

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [The World Food Programme, HC 1915](#)

Tuesday 5 February 2019

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Ian Austin; Chris Bryant; Ann Clwyd; Mike Gapes; Stephen Gethins; Ian Murray; Priti Patel; Andrew Rosindell; Mr Bob Seely; Royston Smith.

International Development Committee Chair (Stephen Twigg) also present.

Questions 1-33

Witness

I: David Beasley, Executive Director, The World Food Programme.

Examination of witness

Witness: David Beasley.

Q1 **Chair:** Governor, welcome to this session of the Foreign Affairs Committee and thank you for sharing your time. We are very lucky that we have Stephen Twigg with us, who, as you know, chairs the International Development Committee. He will also be asking questions. If it is all right, I will go straight on to the first question. How do you prioritise where the WFP works and how far forward do you look when you are trying to determine that?

David Beasley: First, the prioritisation is usually pretty simple, especially if it is an emergency context. If you have a tsunami, an earthquake, a hurricane, a tornado—that kind of thing—or a war or conflict, it will be there.

It is also usually driven, to some degree, by the international community. The UK and your leadership determine where is a priority, and the United States determines where is a priority, because it is determined by the donors as to where we have money. Some 90-something per cent. of our funding is earmarked. If it was 100% not earmarked, I actually do not think the context would change that much, because usually world leaders have the same perspective about where the urgencies are.

The complexities that we have today are unlike the past. If you get into the historical contexts when the World Food Programme was created about 50 years ago, they were primarily short-term emergency contexts, such as natural disasters. Today it is a much more complex environment, so we need more planning for the future where the humanitarian development context comes together.

We can talk more about that in detail with regard to others that are very fragile and what needs to be done. Many of today's problems will not be solved in the historical context. In my opinion, that is where you get some degree of donor fatigue. When the United States, the UK and Germany have been putting funds into this country for 40 years and you have nothing to show for it, what do you need to do differently? We can delve into some of those issues as well.

Q2 **Chair:** Particularly because of the way you raised that, I am interested to know how you prioritise between root causes of food insecurity and just responding immediately, because there, effectively, you could easily get blinded by the headlights of the immediacy without addressing the deeper underlying problems.

David Beasley: Yes, Syria is a good example of what happens when you neglect the root cause. Of course, you can get down to the Venezuela issues, and the Sahel is the perfect storm coming your way, but the international community neglected Syria, and what happened? Sort of like post-conviction relief in the legal profession, everybody waited too late,



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and guess what happened? That was a nation of 20 million people, give or take, and you had a few million who literally migrated up into Europe, with a small infiltration by extremist groups such as ISIS. I think I was doing this on France 24 television one morning, live in France—

Chair: In French?

David Beasley: In France—which doesn't give us hardly any money, by the way, even though they talk multilateral all the time. [*Laughter.*] I love France—anyway, I said, "If you think you had a problem with Syria, a nation of 20 million people, and a small infiltration by ISIS of the few million who migrated into Europe, you wait until the greater Sahel is destabilised, because that is 500 million people. If it is destabilised, with ISIS moving in and partnering with al-Qaida, Boko Haram and a little bit of al-Shabaab, that is the perfect storm heading your way." She said, "Are you trying to scare the European people?" I said, "You're damn right I am. You need to wake up and realise what's going on, because with many of these areas, if you just address them from a reactionary perspective it's going to cost you tenfold."

We assist over 90 million people on any given day in 83 countries, with a dramatic increase in just the past few years. To support a Syrian in Damascus, Idlib or Deir ez-Zor costs about 50 cents. The humanitarian cost of that same Syrian in Berlin is €50 per day, and the Syrian doesn't want to be in Berlin, or in Paris or London. When you assist 90-something million people, you learn a lot. You learn about what people are thinking. You watch their patterns of movement and where they are going, because we are dealing with displaced people all over the world.

What our studies showed us in the Syrian crisis, for example—which is no different from our studies in any other protracted area of conflict or destabilised area—was that for every 1% increase in hunger, there is a 2% increase in migration. A Syrian, for example, will move two, three, four, five or six times. I talked to a woman in the Jordan refugee camp who moved 10 times with her family before she finally moved outside of the country, because people do not want to leave their home. They don't. If you can give them any hope, any reason, they will stay home.

So, move to the Sahel region. This is a region—when you compound it with governance issues, fragility and destabilisation, and now you have extremist groups and climate extremes—that is ripe for mass migration, destabilisation and many other issues. We believe that we could come in with effective programmes and truly stabilise. We are actually proving models now for when we come in, and not just in the context of handing out food, because I can tell you that I have talked to women who say, "Mr Beasley, my husband didn't want to join ISIS, but we hadn't fed our little girl in two or three weeks. What were we to do?" or "Mr Beasley, we really don't want outside support. We want you to help us get on our feet so we can be free and independent and take care of our own families, with food-for-asset type programmes." That is where the humanitarian context and the development context come together.



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Chair: You are hitting very hard on the direct overlap between foreign affairs and development, so it is great that Stephen is here. I will ask him to take over.

Q3 **Stephen Twigg:** Thanks, Tom. You have really anticipated my question, because increasingly we are seeing a shift to cash-based assistance in both development and humanitarian programmes. I would be really interested to hear your perspective on how far you are moving in that direction, and how much further you might do so.

David Beasley: When I got here two years ago—and let me just say very clearly that I'm not your typical UN type of person—

Chair: I think we've established that.

David Beasley: I didn't want to come into the UN; I had no desire to be in the UN. I come from a background where I like to be productive and constructive, and I saw the UN where I thought it should be, versus where I saw the UN as being. It was somewhere in between: the UN does some good things, but there are a lot of things that it probably doesn't do so well.

