



**STATEMENT BY JOSETTE SHEERAN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
UN WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME**

**HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY**

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

As we gather here in Rome, hunger is on the march, with the world food crisis threatening to plunge another 130 million people into life-threatening hunger.

If we do not act quickly, the bottom billion will become the bottom two billion virtually overnight as their purchasing power is cut in half due to a doubling in food and fuel prices.

But I want to start on a note of optimism. So let me say clearly: we can defeat hunger. We can achieve global – and local – food security. The world knows how to do this. Just over a generation ago, food security was achieved in Europe, Japan, the United States and elsewhere – and in recent decades there have been stunning achievements in food security in Latin America, Asia and in many African nations.

The world is producing more food for more people than ever in history. In less than 40 years, the world has cut the proportion of hungry in half, from 37 percent in 1969 to 17 percent in 2002. And we have seen significant progress by countries in Africa – among them Ghana, Malawi, South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania, Mali and beyond – in reducing hunger and malnutrition and increasing agricultural production.

And I believe the high food prices and increasing demand present a huge, historic opportunity for developing world farmers. By 2050, with growth demand, the world needs to produce twice as much food. This simply cannot be done without huge investment in the world's poorest farmers by governments, the private sector and the international community.

But high food and fuel prices now threaten to short-circuit this potential and undo many of these hard-earned gains. Only by pulling together, in the spirit of global interdependence, can we respond strategically to this challenge.

So let us pull together now. Let us act together now.

The world's attention has been awakened to the global food crisis. The demand for action has come across loud and clear. This challenge is our collective challenge – global, not unique to one or two countries, but felt by nations and institutions worldwide.

Here is our opportunity – and our human dilemma. We simply cannot solve this challenge divided. The situation we face presents an opportunity for the global community to demonstrate concerted leadership as never before. Governments, citizens, the UN team, NGOs and private sector must come together in a common call to action: feed the hungry today, produce the food to end hunger tomorrow.

This spirit was summed up perfectly for me, when a 58 year old survivor of the devastating China earthquake in Chengdu told the press that the earthquake ‘shows that there are no barriers, no nationalities, when it comes to disasters’. This disaster – this silent tsunami – knows no barriers, no nationalities. In fact, it is exactly one year ago that I told the *Financial Times* that the world was facing a “perfect storm” for the world’s most vulnerable. Today, we are in the eye of that storm. If we were at sea, it would be time for “all hands on deck”.

And today, here in Rome, we are “all hands on deck.” I applaud the leaders of government, International Financial Institutions, UN agencies, regional organizations such as the African Union, NGOs, scientists, think tanks and others who have joined in a spirit of concerted action. I applaud the Secretary-General of the United Nations for pulling us all together in the global food security task force, vice-chaired by Jacques Diouf and coordinated by John Holmes and David Nabarro. I applaud the leadership of the World Bank, with its focus on action with its “new deal” on global food policy and immediate infusion of over a billion dollars to mitigate the impact of soaring prices. In fact, the World Bank, IMF and UN team are working together to support governments perhaps as never before. This is leadership in action.

The world is standing together and this was evident in the extraordinary response to the World Food Programme’s emergency appeal. Just when the world needed us most, WFP was able to buy 40 percent less food today than we could 8 months ago with the same contribution, just because of soaring food and fuel prices. I wrote to heads of state and government and traveled the globe urging action. Last week, with an historic US\$500 million contribution by Saudi Arabia, the largest single cash contribution in UN history, we finalized that appeal. I thank the leaders and citizens of the United States, Europe, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and beyond, as well as leaders such as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, World Bank president Robert Zoellick, and UN colleagues, for your generous outpouring of support and the confidence you have placed in us. We are deeply moved.

The World Food Programme was created by you, the member nations, with a very specific mission: to work with governments in answering the urgent call of hunger and to promote the restoration of lives, livelihoods, and food self-sufficiency. This year we will meet the urgent hunger needs of close to 90 million people world-wide, including 3 million in Darfur alone. This is some 15 million more than originally expected.

