



Remarks by Ertharin Cousin

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Countries Hosting Syrian Refugees**

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Madam Chairperson,
Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Food remains a foremost priority for the millions of Syrian families who have fled their homes to seek refuge. Their food and nutrition situation is of deep concern. Syria's most recent wheat harvest is its worst in decades. The conflict has significantly limited access to food imports. Despite the recent harvest, prices of basic imported staples have risen by up to 60 percent. Livelihoods have been eroded by repeated and multiple displacements, triggered mostly by conflict but also often by the requirement for food...

Families are left with very limited means. Beyond Syria, both host governments and communities struggle to accommodate and respond to the increasing needs. We acknowledge and thank the governments for their commitment and generosity to date.

The cross-line humanitarian challenges cannot be underestimated. Fighting, road-blocks and controls reduce our ability to provide assistance at the scale that it is needed. Given the escalating violence, increasing food shortages and renewed displacement, rising needs continue to outpace the response. There are many pockets and hot spots of concern. Rural Damascus, Aleppo and Al-Hassakeh are some of the most striking examples, where hundreds of communities are trapped and isolated. In Rural Damascus, 38 locations have not been reached for some time. We estimate that up to 800,000 people are now in need of urgent food assistance. In Aleppo, over half a million people are also without access...

We expect to make progress there with access shortly. In Al Hassekeh, blockages enforced by extremist fighting groups prevent road access, and some 90 percent of the assistance that was planned could not be carried out. There, we estimate that over 280,000 people need immediate aid. In the old city centre of Homs, which has been closed for over a year, we are unable to accurately assess the number of civilians in need.

Displacement also exerts a massive impact on host-communities and governments. In Lebanon, refugees now compete with the local population for resources, for homes, for employment and for food. In many communities, refugees represent some 30 percent of the population. Rapid changes in supply and demand have pushed domestic food prices up by 11 percent...

In areas of the North, prices have risen by up to 18 percent. The facts are clear¹. The impact falls on poor Lebanese families. Their purchasing power is significantly reduced. They are paying for the burden by cutting the number of meals that they eat every day, reducing the quality of those meals. Two out-of-every five host families in the North report this. This upward pressure will continue to increase. WFP staff observe similar situations throughout the region. We must consider how we can assist these affected families better.

The goal of WFP's response is to meet the immediate needs of families, and to build resilience where we can. Within Syria, our target is to reach 3 million people this month and we are scaling up to reach 4 million by December. Through our partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and 23 NGOs, we provide family-food-rations to meet basic food needs... We supply wheat-flour for bakeries. And we support supplementary feeding for malnourished children. WFP's greatest strength is its flexibility to grasp every opportunity to access populations in need, wherever possible. Where we can reach today, however, we may not be able to reach tomorrow. Access is changing all the time.

Across the region, WFP currently supports 1.2 million people. In Jordan we reach over 410,000. We applaud the registration efforts of UNHCR there. In Lebanon, we reach over 550,000. In Turkey, over 110,000. In Iraq, over 70,000. And in Egypt, over 45,000. Yet, there are large pockets of refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt that we still must reach. More needs to be done. Our target is to support up to 2.6 million people by the end of 2013. Certainty of funding is a must, if we are to program operations to reach those in-need and do so in a sustainable manner.

¹ WB, 2013. Beka'a residents, for instance, mostly purchase food on credit (59 percent), borrow food (42 percent), and are spending from their own savings (37 percent). North residents buy "only afford to" food items (43 percent), reduce quality of meals (40 percent) and spend from savings (40 percent).

Vouchers represent 90 percent of the regional response, benefitting the people we serve and the local economy. Families can choose preferred and fresh foods. Women's control and protection is increased. Through voucher programs, over 66 million dollars has been invested in Lebanon, 47 million in Jordan, 26 million in Turkey and 10 million in Iraq. When put together with our local procurement of 100 million dollars in the region, this is a big investment in local and regional economies.

Excellencies, this is not a single issue crisis—this crisis affects children, women, men, communities, economies and governments. Failure to reach all of the refugees will result in considerable pressure on already strained host communities and will exacerbate tensions across the region. The region's long-term stability is at stake. Resilience and recovery must begin now...

We will provide the services that the victims—men, women, the elderly and, especially, the children—require to ease the suffering of this nightmare.