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**As submitted to the**

**UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, thank you for convening this hearing on the current global food crisis and the urgent need to address the growing threat of starvation around the world.

I want to thank the United States Congress and this Committee for the unstinting bipartisan support shown to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). The United States is WFP's most generous and longstanding partner. Last year, the United States provided a record \$3.86 billion in financial support to WFP.

I commend the Biden Administration for its approval of the recent supplemental funding package which includes \$5 billion to address the destructive impact the conflict is having on global food security, and we appreciate the chorus of support from lawmakers on Capitol Hill which made that possible. I would also like to thank the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for its excellent cooperation and partnership, especially in this time of exceptional need.

WFP is particularly grateful for the initial tranche of supplemental funds that USAID has advised we will receive from these new resources. Knowing these funds are coming has already helped us resume support for millions of the most vulnerable in nations across the globe.

The United States has responded swiftly and generously to the looming humanitarian disaster that threatens famine and starvation on a worldwide scale. It is vital that others in the donor community now bring forward similar support and play their part to stop this crisis from spinning out of control.

Today, I will outline the state of global hunger in the context of the war in Ukraine, provide you with an update on WFP resourcing and the impact U.S. supplemental funds are having, and share our latest analysis of how the hunger crisis may develop should humanitarian responders like WFP not receive the scale of resources required from donors to contain its effects.

## II. STATE OF GLOBAL HUNGER

Progress toward achieving Zero Hunger, the second of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, had stalled even before the COVID-19 pandemic produced economic turmoil and eroded food security, with increased conflict and climate change the principal obstacles. In early 2022, on the eve of the war in Ukraine, acute food security in the 82 countries where WFP operates had risen to 276 million people. These are people in need of urgent food, nutrition, and livelihoods assistance. This number was a record high, and more than double the 135 million people living with acute hunger before the COVID-19 pandemic.

WFP's latest analysis reveals that this number has now risen to 345 million as a direct result of the Ukraine crisis and its damaging impact on global food commodity prices and availability, with the bulk of the increase being seen across sub-Saharan Africa.

Among the 345 million, there are 50 million people living in 45 countries in even graver danger. They presently face severe hunger emergencies (IPC/CH Phase 4) – just one step from falling into famine. This number has almost doubled from 27 million over the past two years, an alarming situation. To put the severity of these numbers into context, people in IPC 4 are in a state of “emergency conditions” where they are acutely hungry and are liquidating their final assets to do whatever they can to get food. They are exceptionally fragile, and many die from the impact of their hunger. Thirty percent of their children are wasting and many are now permanently stunted, undermining their ability to ever achieve their potential. This is not just a critical moment of hunger; it is a generational impact that will have consequences for decades to come.

And finally, there are 882,000 people languishing in IPC 5, a catastrophic condition of hunger which is the highest number on record since the 2011 famine in Somalia. Some 401,000 of these people are in Tigray in Ethiopia; 213,000 are in Somalia; 161,000 in Yemen; 87,000 are in South Sudan; and 20,000 are in Afghanistan. While famine has not officially been declared in these places because the technical thresholds have not yet been verified, the people living in them are experiencing the same horrific conditions. The very real risk that famines will be declared in 2022 is an admission of failure at a time when the world has enough resources, food and money to reach them.

While all of this is very bad news, the situation will deteriorate further in the months ahead unless the international community mobilizes the resources required to mount a comprehensive humanitarian response.

### III. THE UKRAINE CRISIS

We cannot adequately speak to the current global hunger crisis without addressing the conflict in Ukraine and the ripple effects it has produced across the globe.

Last year, Ukraine grew enough food to feed 400 million people, but the profound disruption to centers of population, food production and supply chains caused by the war mean that the food grown in the country is no longer able to sustain a significant proportion of its own people. Ukraine has gone from being a global breadbasket to being on the breadlines. About 35 percent of the remaining population inside Ukraine have resorted to missing meals, restricting adult consumption to feed children or borrowing food. WFP is currently targeting 4.7 million people inside Ukraine with food or cash assistance.

