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**Press Release
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**WEATHER FACTORS, HEALTH ISSUES, CIVIL STRIFE, ECONOMIC
POLICIES**

**WORSEN AFRICA'S FOOD CRISIS, SECURITY COUNCIL IS
TOLD**

**40 Million People at Risk of Starvation, Says Head of World Food
Programme;
More Consistent Humanitarian Funding, Investment in Agriculture Urgently
Needed**

Africa was experiencing severe problems of food security because of a combination of difficult weather situations and health factors (dramatically complicated by HIV/AIDS), as well as civil strife and issues related to governance and economic policy, the Security Council was told this afternoon, as it considered Africa's food crisis as a threat to peace and security.

Briefing the Council, the Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), James Morris, said about 60 per cent of the organization's work took place in Africa, as southern Africa, the Horn of Africa, western Africa and the Sahel were experiencing severe problems. There were around 40 million people at risk of starvation on the continent. The Programme's budget for Africa was about \$1.4 billion, of which \$700 million had been raised.

In order to make progress, he said, there was a need for a stronger consistent funding for humanitarian aid. The amount of food aid had decreased by 25 per cent, and 60 per cent of that food aid came from the United States. More investment in agriculture was needed, and the private sector must be allowed to function. There was a need for more investment

in nutrition and in the school-feeding programme. There were 300 million hungry children, half of whom did not go to school. A meal a day, at a yearly cost of \$30, would encourage parents to send a child to school.

Reacting to the Executive Director's comments, speakers stressed the need for efforts by the international community to address the crisis, since there was a strong link between security and food security. They also underlined the importance for governments to prioritize agricultural policy.

The representative of the United States said much of the blame for famine fell on government policies. Boosting agricultural productivity was essential and technology could help in Africa. However, to avert disaster, adequate levels of assistance must be provided immediately. As United States food aid would have to be reduced this year, because of drought and other domestic factors, he urged other donors to help in the coming food crises in Africa.

He expressed concern that controversies over biotechnology could prevent timely distribution of maize. Whole-kernel biotech maize had not been shown to pose a threat to the food supply. In particular, Zimbabwe's restrictions on the import of such corn could worsen a situation already made bad by other misguided government policies. Food should not be used as a weapon, he said, and he urged the Council to prevent such an occurrence in southern Africa.

Bulgaria's representative said that in order to prevent recurrence of the present crises, the international community must use modern information technologies in early warning systems. There was also a need for better synergy in emergency intervention and follow-up for sustainable development.

The representative of Guinea stressed that humanitarian assistance must have economic recovery as its ultimate goal, halving the number of starving people by the year 2015 as per the Millennium Goals of the United Nations.

The representatives of the United Kingdom, Mauritius, Singapore, Ireland, Cameroon, Syria and the Russian Federation also spoke. The Executive Director spoke again, in response.

The meeting, which began at 3:15 p.m., was adjourned at 5 p.m.

Background

The Security Council met this afternoon to hear a briefing on Africa's food crisis as a threat to peace and security by James Morris, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP).

Briefing by Executive Director of WFP

Briefing the Council, JAMES MORRIS, Executive Director of the World Food Programme, said his organization had fed 80 million people. Today, contrary to the past, its work was 80 per cent geared towards responding to emergencies. He said the challenge in that was to respond in such a way that some permanent advantage was accrued to recipients, so that education, health, nutrition and livelihood and food security were enhanced.

About 60 per cent of its work took place in Africa, in areas which were experiencing severe problems. The work was complicated by such factors as difficult weather situations, health issues (dramatically by HIV/AIDS) and situations of civil strife resulting in refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). There were also issues related to governance and economic policy.

He said there were 14.5 million people in southern Africa at risk of starvation, half of them in Zimbabwe, because of serious weather problems, complicated by HIV/AIDS. There were 11 million AIDS orphans in sub-Saharan Africa. There were also tough issues of governance and macroeconomic policies. For situations like that to be addressed, there was a need to open up economies and strengthen the role of free markets. Most importantly, substantial investment in agricultural infrastructure was needed.

He said the second area of concern was the greater Horn of Africa, including the Sudan. The region had had no spring rains, and the fall rains had arrived late, resulting in a crop which was the equivalent of only 20 per cent of last year's. In the worst-case scenario, as many as 50 million people would be at risk. In addition, the WFP was feeding 2.9 million people in the Sudan, mostly refugees and IDPs. The Western Sahel had had serious drought problems and 700,000 people could be at risk. In West Africa, another million people were at risk because of civic strife, refugees and IDPs. There were, therefore, around 40 million people at risk of starvation in Africa. The Programme's budget for Africa was about \$1.4 billion, of which \$700 million had been raised.