I can promise you we will do so coherently, efficiently and effectively – we limit our overhead to 7 percent of our budget, with 93 percent of our people and resources deployed on the frontlines of hunger. I have said that nothing gets between WFP and a hungry child. We deploy a global network of planes, ships, barges, trains, trucks and, when needed, donkeys, camels and elephants to reach those most in need. Since September, we have lost 13 staff and contractors in the line of duty. At the moment 23 of our drivers are missing in action in Darfur. We have been through a lot, but today we are facing perhaps the biggest challenge in our history.

We have listened, and we have heard your call – again last week in Yokohama at the TICAD meeting hosted by Prime Minister Fukuda. As President Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia noted, many governments need help now – not next week, not next year, but now.

In response to your call, today I report that WFP is streaming an additional US\$1.2 billion of urgent food assistance to meet the new face of hunger, in 62 of the most vulnerable countries in the world. Perhaps most importantly is how we are acting: we are working with governments to ensure that our food assistance supports fragile local markets and embeds solutions to hunger and undernutrition whenever possible.

Our urgent action will help keep children in school, meet the urgent nutritional needs of pregnant women and children under two, help communities rebuild vital roads and agricultural infrastructure through food for work, and will purchase food from local farmers if there is extra food available. If there is food on the shelves, we will deploy targeted cash and voucher plans where appropriate to support local markets. In fact today, WFP has deployed what I call our 80-80-80 solution: 80 percent of our cash for food is spent in the developing world, 80 percent of our land transportation is procured in the developing world, and 80 percent of our staff is hired locally in the developing world. This infuses more than US\$2 billion dollars annually into developing world economies and builds food security capacity.

Among the additional steps we will take to help meet the new face of hunger:

- In **Afghanistan** we have scaled up food assistance to an additional 2.5 million people – almost half of whom are urban dwellers – who were priced out of the wheat market, infusing another US\$73.4 million to meet new urgent needs.

- In **Haiti**, we are tripling the number of people we reach with food, from 800,000 to 2.3 million, with an urgent infusion of US\$23 million to our current US\$48 million programme, with targeted food distributions and hot meals in schools, providing nutrition for mothers and young children, and take-home rations for poor urban families at the start of the school year when school fees and uniforms make ends hard to meet.

- In **Burkina Faso** we are reaching 63,000 additional mothers and children with US\$6.9 million in critical food assistance.

- In **Mozambique** we target an additional US\$7 million to a social safety net programme for highly vulnerable populations through school feeding, supplementary feeding, and general feeding for AIDS patients.

- In **Yemen**, we expand school feeding programme for an additional 300,000 boys and girls, spending US\$8 million to restore school feeding for hungry school kids, working with the World Bank and the government.

- In **Cambodia** we will immediately restore the school feeding programme and restart it in October when the 250,000 children return to school.

- In **Senegal** we expand to reach 284,000 children during the lean season with US\$15 million added to our school feeding programme.

- In **Burundi**, we give US\$11.5 million extra to expand school feeding, including in urban areas, and water and land management as part of food-for-work to improve livelihood of returnees and other marginal segments of the population.

- In **Central Africa Republic**, we roll out an additional US\$12.3 million to provide food safety nets to 294,000 people made more vulnerable due to the high prices in lean season, including displaced trying to recover from the crisis, malnourished women, children under five years old, and school-age children from food insecure households.

- In **Sierra Leone**, we support 214,000 children in school feeding and an additional 207,000 through mother child health and nutrition programmes, food-for-work and food-for-training, including for urban youth, with US\$9 million.

- In **Liberia**, we are deploying US\$25 million in additional funds to scale up school feeding to reach 200,000 primary-aged schoolchildren and other safety nets to meet the new face of hunger, including in urban areas. Along with the World Bank, we are also exploring the use of cash and food for employment schemes targeting youth in urban areas.

- In **Ethiopia**, we respond to the urgent needs of 4.5 million people – many of whom are pastoralists and agro-pastoralists and who risk losing their livelihoods altogether due to the drought in the Horn of Africa, high food prices and exhausted coping mechanisms – with US\$193 million. We will also continue to support the government-run safety net programme, which covers more than 7 million people, and work with the World Bank to support the design and implementation of a safety net programme specifically addressing the needs of urban populations.