Even greater concerns lie beyond Ukraine's borders. Global food markets have been plunged into turmoil, with soaring prices, export bans and shortages of basic foodstuffs spreading rapidly. Nations across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and even Latin America are feeling the heat from this conflict.

An estimated 20 million tons of wheat, barley, maize and vegetable oil produced by Ukrainian farmers are trapped in ports, silos and warehouses - threatened by the destruction of the infrastructure to get them to market and the blockade of ports in the Odesa area of southern Ukraine.

We urgently need a political solution to reopen these ports so the food being produced in the country can flow freely onto global markets once again. If they are not reopened, Ukrainian farmers will have nowhere to store the next harvest in July and August. The result will be mountains of grain going to waste while WFP and the world struggle to deal with an already catastrophic global hunger crisis. WFP urges all parties involved to allow this food to get out of Ukraine to where it is desperately needed so we can avert the looming threat of famine.

In recent years Ukraine and Russia became major engines for feeding the world, serving as critical suppliers to global markets for wheat, maize and other food commodities, as well as energy and fertilizer. This conflict has rocked global food and energy markets as exports from Ukraine have been halted by this war. Steep rises are occurring in international prices for basic staples – notably wheat, maize and vegetable oil – creating a food price environment that resembles the 2008 and 2011 crises.

Food prices have risen by at least 15 percent in 53 countries over the past year, rendering essential purchases unaffordable for many. This includes four countries – Lebanon, Zimbabwe, Venezuela and Sudan – which have seen three-digit rates of food inflation. Given heavy reliance on world commodity markets by numerous countries, prices are rising even in places that do not source their wheat or maize directly from Ukraine or Russia. So in truth, instead of exporting food to help feed entire countries, the conflict means that Ukraine is now being forced to export hunger.

In the case of a prolonged conflict, we should expect the destruction of the commodities currently trapped in storage, worsening declines in Ukraine's upcoming grain harvests and severe limits on its capacity to supply global markets. Countries that rely heavily on grain imports from the Black Sea, like Egypt, Lebanon and Yemen, will be greatly affected.

The threat to global food security is being exacerbated by the upheaval in worldwide fuel and fertilizer markets, as shortages and price spikes sharply reduce access to these vital inputs for farmers on every continent. Some 25 countries – ranging from Honduras and Guatemala to Mozambique and Sierra Leone – depend on Russia for 30 percent or more of their fertilizers. Meanwhile, fertilizer prices have risen by a staggering 231 percent over the past two years. Without urgent action, global food production and crop yields will be slashed. This raises the frightening possibility that in addition to today's food pricing crisis, the world will also face a genuine crisis of food availability over the next 12-24 months – and with it, the specter of multiple famines.

Let me be crystal clear: Conflict in Ukraine is quickly transforming a series of already terrible hunger crises into a global food crisis that the world simply cannot afford. A crisis of this scale will destabilize many parts of Africa, the Middle East, Central and South America and Central Asia.

#### **IV. RESOURCING AND EARLY IMPACT OF U.S. SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDS**

This unprecedented crisis leaves WFP in the position of serving the greatest number of people in its 60+ year history. In the face of COVID-19, multiple conflicts and climate-related crises, we aim this year to assist 152 million people. This is after reaching a record-breaking 128 million beneficiaries in 2021.

Unfortunately, we are doing this in a time of dramatically insufficient resources. WFP's assistance this year will cost approximately \$23 billion. To say that our needs outstrip our funds would be a significant understatement -- today WFP faces a funding gap of over 50 percent, even after the generous supplemental funds provided by the United States. While WFP has historically faced funding shortfalls, they have not been as great as this in the past or surfaced in such a complicated environment. As other UN agency and government budgets are similarly under strain, many responders are forced to cut assistance at the same time. This makes cuts in WFP's assistance much more painful for recipients than in prior years.