When I came in, I had some questions about the cash-based transfer system. The World Food Programme was doing about \$600 million or \$700 million-worth of cash at the time. I questioned how effective it was, and the vulnerabilities with regards to cash getting in the hands of extremist groups—those types of issue. Having said that, we plan to spend \$2.2 billion this year in cash. I am a firm believer that countries need to give us maximum flexibility to determine the best modality in each country. In some places you can't put cash, and in some places there still need to be commodities. How we do cash needs to be varied in every country context.

Let me give a couple of examples. In Lebanon, if we were not there doing what we do with cash, you would probably have an implosion of the Lebanese economy. We are assisting about 1 million people, injecting an incredible amount of liquid cash into the economy. Working with the Lebanese community, particularly in the southern part where the Syrians have come in, we have designated more than 500 stores, working with mom and pop stores—small stores. I had one of my Lebanese businessmen who is an old friend of mine raise his hand with me: "You've gotta send these Syrians back. You've gotta cut off the money". I said, "Let me explain what we do. One third of the money is used to buy products that are grown locally, one third is used to buy products that are processed locally, and one third comes from the international market in the Lebanese economy. So you need to understand what we are doing to keep your economy afloat, trying to minimise the impact of the refugees in your country, in the small nation that Lebanon is".

The same thing in Jordan. Even though we have massive refugee camps—millions of my people—we are using cash-based transfers in those camps to bring as much civility and a common way of life as we possibly can. In



Turkey, there are about 3 million-odd Syrians there, and we are supporting a little over 1 million. And then we can get into other countries where we evaluate each situation: what are we trying to achieve, is there an agricultural-based need, what can we do to use cash, or what do we do with commodities or with food-for-assets-type programmes?

I have a general rule of thumb: I want to put the World Food Programme out of business. That's my goal, because we achieve goals and objectives. It's kind of unusual in that world. I believe we should have an exit strategy in every country. Obviously if there is a hurricane, tornado or volcano it's easy: you come in, support the people on a very temporary basis, get their feet back on the ground and you're out. But war and conflict create more complexities and then you get the Sahel-type regions. Last year, for example, we put more than 10 million people in food-for-asset programmes. Beneficiaries planted more than 10 million trees last year, constructed more than 10,000 km of road, more than 5,000 km of canals and more than 5,000 water reservoirs, dams and holding ponds. We rehabilitated more than half a million acres of land. We—the beneficiaries. And I haven't found a beneficiary yet who did not want to be engaged in a community improvement project. I have talked to mother after mother in the Sahel region—I showed you a video I believe about a year ago.

Chair: Yes.

David Beasley: A lot of these NGOs and UN agencies will come up with these 15-minute videos. When do you have time to watch a 15-minute video? It was a two-minute video. We put together some short two-minute videos that showcase what happens when we come in and can completely rehabilitate a land area. As in the Sahel region, in this particular area we will use cash-based transfers where we can in multiple different ways. We will use food-for-assets and commodities, mixing the pot as necessary to achieve goals and objectives. And we can break this down—that's probably a long enough answer to that one question. Let me just stop right there. Thank you.

Q4 Priti Patel: I just want to declare that Dave and I have worked together in my former role. Obviously, I am familiar with the very important work of the World Food Programme. It is very nice to see you, David.

You will know that Britain, in both its foreign policy and its foreign outlook approach with the United Nations, drove a reform agenda that started in 2017. As part of that, various agencies were conditioned in terms of UK funding, based on performance and delivery. It is fair to say that the World Food Programme was semi-conditioned in relation to output and delivery, based around reform with the Grand Bargain, but also trying to drive better value, better co-ordination and more strategic imperatives in driving humanitarian outcomes. That included joint impartial needs assessments and cash transfers, as you just highlighted to Stephen. Where have things moved in terms of focusing on output, better value, more co-ordination across the UN system so that there is less competition, but also driving the right kind of outcomes in protecting the most vulnerable and those in need around the world?



David Beasley: I could probably talk about this for about a week. The outputs are critical. Having been a United States Governor, I look at the big picture and ask, "What are your goals? What are your objectives? What do you want to achieve? How long is it going to take?" Coming in to the UN system, I was really impressed with some operations. I really think they get it, and understand what they need to be doing. But I am not so impressed with others, but I don't want to get into that—maybe with a whisky or two I might say more.

With the WFP, we believe, "What can we do to leverage every dollar?" That is fundamental. What is our exit strategy? How do we achieve our goals and objectives? How do we create food security in such a way that is sustainable and self-reliant when we are no longer there? So we push on our teams with a lot of these hard questions. What are best practices, what is working here, what is working there, what can be scaled up? One of the biggest problems that we see is the lack of scalability. What will happen in some of the vulnerable, more fragile areas—the UK will come in here, the Germans will come in here, the United States will come in here and they will collaborate as they should. The countries have been asking us to collaborate more, with which I absolutely agree.

It is quite surprising how siloed the UN can be. But the UN was designed based on European and United States systems, so some of those silos need to be broken back down. Some of them probably need to be done away with. But when I take ambassadors or Government Ministers to a country, I say, "You are asking us to collaborate more, and I agree 100%." I then say, "But I am also asking you to collaborate more, because you are piecemealing from time to time." That creates the visions within agencies.

The World Food Programme is the world's largest humanitarian operation. Most agencies in countries don't have the capacity to scale up, so I tell other agencies, "If you have a good idea, come to us. We don't care about who gets credit; we want to see the job done. You can take all the credit, but we have the people, the capacity to scale up, so take advantage of what we bring to the table." That has been a little bit hard for some, but we are making headway.

