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« Intervention, then what? »
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**HUMAN RIGHTS START WITH A GOOD BREAKFAST
IN THE MORNING**

“A hungry man is not a free man” – Adlai E. Stevenson

Once a crisis is over, what should be done so that it does not happen again? But even more... why wait so late? We should address the very first question as well: what should we be doing to prevent a crisis from occurring?

Many solutions have been presented during this conference. But I would like to address a very specific problem – hunger - and offer some solutions or, at least, some food-for-thought on what could be done to eliminate or at least reduce considerably this crucial risk of conflict. Indeed, on the Richter scale of the causes of instability in the world, hunger is the first one.

Why? Because a hungry man is an angry man. A hungry man can steal or kill to get food.

Indeed, hunger kills bodies – 24,000 people everyday, the equivalent of a jumbo jet crashing every half hour – but it also kills the productivity, creativity and the hope of those who survive.

A hungry person is busy all day long looking for food for himself and his family. Lack of economic productivity in poor countries of the world is the root cause of crises. A hungry man has no time to spend on the economic development of his country. This is why at the United Nations World Food Programme we think that human rights start with a good breakfast in the morning and we are convinced, as Adlai Stevenson said, that: “A hungry man is not a free man”.

WFP is the food aid arm of the United Nations whose mission is to eradicate hunger in the world; be it hunger that suddenly afflicts people fleeing war, violence and conflict or the chronic hunger that affects the hungry poor of the world.

Today we have an estimated 800 million hungry people in the world, 800 million people who will go to bed tonight on an empty stomach. One out of seven inhabitants of this planet does not know what it means not to be hungry.

This is a scandal – the worst of our time - because we do produce enough food to feed everyone, men, women and children of the world.

If 800 million people go to bed hungry every night, despite the fact that we produce enough to feed them, it is because they are too poor. They don't have the money to buy this food. Poverty is the root cause of hunger, but, as Noble Prize Amartya Sen says: "Hunger is also a cause of poverty".

WFP tackles hunger in emergencies as well as in development programmes.

WFP intervenes only upon a request from the authorities of a country. But WFP does its own assessment of a situation. It is a prerequisite. If this assessment is denied, WFP does not get involved.

Before bringing in food aid we need to answer basic and important questions: Who need the food aid? Where are the vulnerable victims? (WFP helps the most vulnerable) How can we reach them? What do they need? What do they normally eat? How many are threatened? What are their coping mechanisms? When will they have exhausted them? For how long will they need this food aid? How much will it cost to bring in food, so that we can turn to donors for funds?

WFP contributions are voluntary – for each dollar we want to spend we have to raise it - and this comes essentially from donor countries. The United States is by far the most important donor (60% of WFP's annual budget). WFP is the first UN agency to ever get a contribution of more than a billion dollars from a single member state – the United States. The European Union and Japan are the second and third, UK the fourth and Canada the fifth (Canada has so far contributed an amount of US\$ 86.4 million dollars to WFP operations in Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, southern Africa, Angola, Zambia, Uganda, Western Africa, Sahel countries, North Korea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Northern Caucasus, Central America, Afghanistan, Iraq and Tajikistan).

The WFP budget in 2002 was US\$ 1.8 billion and we provided 3.6 million tons of food to hungry people – this amount represents a third of the entire world food aid. WFP is not the only agency that dedicates itself to the ideal of eradicating hunger in the world, but it is by far the largest and most far-reaching.

Over the years, our leading donors have boosted contributions but, even so, we are falling behind. By the end of the year we will need to have raised two billion (more than our 2002 budget) for Africa alone. We had raised two billion dollars for the whole world by the end of September.

For lack of funds, WFP is now often engaged in an exercise in triage among those threatened by starvation. Who will we feed? Who will we leave hungry? This spring in North Korea we had to cut off rations for 3 million women, children and the elderly. We are better off now. But one cannot eat retroactively. The damages that have been caused because of ration cuts cannot be repaired. 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.

