

**Remarks by WFP Executive Director Ms. Ertharin Cousin at the UNHCR 65<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee's High Level Meeting on Enhancing International Cooperation, Solidarity, Local Capacities and Humanitarian Action for Refugees in Africa**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates.

Allow me to thank my colleague and friend, the High Commissioner, and previous speakers, for providing an overview of the evolving challenges, extreme vulnerability and suffering endured by refugees throughout Africa. And also for mobilizing us here to rethink how we can, together, effectively address these problems.

Ladies and gentlemen, the truth is—despite our best efforts—millions of women and men have spent decades in limbo; children—and now even grandchildren—have been born into limbo. For many, in places such as Dadaab Refugee camp, hostile homelands with limited opportunities may offer limited hope of return. The reality, as you have heard this morning, is that every refugee crisis is also and always a food and nutrition crisis.

Working closely with UNHCR, the World Food Programme provides food assistance to some 3 million persons of concern, in 25 countries across Africa. And these numbers are increasing, as a result of growing levels of conflict and violence—creating new displacements. In the Central African Republic and DRC, hundreds of thousands of people are newly displaced. And in less than a year, almost half a million refugees fled South Sudan, crossing into Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan. Many camps closed after South Sudan's independence are again receiving new arrivals of women and children.

The level of acute malnutrition experienced by South Sudanese refugees is alarming. In Kenya and Ethiopia, rates of global acute malnutrition in children under five years of age already exceed the

critical international threshold of 15 percent, indicating we have a very serious crisis.

We must warn the Executive Committee, meeting both the needs of new refugee populations and refugees in protracted situations is increasingly challenging. We face critical breaks. In Chad, Cameroon and Liberia we already cut rations. In Kenya, where we reach over half-a-million refugees, there is literally no food for December. And in Ethiopia, by December, operations reaching some 630,000 refugees will experience critical shortfalls. To keep all of our refugee operations going in Africa, we need almost \$15 million per month, every month, until the end of the year.

The impact of any ration cut—or indeed suspension—is severe, particularly on the most vulnerable. Refugee families go to considerable lengths to ensure they can survive, but at what cost. If our role is to be more than ‘simply administering human misery,’<sup>1</sup> it is clear, we must find new ways to progress durable solutions, reduce the burden, and enhance solidarity.

Yes, it is our duty to galvanise innovation and new ways of providing assistance, not simply because of increased efficiency but because of the improvements in well-being they offer. Addressing humanitarian needs does not mean ignoring people’s futures. Even when addressing refugee hunger and nutrition challenges we must embrace and implement a twin-track approach.

In practical terms, it means we must shift more and more of our focus toward activities, which promote self-reliance, through income-generation, agriculture or even Food for Work activities. We already started piloting these approaches in Chad and Uganda.

We welcome and of course support UNHCR’s “*Policy on Alternatives to Camps*” and its new global strategy for livelihoods. With broader support from governments and donors, we can harness

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR’s High Commissioner Gerrit van Heuven Goedhart, made this statement when referring to protracted refugee camps from World War Two.

the full scale of our food assistance programs to leverage people's own potential for self-reliance. And we can establish asset-building programs, stabilizing—and even restoring—environments for the benefit of both refugee and host populations.

For example, cash and voucher programs offer the possibility of not only reducing the burden on host communities, but also strengthening solidarity with refugee populations. Across Africa, many of our refugee operations are developing some form of market access program, and the initial learning is very positive.

Take the example of Burundi, where the introduction of a voucher program demonstrated improved food consumption for refugees and lowered delivery costs. However, it did more. It also delivered significant protection benefits: improved dignity, greater household and social cohesion, and increased economic benefits for the local community. These programs demonstrate that positive results outweigh the fears of negative consequences.

We ask all host governments and donors to support our efforts to introduce new innovative programs, benefitting not only refugees but also local host economies. We need governments to consider policies supporting refugees' self-reliance, including access to land and opportunities to participate as citizens, particularly the opportunity to seek employment.

Finally, distinguished delegates, we urge the international community to acknowledge that addressing growing humanitarian needs requires additional resources. We cannot redirect funds from one emergency at the expense of another. Because although, in many cases, conflict is the primary cause of flight, we must acknowledge climate change, food crisis and even today health crisis now propagate forced migration.

Mitigating these causes—helps prevent future episodes of displacement and remove potential obstacles preventing large-scale return.

Ladies and gentlemen, the current unprecedented level of crisis requires us all to do more with less. It requires solidarity and burden sharing. Innovation must be our new norm. Let us take the opportunity to be administrators of human potential, by modernizing our approach, rethinking our architecture and providing refugees with the support they need and the support they deserve.

I dream of a day when every child grows up in a home, in his or her own state, a home of her choice, where she is food secure, fearing not hunger, fearing not want. Yes we must dream big, because as President Johnson-Sirleaf says: if our dreams do not frighten us, we are not dreaming big enough.

Thank You.