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Committee on Agriculture

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**BACKGROUND DOCUMENT TO THE 100TH WTO REGULAR MEETING
OF THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE**

"COVID-19 AND AGRICULTURE"

Submission by the World Food Programme (WFP)

The following submission, dated 2 March 2022, is being circulated at the request of the World Food Programme (WFP).

1.1. The world is not moving towards but away from zero hunger. Behind this trend lies a less peaceful world faced with ever more climate-related disasters and recurrent economic setbacks, most recently due in large part to the COVID-19 pandemic. These shocks amplify each other and unfold in a damaging way for millions of people across the world due to structural vulnerabilities, which are further entrenched by deepening environmental, demographic, economic and social stressors.

1.2. According to the latest [WFP-FAO Hotspot Analysis report](#) (January 2022), organized violence or conflict remain the primary drivers for acute hunger. Weather extremes such as tropical storms, hurricanes, flooding, drought and climate variability remain significant drivers in some countries and regions. Global and national economies are still grappling with the downfall resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, while new variants bring new uncertainties which might further affect economies.

1.3. Overall, high food prices and low household purchasing power are major economic concerns for further increasing acute food insecurity. Across the 81 countries where WFP operates, up to 276 million people are currently acutely food insecure or at high risk. Among them, 44 million people in 38 countries are teetering on the edge of famine.¹

1.4. In addition to driving needs to unprecedented levels, the socio-economic fallout from the pandemic makes responding to existing crises even more complex. About 97 million more people have been pushed into extreme poverty as a result of the pandemic,² and another 207 million are projected to remain unemployed this year.³

1.5. In parallel, the costs to deliver assistance have increased. While higher food and non-food prices are reducing the purchasing power of those already in need, also WFP operations are affected by higher procurement and shipping prices. WFP food procurement is currently 30% more expensive than in 2019, resulting in additional costs of approximately USD 42 million per month.⁴ WFP's operations are entirely funded through the generous voluntary contributions of donor

¹ WFP Global Operational Response Plan 2021 – Update #4, February 2022, <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000136949/download/>.

² World Bank. [COVID-19 leaves a legacy of rising poverty and widening inequality](#). 7 October 2021.

³ The International Labour Organization. [ILO World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2022](#). ILO, 18 January 2022.

⁴ WFP Global Operational Response Plan 2021 – Update #4, February 2022.

governments, institutions, corporations and individuals; hence, every cent of these contributions needs to be maximized.

1.6. Events unfolding in Ukraine pose new challenges to WFP. The Black Sea basin is one of the world's most important areas for grain and agricultural production, and the food security impact of the conflict will likely be felt beyond Ukraine's borders. As over half of the grains WFP uses for its operations is purchased in the Ukraine-Russian Federation area, a dramatic impact will be felt on food costs, shipping costs, oil and fuel. According to a recent statement made by WFP's Executive Director: "This is catastrophe on top of catastrophe."⁵

1.7. With an operational footprint in more than 80 countries, WFP's mandate is to assist the most vulnerable populations, delivering life-saving food assistance and working with communities to improve their access to food, nutrition and build resilience.⁶ With 60 years' experience delivering food assistance in some of the planet's remotest and most insecure regions, WFP is a partner of choice in humanitarian response and also, increasingly, in the effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

1.8. In 2021, WFP was able to reach 124 million people with food, cash, and nutrition. WFP's biggest planned operation in history has grown even bigger, with 137 million people targeted in 2022.⁷

1.9. Nearly 38% of WFP's food procurement in 2021 was sourced locally or regionally, in line with the corporate Local and Regional Food Procurement Policy.⁸ By connecting smallholder farmers to markets and purchasing their surplus production, WFP contributes to strengthening local economies and supporting the increased resilience and productivity of rural communities – one of the pillars of its hunger eradication strategy.⁹ In-line with the "do no harm" principle mentioned in the WFP procurement policy, WFP's food purchases are carried out when and where supplies exceed the demand, thus not putting at risk the food security of supplying countries.

1.10. As we are marching towards a catastrophic year for hunger, well-functioning food supply chains are crucial to ensure WFP's life-saving food assistance reaches those most in need. That is why WFP welcomes any measure adopted by World Trade Organization (WTO) Members to facilitate the smooth movement of WFP's humanitarian food assistance. In particular, WFP is very grateful to the over 80 WTO Members who voluntarily committed not to impose export restrictions on WFP foodstuff by signing the [Joint Statement on Agriculture Export Prohibitions or Restrictions Relating to the World Food Programme](#). While the WTO 12th Ministerial Conference is approaching, it is our hope to see more Members joining the above-mentioned commitment, thus fostering the organization's contribution to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2 on "Zero hunger".

⁵ <https://www.wfp.org/stories/world-food-programme-set-assist-thousands-refugees-ukraine>.

⁶ <https://www.wfp.org/overview>.

⁷ WFP Global Operational Response Plan 2021 – Update #4, February 2022.

⁸ WFP Local and regional food procurement policy, November 2019, <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000108552/download/>.

⁹ <https://www.wfp.org/purchase-for-progress>.