Deputy Secretary-General’s remarks at the ECOSOC Meeting on the Transition from Relief to Development - Recurrent crises and sustainable solutions: building resilience and addressing rising food insecurity and displacement
[checked against delivery]

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It really is indeed a pleasure to address the opening of the 2022 ECOSOC meeting on the transition from relief to development.

Your themes of recurrent crises and sustainable solutions; building resilience and addressing rising food insecurity and displacement could not be more timely.

There is no doubt that much of the developing world, supported by the United Nations system, bilateral and other partners, made significant progress in enhancing food supplies and reducing hunger over the past 25 years. But more recently we have seen global hunger on the rise, reversing decades of progress. Climate change, extreme weather events, conflicts and economic downturns are some of the factors driving growing food insecurity.

Some 193 million people experienced food insecurity across 53 countries or territories in 2021. Acute food insecurity is at a record high. The ripple effects of the conflict in Ukraine are extending human suffering far beyond its borders, threatening global hunger on an unprecedented scale.

Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Yemen are ‘hunger hotspots’ facing catastrophic conditions, according to the latest report by the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization. Afghanistan and Somalia are new entries to this worrisome list.

A total of 750,000 people are already facing starvation and death in Ethiopia, Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia, and Afghanistan.

The Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, the Sahel region, the Sudan, and Syria remain ‘countries of very high concern’ where conditions are critical, and deteriorating.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Violence and conflict remain the primary drivers for acute hunger, and conflict levels and violence against civilians have increased in 2022.

In particular, conflict has led to new waves of displacement, forcing people to abandon their homes, their land, their livelihoods, reducing the amount of food locally available in their communities. In the Sahel alone, close to 2.8 million people have been internally displaced.

Some 13.6 million children globally under the age of 5 are suffering from severe acute malnutrition, according to UNICEF.

In young children, this is a medical emergency that carries an 11-fold increased risk of dying, compared to healthy children. Even if these children survive, they may be suffering from stunting, which has lifelong consequences.
Only one in three of those children has access to treatment.

We can change that, with just 300 million US dollars – just 0.1 percent of ODA spent in a year.

To put that figure into perspective, 62 new food billionaires have been created in the past two years. And billionaires in the food and energy sectors have seen their fortunes increase by some 382 billion US dollars over the past two years.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,

We cannot continue with business as usual. Investing in development is key to addressing our root causes. This must be done with a sense of urgency and scale to get ahead of the crises.

The war in Ukraine has combined with the climate crisis and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the unequal recovery to create a perfect storm of needs in developing countries.

We need new approaches and policies, commensurate with the challenges we face.

The Secretary-General’s initiative to address the multiple waves of crises, the Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance, convenes the UN agencies, international financial institutions and partners around this triple crisis.

The group in its first brief revealed that 1.2 billion people live in countries that are severely vulnerable to all three dimensions of the crisis, while 1.6 billion are exposed to at least one dimension.

The GCRG’s second brief sets out how rising inequality and economic instability could lead to social and political unrest in some of the worst affected countries in the coming months.

I would like to focus on the actions needed to prevent this perfect storm, on three possible fronts:

First, time is short to prevent a food crisis of global proportions next year.

We must stabilize global markets, reduce volatility, and tackle the uncertainty of commodity prices.

There can be no effective solution to the global food crisis without reintegrating Ukraine’s food production, as well as the food and fertilizer produced by Russia into world markets – despite the war.

To avert a food availability crisis in 2023, we must restore fertilizer availability, especially for our smallholder farmers now.

Second, food is a fundamental human right.

We must alleviate immediate suffering through humanitarian assistance but also by investing heavily in social protection systems.

But must also realize our long term vision of a food systems transformation, to which we all committed last year at the UN Food Systems Summit.
Third, we need country-specific responses, and our revitalized UN Country Teams, guided by the QCPR, under the leadership of Resident Coordinators, have a central role to play.

Countries across the world have already benefitted from the convening roles of Resident Coordinators in the formulation of national pathways for sustainable food systems, which will guide the development of policies and legislation. Now, UNCTs must support governments to translate these national pathways into concrete actions and policy interventions, even as they target the short-term needs.

I am pleased to say that UN Country Teams are doing just that.

UN Country Teams are using the Development Emergency Modality of the Joint SDG Fund to help governments devise strategic interventions to cope with the multi-dimensional crisis in food, energy and finance, and accelerate the transformation of food systems.

In Yemen, for example, the focus is on identifying key inefficiencies in the political economy of the food system and the gatekeepers responsible for them, to help inform the design of future policies.

In Haiti, the emphasis is on diversification of the economy; improved livelihoods of women and youth; and strategic partnerships for agriculture and fisheries.

In Niger, our efforts prioritize data gathering and strategic forecasting, to better understand and respond to the triple crisis.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,
The world is facing a global hunger crisis of unprecedented proportions, and we are at a critical crossroads.

We will need to rise to the challenge of meeting immediate needs while supporting programmes that build long term resilience at scale, or we will face even greater humanitarian crises down the line.

It will take everyone’s efforts to fix a crisis that involves everyone, and I look very much forward to these discussions and to the outcomes of the dialogue.

Thank you.