riots as people protested when families could no longer afford food. And still a child dies every 5 seconds from hunger.

Based on national hunger action plans, we must act urgently and decisively to protect those who suffer and starve in silence; to prevent people from having to take to the streets or make for the roads; and to promote peace and development by focusing on food security. We must get back on track to meet the Millennium Development Goal number one of cutting the numbers of hungry in half by 2015. We must pull together and deliver as one to realize the great potential in the food security initiative of L'Aquila and the G-20 nations.

Thirty five years ago the world was at a similar crossroads

when the World Food Congress met here in Rome. Food and fuel prices were soaring. People were starving and leaders gathered. It would be easy to succumb to despair in the face of a seemingly unsolvable problem that returns with a vengeance with every generation.

In fact with drivers like climate change, scarcity of land and water and a world population that is projected to top 9 billion by mid-century the situation has become more dire.

The time for words is over. We are better positioned for action today than we have ever been before. Let me offer five reasons why.

**1. For the first time in history the world is in concert to support comprehensive country-led solutions.** This should not be an issue that divides developed nations from developing nations. In fact, it's an issue that has the power to constructively unite them. At L'Aquila and reiterated in Pittsburgh by the G20 national leaders, committed to comprehensive food security solutions and investments in

agricultural production, food safety nets to ensure food access and humanitarian food and nutrition assistance.

In response to the triple crisis – food, fuel and financial – the leadership of the world has realized that we need long-term sustainable solutions as well as immediate emergency measures to make sure that the hungry eat today – and are able to feed themselves tomorrow.

Leadership makes a difference, as when leaders such as Brazil's President Lula, China's President Hu, Malawi President Mutharika prove this can be done. Spain's President Zapatero, brought leaders together at the High Level Meeting on Food Security for All in Madrid in January, President Obama declared food security a driving force of his administration from the day of his inauguration, EU President Barosa helped inspire the 1 billion Euro food facility and Secretary General Ban Ki Moon pulled together the High Level Task Force with the unified support of the three Rome-based food agencies to address the food crisis. These are just some of the actions moving the world.

## **2. The world has shown that it can unite to fight hunger.**

Last year WFP, which is 100 percent voluntarily funded, had more than 100 donor nations – most of whom are also helping this year, even in the crunch of the global financial crisis. At a meeting in September held by the UN Secretary General and Hillary Clinton as a follow-up to the L’Aquila initiative, more than 100 nations were represented. This is a bold response of hope and collective action in the face of multiple crises.

## **3. We know how to defeat hunger and malnutrition.**

Many nations are stopping hunger in its tracks. In the past decades developing nations like Brazil, China, Vietnam, Rwanda, Malawi and Ghana have made great gains and lifted tens of millions of people out of malnutrition. They have followed in the footsteps of Sweden, Ireland, India, Singapore, South Korea, South Africa, Chile and other nations that have been successful in creating food security through agricultural production, social safety net protection, trade and market solutions.

Launched in 1997, Mexico's PROGRESA program, which now reaches some 2.6 million poor families across the country, includes school meals and nutritional supplements for young children and pregnant and lactating women.

Knitting together local production with food programmes is essential in food security strategies. For example, Brazil's Zero Hunger initiative and Sierra Leone's Operation Feed the Nation use local commodities as food assistance and encourage the consumption of home grown food by promoting linkages between smallholder farmers and retailers.

**4. New comprehensive approaches.** The world has known for nearly half a century that access to food is just as critical as agricultural production to defeating hunger. Last year enough food was produced so that every person on earth could have sufficient calories. Yet more than 1 billion went hungry. We need to leverage every food assistance dollar for maximum long-term impact – from agricultural production to food safety nets for the vulnerable. Women, who produce more than 80 percent of the food in many

developing nations, are key to all hunger solutions. Rural smallholder farmers are not a problem to be solved; they are the critical ally in the fight against hunger and for sustainable economic growth.

At WFP, through an innovative partnership launched last year called Purchase for Progress, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, the Government of Belgium and 21 nations, WFP is purchasing food from smallholders in Afghanistan, El Salvador, Ghana and 18 other pilot countries, helping them increase agricultural production, gain access to markets and ensure stable demand for surpluses.

By agreeing to buy a certain portion of their yield through this program, WFP and its partners, such as FAO, IFAD and AGRA are creating incentives for smallholder farmers to develop crop management skills, produce quality foods and connect to markets.

In Liberia, 70 percent of people's livelihoods are from

farming, and women make up the majority of farmers. Connecting women small holders to markets is critical. WFP, working with FAO, has installed rice milling machines for women farmers cooperatives, so farmers can benefit from the value-added price of milled rice. WFP made an initial purchase of rice from the cooperatives this year and we plan a six-fold increase of our purchase by the second quarter of 2010.

We are also partnering with Ecobank Liberia, to provide onsite payments to smallholders, so each seller is paid in cash. Placing payments directly into the hands of women farmers, insisting on transparency on selling price and that the women's cooperative pass profits to each farmer has proved pivotal in building confidence in markets and cooperative marketing. Together, these programmes are helping support the vital role that women farmers play in Liberia's food security.

These innovative, hunger-solution programmes bring together country leadership, support from the Rome-based

agencies, and from nations around the world. These are the types of actions we need to build lasting food security and defeat hunger.

**5. Fighting hunger and malnutrition is the job of everyone, not just world leaders.** Mother Teresa said “If you can’t feed a hundred people, then just feed one.” Today there are a billion people on line in the world and a billion people who are urgently hungry. If every person with plenty shared just a \$1.50 or a Euro a week with those who do not have enough food, hunger could be overcome virtually overnight. With a billion hungry people, needs are exceeding resources, and we need new nations and even world citizens to step in to fill the gap.

At the start of the World Food Summit, WFP reached out to the world with “A billion for a billion” our first Internet citizen appeal at [www.wfp.org](http://www.wfp.org) to ensure that children reach their full mental and physical potential because they are not stunted from malnutrition. In just the first 48 hours since we launched this citizen campaign, we raised enough

money to feed 250,000 children.

At WFP, 13,000 staff – mostly in the field – are working around the clock to sustain assistance programs for 100 million people, mostly women and children, smallholder farmers, refugees and rural poor across the developing world who are in urgent need of basic and life-saving food and safety net support. We work closely with our good colleagues here at FAO and IFAD in Rome and other agencies in the Secretary General’s High Level Task Force and more than 1,000 non-governmental organizations, such as World Vision, Oxfam, Care, Caritas, German Agro-Action and MSF, to reach the most vulnerable.

Our task is straightforward and threefold: we must meet emergency food needs when disasters like droughts and floods strike. We must ensure access to nutritious food and safety nets for those who are hungry today. And we must grow more food for a growing population tomorrow. We have the tools and technology to help nations achieve food security.

WFP is proud to be the partner with developing nations, including many that once were reliant on food aid but are now able to provide for their own citizens. During the past 30 years, 30 countries have taken over school meals programs first started by WFP. We continue to work with governments to secure school meals for as many as 20 million children worldwide. In nations such as Ethiopia and Afghanistan we work with governments to provide productive safety nets for millions of food insecure people who get nutrition while creating assets for agriculture and adaptation. Our large logistics and local procurement capacity is a pillar of support for such sustainable food security solutions. Last year we procured \$1.16 billion in food from Africa alone.

The five principles endorsed in the World Food Summit's declaration are the strongest ever confirmation of a universal commitment to a comprehensive, country-led food security approach.

The final measure of the success of this Summit – or any gathering – is whether there will be less hungry when we next gather. It's time to act.