I think that the European community—I have been speaking to the Bundestag in Germany about breaking down some of these traditional silos of humanitarian development. You need development, but today's context is a little bit different. In 30 or 40 countries, you need to give these departments a little greater flexibility and a little bit of encouragement.

Q5 Priti Patel: David, are you hearing Britain's voice being leveraged adequately in this debate? Obviously there isn't a silver bullet to bring about reform and change.

David Beasley: Could you say that again?

Priti Patel: Do you see the United Kingdom—the British Government—leveraging itself in terms of that debate and influence? It is not just from



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a DFID perspective, but from a Foreign Office perspective, bringing the two combined elements together, whether it is internally at the United Nations or in countries, through our bilateral footprint.

David Beasley: The UK pushes that more than any other country, by far. It is not even a question. We have meetings constantly with the UK. My team understands that you are the donors, we work for you, we are the United Nations, what do you want to achieve, what are your goals and objectives? When we run into problems, I tell our teams, "You don't have a problem. You can write to your donors and say, 'We've got a problem here in this country'"—whatever it may be. The UK has been brilliant in pushing. Sometimes I push back a little bit and say, "Whoa, let's talk about a country right here," or "That sounds good." But the practical, working relationship that we have with the UK is remarkable. All day yesterday our teams were meeting in Rome. Based on exactly what you are talking about, I think the World Food Programme and the UK are pretty much lying eye to eye and have a great collaborative spirit. It is really remarkable.

Senator Lindsey Graham in the United States—a friend of several of you on this Committee—was one of the ones who talked me into doing this. He said, "Now Beasley, whatever you do, don't go learning that UN lingo." He said, "Nobody knows what they're saying with all those acronyms." I remember the first couple of weeks I was there, and I had a meeting with the UN. I saw Antonio Guterres and we sat down privately. I said, "Antonio, I thought English was the primary language here." He looked at me as if to say that it is. I said, "Well, I don't know what anybody is saying round here, with all these acronyms. What are they even talking about?"

We have got to talk a more common-sense language. In my opinion, the UK takes a more common-sense approach. It asks the hard questions. In today's world, the major donors have every right to ask the hard questions to the UN: "You have been in this country now for how many decades? What do you have to show for it?" The UK is pressing that, particularly in the cash-based transfer system.

That is why we have now created special divisions for risk management in the World Food Programme, because we are no longer dealing with just a few hundred million dollars. Our budget since I arrived has risen. We are now spending \$5 million more per day than we were two years ago. A large percentage of that is a cash-based system.

Chair: That brings us straight to our next question. Andrew, you wanted to ask about that.

Q6 **Andrew Rosindell:** Thank you, Tom. Good afternoon. President Trump has obviously rather changed the mood on so many things, including how the United States contributes to international programmes such as this. Has his stance, in your view, impacted the funding and the climate in which you operate?



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David Beasley: I got the original phone call about doing this because Bush and I had been very close friends. I told my friend Bush, "Look, I'm a dad; a father of four. I've been there and done that, and I'm going home to raise my children. I'll see you later." So, Trump gets elected and I get a phone call. I said, "Look, I didn't join with Bush, and I don't have any intentions here." But then I got another call from a friend, who said, "We are very concerned about the United Nations and Trump and the World Food Programme." I said, "Well, you should be." We kind of laughed and chuckled and I said, "What are you thinking?" They said, "Would you be interested?" I said, "I'm not interested in working in the United Nations."

They went on again to explain about the World Food Programme and why and how it is essential to national security interests and nations all over the world. I absolutely did not realise the impact that the World Food Programme has in the global context. As I delved into it, I began to see, okay.

Some of our Republican and Democrat friends, primarily in the Senate, who I had known over the years, came to me and said, "You've got to do this." I said, "So, let me hear it right. We are facing the worst humanitarian crisis since world war two. We've got four nations that are facing famine. You have got the No. 1 donor to the World Food Programme talking about zeroing out of the budget, and you want me to take that job." And I said, "Okay. We'll do it."

I felt confident, if I could sit with Trump, and in particular his top team, several of whom I knew very well, that when they saw the facts they would realise that the World Food Programme is too critical to the national security interest and for the moral good around the world. When I arrived, the United States was contributing a little over \$1.8 billion to the World Food Programme, out of a budget of less than \$6 billion. As of 2018, we received from the United States \$2.7 billion. So our funding from the United States alone has gone up by almost \$1 billion, but it has taken a lot of work.

I have been speaking to all my friends in the House and the Senate, speaking to Committees, explaining the critical role that the World Food Programme plays. I think it was Becky Anderson at CNN who asked me this question about a year ago. The obvious portrayal is that the United States is cutting back everything multilateral, which is no different from the UK. But the UK is not cutting back everything multilateral.

I have been hard on the press that all they do is focus on Trump, Trump, Trump, Brexit, Brexit, Brexit. Nobody is covering the conflicts and the wars and the starvation and the humanitarian disasters around the world. Becky asked me, "Okay, you have been able to convince the Trump Administration." Honestly, the Republicans and Democrats in Washington seem to be fighting on everything, but when it came to food aid it was like they laid aside their weapons and came together. It is a beautiful, remarkable thing.



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The last comment from Trump to me, which was at the G20, was, "David, we are not backing down on our commitment." The same comments came from several of my friends in the Senate, both Ds and Rs. They said, "Go tell our allies that we're not backing down on international aid, and ask them not to back down too." You don't see that in the press, but it was a remarkable stand, I think, by the United States Government; that they are not going to back down on international aid. So the United States has gone from \$1.89 billion to \$2.7 billion.

Q7 **Andrew Rosindell:** Under Trump?

