

**Executive Director Ertharin Cousin Remarks at the
Sixty-Third Session of the Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme, October 1 2012,
Geneva, Switzerland**

His Excellency Ambassador Jan Knutsson, Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme; Mr António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation to speak today to the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme.

I sincerely appreciate this opportunity because as you know UNHCR and WFP signed their first operating MOU in 1985 which has been revised a number of times most recently in January 2011. I am here today to acknowledge that not only is our MOU one of the most functional in the UN system but our working relationship on the ground is effective and valuable to those we serve.

And serve we do...through these past 12 months we have seen human conflicts flaring on multiple fronts. As WFP and UNHCR we each continue managing our roles serving vulnerable people in protracted conflicts across the globe including Afghanistan, South Sudan, and the Horn, while addressing the needs of new refugees and others forcibly-displaced people, as you just saw in the film, in the Sahel, North Africa and the Middle East. Each new conflict stretches the world's limited resources further, and risks more lives and more livelihoods lost.

The stamina and resolve of our people and our agencies have been severely tested. Both the UNHCR and WFP have lost cherished colleagues in this battle against humanity's universal oppressors.

We are reminded on a daily basis that the work we do... carries high risk... and if ever the UN flag had the capability to deflect bullets, it does so no longer. But we carry on.

Mr Chairperson,

Despite all the challenges we face, WFP holds sacred our commitment to UNHCR, and most importantly, to the refugee and other forcibly-displaced populations we serve together.

WFP will not back down from this commitment. Supporting the food assistance needs of people forced to flee their homes, villages and countries is a WFP priority. UNHCR's mandate is clear and WFP remains a steadfast partner in the delivery of UNHCR's mandate.

In my first weeks as WFP's Executive Director, I was fortunate to enjoy the wise counsel and good company of High Commissioner António Guterres. We travelled to Niger together to observe our emergency response there and to witness first-hand one of the finest examples of UN coordination and partnership. While there we both committed to address the regional dimension of the crisis. Our organizations developed a successful regionally-coordinated response that supported both drought- and conflict-affected populations as well as host communities in Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Mali. We were committed to working together to avoid a famine. And we did. We are using a similar regional response model also for Syria.

I am grateful for his guidance and support as I made that running start into a job dealing with humanitarian situations that has kept me on the move from the very beginning.

Mr Chairperson,

Now, with many of the world's wealthier countries facing their own economic and social crises, and resources available for humanitarian

assistance ever more thinly spread, we must become ever more effective and efficient...we must provide value for every dollar invested in our operations.

So, let me begin by acknowledging that while we work hard to serve as your best partner in the field... admittedly, sometimes we fall short... and sometimes...and even one time...is unacceptable... when the lives of those we serve depend upon us getting it right every time. .

A popular saying advises that *if it isn't broke, don't fix it*. But the opposite is equally true. *If the system isn't working, change it*.

On my first day as Executive Director, I told WFP staff: “Every decision we make, every programme we launch, every dollar we spend – each must be judged by its impact on the people who depend upon us.”

WFP is undergoing a transformation to make us better ‘fit for purpose’ in an increasingly complex and ever-changing humanitarian environment and shrinking donor resources.

In order to better fulfil our mandate of feeding the world’s most vulnerable and hungry people, I, together with my team, have undertaken a wide-reaching organizational realignment to get us in the

right shape for running our business and delivering. This realignment is based on four principles:

1. First, the people we serve are the focus of all our work;
2. Second, Country Offices are the “centre of gravity”, with decision-making authority as close as possible to the point of implementation;
3. Third, Regional Bureaus serve as WFP’s frontline platform for managing, overseeing and supporting Country Offices; and
4. Fourth, ensuring unity of purpose and strong corporate identity so that everyone operates according to WFP core policies and strategies.

Our goal is ensure that we at WFP are not only appropriately aligned to ensure our ability to provide the right food assistance, to the right people at the time but that we have the right people in place to perform the work.

The High Commissioner and I continue to compare notes on efforts to realign our agencies to make them more effective and efficient. We will also continue to hold meetings at the ASG level twice a year where we sort out operational and coordination issues ensuring that our teams can continue working together more effectively... with well-monitored and impactful results.

Mr Chairperson, Your Excellencies,

The call for improved leadership, coordination, accountability for better resource management and greater accountability to the affected people we serve – these reform goals are not unique to UNHCR and WFP.

They have been joined across a broad coalition of UN agencies, international and non-governmental organizations, and embodied in the *Transformative Agenda* adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in December 2011.

WFP and UNHCR are taking forward the implementation of the Transformative Agenda in a concrete manner through the development of common implementation plans, including joint missions to develop flexible models that enhance our joint response to refugee and/or mixed displacement situations.

In fact, a high level joint mission to the Sahel – Mauritania - is being planned between our Assistant Secretary Generals for Operations to further explore opportunities to perform better.

Today, I offer this commitment, not only as our joint activities relate at headquarters level and within the Humanitarian Cluster System, but

further, into the deep-field, applied to every effort where WFP and UNHCR humanitarian workers labour side-by-side, facing shared challenges, I commit that WFP will work to design and deliver better food security and nutrition programming, faster logistics, and inter-operable 21st century information systems in the world's toughest places.

As an example, we are cooperating in the area of cash and vouchers and pooling our learning. For example, in the Syria regional refugee response we are exploring opportunities for UNHCR to use WFP's infrastructure to jointly distribute vouchers and cash to meet food and non-food needs.

WFP has committed to being UNHCR's key partner in addressing food needs through these approaches. As was noted in the last meeting of the UNHCR Standing Committee, our two agencies have formalized this mutual commitment in a joint plan of action.

And we are also exploring common approaches for supporting logistics and information systems.

WFP sees great potential from linking vouchers and cash with inter-operable beneficiary registration systems, while recognizing the necessity to ensure the security of this information. This would improve

targeting, boost transparency and help ensure end-to-end performance monitoring across the entire value chain from donor to beneficiary.

Your Excellencies,

Together, we are intensifying our focus on joint needs and market assessments. UNHCR and WFP have completed the first two of four joint evaluations in different countries reviewing evidence and providing inspiration for improving the contribution of food assistance to durable solutions for refugees in protracted situations.

The first of these evaluations in Ethiopia raises concerns about the care and maintenance approach when applied in protracted situations, citing refugee dependency on food aid and the resulting disincentives to pursue alternative livelihood opportunities over time. The evaluation offers 13 recommendations, ranging from short- to long-term, for shifting the agencies' approach toward more durable solutions for these refugees including increased opportunities for implementing and where appropriate scaling up livelihoods and resilience programmes.

WFP and UNHCR are working together to identify and develop resilience strategies for populations affected by crises, including host populations and long-standing refugee groups in protracted situations

which because of financial difficulties we are finding challenging to sustain. We have started a high-level dialogue on how we can do this better and how we can better engage donors for investments in these important activities.

Mr Chairperson,

These are the kinds of urgent changes countries have told us they would strongly support, and they are the changes that donors and food assistance recipient countries must have in these economically challenging and socially turbulent times.

WFP and UNHCR must continue engaging in urgent conversation about how we will accelerate and integrate changes in our way of doing business at both agencies.

Now is the time for us to marshal the necessary will to hurdle over each of our own built-in institutional barriers and business-as-usual thinking to bring these urgent changes sooner and not later.

I know together we are committed and we will get this right for those we serve.

Thank you.