The Ukraine conflict has further added to the funding gap by increasing WFP's operational costs and constraining its response at a time when it is needed the most. While other exporters of staple food commodities should—at least partially—be able to make up for the shortfall in supplies from the Black Sea region, these commodities are higher priced and moving them comes with significantly greater operational costs; shipping costs are now 4 times what they were in 2019. WFP's operational costs are now \$71 million

more per month than they were just two years ago, an increase of 44 percent. This is enough to feed 3.8 million people for one month.

Because of these increased costs, we have had to cut rations to our beneficiaries. In recent months we have had to reduce rations to 8 million individuals in Yemen who are already in IPC 3 and 4. We are being forced to make the terrible decision to literally take food from hungry children to give it to starving children. This is also true for many of our beneficiaries in Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Haiti, Honduras, Mali, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, and sadly the list goes on.

**This is why the generous supplemental funding provided by the United States comes at such a critical juncture. Already, working together with USAID, WFP is using these resources to have a tangible and positive impact on reducing the damaging impacts of these ration cuts.**

- In Yemen, WFP received \$114 million and has been able to provide increased rations from 50 to 75 percent to 4.7 million people for up to four months.
- In Afghanistan, WFP received \$190 million and has been able to provide partial rations for 5 million people from August – October and to begin prepositioning commodities in areas that will be isolated during the winter months.
- In South Sudan, WFP received \$101 million and has been able to assist 2.4 million people with 50-70 percent rations for the remainder of the year.
- In Ethiopia, WFP received \$262 million and has been able to expand programming in northern Ethiopia to 3.4 million beneficiaries and an additional 2.4 million in other parts of the country.
- In Somalia, WFP received \$106 million and has been able to assist 4.1 million people with full rations through October. In addition, WFP will be able to scale up its nutrition program for 444,000 children and mothers through October.
- In the Sahel, US supplemental funding has allowed WFP to scale up from 5.6 million people to 8.2 million people. In Niger, specifically, we were able to increase to full rations from 65 percent rations. And in Chad, beneficiaries are receiving cash assistance as early as this week.
- In Haiti, the US supplemental will allow WFP to increase its cash assistance to 150,000 people, providing critical support against rising food prices.

Notwithstanding these significant gains supported with US supplemental funding, it is clear that the United States alone cannot fully meet the needs in all crisis countries. Other donors, governments, the private sector, billionaires, etc., must all step up now to do their part to meet these unprecedented needs.

Of the 68 countries for which WFP requested supplemental funding from USAID, only 31 received support. Critical funding gaps remain that must be filled urgently by the broader donor community if we are to avoid a further deterioration of food security and stability in many countries. A few examples include:

- In Sudan there is a \$263 million funding gap for the balance of the calendar year that is limiting the assistance that needs to be provided to 6.24 million beneficiaries.
- In Afghanistan, WFP's shortfall for the next six months is \$926 million.
- In Yemen, beneficiaries are only receiving 50 percent rations and the rations will be cut off completely in January if new funding is not received.
- In Somalia, WFP expects a \$132 million shortfall beginning in October that will force the reduction in both relief and nutrition assistance.
- In west Africa, more than \$594 million is needed for crisis response activities through the end of the calendar year.
- In Central America, WFP projects as many as 3.2 million people may migrate due to severe food insecurity.

## **V. IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL STABILITY**

We have long known that war produces hunger; that has been true of every major conflict in human history and the world is seeing this dynamic unfold in real time in Ukraine today. But we have also observed that hunger itself can produce conflict and instability, creating a vicious cycle of deepening hunger fueling increasing conflict. This is what we should be afraid of today - the further weaponization of food.

One of the most predictable ways that food insecurity can produce instability is through unexpected, rapid spikes in food prices or a lack of access to food. As prices of grains, oils and other basic commodities

suddenly spike in countries around the world it is important that we realize the risks this portends. Recent history serves to warn us.

In 2007-08, a rapid increase in prices for major food staples produced social unrest in at least 40 developing and middle-income countries, and regime change in at least one. We saw food-related instability strike again in 2011 with a second wave of price spikes linked to the Arab Spring in the Middle East, which created social upheaval in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and especially Syria.