David Beasley: Since Trump, in just two years. But the UK has given us from £356 million to £600 million, give or take £10 million or £15 million, in the last two to three years. Germany has substantially increased from what was £65 million six years ago, maybe, to now over £800 million, because they see the urgent need to address these destabilised or fragile areas that will impact not just the common good but their own countries—because it costs 100 times more to support a refugee inside a European nation than it does to do so at home, when a refugee or a potentially internally displaced person doesn't really want to leave.

So the international community has been stepping up more, but there is a problem. I can only give you the context for six or seven countries. What I have been trying to do is convince more countries to participate multilaterally—the UAE, the Saudis, the Chinese, the Russians and others. That gets complex in itself, as you can imagine.

So that is where the funding is. We are still short. While we are raising \$5 million more a day, we are still short because of the crisis. Let me throw this context out: in the last two years the severe hunger rate—not the general hunger rate—meaning those people literally marching towards starvation, who don't know where the next meal is coming from, has risen from 80 million to 124 million in just two years. Actually, when you compound that with Venezuela and Yemen in the last six months, that number is well over 130 million. The first question will be what is the most significant driving impact?

Q8 **Andrew Rosindell:** That is all very positive and good to hear. What is your view of our approach to this in the United Kingdom? Is there an equally positive approach, in your view? What is your perception of DFID's approach, compared with that of the Foreign Office?

David Beasley: Most—almost all—of our funds from the UK come from DFID; very little of it comes from the Foreign Office. I would say that 99.5% would probably be about right. There has been a significant increase in the UK's participation. We could break that down into particular countries, whether you are talking about Yemen, the Syrian region, the Sahel region and others. Our participation with the UK has been remarkable. You have an ambassador on our board, on what we call list D—the United States, the Nordic countries, Germany, the UK. It is a great working team.



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As we work we co-ordinate to some degree with New York, but I think one of the reasons the World Food Programme is so successful is that we are not in New York. We are fairly independent in that sense—and 100% of our funding is voluntary funding, which means we have to earn and justify every dollar, every year. That makes you lean and mean. It doesn't matter—we have seen over the years—whether you have got a left-leaning Parliament or a right-leaning Parliament. We have to justify the dollars, and what we do in food assistance, I think, sort of transcends the context of left and right.

People have seen over time that the World Food Programme is a very effective operation. We could be better, and we are going to be better. But as I told the UN Secretary-General, whom I respect tremendously, "In this reform, make sure you don't destroy the one or two operations you've got doing a good job."

The UK has been a great partner, and I don't think that will change. I think it is going to continue to strengthen—because we are looking for further collaboration. Just like yesterday—I asked him, "Ask the tough questions. Please don't assume anything with us." Back on the Grand Bargain and the new way of assessing—I forget what you call it—and all this kind of stuff, they said that we surpassed the objectives and targets set by DFID in 2018.

Q9 Mike Gapes: You have talked, in passing, about a number of different countries. Do you have an overview of where the major refugee and displaced populations are? Clearly—you have referred to Syria—people can be internally displaced several times before they actually get to cross a border into another country. Just as a little anecdote, members of the former Foreign Affairs Committee were in Adana, in Turkey, in the early part of 2017, where we met Syrian refugee families who had come from Aleppo. What they told us shocked me, because I had visited refugee camps in other places and they were living in the community. They said they did not want to go back to Syria, because it was so awful. I had not heard refugees say that in other situations.

Can you give us a sense of the scale of the biggest crisis? Is it the Rohingya? Is it what has happened in and is coming out of Syria? Or is it the current developments in Venezuela? I gather that 3 million people have left that country to go to neighbouring countries.

David Beasley: Syria is by far one of the worst, because you have about 11 million people displaced: 6 million with refugee status outside the country and 5 million-odd inside the country.

Mike Gapes: Still in Syria but elsewhere.

David Beasley: Yes. You have about 3 million in Turkey, 1 million-odd in Lebanon and 1 million-odd in Jordan. Then you have some in Egypt and in Iraq. So that context is pretty bad. You have South Sudan and Uganda. Then you get into neighbouring countries—a few hundred thousand here or there. The Rohingya crisis drove out about 1 million, give or take, in a short time span.



What you see is that each country is different. People want to go back home, but they want it to be safe, and the longer they stay—probably some formula has been done: the longer you stay versus what your country was like before. After a few years, people settle in, particularly in some of the African countries and particularly where they are more tribal than national. They say, “Well, we just want to stay here.” Museveni has been tremendous in opening the doors and giving people land. They started out with this much acreage, but as the numbers kept going up, the acreage started going down, as you can imagine.

But these are serious issues. If you ask me point-blank whether I think the Rohingya are going to go back, or whether they would want to go back, I think they would. Will they go back, under the present circumstances? I didn’t meet a single Rohingya that was ready to pack their bags and head back into Myanmar, and I’ve been there several times. I don’t know what the technical definition of ethnic cleansing is, but if that doesn’t qualify, it needs to be redefined. When you meet these men and women and they tell you first-hand stories, it’s heartbreaking—the murdering, the raping, the pillaging, the burning alive, the just shooting people in the head. It’s so shocking. To ask them to return to the same environment is just preposterous.

I think most Syrians do want to return, but they are not ready to do it today. I think there is going to have to be a tremendous change in dynamics for them to go back. I think, from our studies—we have just come out of the field with more surveys and studies—that most are not ready to go back. They want to go back, but I don’t think they see it happening anytime soon. That’s got to change on the ground in Syria.

- Q10 **Mike Gapes:** Can I ask you about the current developments in Venezuela? As I understand it, 3 million people—about 10% of the population of Venezuela—have actually left the country, and 1 million of those are in Colombia. I am interested that there has been a suggestion from the new interim President, Juan Guaidó, that there should be some kind of support in Colombia for those people. Clearly this brings the Venezuela conflict into your organisation and others. What is your assessment of that, and what is going on in Venezuela and neighbouring countries for the people who have had to flee because of the abject, terrible situation in the country?

