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Introduction

In January I was on a mission to Southern Africa and visited with a 70 year old Zambian woman far out in the countryside. She was rather frail and losing her sight, but she was still pretty clearly in charge of her household. What struck me most was her overwhelming exhaustion. The reason for it was clear enough -- all around the hut where she lived there were children. I couldn't count them all, but there were far more than a dozen. They were her grandchildren, her nieces and nephews, the children of neighbors -- all of them orphaned by AIDS.

A generation has been lost to AIDS in that Zambian village and a worn and aging woman left alone with all those many children. That Zambian grandmother and her children are among 15 million people in southern Africa living on the brink of starvation. They are at the epicenter of a potential famine, largely helpless to do much about it.

Thanks to the tremendous generosity of the American people and the dedication of people like Andrew Natsios and his team at USAID, a huge international effort is holding famine at bay in southern Africa -- at least for now. That is the good news. President Bush recently announced a \$200 million commitment to a famine fund for the Fiscal Year 2004 budget and there are plans to work with other members of the G8 on an initiative against famine when France hosts the G8 this summer. Meanwhile, the EU and its member states have also sent a signal, boosting contributions to WFP for food aid by \$150 million last year. That is more good news. Finally, this Congress has had the compassion to vote a supplemental appropriation for \$275 million to help aid agencies cope with food crises stretching through much of the African continent. That is also very good news. The bad news is that all this will not be enough.

1. The Greatest Threat to Life

We are losing the battle against hunger. Not only are we losing the battle in emergencies like those in Afghanistan, North Korea and Africa where we often lack the funds needed, we are losing the battle against the chronic hunger that bedevils the lives of hundreds of millions of families who are not the victims of war or natural disasters.

Last year WHO released a report ranking the greatest threats to health and life. Was the leading threat heart disease, cancer or AIDS? No, the greatest threat to life remains what it was a hundred years ago, five hundred years ago, a thousand years ago -- it is hunger.

The problem is not that trade, investment, and economic aid are not producing results. They are. In the 1990s, poverty was reduced by 20 percent world wide, but hunger -- its most extreme manifestation -- was cut by barely 5 percent. In fact, if you exclude China from the data the number of hungry people actually rose by more than 50 million across the developing world.

I cannot say the resurgence of hunger has received much attention from the media. Perhaps that is because there is such a long history of progress. We have always assumed that hunger was declining and would continue to do so. But, in fact, we are losing the battle against hunger. No agency is more aware of that than the World Food Program, as we struggle to bring food aid to the growing number of families living on the brink of starvation.

2. A Rising Tide of Food Crises

Let me try to put the current humanitarian crises in context and, at the same time, tell you a bit about the World Food Program's role in addressing hunger.

Up to the early 1990s, WFP used most of its food aid in food for work, nutrition and education projects. But in recent years we have been forced to become an ambulance service for the starving. Nearly 80

percent of our work is now emergency driven -- reaching out to Afghan families suffering the effects of drought and decades of war, malnourished infants and children of North Korea, and families driven from their homes by violence in Chechnya, southern Sudan and Colombia. Today, WFP has few resources for nutrition and school feeding to help bring the number of chronically hungry people down from 800 million -- we are barely funding our emergency operations and, I am afraid, the worst is yet to come.

The number of food emergencies is skyrocketing. In the first half of the 1990s, WFP conducted 18 emergency food needs assessments per year with FAO, in the second half the number nearly doubled to 33. The number of victims of natural disasters has tripled compared to the 1960s, averaging 136 million a year and the poorest among them need food assistance. This year WFP faces the daunting task of finding \$1.8 billion just to run our operations in Africa -- a sum equal to all the funds we received last year. Never before have we had to contend with potential starvation on the scale we face today.

The sheer intensity of these crises has transformed WFP into the largest humanitarian agency in the world. Few people know that. At the same time, we have quietly become the logistics arm of the United Nations when emergencies strike -- providing air service and communications links for other UN agencies and our NGO partners. At the height of the bombing campaign against the Taliban, we kept 2 000 trucks on the road every day. We brought food to 6 million hungry Afghans who were already reeling from the effects of three years of drought, the oppression of the Taliban, and decades of civil war.

