

Director of the Coordination Division at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Wafaa Saeed, on behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, Closing Remarks at High-Level Event on Famine Prevention

Virtual 4 October 2021

As delivered

This has been an important event— thank you all for your contributions.

I will close by stressing urgent action in three areas.

First, funding. We urgently need to step up funding for famine prevention. As highlighted, to date, less than half of the \$6.6 billion we need to stave off famine has been received. We need the rest to scale up and save lives. To protect women and girls from further gender-based violence. And to make sure girls are going to school instead of getting married.

Unearmarked funding to flash appeals and Humanitarian Response Plans – through pooled funds whenever feasible – is a good way to ensure the money helps those most in need.

Current funding to these plans is spread unevenly. Countries like Burkina Faso are consistently underfunded, as are certain sectors such as water and sanitation, health, protection, as well as logistics and security, which are the oil in the engine of a humanitarian operation.

Second, let me stress the importance of acting to prevent, not just to respond. This has been raised several times today. We know anticipatory action saves lives, enables faster recovery, protects development gains and saves donors’ money. It also delivers better results for the people we are helping.

We can forecast the risk of famine in most cases. We must act on this analysis and set up pre-agreed financing to mitigate these risks.

In April, we used risk forecasting to trigger the release of \$40 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund to Ethiopia and Somalia. We staved off acute hunger for thousands of people.

Third, we call on countries at risk, parties to conflict and all those with influence to take swift, concrete action to ensure respect for international humanitarian law.

This includes ensuring safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access and the protection of humanitarian personnel and assets.

In many countries facing the risk of famine, lack of humanitarian access is the single biggest constraint to our humanitarian operations.

We urge authorities to facilitate the movement of humanitarian goods and personnel by fast tracking administrative procedures, from customs and visas to checkpoints.

Finally, let's not forget what we are capable of.

In 2017, Governments and humanitarian agencies saved millions of lives by taking early action to prevent famine in north-east Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

We can – and must – do it again.

In a world where there is more than enough food, allowing famine to happen is a failure of compassion and foresight.

We have the power to stop hunger from taking hold. So let's use it.

Thank you.