David Beasley: Ten months ago I was on the ground, along the border of Venezuela, on the Colombia side, meeting with the leadership of Colombia. You have 30,000, 40,000 or 50,000 people crossing that border every day—most of them going back, but there is no food, in spite of what was being said by certain outlets.

We were watching people, and we would pick the different demographic looks, so I was not hearing just from one type of person. Across the board, it was a crisis that was taking place internally, inside Venezuela—not even getting to the complexities of how much progress Colombia has made with regard to the guerrillas and the different groups inside



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Colombia in the last 20 to 30 years. We were seeing prostitution, and so many dynamics just unravelling before our very eyes.

We are in Colombia doing everything that we can to help mitigate the pressures, because there are certain elements that want to take advantage of this Venezuelan context to destabilise Colombia, as well as other countries in the region. When I came back to the United States from that trip in April, I said, "There's a perfect storm coming, and the United States and other North American countries need to wake up and begin to address this problem." I do not think many people believed it at the time.

Now we have had the wake-up call. Given the way the United Nations operates, without a Security Council resolution on a nation that is in complete war, we cannot go in unless we are invited by the recognised Government. How the United Nations determines who is the recognised Government is the mission that is sitting in the United Nations in New York. That has to unfold.

Having said that, we are preparing to do everything we can to assist in any way we can inside the country, when we are allowed to come in, as well as in the region surrounding Venezuela.

- Q11 **Mike Gapes:** Can I press you on that? Would you be able to act at the request not of the Government of Venezuela, but of the Governments of Brazil, Colombia or Ecuador?

David Beasley: We can in that region, but not inside. Not to get into the legal technicalities, of course you have the President of the Assembly who, constitutionally, it is being argued, is the real leader, but at the UN headquarters in New York, based on the UN constitution, the laws and the practice and customs, he is still not recognised as the leader from the UN perspective. That is a process.

We will see what takes place. We are very vigilant on it. I will be very careful what I say here, but we are hoping, as we would in any context, that innocent people will not suffer as a result of the politics of any nation, and we stand ready to come in and help in any way we can, in such a way that benefits the people and not any Government or regime.

- Q12 **Priti Patel:** I have two quick points. Have you had—I guess you have to be careful again how you answer this—direct discussions with other countries about providing support, or even fundraising, perhaps even with the British Government, vis-à-vis Venezuela?

Secondly, you spoke to Mike very clearly about the countries where need is growing and there are some terrible things, such as inside Syria. How are you trying to work with other countries, with the UK and with the UN system to get access, because humanitarian access is absolutely critical?

David Beasley: This is extremely important, because particularly in areas of conflict you have different parties, and different sides to the equation. It is interesting, sometimes, which country you need to call that might have a little influence. We can break this down, maybe in the Yemen context, but with Venezuela we are definitely working with other countries. Some



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countries might not have the money that the UK or the US can give, but they might have other things that they can do—providing us access, a port, or trucking systems. So many different dynamics come into play when moving food. When you feed, like we do, 90-something million people, you know how to move commodities around, and it takes a lot of support in context, from country to country. In Venezuela, the reason will be that we need a lot of support.

Yemen is a nation of 30 million people; it is a disaster. We have the largest footprint there. We are now assisting over 10 million people. A year ago, as most of you will recall, I was brutal on the Saudis and the coalition because of the blockade. You can imagine, a lot of friends in the US were upset that I was being so vocal, but I was like, “I’m not here to make anyone happy. Fire me, get rid of me, you won’t hurt my feelings.” The blockade was ended and the Saudis and the UAE stepped up funding substantially. The UAE, frankly, has been remarkable to work with in the last year. Once we sat down—I sat down with the leadership and spent hours going through what we do, why we try to do what we do, and why they should be engaged in a multilateral context—it has been a remarkable change of theirs.

At the time, the Houthis were so happy that I was jumping on the coalition, but I told them, “I’m not doing this because I’m taking sides. I’m not doing this because I like you. I’m doing it because this is the right thing to do. If you cross that red line, I’m going to be on your back just as hard.” Well, moving forward, two months ago—

Priti Patel: You issued a statement.

David Beasley: Yes. I was pretty tough on them. But I had been hard on them in the last few months, saying, “You’re not giving us the access we need.” The UK has been tremendously helpful when we have access issues—based on fundamental humanitarian principles, the US and the UK, especially in the Yemen context, have been extremely helpful.

If you don’t mind, Mr Chairman, may I give a little more detail about Yemen?

Q13 **Chair:** Yes. Yemen was going to come up, so carry on, please.

David Beasley: Yemen is not quite so simple. Obviously, the war has brought a lot of bad things to bear. Yemen has always been a poor country—I don’t want to say “always”, so in my lifetime. The exchange rate 20 years ago was 20 rials to \$1, and the day before the war started it was 215 rials to the dollar. For a country that was already very poor, the collapse of the rial was already happening. When I was back on the ground in Aden, Sana’a and Hodeidah a couple of months ago, the rial was 800 and something to the dollar. So what the war hadn’t accomplished in terms of humanitarian disaster in four years, the collapse of the economy has done in about four months.

If you sit back and analyse that—forget the politics of whether there is a war, or whose side you should be on, that’s a different issue—that we



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have been assisting, at the time, about 8 million out of 29 million or 30 million people, that means 22 million people are getting their food independent of the humanitarian sector. As you know, in that country, 90% of all its food comes from the outside, with 70% to 80% of all products coming into the country through Hodeidah port. What has happened in the last six to nine months has created a tremendous collapse in the economy, but in terms of the war nothing has changed—a little movement here, a little movement there—so you have to ask, why now? What is really happening?