Our annual budget already outstrips the UN in New York. We were the first UN agency to ever get a contribution of more than a billion dollars from a single member state -- the United States. Eight of our ten leading donors have boosted contributions, in part because we have one of the lowest overhead rates you can find. Yet with all this generosity, we are falling behind.

For lack of funds, WFP is now engaged in an exercise in triage among those threatened by starvation. Who will we feed? Who will we leave hungry? In North Korea we have had to cut off rations for 3 million women, children and the elderly. In Afghanistan we have delayed and cut rations. Refugee camps in Kenya and Uganda are always teetering at the edge, about to run out of food for people who simply cannot help themselves. And now, a task that could dwarf all our earlier relief operations may well await us in Iraq if no political solution is found to the current impasse.

3. Why are We Seeing More Food Emergencies?

What is driving the explosion in food emergencies? Basically, there are four immediate triggers for large-scale food emergencies. Most recent crises have been fueled by a combination of these factors:

- Failing economic policies
- Political and ethnic violence
- AIDS and
- A sharp rise in natural disasters

I. Failing economic policies -- the principal example here is the DPRK and, given the heightened political interest, we are submitting a more detailed statement to the committee on the situation there, especially with regard to WFP's repeated requests over 8 years to the Government to allow us to strengthen monitoring to meet our normal operational standards.

The severe contraction of the industrial base in North Korea after the fall of the Soviet Union, the lack of structural reform and cyclical drought and flooding have combined to create major food shortages and claimed enormous numbers of lives. Estimates of the loss of life from hunger range from several hundred thousand up to two million. We simply do not know for sure. This year the DPRK had relatively benign

weather and was still 1 million metric tons short of needs. The country simply lacks the arable land and technology to be self-sufficient even under ideal conditions. The only way out is structural reforms that will revive the industrial sector where two-thirds of North Koreans work so the country can earn foreign exchange to import food commercially.

There is one bright spot. The nutrition survey by UNICEF, WFP and the Government of North Korea released last week showed some marked improvement in nutritional indicators for children, but they are still alarming by WHO standards and a breakdown in food deliveries could mean we lose the ground we have gained. Andrew Natsios is well known as an expert on North Korea and can give you more guidance on food issues there.

WFP is also working, under more promising conditions, in some of the ex-CIS states, such as Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, which are struggling with the transition from centrally planned to market economies. Our goal is to help maintain social safety nets as these countries go through the often painful transition process.

Failed economic policies have also contributed to a slowdown in southern Africa, with the most dramatic troubles now surfacing in Zimbabwe. I would like to go into a bit of detail about Zimbabwe because it is the greatest source of alarm in the region.

Ironically, Zimbabwe has been a traditionally strong food exporter. In the 1980s WFP purchased up to a half million tons of food a year there for use in operations in other parts of Africa. But politics, bureaucracy and bad economics have conspired to damage food output and, worse yet, slow down the aid response.

It is not our place to judge the merits of land redistribution in Zimbabwe or elsewhere. But the scheme now operating in Zimbabwe is damaging. Thousands of productive farms have been put out of commission and food output will be a mere 40 percent of normal levels this year. This scheme along with restrictions on private sector food marketing and a monopoly on food imports by the Government's Grain Marketing Board are turning a drought that might have been managed into a humanitarian nightmare. More than half of Zimbabwe's 12 million people are now living with the threat of starvation.

Nationwide shortages of basic commodities and fuel, high parallel market prices and runaway inflation are a formula for disaster. Levels of malnutrition are worsening and we are seeing hunger related diseases such as pellagra. Children have dropped out of schools and desperate families in rural Zimbabwe have resorted to eating both wild fruits and tubers -- some poisonous -- just to survive. Despite pressure from UN agencies, the Government has declined permission for us to conduct nutritional surveys that would help target what resources we have to the hardest hit areas.