Donor countries make contributions either in cash or in kind: roughly on a fifty to fifty ratio. We do appreciate donations in kind (the donor must also pay for the associated costs: transports, salaries, etc.), but our preference goes to cash donations, as it allows us to source from the surroundings areas. In this way, we can help the economy of the region and distribute food more adapted to the consumption habits of the people in need. Costs of transport are also much less expensive. The main factor in favor of this kind of contribution is that quality is often better, in that, better nutritious elements like vitamins and minerals can be included and are very precious for the recovery of those suffering from malnutrition. The quality of food aid has become an important element. Currently most of the contributions are earmarked for specific crises in a specific country. We now receive less and less multilateral funds that we can use at our discretion.

WFP distributes the basic food basket: cereals, pulses, vegetable oil, salt and sugar. We do also distribute corn soya blend, a mixture particularly enriched with vitamins which is distributed to children or adults, pregnant and lactating mothers in supplementary and nutritional centers where people suffering from malnutrition are treated. We also distribute high-energy biscuits, which contain precious nutritious elements that are distributed to refugees or displaced persons on the move who have no fixed abode where they can cook proper meals.

Last year, WFP fed 72 million people in 82 countries of the world, who included refugees living in camps and internally displaced persons. WFP's assistance is delivered to countries in greatest need, which are facing chronic food shortages as well as shortages in hard currency to purchase food – (commonly referred to as low-income food-deficit developing countries or LIFDCs)

WFP currently works with more than 870 national and local NGO's as well as 250 international NGO's. WFP whose headquarters is in Rome has 9,221 staff members (1,031 international staff and 8,190 local staff). Due to the need to be as close as possible to the beneficiaries, WFP is highly decentralized with most of its staff working in the field.

WFP is also well known for its logistic capacity. We use whatever means of transportation we need to bring life saving food: ships, boats, trucks, barges, canoes, trains, planes, helicopters, air drops, donkeys, yaks, elephants and even bicycles.

We have also become the logistics arm of the United Nations when emergencies strike – providing air service and communication links for other UN agencies and our NGO partners, as in Angola and Iraq.

Ending hunger: a difficult and sometime dangerous job

Ending hunger is a difficult task, because not only do we have to bring food into a war zone, we also have to bring food into places where more than often there is no road or if there are roads, they are in bad shape or worse still, it is the rainy season and they are impassable. Logistically speaking to bring food aid into an area that is ravaged is more often than not a nightmare, because one has to deliver in spite of all the logistical difficulties to beat deadlines and avoid starvation or death.

In Sudan, we have to airdrop food because there are no roads. The war has destroyed almost all the infrastructure to the south of the country.

WFP had to deploy all its logistical know-how to bring in food, from all the surrounding countries, into Afghanistan during the war. Similarly in Iraq we bring enough food for the entire population of more than 26 million people. We bring in almost 5,000 tons of food each month. Since April, we brought in nearly two billion tons of food. This is enormous for only one organization. It is the biggest operation ever undertaken by WFP. More so, it is the biggest humanitarian operation of all time.

Ending hunger can also be a very dangerous job. We deliver food aid in very risky places. I don't think I have to recall what happened in Baghdad on 19 August 2003. This was a very sad day for the UN – one of the worst ones - and we are still shocked, especially after another attack occurred on 22 September 2003. We try to protect our staff as much as we can, but sadly, WFP is on record as having the highest rate of staff killed on duty, in the UN. As you can imagine, trucks loaded with food don't go unnoticed and symbolize a lot of power for fighters. The UN flag is no longer bullet proof.

One of WFP's most important tasks once it has succeeded in bringing food into a country is to make sure that this food aid is distributed to those in need, and not diverted for political, strategic, military or any other reasons other than the well being of the hungry poor.

WFP policy is “no access, no food”. There are some districts in North Korea where WFP does not distribute food aid because the authorities forbid us access to those regions to check the delivery of food.

WFP also has a “zero tolerance policy” on political interference in the distribution of food. WFP distributes food aid through its NGO partners. In Zimbabwe, 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. The organization has suspended local distributions twice over this issue. But the simple fact is that WFP does not control all the food – far from it. Our goal is to provide roughly a third of what is needed (800,000 tons) while the government and private traders are to provide the rest.

