



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock
Remarks at Global Network Against Food Crises' Side event on "Food Crises and
COVID-19 - emerging evidence and implications for action"**

15 September 2020, 08:30 a.m.

As delivered

Well, thank you very much Sara, and nice to be with everybody today.

I think we all understand what's happening. The pandemic has driven this big contraction in the global economy, and that is what's driving the very big contraction also in the most fragile countries, and that's what's driving the food insecurity.

Alongside that, we've got the current unavailability of health services and that means that starving people won't get the lifesaving immunizations done that they need and so there will be a big loss of life.

And it's important to recognise that this isn't like the 2017 experience where we were trying to stave off four famines. The number of countries at risk now is much bigger and includes countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burkina Faso and Afghanistan. So, it's a much bigger problem we've got this time.

I think that the agenda that Nick [Dyer] set out is a very good agenda. But I think the central point that we need to recognise and grapple with and do something about is that we've got a huge crisis, the biggest crisis the world has seen for 50 years.

We've had a huge economic response in the G20 and OECD countries. But we've had a very, very tepid response in terms of support for these countries which are at risk of mass starvation. And until we get to grips with that, we will not be dealing with the risk of famines being back and that's loss of life and everything that that will bring.

So, somehow, we need to find a way to use all the tools in the toolbox that have been used in the past but aren't being used this time. And the International financial institutions I think have a particularly important role to play there. Their shareholders really need to authorise the institutions to throw the kitchen sink at this problem.

Otherwise, we are going to find that starvation and famine will be back. It will be a long-lasting problem. We can see it coming, it's not like the virus where we have the excuse to say we couldn't see what was happening. We know, everybody's analysis is the same, we

know what the consequences of failing to act are. It's not too late to act now but time is running out.

Dongyu, who I think is going to speak next, Dongyu Qu my colleague at FAO [the Food and Agriculture Organization], and I with David Beasley will be briefing the Security Council on this on Thursday and somehow we need to work collectively to get the powerful decision makers in the world to open their eyes and act before it's too late.

Thank you very much.