There have been widespread accusations of food being withheld from opposition groups and news reports make it clear that food is seen as a weapon in domestic politics. Let me assure you that as far as the food aid we distribute with our NGO partners is concerned, we have a zero tolerance policy on political interference. We have suspended local distributions twice over the issue. But the simple fact is that we do not control all the food -- far from it. Our goal is to provide roughly a third of what is needed -- about 800,000 tons, while the Government and private traders are to provide the rest. Thus far, none of us is reaching the target.

II. The second trigger for food crises is political and ethnic violence -- northern Uganda, Chechnya, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are some leading examples.

Violence and hunger go hand in hand now in West Africa. Liberia is now the epicenter of a conflict that engulfs the whole region and will impede economic recovery in Guinea and Sierra Leone. Significant new influxes of Liberian refugees have been recorded in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire and 135 000 people are displaced within Liberia itself. The ongoing civil unrest in Cote d'Ivoire has displaced 180 000

people and that figure may go higher. Further delay in resolving the underlying political problems there could lead to another major food crisis in Africa.

Some of these politically-driven crises have resolved themselves quickly, at least from a food aid perspective. The massive intervention WFP made in Kosovo was in response to ethnic violence. With the revival of agriculture in the region, we were able to shut down our feeding operation relatively quickly. We also intervened in East Timor and there too we have been able to move on. An end to violence is not, however, always a sign that we can phase out. In Angola our caseload has gone up by more than a half million as we have access to areas we could never reach before and we have begun to distribute food to help families return home and feed soldiers as they demobilize.

There are unfortunately some genuinely intractable conflicts like the civil war in the south of Sudan that wax and wane but never seem to go away. There are also a number of refugee feeding operations, such as those in the Western Sahara and Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, that have dragged on for more than a decade. The civil war in Colombia shows no signs of ending and the pervasive insecurity has brought some of the highest food delivery costs anywhere in the world.

In much of Africa and in Afghanistan we are struggling to cope with the legacy of war. Many airstrips in Angola, for example, are so heavily mined they are useless for food aid deliveries. Rural bridges and roads have not been maintained in years. Ports have deteriorated. Many demobilizing soldiers are bringing AIDS and other disease back to their native villages after prolonged separation from their families.

III. AIDS -- We all know AIDS is a health disaster of epic proportions. There is far less appreciation of the fact that in many countries it has become a major cause of hunger both for its victims and their communities. As the disease affects people in their most productive years, the burden of producing food falls on the elderly and children. Since 1985, more than 7 million agricultural workers have died of AIDS in 25 African countries.

Peter Piot, who heads UNAIDS, has said that in many poor communities he has visited the very first thing AIDS victims ask for is not medicine, not money - it is food for their families, food for their hungry children. For those AIDS victims lucky enough to receive medical treatment, nutrition is critical. For the HIV positive, good nutrition is crucial in helping them ward off opportunistic infections and stay productive as long as possible. Unfortunately, donors have not yet recognized that fact fully and WFP certainly is struggling to get resources for the operations we have begun for AIDS victims, their families and orphans. We are working with the Secretary General and the most affected countries on this issue and on getting access to the Global AIDS Fund for more nutrition interventions. We would certainly welcome active support from the United States.

In my entire life I do not believe I have ever seen anything as disturbing as the impact that AIDS is now having in southern Africa. In modern times, we have never before seen a disease with the capacity to cause large scale social breakdown, to simply destroy societies. HIV infection is aggravating the famine in southern Africa and literally decimating the rural labor force. Four out of 5 African farmers are women, and women now have higher infection rates -- among young people, women account for nearly two out of three new cases.

The number of AIDS orphans in sub-Saharan Africa is staggering -- over 11 million and rising. In some of the villages I visited as the Secretary General's Special Envoy for the crisis in southern Africa, fields lay unattended with no one to work them. There are many thousands of families without parents -- one in ten in Malawi. Worse yet, what we see today is only the tip of the iceberg as death rates will not peak until 2007-2009.