Targeting women to end the vicious cycle of hunger

How do we make sure that food reaches the people in need? WFP monitors around the world go to households, hospitals, orphanages, institutions for handicapped, and

nutritional and therapeutic feeding centers for children suffering from malnutrition, to check that the food is available, in adequate amounts as has been distributed to those in need.

Experience has shown us over the years that the best way to avoid food aid diversion and ensure that food stays within the family is to channel the food through women.

Food aid put into the hands of women is less likely to be sold or misused. There are fewer chances that women will use food aid to perpetuate the problems that cause the crisis. Women in third world countries are traditionally not involved in politics or military activities. They don't belong to political parties. They are less tempted to exchange or sell food for beer, cigarettes, or arms. In Rwanda, it is women's committees who were distributing food to refugees returning from Tanzania. In Gaza, WFP hires women to run food distribution centers.

But there is more than ensuring that food stays in the family by targeting women in our distribution.

Women are the shortest route to ending hunger and poverty.

If hunger has a face, it is the face of a woman. Seven out of the 10 poorest people in the world are women and they earn less than one dollar a day – (level of poverty as defined by the UN). Women are the sole breadwinners of one out of three households around the globe. But it is they who eat last. Even in areas where there is sufficient food, women don't necessarily eat enough. They buy or grow the food (eight out of ten farmers in Africa are women and six out of ten in Asia), prepare the meals and serve them but don't always eat properly. They first serve their husbands, then their children and lastly themselves, if there is something left over.

Women eat last and yet they should be the first, because a hungry woman gives birth to a hungry baby who does not have the weight or the height he should have. Studies show that children suffering from malnutrition never recuperate entirely. Not only do children suffering from malnutrition get sick more often, but they also get retarded in development with lasting damages on their health Diarrhea affecting a malnourished child has a much more devastating impact than on a child who does not suffer from malnutrition.

Each day, 40,000 children in the third world die of diseases linked to malnutrition. Most of them are from Africa.

Studies show that children borne of mothers suffering from lack of food are more susceptible to chronic diseases like diabetes and will have heart problems when they are adults. Those children start off in life with a serious handicap.

Hence targeting women is essential and WFP goals include:

- 80 percent of food relief to be distributed directly to women

- 60 percent of WFP's resources in a country with a significant gender gap to go to women and girls
- 50 percent of WFP's education resources in a country to go to girls

Man made violence, weather disorders and hunger go hand in hand.

The late 1980s and 90s saw a large increase in the number of refugees and other people displaced by armed conflict or political instability. Crisis-driven peaks in demand for emergency food occurred in 1986, with the war in Ethiopia and Eritrea; in 1994, due to the genocide in the Great Lakes region; and in 1997 linked to the conflict in the Balkans and famines in North Korea.

Today WFP intervenes in many war situations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Colombia, Palestine, Côte d'Ivoire, etc... Yesterday, it was Rwanda, Burundi, the Great Lakes region, Kosovo, Bosnia, East Timor, etc. We bring food aid to refugees, displaced people, who have fled violence, often with only their clothes on, abandoning their houses, and belongings to find refuge in other countries or in places more secure in their own countries. WFP feeds refugees in camps in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and elsewhere in the world.

The sheer intensity of these crises has transformed WFP into the largest humanitarian agency in the world. Few people know that.

Compared to man made disasters, weather disorders remain the biggest threat. The past two years have recorded the highest number of weather-related disasters over the decade. We are seeing abnormal weather phenomena on a scale no one has ever imagined and this is causing massive needs in terms of food aid. The number of victims of natural disasters has tripled compared to the 1960's, averaging 136 million victims a year and the poorest among them need food assistance. This year WFP faces the daunting task of finding US 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.

WFP is present in southern Africa with six countries affected by a severe drought threatening 15 million people and we are also present in Ethiopia and Eritrea where a similar drought has made 11 million victims of hunger.

