Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths video statement at FAO and WFP event on Anticipatory Action

12 October 2021

Colleagues, thank you, Commissioner Lenarčič, for convening this event on responding earlier, faster and more cost-effectively to growing global food insecurity.

That this event is taking place just a month after the high-level event on anticipatory action speaks of the growing commitment to this smart new way of addressing predictable crises. The European Union, under your leadership, is a steadfast partner in anticipatory action.

I also welcome ECHO's increasing engagement in anticipatory action, including through the efforts of the working group on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid, COHAFA.

Globally, 41 million people are at risk of dying from hunger in 43 countries and territories. 155 million people are acutely food insecure. We must help these people before catastrophe strikes.

We need much higher levels of unearmarked funding for humanitarian response plans in countries at risk. We need unhindered humanitarian access to reach people in need.

We must also do more to get ahead of predictable crises.

We can predict food insecurity and famines. And when we see them coming, we need to take swift action.

We know that an anticipatory approach to food insecurity works.

In 2017, under the UN-Secretary-General's leadership we acted on forecasts of four imminent famines. Donors stepped up. Nearly 70 percent of the funds requested were raised in just six months. We reached over 13 million people and we prevented famine.

Since then, we have pioneered anticipatory action at a smaller scale. Many of you are in the forefront in heralding this exciting future in the humanitarian sector.

 Colleagues, at OCHA we continue to facilitate collective anticipatory action.

In 2020, we provided funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund, or CERF, ahead of predictable food insecurity in Somalia due to COVID, floods and locusts.

This led to other early financing.

Together, we prevented half a million people from sliding into crisis and emergency levels of food insecurity between July 2020 and January 2021.

Early this year, forecasts predicted drought in Ethiopia and Somalia. CERF invested 40 million dollars for anticipatory action in both countries. We staved off a huge hunger for thousands of vulnerable people at the peak of the conflict.

We know that anticipatory action works. Now we must bring it to scale.

But how do we do this?

First, we must invest in early warning, especially at the local level, at the community level, to enable anticipatory action by governments and communities.

Second, we need more financing for anticipatory action.

This includes financing to build anticipatory action plans.

So, this will enable us to deliver the assistance people need when they need it, and to evaluate the impact of our work so we are accountable and can do better next time.

Existing humanitarian pooled funds, including the CERF are strategically positioned to make the most effective and efficient use of available funds.

Third, we must have the courage and conviction to act early if we are to deliver to the most vulnerable people.

Forecasts indicate that the next rainy season will fail in the Horn of Africa.

This will be the third failed rainy season in a row.

Initial projections for the March to May 2022 rains are also bleak.

If these forecasts become reality, this will be the first time since 1984 that four consecutive rains failed in that region. And in 1984, more than one million people died in resulting famines and millions more were displaced.

Today, we are also grappling with conflict, COVID and other stresses in the Horn of Africa.

The cost of not acting now to mitigate the impact of severe drought will be tremendous.

We have a choice.

To act now, to deal with the current crisis and to break the cycle through anticipatory action or to wait and see.

The choice is very clear. I thank you.