The longer-term impact of AIDS will have a staggering effect on everything from food security to overall political and social stability. The ranks of government workers are decimated. A UN colleague relates how a ten-person delegation from the European Union was met by the Minister of Agriculture of one African country. Strangely, the Minister arrived at the meeting alone bluntly explaining that all his senior staff was either ill or had already died from AIDS. The President of Zambia told me his country was losing 2 000 teachers a year, while only training 1000 replacements. You could see in the faces of many government officials a horrible resignation, a sense of impending collapse.

IV. And finally -- and this is really the largest threat we face -- there is the weather. Yes, the weather. The scale of WFP's activities has tracked closely with the occurrence of natural disasters brought on by abnormal weather phenomena. And we are seeing those phenomena on a scale no one has ever imagined. In the last few years, we delivered emergency food aid in response to the largest floods in China in a century and to drought victims in over a dozen countries stretching from southern Sudan to Pakistan. The past two years have brought the highest number of weather-related disasters over the decade.

One-sixth of the main harvest in Ethiopia has been lost to drought, six million people are already in need and that figure could more than double after the first of the year. WFP has appealed for 80 million dollars worth of food aid for the first quarter of 2003, about half the total needed. The worst-case scenario will require two million tons of food aid at a cost of 700 million dollars. Ethiopia has suffered from cyclical droughts for years and has not managed to build up a capacity to withstand them. As is the case in much of Africa, state control of agriculture has failed to provide the food output needed with high population growth rates and Ethiopia -- a net food exporter in the 1960s -- is now chronically dependent on food aid.

Nearly 60 percent of the population of Eritrea - more than 2 million people -- have also been hit hard by drought and will need food aid this year. The effects of recent war with Ethiopia remain -- thousands of soldiers are yet to demobilize and 1 million people in major grain producing areas were dislocated.

There have been comparisons in the media of the situation today with the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85 and the large drought that struck southern Africa in 1992. There are critical differences -- some positive, some negative. First, early warning systems have functioned well -- the affected governments and donors have known for months of the impending food crises. In Ethiopia and Eritrea, we expect to profit from the end of hostilities between those countries. Both faced drought just two years ago when relief operations were held up by fighting and the fact that war was draining a million dollars a day from their national treasuries. While the scale of the drought in the Horn of Africa may eventually eclipse what we are confronting further south, the political climate and the level of organization for coping with such emergencies, especially in Ethiopia, will make the relief effort far more effective.

4. Why Are we Losing Ground to Hunger?

Why are we losing ground to hunger? Well, part of the answer lies in this massive overload from emergencies - - an overload I am convinced may ebb now and then but will definitely not go away. Donors -- including the United States -- did not anticipate anything like this developing in the 1990s and quite naturally they tried to keep a cap on historic funding levels for food aid.

One result is that funding for non-emergency food aid targeting pregnant and nursing women, infants and children in the most vulnerable areas is simply drying up. WFP's donors want to keep images of dying women and children off of our television screens, but the chronically hungry are suffering neglect. A stunted child in Kabul covered by an emergency operation stands a far better chance of being fed than an equally hungry child across the border in Pakistan.

So there is much more that could be done with a major infusion of funding for food aid. But hunger today has its roots in politics and it demands political solutions. There are really no obstacles -- other than lack

of political will -- that would prevent us from ending hunger tomorrow. There is more than enough food worldwide, even developing countries collectively have had enough food for every man, woman and child for decades. But instead of ending hunger, wealthy and poor countries alike have unwittingly adopted political policies that make that goal unattainable. There is not enough donor money now to feed those starving today, and trade and economic policies -- national and international -- make it unlikely all will be fed in the future.

I do not, by any means, intend to paint a picture that is hopeless. People have asked me if mass starvation in Africa is inevitable. In fact, there has not been a major famine in Africa since the massive loss of life under the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s. The international community has successfully countered potential famines now for nearly two decades. I believe that USAID can take a lot of credit for this as it has helped fund increasingly sophisticated early warnings systems and paid attention to the critical issue of helping poor families maintain their assets through crises so they are not even more vulnerable when the next drought, flood or conflict arrives.