We were in Central America to help the victims of Hurricane Mitch. We were in Mozambique when El Nino phenomenon caused incredible floods. We are in south Sudan where war and drought have displaced the most important number of people in the world. We are helping six million people in DPRK, who have been faced with bad weather since 1995: not enough rains, too much rain, hurricanes, etc,

A weather problem, which is bad news in the northern hemisphere, becomes a nightmare in the southern part. All countries are not equal to face Mother Nature when she gets

upset. A drought in United States, floods in eastern Europe as we have witnesses these last years is bad news, but does not contribute to food insecurity, as we see when droughts or floods threaten the southern hemisphere. One has the coping mechanisms while other does not.

School feeding: the key to development

Chronic hunger often continues long after a crisis has ended and can even fuel future emergencies. Development activities are therefore designed to sustain people as they work for a better tomorrow.

WFP not only prides itself in its ability to respond to emergencies, but also embraces the broader goal of removing underlying causes of hunger. Once immediate foods concerns have been addressed, WFP turns its attention to helping build, or in many cases rebuild lives and communities.

After an emergency is over, we give food as an incentive for people to rehabilitate their homes, farms, roads and schools. We have a Food-For-Work operation (FFW) where workers are paid in food to do work that will benefit themselves and the community. WFP has planted five billion trees to fight soil erosion, through FFW.

But coming back to our main goal “Intervention, then what?” and our key word: prevention, one has to point out that 87% of the total operational budget spent on emergencies last year represents money that could have been spent on sustaining lives and building assets if appropriate steps had been taken to prevent several emergencies from spiraling out of control.

When WFP was created in the 60s, three quarters of its budget was for development programs. Nowadays it is less than 20%. Why such a change? The end of the cold war saw an increasing number of emergencies and as earlier said the number of natural catastrophes has increased in countries that do not have the means to cope with them and lastly, donors are still highly solicited to save lives.

There is also what we call: the CNN syndrome. It is much easier to get funds for a crisis, which makes the front pages of our newspapers and is on our TV screens than it is to get money to fight soil erosion in Ethiopia through food-for-work programmes where workers are paid with food to plant trees.

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. The child in Kabul is on our TV screen, the one in Pakistanis not. When a crisis is over, when it no longer features on our TV screen, it becomes very hard for us to raise the money needed to achieve what is the most difficult and most crucial in bringing back stability to a country: building peace capacity.

In Africa, 40 million people live with the threat of starvation and nearly 200 million suffer quietly from chronic hunger far from the attention of the media.

For all these reasons, development is not high on the world agenda. A case in point is Ethiopia with high per capita emergency assistance and very small per capita development assistance. This is why year after year we are confronted with a food crisis in this country. UN estimates the level of poverty to be at one dollar per day. Ethiopians earn a third of this amount. Ethiopia is a tremendously poor country.

But more and more experts in development do believe that if we want to help poor countries get on the recovery track, and want them to have a healthy economy of their own, we must invest in education and information. This is the medium and long term solution.

We at WFP, strongly believe in this and we know, by experience, that food aid can do a lot to educate a whole generation of children.

Today there are 300 million children who do not go to school or who attend school without having eaten anything. Everybody knows that it is difficult to concentrate in class when hunger pangs tear at your stomach.

If so many children don't go to school, it is not because their parents don't want to send them there. It is because they cannot afford it. They need their children to earn a salary to bring food to the table and more than often the job is too difficult for their ages. Experience has shown us that if we distribute meals at lunchtime, parents do send their children to school because they know they will be fed.

We need too to bring little girls to school. As we said before, we must target women to put an end to the vicious cycle of hunger. UN studies show as well that with only four years of primary school, girls marry later, have fewer children and are better equipped to take care of the health of their children.

But in many countries of the world where the status of women is tremendously low, it is not enough to offer a meal at lunchtime to attract little girls. We must do more. In such countries, at the end of each month, little girls bring back to their homes, a present from school which is some form of food for the rest of the family. The little girls represent an important economic asset for poor hungry families. They are a source of pride. This goes well beyond feeding the body and mind of a little girl. It also gives her self-esteem. Mothers, who have never been to school, are so proud of their little girls. They are achieving something they were never allowed to do. And these little girls who are going to school will send their daughters to school when they will be mothers.