In order to make progress, he said, there was a need for a stronger consistent funding for humanitarian aid. The amount of food aid had decreased by 25 per cent, and 60 per cent of that food aid came from the United States, which was not a healthy situation. More investment in

agriculture was needed. The private sector must be allowed to function. There was a need for more investment in nutrition and in the school-feeding programme. There were 300 million hungry children, half of whom did not go to school. A meal would encourage parents to send a child to school; the impact of feeding a school child for \$30 a year could dramatically change a child's life.

He commented on the situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, where the WFP had been feeding 6.4 million people there a year. Commitments for food aid there had dropped dramatically, since major supporters had not made commitments. The WFP had 110 employees there, and they were the presence of the United Nations. He was concerned that on 1 April there would not be resources for the Programme to continue its work there, and thus there would not be a United Nations presence.

Mr. Morris said the WFP focused on the most vulnerable people in society, targeting women, children and the elderly. A child born to a healthy mother and with good nutrition for the first two years had a good chance to have its brain well developed. A child without those benefits would probably develop severe brain damage. The issues in Africa were huge, with an enormous number of children not going to school. Among other things, education would be the only opportunity for many to learn about AIDS and ways to avoid it.

Statements

ADAM THOMSON (United Kingdom) thanked the WFP for its efforts, in light of the high percentage of its budget that was consumed by emergency operations. He hoped that such a trend could be reversed. There was a strong link between security and food security, he said. Food insecurity was a symptom of poverty, and his country's aid efforts were conducted in recognition of that fact and other linkages. Such linkages needed to be addressed consistently in the Council.

He asked Mr. Morris whether the WFP was confident that those in need of food aid were receiving it and whether the Programme was confident in its monitoring mechanisms. He asked how conflicts over food could be minimized in the areas in which the WFP was working, and what was the extent to which food insecurity was worsened by drought and by government policy.

JAGDISH KOONJUL (Mauritius) said that it was indeed important for governments to prioritize agricultural policy. He spoke of the high degree of food insecurity in the southern African region, and how it would be exacerbated by coming weather phenomena. Crop production,

he said, could drop even lower in southern Africa and the food crisis could increase next year.

He asked about the WFP's strategies in light of that situation, as well as the WFP's position on genetically modified foods and their potential risk on biological diversity. He urged donors to increase their pledges for the WFP, and to consider avoiding genetically modified food.

CHRISTINE LEE (Singapore) said that food security had many causes, some of which were beyond human control, but some of which could be affected by policy. She asked whether some WFP programmes could be made self-sustainable and reduce the number of chronic emergencies. She also asked for comments on the paradox of high-world productivity of food coinciding with high-food insecurity.

RICHARD WILLIAMSON (United States) said that much of the blame for famine fell on government policies. Boosting agricultural productivity was essential and technology could help in Africa. However, to avert disaster, adequate levels of assistance must be provided immediately. The United States Government had been providing high levels of such assistance, along with assistance in regional management and logistics, and other non-food aid.

The availability of United States aid, he said, would have to be reduced this year because of drought and other domestic factors in the country. He urged other donors to help in the coming food crises in Africa.

The United States, he said, was also concerned that controversies over biotechnology could prevent timely distribution of maize. Whole-kernel biotech maize was as wholesome as any supplied in the past, and had not been shown to pose a threat to the food supply. It was the same maize as that which was eaten in the United States. In particular, Zimbabwe's restrictions on the import of such corn could worsen a situation already made bad by other misguided government policies.

He said food should not be used as a weapon, and he urged the Council to prevent such an occurrence in southern Africa. He wished to ask the WFP representative what role food-import policy and government corruption played, among other factors, in the threat of famine.

GERARD CORR (Ireland) said the humanitarian situation was of the utmost gravity. The central issue at stake was political commitment, particularly by developed countries. The long-term work of the WFP had suffered because of a lack of resources. Support and donor contributions

were of the utmost importance. The European Union had substantially increased its funding to food security in Africa.

He asked about the role of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the private sector in addressing the problem. Noting that low soil fertility and degraded land had had an enormous impact, he said there seemed to be a need for long-term support in tackling soil degradation. He also asked what could be done by the WFP to encourage donors to return to long-term agricultural development which had dropped dramatically. He finally asked what the international community could do within the next few weeks about the problem of seed planting for next year's crops.

