

High-Level meeting of the Committee on World Food Security
Tuesday, October 13, 2020

Please check against delivery

Excellencies, you will have heard the humbling news on Friday that WFP has been honored with the Nobel Peace Prize so I want to start by offering my heartfelt thanks to all of you.

Our sister Rome-Based Agencies; the Member State missions here in Rome; your governments; you all play a critical role in the life-saving work we do together. You are WFP's closest partners, colleagues and friends, so the Peace Prize truly belongs to each and every one of us.

Friday was a brief moment of celebration for the RBA family, but it was also a reminder of how much harder we must all work and how much farther we still need to travel to reach Zero Hunger.

So I am very pleased to join you today for this High-Level meeting of the Committee on World Food Security, to discuss how together we can continue our journey.

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly made the task of achieving Zero Hunger even harder. I know some people feel uncertain about the future, even despair. But I remain hopeful - because in the past 200 years we've made incredible progress in lifting people out of poverty and spreading prosperity.

In 1820, 94% of the world's population lived in extreme poverty. Today, that proportion is around 10%. Sustainable economic growth and development has lifted billions out of poverty. And aggregate global wealth has reached \$360 trillion dollars.

Don't misunderstand me - the job of ending poverty and hunger is very far from over - and Covid is threatening to undo years of progress. But when I look at how far humanity has come, it gives me hope that if we work together, act decisively and invest wisely, we can confront and overcome the immense challenges we now face due to this pandemic.

The Committee on World Food Security has a vital role to play in rallying the support and resources needed to win this battle.

Even before Covid swept around the globe, there were 690 million hungry people in the world. And another 135 million were marching toward the brink of starvation. Today, because of the pandemic and its devastating economic consequences, that number could sky-rocket to 270 million. We may be on the cusp of an unprecedented hunger pandemic.

The impact will be worst in low- and middle-income countries, where the virus has destroyed the equivalent of 400 million full-time jobs.

Only extraordinary measures from governments globally, in the form of \$17 trillion of economic stimulus and central bank support, have kept a lid on rising hunger, aided stability and staved off famine - so far.

But this is a long way from over and we are not out of the woods yet. Malnutrition threatens to destroy millions of children's futures, and famine still looms as a real and dangerous possibility.

There is a real danger many more people will die from the economic consequences of COVID-19 than from the virus itself.

Now, I know your governments are spending billions on domestic stimulus packages. National budgets are tight and reserves are running low. But I urge you – don't walk away from your commitment to humanitarian assistance and overseas development aid. Don't turn your backs on the world's hungry people.

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens the hard-won development and peace-building gains that were achieved over decades. Without immediate, co-ordinated international support we could see increased civil unrest, rising migration and worsening conflicts.

WFP is playing its part, along with our sister Rome-Based Agencies. Our frontline teams are working day and night to get help where it's needed most. Our logistics services are the backbone of the global response to COVID-19, transporting critical supplies and aid workers on behalf of the entire humanitarian community.

We have also recently launched the biggest humanitarian response in our history.

We plan to scale up right across our 83 operations to reach 138 million people in 2020. To fund this scale-up WFP is appealing for US\$4.9 billion to fund our response through year-end 2020.

But WFP and the other RBAs will only succeed with your support and collaboration.

So I urge every member of the Committee on World Food Security to work closely with us and find new ways to partner together. Let's be ambitious and imaginative. Let's design, fund and implement programs that convert the crisis unleashed by COVID-19 into an opportunity to build our food systems back better.

If we do, we can truly save lives and change lives - and give every child, no matter where they live, the chance of a brighter future.

Thank you.