What has happened is that, after four years of no jobs, all the money that had been saved up has been burned—I mean, it's been spent—so there is no cash in the economy at all. Now, like in Venezuela, you have this collapse, and you are not going to solve the problem from a humanitarian perspective. We are scaling up to 12 million, as we speak; the UAE and the Saudis are helping, and the UK, the United States, Germany, the EU, etc.

What we have proposed—we have been meeting the international leadership—is that there must be an injection of liquidity into the marketplace to stabilise the rial. If you don't do that, you're going to have a catastrophe beyond—you already have a catastrophe, but you think it can't get worse and it can get worse. Our team—our economic experts—say that if we can get enough liquidity into the market to bring the rial back down to the 400 level, that should stabilise enough of the market to be able to allow enough of the economy to start moving to provide food.

Imagine a mother of four with limited money who was not on the World Food Programme's humanitarian assistance going to a store to buy the limited—that is if they can even get food at the store, because another problem is that with distributors a lot is done on credit. The credit has been burned up and people do not want to ship inside Yemen any more. The mother gets to the store and she now finds that a pound of rice is no longer just a couple of bucks, but 20 times higher and she doesn't have the capacity. We are working with the Bank of Yemen and the governing board there and with international leaders on how to inject cash. Most of what we do in Yemen is commodity-based, but we are proposing, as we scale up, to go to a cash-based system as well, so that we can knock out two birds with one stone—getting liquidity into the marketplace at the same time as feeding people and bringing back some normality.

What is critical is that this is not a simple environment. We believe that we need biometrics, digital registration and all the processes in place to ensure that taxpayers of the UK and the United States know where their money is going, and that is not so simple in Yemen. I have told the Houthis, "I am dividing you into two groups. You have good Houthis and bad Houthis. There are certain Houthis we can work with." It is tough, but we make progress. It is four steps forwards, two steps backwards, but we sit down and talk and explain, "We are not asking you to do anything that we don't ask of any other place where we operate in the world." Then you have a certain element of Houthis and they don't care. They thrive on



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corruption, destabilisation and chaos, and that is what they want. We are hopeful that we can create enough pressure, because in my opinion there is a certain element of the Houthis who want to take care of their people, as there are on all sides of the conflict.

- Q14 **Stephen Twigg:** Am I right that there is an immediate issue about access to some of your food aid at Hodeidah?

David Beasley: Yes.

- Q15 **Stephen Twigg:** Can you say a little about that?

David Beasley: It is a very serious issue. In fact, I wrote a pretty stark and striking letter to the Houthi leadership back in December. One of the things that we have been saying for well over a year is that we don't have the access we need to be able to put into place the normal protocols and processes that we need to assure donors that the money is achieving the objectives. When I say "access", I don't necessarily mean a road from point A to point B—from Sana'a to Hodeidah. Access also means visas. Visas might mean that we need 25 more people, but it is not just any 25 more people. These are internationals coming in who know how to run the operations on nutrition, biometrics and digitisation. These are very complex systems that need to be put in with the right process and protocols, including equipment, vehicles and all the things we need to be able to deliver. We will say, "Yes, we have just signed agreements with the Houthis on biometrics, digital registration"—the list goes on—"so we are cautiously optimistic, but then we are not getting the visas we need to be able to implement." As you can see, it is not so simple.

We believe that there has been food aid diversion in certain areas, and we have come down hard on that, but it is not so easy to catch that in this environment. It is not like you're trying to do it in London. You just don't get the cargo and drive around Hodeidah. Erring on the side of innocent people not getting their food versus innocent people not getting their food—it is tough, so we try to use a carrot and stick approach. I am usually the one with the stick. The guys on the ground are usually the ones with the carrots. It is not too pleasant on the ground in some of these places.

- Q16 **Priti Patel:** David, can I just go back to your statement in December, which was incredibly strong? You were clear about the Houthis, their criminality and what was going on with food aid diversions, the need for reform and so on. If I remember rightly, the Foreign Minister in the UAE, Dr Gargash, said that very clearly and gave support to what you were proposing. Have you had support from other Governments around the world, the United Kingdom, our Foreign Office and other donor countries? Clearly, a lot of change is needed and, if I recall rightly, about two years ago the British Government—I was part of that—impressed on the Saudi Government to recapitalise the banks to get things moving. Much of this is in the domain of foreign policy as well as the humanitarian. Trying to integrate that in your dealings and feeding back through the international system is absolutely crucial for the bilateral system.

David Beasley: Messaging and the time of messaging is complex sometimes in these environments. If you are dealing hypothetically in a particular area where one side of the conflict controls geographical access to an area, if they don't care what the world thinks, how do you pressure them to give access?

I think we were dealing with that in some areas of contact in Yemen. As things developed, particularly with the peace process moving forward, it created a window for us. I believe that the Houthis were more susceptible to international public perception. I took advantage of a window of opportunity to be able to say, "Now, if you want to be a leader in the world spectrum, it is time for you to step up to international standards. We need you to do that here". But it is not so easy, as you know.

The UK has been brilliant in helping us. Alistair Burt—I am not going to get into names—I can pick up the phone and call Alistair at the drop of a hat and say, "Alistair, we have a problem here, do you know anybody you can call?", that kind of thing—it's been good. The UK is so practical to work with, assessing dynamics on the ground that it is hard to see in the press or in a report.

Sometimes some of my friends who we all know in Washington say, "You don't need to be dealing with terrorists." I say, "We don't want to deal with terrorists. Let me tell you, Senator, I want you to drive that next grain truck in Somalia and about 150 miles down the road when Al-Shabaab pull up in their jeep and put a gun at your head, you tell me whether you negotiate or not. Are you going to give them a bag of wheat, or what are you going to do?"

