

The representative of the United Kingdom cautioned that one had to be careful in using food aid outside acute emergency situations, because food aid in conflict situations was highly sensitive and, if misused, could have a direct and immediate effect on the dynamics of violence. He held that systems had to be put in place to minimize food aid diversion, and the use of food aid should have a clear exit strategy. He expressed the view, echoed by the representative of the Russian Federation, that the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council should work towards a

closer and more comprehensive understanding of conflict issues and how the system could deal with them more effectively.¹⁰

The representative of Bulgaria stressed the need for the international community to intervene at the right time to mobilize awareness about a crisis and believed that the Council should take appropriate measures, including targeted sanctions, when access to those who needed humanitarian aid was denied.¹¹

¹⁰ S/PV.4507, pp. 10-11 (United Kingdom); S/PV.4507 (Resumption 1), pp. 7-8 (Russian Federation).

¹¹ S/PV.4507 (Resumption 1), p. 2.

B. Africa's food crisis as a threat to peace and security

Initial proceedings

Deliberations of 3 December 2002 and 7 April 2003 (4652nd and 4736th meetings)

At its 4652nd meeting, on 3 December 2002, the Security Council included in its agenda the item entitled "Africa's food crisis as a threat to peace and security" and heard a briefing by Mr. James Morris, Executive Director of the World Food Programme. Statements were made by the representatives of Bulgaria, Cameroon, Guinea, Ireland, Mauritius, the Russian Federation, Singapore, the Syrian Arab Republic, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The Executive Director declared that the challenge for the World Food Programme was to respond to emergencies in a way that strengthened individual educational opportunities, health, nutrition, livelihoods, food security and the creation of assets. Referring to the causes of severe hunger in Africa, he pointed to bad weather in the greater Horn of Africa region that threatened to put as many as 15 million people at risk, and HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa that had resulted in 11 million orphans. Civil strife, a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons, landmines, the issue of genetically modified organisms, and issues related to governance and macroeconomic policy further complicated the state of affairs. He held that stronger and more consistent funding for humanitarian aid was required in the short term, while a major opening up of economies, a strengthening of the free market and substantial investment in basic agricultural infrastructure and

nutrition were necessary in the long haul. The Executive Director stated that the focus of WFP was to feed hungry poor people, while abiding by the principles of accessibility, accountability, transparency and a zero-tolerance policy for foolishness or the inability to work throughout a country. As an example of the Programme's ability to stay away from political issues, he pointed to the fact that WFP was the only international agency that had offices outside the capital of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In conclusion, the Executive Director observed that 40 to 50 million children of school age in Africa were not in school but could be drawn there by a school feeding programme. He stressed that education was crucial in addressing the HIV/AIDS issue and providing children with an opportunity to think about alternative lifestyles.¹²

Following the briefing, most speakers expressed concern at the gravity of the situation in Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa. The representative of the United Kingdom emphasized the importance of addressing the link between conflict and food insecurity, as in his view each could cause or reinforce the other.¹³ Similarly, the representative of the Russian Federation observed that overcoming the food crisis in African countries was a comprehensive, multifaceted challenge, requiring both the resolution of armed

¹² S/PV.4652, pp. 2-5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

conflicts and the achievement of sustainable development.¹⁴

The representative of the United Kingdom, echoed by the representatives of Mauritius and Singapore, expressed interest in discussing the role played by government policies in worsening food crises.¹⁵ Observing that famine was neither a natural occurrence nor an inevitable condition, the representative of the United States called for the international community to look at failures of governance, development and assistance in explaining the existence of famine. In his view, productive investment in agricultural and rural development was essential for overcoming famine, but in the short term the immediate adequate assistance of the international community was critical for averting widespread famine in Africa.¹⁶ The representative of Bulgaria emphasized the responsibility of recipient States to coordinate and use the assistance provided by the international community.¹⁷

In agreement with the Executive Director, the representative of Ireland affirmed that the humanitarian situation in Africa not only constituted a threat to international peace and security, but was also intolerable from a moral and humanitarian perspective. He also drew attention to the reduction in the level of long-term development funding by the international community, and enquired about the possible role of WFP in encouraging donors to return to long-term agriculture support programmes. In connection with the debate surrounding globalization and protectionism, he noted existing criticism in some African countries that the liberalization of their economies had not been met with a reciprocal response by developed countries in terms of reduced tariffs and an easing of protectionism in agriculture.¹⁸