ZLATI G. KATZARSKI (Bulgaria) said the crisis was unprecedented and the international community needed to make special efforts to provide massive support to end the situation and prevent it from becoming catastrophic. The Council must also address the long term and learn from past lessons. The international community must use modern information technologies in early warning systems to prevent recurrence in the future. There was a need for better synergy in emergency intervention and follow-up for sustainable development. Success of the WFP mission depended on getting food aid to the most vulnerable people, furthest away from the food distribution centres. Recipient States, therefore, had a responsibility to coordinate, and to promote reforms in agriculture and education. He asked about cooperation between the WFP and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

IYA TIDJANI (Cameroon) said the presentation of Mr. Morris portrayed well the acute nature of the famine crisis in Africa, as well as the diversity of its causes. His country hosted two WFP offices, and he was in a position to say that civil disorder was an obvious cause of food insecurity. Agricultural production must be encouraged, and he commended the WFP on its efforts to take cultural practices into account in that regard.

He asked what could be done to reduce the dependency on a small number of donors. He congratulated Mr. Morris and his team for stimulating the current debate, and he appealed to all donors to further diversify sources of funding.

MAMADY TRAORE (Guinea) said the magnitude of food crises in Africa meant that an immediate, strong response was needed by the international community. He reiterated his country's commitment to find a more consistent approach in organizing humanitarian assistance. Such assistance must have economic concern as its ultimate goal, halving the number of starving people by the year 2015 as per the Millennium Goals.

For those purposes, he said, aid was essential, as well as attention to the safety of humanitarian workers.

He asked what the most effective approach was for the provision of food aid in Africa, and what the role of women should be in that effort. He also asked how it could be made possible to move from emergency food aid towards real development for the affected people.

MILAD ATIEH (Syria) said the 25 per cent reduction in financing was a matter of great concern. He agreed that encouragement of investment in agriculture could provide a minimum degree of food security in affected countries. There should also be investment in school-feeding programmes, because creating a healthy generation of children meant a better future, where better economic and political development could be achieved, especially in countries that suffered from occupation and civil war. What were the policies of the WFP in the field of school feeding in Africa? Were there awareness programmes so that children would not resort to illegal activities?

EVGENY A. STANISLAVOV (Russian Federation) said the current situation required an immediate reaction by the international community. His country continued to provide humanitarian assistance to African countries and was considering the provision of assistance through the WFP. The challenge was multifaceted and would also require efforts to resolve conflicts and establish sustainable development. He asked how, in addition to providing food assistance, the WFP could help resolve those key problems of Africa. It was important to coordinate international assistance, and the Economic and Social Council could play a significant role in that.

Responding to the statements, Mr. MORRIS, Executive Director of the World Food Programme, said that he would reply in writing to all questions asked. In the meantime, he would respond briefly to points raised by Council members.

He said the Programme had elaborate systems in place to monitor whether or not food aid was getting to those who needed it the most. It also coordinated closely with other agencies in that regard.

Regarding government policy in prevention of famine, he said that the principles were similar to those leading to a successful economy. Concerning genetically modified food, he said that was an important topic because that kind of food would increase exponentially in the coming years. Donors were required to approve the safety of food and then such food was subjected to WFP tests and submitted to the receiving countries. No one had yet rejected genetically modified foods, and no solid dangers had yet been established concerning them.

The WFP had confidence in it. Reiterating the magnitude of the food crisis, he said WFP's focus was on keeping people alive through food assistance.

In regard to the paradox of high productivity and high-food insecurity, he said it could be illuminated by the fact that many previous food recipients were now food exporters. African countries needed to work towards such exportable surpluses.

On the question of food-import policies, food distribution policies and corruption, he said those factors clearly influenced food availability in a given country. He said investment in Malawi in conservation technologies had paid off well. Long-term programmes were important, such as those that countered soil degradation. Investments in short-term emergencies could be done in a way that had long-term implications, especially when programmes were aimed at schoolchildren.

He said that in the six countries he was most focused on, the support from donors for critical non-food areas was less than 25 per cent, and opportunities had been missed to avoid further crises. He urged donors to provide resources for seeds and fertilizer to begin planning for the future. Regarding information technology, he outlined what was available from the WFP, and said that early warning systems should be a priority in health, as well as food, issues. In the area of health, he said the WFP worked closely with UNAIDS and had changed the nature of food donations because those who were vulnerable needed more of certain nutrients.

Cameroon, he said, had provided extraordinary leadership for the Programme. Responding to its question about increasing the diversity of donors, he said the Programme was making the case to many countries that had the resources to help but were not yet doing so. He hoped that all countries, however, would contribute, even if the amounts were symbolic.

He agreed that it was important to focus on the safety of humanitarian workers, and to focus as well on the role of women in feeding people. In reaching the Millennium Development Goals of feeding people, the best way was to focus on schoolchildren. Focusing on long-term health issues was also valuable, in conjunction with other United Nations operating agencies.

He ended with a plea for increased support and for Member States to take a long view towards hunger and development. The Millennium Goals were areas where substantial progress could be made, given current resources.

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