USAID, the World Bank and UNDP have also begun to address the really thorny issues of good governance, corruption and interference with commercial markets. It was gratifying to see that the additional US assistance announced by President Bush in Monterrey will reward those governments who adopt pro-market policies and show a real commitment to devoting their own resources -- however limited -- to sectors like education and health.

5. Looking Ahead

So we are beginning to see a more political approach to aid programs addressing hunger and poverty. That is a welcome. But if we want to succeed any time soon, we will need to take some costly steps and tackle some issues we might well want to avoid.

First, we must have stronger and more consistent funding for humanitarian aid. While WFP funding has risen, global food aid has not. In fact, during the last three years it has actually dropped by a third from 15 million to 10 million metric tons (1999-2002). Emergency food aid needs are up and food aid is down. More funds are essential. All the major donors need to make a political commitment to a food aid system that works and is not dangerously reliant on surpluses, last minute appeals or a single donor.

Second, countries must invest more in agriculture. With hunger far from solved in the developing world, more donor aid needs to be targeted on agriculture. Yet investments continue to drop. In 1988, Official Development Assistance for agriculture was roughly \$14 billion, but it was barely \$8 billion in 1999. That is hardly logical when the number of hungry is on the rise in so many countries. A bright point here is that some donors are beginning to turn that situation around -- the United Kingdom, for example, has boosted its aid for agriculture five-fold and USAID raised its aid by 38 percent last year.

Third, we must free up the private sector. What so many food insecure countries have in common are inappropriate restrictions on private enterprise in agriculture. They fail to acknowledge what the introduction of market measures has done for agriculture in other developing countries. According to my colleagues at UNDP, the largest mass movement of people out of poverty in history took place in China in the mid 1980s when the Government introduced a market system in the food sector. Roughly 125 million people rose from the ranks of the poor. Yet so many countries where WFP works still impose inflexible, state controlled economics on food production.

Fourth, we need to invest more in nutrition, educational and school feeding programs in the developing world, especially targeted on girls. Seven out of 10 of the hungry worldwide are female. In Africa, donors need to move in aggressively to support NEPAD -- a home grown effort targeted at, among other things, bringing 40 million African children into school using school feeding and other mechanisms that support education.

There is no point in investing in new ports, roads, and schools, if we are not investing in sound nutrition for the children who will one day use them. One hundred and twenty million children are already stunted from malnutrition. They cannot wait for good governance, sound investment and even the wisest of aid projects to reach their villages and towns. Their lives are not on hold. They are hungry now and that hunger is crippling them and robbing them of a future.

We look especially to the US here -- former Senators McGovern and Dole have been major advocates of school feeding and the Bush Administration has made the Global School Feeding legislation permanent. But the funding falls so incredibly far short of needs. US domestic nutrition programs are budgeted to receive \$42 billion in funding in FY 2004 -- so far funding for Global School Feeding is set at \$50 million. Is that in the long term interest of the United States? Are we not better off having well nourished children in schools learning in Afghanistan, Central America and Africa?

Finally, we need a new global trade environment. As the Secretary General has noted, we need a trading system that encourages African and other developing country farmers to produce and export. They simply cannot compete with developed country subsidies that now amount to nearly a \$1 billion a day and allow food to flow into poorer countries making private investments in agriculture unprofitable. I am from the Midwest and am an ardent believer in support for America's farmers, but we must negotiate a system -- especially with Europe and Japan which have far higher farm subsidies -- that will not stifle farmers in poor countries. Food aid is inherently a short-term solution: the people of the developing world must be given the conditions and tools they need to feed themselves.

Separating humanitarian aid from political decision-making has not worked in the past. It will not work in the future. People are hungry because governments have made the wrong political decisions. In the end, hunger is a political creation and we must use political means to end it.