The representative of Mauritius raised concerns about the safety of genetically modified food products sent by WFP to members of the Southern Africa Development Community, noting that several countries had expressed reservations with regard to receiving such products.¹⁹ Arguing that government policies over

genetically modified food aid had hindered the food aid distribution process, the representative of the United States expressed concern that efforts to provide desperately needed assistance could be delayed, if not derailed, by the confusion over biotechnology food issues.²⁰

Responding to comments and questions from the representatives, the Executive Director insisted that African countries needed the ability to produce and export their own food, and advocated consideration of the issues of tariffs, use of surpluses and trade, with that goal in mind. On the issue of support levels and long-term development, he acknowledged that the trend had been against long-term development, but suggested that an investment in short-term emergency work could become a very powerful long-term investment. The Executive Director further informed the Council that WFP was focusing on long-term health issues by working with the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). On the topic of genetically modified organisms, he explained that the policy of WFP was to ask the donor Government to certify that genetically modified food met the health and safety standards for consumption by its own citizens. In response to enquiries about the use of modern information technologies and early warning systems to prevent further famine, the Executive Director stated that WFP was making large investments in information technology to provide a vulnerability assessment map of every country in the world. In conclusion, the Executive Director asked Council members to support WFP financially, to make the case to their Governments as to the importance of its work in terms of the peace and security agenda, and to take the longer view regarding investment in development.²¹

At its 4736th meeting, on 7 April 2003, at which statements were made by a majority of Council members,²² the Council again heard a briefing by Mr. James Morris, Executive Director of the World Food Programme.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 6 (United Kingdom); p. 6 (Mauritius); and p. 7 (Singapore).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 14-16.

²² The representative of the Russian Federation did not make a statement.

The Executive Director stated that the causes of Africa's food crises — recurring droughts, failed economic policies, hostility and conflict, and the extraordinary impact of HIV/AIDS — had not changed. He informed the Council that FAO had reported an increase in chronic hunger in the developing world outside China, and WHO deemed hunger to be the greatest factor in poor health in the world. On the positive side, he welcomed the placement of hunger at the top of the Secretary-General's agenda, and the announcement made by France and the United States that they were working together, within the framework of the Group of Eight, to focus the world on the African food crises. He also told the Council that the issue of genetically modified food was no longer delaying or disrupting deliveries. Referring to the situation in Zimbabwe, he underlined that the WFP goal was to depoliticize food aid in that country, on the rationale that food should be available to all, on the basis of humanitarian principles. He further drew attention to the situation created by drought in the Horn of Africa and the deterioration of food security in the western Sahel. He announced that the Programme's early response, assessment and surveillance systems enabled it to respond more effectively.

With respect to the Council's role in addressing food crises, the Executive Director stated that the Council could help to put humanitarian issues at the centre of the world's agenda, as humanitarian issues were also security issues. In response to questions asked by representatives, he emphasized that leadership and governance were pivotal and basic to everything, as demonstrated by the AIDS crisis in southern Africa, and reported that WFP was focusing on the importance of agricultural investment and broadening the donor base.

He expressed regret that even though WFP sought to invest as many of its resources as possible in long-term development, over the years an increase in its emergency work meant that only 20 per cent of its resources were aimed at the prevention of food shortages. On the issue of food as a means to prevent conflict, he said that although such efforts had been successful in Angola and Sierra Leone, WFP tried to stay focused on the humanitarian agenda and absent itself from all other political debates in progress. He also called for a stronger donor commitment to emergency food aid based on better targeting and more sophisticated early-warning systems, and for a substantial increase in support for investment in basic agricultural infrastructure.²³

The representative of the United Kingdom expressed the view that while the United Nations system should address the structural causes of food crises, the proposals put forth by the Executive Director did not fall within the Council's responsibility, but to the United Nations family, the donor countries and the Governments on the ground.²⁴ While acknowledging the limits to the Council's mandate, in the light of the food crisis, the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic insisted the Council should clarify the role it could play in resolving that important problem.²⁵ Stressing that the Council should have the knowledge and the capacity necessary for integrating food security into its approach to conflicts in Africa, the representative of Bulgaria believed that the Council should not be timid, nor worry about going beyond its area of competence.²⁶

²³ S/PV.4736, pp. 2-6, 8-9, and 13-16.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.