With school feeding we can kill two birds with one stone: we can feed the mind and the body of child.

Nowadays, WFP feeds nearly 16 million children in schools in 64 countries. It is not enough. We need more money if we want to give a chance to all the children of poor countries of the world; it costs only 19 cents per child per meal.

It is not that much and we could make such a big difference. Because if it is true that human rights start with a good breakfast in the morning, the same goes for education.

HIV/AIDS and food insecurity: a new form of famine

HIV/AIDS is a new “variety of famine”. It breaks the historical mold of food crises. It isn’t caused by weather, war, and failed government policy or crop disease. Rather, this is a food shortage caused by a disease that kills the farmers themselves. Recovery won’t come with weather improvement, new government policies, a peace treaty or improved hybrid crop.

When famine due to war or natural catastrophes strikes, it attacks the most vulnerable: children and the elderly. They are the first victims. But HIV/AIDS is worse: it kills active people, women and men whose work is necessary for the well-being of the family; men that cannot till their land anymore because they are too weak and women who cannot take care of their family because they are dying.

More than seven million African farmers have lost their lives to AIDS.

Much of Africa’s political and technical talent is dying (or emigrating because of lack of debouches), a huge depletion of Africa’s human resources. With more than 70% of the world’s HIV positive people in Africa, HIV/AIDS is no longer only a health issue. Nearly 30 million people are living with HIV in Africa and their premature deaths may rob the continent of vital skills. By 2010, life expectancy will be an estimated 27 years in Mozambique, and 34 years in Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Political structures at the national level in the worst affected countries may gradually just fade away and, along with them, the services and social order they were intended to provide. Many of these governments grew out of the artificial political demarcations left by colonial powers and as political cohesion looses, the potential for civil conflicts along the lines of those we see today in the Congo and Cote d’Ivoire grow more likely.

Basic services are bound to suffer. How do you turn around food production in a country that no longer has a viable agricultural extension service? How do rural children learn to farm when their parents are too sick to teach them? How will children learn when the teachers are dying at a faster rate than they are being trained? Zambia is losing 2000 teachers a year to AIDS and is able to train only 1000 a year to replace them.

We are in the process of losing two generations to HIV/AIDS in Africa, especially in southern Africa: men that cannot work their land anymore and have no time to pass on their know-how to their children because they are dying too young and children that drop

out of school because they have to take care of their brothers and sisters since their parents are dead.

In Swaziland, the government estimates that more than 15% of children under the age of 15 are orphaned and 10% of the nation's households are headed by children - even more are headed by grandparents too old and weak to work the fields.

The situation is dramatic. It is a catastrophe on a scale never experienced before. Worldwide, they are now 14 million children under the age of 15 who have lost their mothers or both parents and more than 90 percent of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa

What is the link between HIV/AIDS and food would you ask? There is a very important one, but one that has been and is still neglected by the international community even if the World Health Organization has repeated again and again that the most important medicine for HIV/AIDS victims is food.

The first thing people ask us for in southern Africa, the region worst afflicted in the African continent, is not medicine, it is Food!

What can food do? Allot. We can at least give the sick the energy they need to work and help them live longer.

We can distribute food in schools so children won't drop out. We can also give them food to bring back home for their brothers and sisters.

For those AIDS victims lucky enough to receive medical treatment, nutrition is critical. We have to keep them in clinics until they are cured. Otherwise, they will go back home as soon as they feel a bit better and will infect the rest of the family or the entire village with an opportunistic disease like tuberculosis.

For the HIV positive, good nutrition is crucial in helping to ward off opportunistic infections and stay productive for as long as possible.

And this is not a famine that will stop with the rains to come or peace back, it is here to stay. And the worst is yet to come. The peak of the AIDS pandemic in Southern Africa is expected between 2005 and 2007.