- In **Kenya**, we are restoring rations to school children that were being cut due to soaring food and fuel prices, and supporting people affected by drought and recent political unrest, with an infusion of US\$85 million. A new operation will cater to the needs of displaced persons and an increasing number of vulnerable people in the arid and semi-arid areas of north and north-eastern Kenya.

- In **Somalia**, we are more than doubling the number of people assisted to 2.6 million, to help them deal with the devastating effects of drought in the Horn of Africa, compounded by hyper-inflation, and continued conflict, with US\$163 million to scale up interventions to confront the new vulnerabilities.

These immediate actions we are taking provide the space needed to respond to medium and long-term challenges facing the most vulnerable people. We will send in our country directors to discuss with your governments current programme status and new needs arising. And we must work together on implementing the plan of action, as outlined by the Secretary-General, Robert Zoellick, Mr Diouf and others.

First, we must avoid breaks in the humanitarian pipeline. We now have almost half of what we need to meet our voluntary funded programme of work for 2008; some further US\$2.5 billion in voluntary funding for this year is needed.

And we estimate that in the next 18 months, another US\$2 billion will be needed to meet the new needs as a result of the impact of high food and fuel prices on vulnerable populations.

Second, we will work with governments to assess the increasing needs and vulnerability at the local and household level.

Third, we will work with governments to scale-up safety net programmes, such as school feeding, mother-child health and nutrition programs, and food-for-work.

Fourth, we will strengthen the use of our local purchasing power where last year we spent 80 percent of our cash for food purchases totalling more than US\$600 million in developing countries.

Through our local purchase programme we also aim to increase not only the quantity but the quality of food through fortification of locally purchased food with basic micronutrients to help tackle malnutrition.

Fifth, in an effort to address the medium to long-term responses, the world must invest in agriculture, including small-holder agriculture, today so we have enough food tomorrow. FAO estimates that US\$1.7 billion is needed urgently for agriculture inputs like seeds and fertilisers, which have been priced out of the reach of poor farmers. IFAD is seeking \$1.2 billion in regular replenishment contributions to expand its support for poor rural people to raise their productivity, and increase their food security and incomes. African Union has shown great leadership, through CAADP, in calling for 10 percent of national budgets to be allocated to agriculture. I urge the international community to support these efforts.

Sixth, we call on all governments to ensure access to purchases of food for humanitarian purposes, and exempt these purchases from export restrictions, and to permit unhindered and safe movement of humanitarian food within and across borders. We also urge all governments to ensure adequate global humanitarian food reserves.

Excellencies,

More than thirty years ago, the world was gathered in Rome for a discussion similar to the one we are having today. At the 1974 World Food Conference in Rome, Henry Kissinger gave what he considered one of the most important speeches of his career. In response to that food crisis, he set the bold objective that, “within the decade no child will go to bed hungry, that no family will fear for its next day’s bread, and that no human being’s future and capacities will be stunted by malnutrition.”

He called upon the world to act urgently, saying: "No social system, ideology or principle of justice can tolerate a world in which the spiritual and physical potential of hundreds of millions is stunted from elemental hunger or inadequate nutrition. National pride or regional suspicions lose any moral or practical justification if they prevent us from overcoming this scourge.

"In short, we are convinced the world faces a challenge new in its severity, its pervasiveness, and its global dimension.....Let us agree that the scale and severity of the task require a collaborative effort unprecedented in history.

"And let us make global cooperation in food a model for our response to other challenges of an interdependent world – energy, inflation, population, protection of the environment."

A number of countries have been on track to reach the Millennium Development Goal on hunger and will, by 2015, if we stand with them – Brazil, Chile, Ghana, Vietnam and others. We must stay the course. Many countries are leading the revolution against hunger and poverty. Many countries are doing the right things. We must stand by their side.

I am an optimist. My ancestors were from Ireland and left during the famine and yet just two generations later we have left an economy of famine to one of prosperity. It can be done.

In meeting the challenges I have outlined here, what we need, above all, is good will and good people. Today I am reassured the global community has both of these things in abundance. Let today mark the moment of hope, momentum and global action.