I'm being humorous, but these are not safe environments. I say this because the men and women of the World Food Programme put their lives on the line every single day. We are losing more humanitarian workers literally almost every day—killed, kidnapped or injured, because the complexity of where we are working today compared to 40 or 30 years ago is so very different.

Q17 **Ann Clwyd:** One of the things I want to ask about is reduced aid to the Palestinians. How do you feel about that?

David Beasley: We believe that every human being, every child on earth, deserves a balanced nutritional meal and we will do everything we can with regard to politics to achieve those goals and objectives. But we have to get funding. We are in Palestine.

Q18 **Ann Clwyd:** I know you are in there, but there has been reduced food aid in addition to other aid. Is that the case?

David Beasley: I am not up to snuff on what the other issues are in the Palestinian geographical context and I don't have the numbers off the top of my head about how much support for food we provide. I think we are the biggest player on the ground, notwithstanding UNRWA, which is an issue in itself in the geopolitical context.



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- Q19 Ian Murray:** You mentioned earlier the safety of your own teams on the ground. Can you give us an indication of how many people you lose whether through being killed or disappeared?

David Beasley: We have direct WFP employees and we subcontract out with a couple of thousand different NGOs out there. We have 16,000 to 17,000 people who work directly for us but we subcontract to all the NGOs you can imagine around the world; I would guess we are collaborating with 50,000, 60,000 or 70,000 people on any given day. The number that I was given was that almost one person per day is either killed, injured or kidnapped—not in WFP, but in the humanitarian sphere. We have lost a couple in just the past few weeks, in different places. [*Interruption.*]

You've got mortar missiles, you've got crossfire, and then you get into landmines. We are dealing with a complex matter now with the Red Sea mills, where we have food stored in about 16 silos that have been mined—mined around them, mined inside them. I mean, who would put mines inside a silo? That is 3.7 million people who we could feed over a 30-day period right there. One silo was hit by a mortar shell about two weeks ago. We hadn't been able to get access to it for many months, and the day before we were supposed to go, one of them got hit by a mortar shell and burned up. Coincidence? I don't think so.

- Q20 Ann Clwyd:** Can I pick up on Yemen again? You see the people on the television almost every night now, and there is great despair about the failure to get an agreement. There is eventually going to be the most awful famine in Yemen unless somebody can break the present impasse. How do you see yourselves dealing with that?

David Beasley: How bad is it? I've been to some pretty bad places on earth, and this is about as bad as it gets. Sometimes, I think your team wants to insulate you from seeing all the bad things, but you can't do that; you have to go and see what the reality is. When we talk about how many people are severely food insecure, these are numbers, but they're not numbers: they're people. They're little girls and little boys. I go to the hospital; I want to see. We go into the streets where we can, and you can imagine the UN's safety division don't want you to go here or to go there. Sometimes I think that the foreign service get so overly protective that our foreign agents can't even see reality on the ground, but we are a little different. We get out there, and I push pretty hard.

Interestingly enough, it is amazing how the World Food Programme is respected by even the extremist groups, because they know we are not there to take sides; we are there to help people survive. Just a few weeks ago, I was in Hodeidah, where the primary hospital is shut down. Hodeidah is a battlefield; it is a war zone. It is like walking through an old Western movie, with the tumbleweeds. There is nobody in the streets, but as you can imagine, when I came into Hodeidah all sides of the conflict settled down. Women would say—they didn't know my name—"Sir, please don't leave." Not because they liked me—they didn't know me—but they knew as long as I was there, there wouldn't be any bombing.



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I went into a couple of the hospitals, and I was seeing children dying before my very eyes. This is not "Let's take one little isolated case and sensationalise it, and make everybody think that is the norm." It is the norm. I was in this one room with the hospital doctor, who is also the administrator. I walked in—I've got four children, and they're grown now, but you're a dad or you're a mom—and there was a little baby there whose little feet were sticking out of the blanket. I thought, "Okay, I'll tickle the little feet and get a little smile." I mean, humanity is humanity. It was like tickling a ghost. It is a hospital where babies aren't crying, because they're not strong enough to cry.

I asked the doctor, "How many children like this do you get in this facility per day?" He said, "50." I said, "How many can you handle here?" He said, "20." I said, "What do you do with the other 30?" He said, "We send them home to die." This is not a woman who put her child in the car and drove 15 miles down a nice paved road. The odds are that she drove through multiple battlefronts and checkpoints, putting her life in danger; it could very well have taken her two, three or four days; she had no money—it took every dime she had to just get her child to that hospital, to be told, "I'm sorry; there is nothing we can do."

You have got \$300 trillion dollars-worth of wealth in the world today, with all the technology and advancements in the world today. If I give you the big picture, it does seem that there is a lot of gloom and doom around the world, but let me give you a positive thing.

Two hundred years ago, the world population was 1.1 billion and 84% of the people in the world were in extreme poverty. Today, that is well below 10%. The world has made a lot of progress in the last 200 years, but in the last couple of years, it seems like we are going backwards. Having said that, we need to end these wars, because 80% of our expenditure today, and 60% of the people, in the World Food Programme are in conflict areas.

The general hunger rate has risen for the first time, from about 777 million to 821 million people, even though the population has increased 2 billion in the last 25 years and the hunger rate had dropped by 200-odd million—800 million in China alone, by the way. So the hunger rate is now going back up for the first time. The severe hunger rate is going back up for the first time in a very long time. I do believe that if we can end the wars, we can end world hunger.