Put our house in order:

The causes of Africa's food crises, as an example, is a lethal combination of recurring droughts, civil wars and failed economic policies (as well as the widening impact of AIDS, which has damaged the food sector and the capacity of governments to respond to the needs – but we will come back to that later on).

Although war, violence and natural disasters are among the important causes of food insecurity in the world, bad policies and lack or bad timing of economic decisions also play their part. Trade imbalances in Agricultural import/export procedures factor into the causes of food insecurity in poor countries of the world that are not necessarily at war. For how long can this go on?

Six countries of southern Africa were threatened last year with an incredible disastrous drought. But failed economic policies have also contributed to the slowdown of these countries, with the most dramatic troubles now surfacing in Zimbabwe, which represents 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 from there for use in operations in other parts of Africa. But politics, bureaucracy and bad economics have conspired to damage food output. The land redistribution in Zimbabwe – in the way it was conducted, not on its principle – has been damaging. Thousands of productive farms have been put on commission and food output this year will be a mere 40% percent of normal levels. This 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 within the threat of starvation.

What we need is a system where leaders of poor countries are made to be accountable for the well-being of their own citizens, a system which will ensure that they will have to spend a larger proportion of their budget on the social and economic development of their country (debt/ Equator/ Italy).

Agricultural policies today are wanting. The failure of WTO negotiations in Cancun to make agricultural trade fairer is a bitter disappointment.

Just one week worth of the US\$300 billion in agricultural subsidies paid by rich nations to their own farmers would pretty well wipe out the need for food aid this year and go a long way towards halving the number of hungry people worldwide by 2015.

We need a trading system that encourages farmers in Africa and other developing countries to produce and export. They simply cannot compete with developed country subsidies that allow food to flow into poorer countries making private investments in agriculture unprofitable. Many believe in the need to support Americans, Japanese, European farmers. But we must negotiate a system 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.

But we failed in Cancun. Meanwhile, what do we do?

In the absence of an agreement on world agricultural trade, governments in the developing world and international donors need to invest more in agriculture and ensure

that poor and hungry people can rely on a social safety net to keep them alive and productive until the promised trade benefits arrive. That's where food aid, when properly targeted and combined with other development assistance, can help. With hunger far from solved in the developing world, more donor aid needs to be targeted for agriculture.

We need more political will

The picture is not hopeless. Mass starvation in Africa is evitable. In fact, there has not been a major famine in Africa since the massive loss of lives under the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s. The international community has successfully countered potential famine now for nearly two decades.

We know now how to prevent a famine. Donor investments in early warning and food aid response systems have paid off, particularly in Ethiopia. There is no reason for us should face yet another famine of the proportions seen in Ethiopia in 1984/1985 where over one million people tragically died. We have early warnings. We know now well in advance what will happen if rains do not fall in time in one particular place of the world, whom it may affect, how many people will be vulnerable, who will need help and for how long. We know all that today.

There has been improvement in the world food security. The numbers of hungry people have dropped from 950 million in 1970 to 800 million today. This is rather remarkable given that the world's population almost doubled during this period.

These are valuable, hard-won gains. However, we cannot let down our guard.

We can intervene in an emergency situation. No problem, if we have the funding and the support of the international community, of the donors.

But it is at the time when we need the support of the international community to prevent those catastrophes that we often lack it. There is indeed some support but it is not enough.

Today, policy-makers are waking up to the fact that it is more economical to invest in people's future during good times than to respond once a crisis occurs. Hunger is not like poverty. In the case of poverty, future earnings can make up for the lack of present income. Food arriving next month, however, will not diminish hunger today, nor will it fully repair the damage done to growing bodies and minds.

Hunger today has its roots in politics and it demands a political solution. They are really no obstacles – other than lack of political will – that would prevent us from ending hunger tomorrow.

We need to do more. We are losing the battle against hunger. We will not reach our target to reduce by half the number of hungry poor as we have decided at the World Food Summit in 1996, except if we decide to invest massively in school feeding.

Hunger cannot be put on hold. Inaction is not an option. The stability of the world depends on ending hunger.

Christiane Berthiaume
Ottawa
03.10.2003