The links between food insecurity and instability often produce spikes in migration. Food insecurity in Middle Eastern countries during the Arab Spring led to an increase in refugee flows and asylum seeking in Europe. WFP's own research into the causes of migration, based on data from 88 countries, found that a 1% increase in food insecurity fueled a 2% increase in migration. More recent surveys across Central America have produced similar results – a 1% increase in hunger leads to a 2% increase in migration.

The bottom line is that people do not stand idly by when they cannot feed themselves or their families. Already in recent weeks, we have seen social unrest triggered by food price spikes in Pakistan, Indonesia, and notably Sri Lanka. This is likely just the beginning: the conditions for food-related instability today are far greater and the risks of social upheaval are much higher than they were a decade ago.

First, in 2008, the world was more stable than it is today. Several major conflicts have erupted since that time. The civil war in Ethiopia began in 2020, the Yemeni civil war in 2014, the Syrian civil war in 2011; while the conflict in Northeast Nigeria began in 2009 and in Central Sahel in 2017. Furthermore, we are experiencing exceptional, persistent droughts across the Horn of Africa, central Asia and the Dry Corridor, which have already created millions of additional migrants. The combination of conflict and drought has created fragility in multiple regions impacting hundreds of millions of people.

Second, the world has still not fully recovered from the ripple-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving it ill-equipped to cope with yet another crisis. In low- and middle-income countries especially, incomes are still depressed from COVID-19, labor markets are struggling to recover, and debt is at record levels. With rising interest rates, the costs of credit further limit the options for governments to respond to these difficulties.

Third, city dwellers are facing increasing obstacles to accessing affordable food due to reductions in incomes and closures of informal markets, combined with price surges due to COVID-19 containment measures. While hunger has long been associated with rural areas, COVID-19 has created a growing class of hungry people: city dwellers in low- and middle-income countries. This matters as food price riots occur overwhelmingly amongst urban populations, particularly in relation to food products of cultural significance, and among countries with a strong reliance on agricultural imports. For example, Egypt, the

most populous country in the Middle East and Ukraine's top wheat customer, will struggle to maintain existing subsidies on bread – a staple of the Egyptian diet – in the face of rising global wheat prices.

The combined effects of these factors, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, have created a perfect storm that threatens to unleash an unprecedented global wave of food insecurity and instability.

## VI. CONCLUSION

A swift resolution to the crisis in Ukraine appears unlikely. Therefore, its global repercussions for food security and stability will become progressively more dangerous in the months ahead. As humanitarian needs soar our ability to respond is diminishing due to the lack of funds. While global food supply chains are stressed, there are enough resources available in the world to feed everyone; the issue is one of cost and allocation.

The costs of humanitarian *inaction* are tremendous, especially for people in need, who in the worst cases pay with their lives. Failing to mobilize sufficient and timely funds for humanitarian assistance will not spare national budgets, it will only delay how and where they are spent.

The United States has shown global leadership with its allocation of \$5 billion to address the impact of the food security crisis sparked by the war in Ukraine. WFP is grateful for the initial monies allocated, and I sincerely hope that further tranches of funding will be forthcoming for our most urgent and underfunded operations.

But this crisis is very far from over and much more needs to be done – especially by our friends and partners in the donor community. If a decisive, coordinated response is not mounted - and soon - we will see mass starvation, migration and destabilization on an unprecedented scale, at a far greater cost. A massive influx of refugees to Western countries could soon become a reality. As soon as they arrive, the host governments will start paying the price – literally – for not having acted earlier. Germany's recent experience of absorbing Syrian refugees in the aftermath of the civil war is a case in point. It costs less than 50 cents to feed someone for a day in Syria. It costs almost \$70 a day in Germany to provide a refugee with the humanitarian support they require.

The US has shown leadership again and we must bring pressure to bear on all other potential donors around the world. Modern famines are man-made – but this also means the international community has the ability to avoid them. As starvation tightens its grip on dozens of nations, we must not allow the war in Ukraine to overwhelm millions of families already trapped in a deadly struggle against hunger. They are relying on us for survival, and we must not let them down.