

49th session of the Committee on World Food Security
Monday, October 11, 2021 – opening session

Speaking time – 3-4 minutes

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

The 49th session of the Committee on World Food Security is meeting at a time of unprecedented challenges to global food security. In the past year alone, a toxic combination of conflict, climate change and COVID-19 has plunged nearly 300 million more people into food insecurity.

Chronic hunger has risen by 160 million to 811 million. And severe hunger is up by 135 million – it's doubled to 270 million. Most terrifying of all, there are now 42 million people in 43 countries who are literally just one step away from famine.

We still have a window of opportunity to avert disaster, but we must all mobilize against this hunger pandemic - today. If the world turns its back on these people we could be seeing famines of biblical proportions within months.

If we are truly serious about tackling hunger and strengthening our food systems, we need urgent, coordinated action and a long-term plan - backed by the resources required to get the job done.

Short-term, that means funding and access to hold back the rising tide of hunger we're seeing around the world. It's going to take \$6.6 billion in additional funding to reach the 42 million at risk of famine and pull them back from the brink.

At WFP, we are ready to play our full part. Our deep field presence and global footprint means we can mobilize fast – if we get the resources we need, our trucks will get rolling right away.

But longer term, we also need to invest in the time-tested programs that help communities become more resilient and self-sufficient. Let me give you a great example of this approach in action.

The School Meals Coalition, launched at the UN General Assembly last month, is an innovative partnership between 60 governments and around 50 other organizations. They all recognize the wide social and economic benefits of investing in our youngest citizens.

School feeding programs are life-changing. They provide a powerful incentive for the very poorest families to keep their children – especially their daughters - in school.

And by sourcing foods from smallholders, they help the farmers earn a sustainable living and strengthen local economies. In fact, school feeding programs create around 2,000 jobs for every 100,000 children fed - many of them jobs for women.

In the poorest countries school feeding costs just 25 cents, per child, per meal. It's the smartest investment any government can make. And it's exactly the kind of practical program which can make a real difference to hungry families, as we all work together to regain the ground lost to Covid over the past 18 months.

The Committee can, and must, play a vital role in rallying the support and the resources needed to address the immediate hunger crisis, while also tackling the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition.

That's why supporting your critical work is a shared priority for all three Rome-Based Agencies. Because even as we go all-out to get help to those who need it most today, we also have to plant the seeds for more resilient and more sustainable food systems tomorrow.

This is the only way we will achieve our shared ambition of a future free from hunger. With the support and collaboration of the Committee and its members, I am hopeful that one day we will succeed.

Thank you.