There is too much money; there is too much, I think, compassion in the world today, even though most people turn on the TV and they see two things only, generally speaking—Brexit, Brexit, Brexit and Trump, Trump, Trump. Of course, a year ago it was Le Pen, Le Pen, Le Pen. The children deserve better, in my opinion.

I want to thank the people of the United Kingdom for not backing away from their commitment to innocent starving families and children around the world. The United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, the EU, and our other partners around the world are stepping up. I am hopeful that the



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world realises that there is more that we must do, because if we don't, the vulnerable children who don't have jobs and don't have hope will fall prey to extremist recruitment. I see it every single day. This is not rhetoric. It is a reality.

It is in the national security interests of the people of the UK for it to be effective—not just efficient, as I have told the EU; what good is being efficient, if you are not effective? We need efficiencies and effectiveness. So I want to thank you for the commitment and the support of the people from the United Kingdom.

Q21 Mr Seely: On that point, the DFID aid budget for poverty alleviation and humanitarian disasters is about 15% of its total budget. Do you think that that should be more? What you are talking about is basic keeping people alive.

David Beasley: I don't know the dynamics of the politics of every country's budget, but obviously, as I tell my friends in the US Senate and the US House, you need to look at what we are facing here—you are going to pay for it one way or the other. The key is effective, because I do think there is some degree of donor fatigue, whereby to some degree in my opinion the international community—the UN—shunned the private sector, which was a huge mistake, as opposed to integrating the private sector in long-term strategic root-cause solutions, particularly in many countries in Africa. We need more money not just in a humanitarian context. We need more money in a development context as well.

I believe, because we can show the models, and I can show you in Niger, that when we come in with the right programmes, that this is not rhetoric. As opposed to just handing out food, when you engage people in a food for asset programme, sustainably developing their community—these are very simple things that we are talking about; it is not complicated—migration drops. When you have school meals programmes integrated within these programmes, marriage by 12 and 13-year-olds drops. Teen pregnancies drop. Recruitment by ISIS, al-Qaeda and extremist groups drops. Conflict between the herders and the farmers drops.

We have quantified those numbers, when you come in and spend effectively. If you take just on direct cost—a 30-year amortisation, doing it the old-fashioned way—here is what you will spend, and you will have nothing to show for it at the end of 30 years other than that people were kept alive. You will still not have addressed any of these other issues, but if you come in with effective programmes, we can be out of there in five or six years.

Q22 Mr Seely: Just to make sure I understand, you said “effective programmes”. What do you mean by that? Stuff that works—I get that—but what were you saying works? You said food for friendship.

David Beasley: No, food for asset. Each country has a different context for what you would do, as we were talking about earlier, whether it is cash modalities, commodities or food for asset programmes within these contexts. For example, in the greater Sahel region, where you have



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climate extremes, you have a lot of issues in Niger and Mali, and I could keep going along.

This is not, by the way—Kagame and I have talked about this with the Europeans—a Sahel problem alone; it is greater Sahel. It is from the Red Sea to the Atlantic, and you have extremist groups coming in from both sides—al-Qaeda particularly from the western side, ISIS more so from the eastern side.

When you get those fragile environments, if you look at a picture of the land—this is why I like to put out a map of what we are talking about—you do not know how anybody can survive there. We can come in with effective programmes of rehabilitating the land. Last year, we rehabilitated many of the beneficiaries' 0.5 million acres of land. When we do that, livelihoods take place, stability takes place and all these positive things.

Mr Seely: That was part of the 2016 UN—

Chair: Can we tighten it up, because we are running on a little bit?

David Beasley: We can get together and provide anything that Bob and you are looking for.

Q23 Stephen Gethins: Governor, thanks for your extraordinarily compelling evidence. With some of the evidence that you were giving us about Yemen earlier on, which was incredibly powerful, to what extent—not just in Yemen, but maybe elsewhere—do you think starvation is being used as a weapon of war, and how do you think those of us in the international community should respond to that?

David Beasley: We see it particularly with extremist groups, whether it is ISIS, al-Qaeda or Boko Haram. If we lay out the maps, we can show you the movement. That is the thing, when you are assisting 90-something million people, we do not drop it all from the sky. We are on the ground; we are distribution boys. We see the movement of people, and we see how they will take trade routes, trucking routes and migratory routes, or routes where the cattle may be moving, or camels, goats or herds, and they will start doing everything that they can to stop economic progress, starving people over here.

I saw it particularly in the Boko Haram-impacted area of north-east Nigeria. Where they could create starvation and lack of access, they can determine your future, because you have to join up to survive. I hear this from mother after mother. They do not say that they use food as a weapon of recruitment or a weapon of war, but we see it in a different context.

Let me very blunt about the Houthis. I have said this to any party of a conflict when they reach a certain point. With the Houthis I said, "I want to be able to say to the world that you're co-operating with us, and we're making great progress, but if you deny us access to the red lines that we need, I'm going to say to the world that children are dying because of you. That's just the way it is."

With some people that does not work, but with some it does, and we have to play that card where we can. It is a problem, and it gets complicated, as you can imagine, in certain dynamics all over the world. We ask our donors, "Please don't put us in those positions."

- Q24 **Stephen Gethins:** One thing that has really come out from your evidence—this is clear from the kind of conflicts that we are facing, whether in Yemen, Somalia or elsewhere—is that you are having to engage regularly with non-state actors, including armed non-state actors, who do not fall into nice neat categories.

David Beasley: Some of the state actors don't, either.

Stephen Gethins: Indeed—and then you come and speak to people like us in the United Kingdom or colleagues back in the United States. Can I draw you out a little on the PR element of dealing with these non-state actors? How else do you deal with them? What other lessons do you think we can learn for dealing with these kind of groups?

David Beasley: We have teams who work on this. Peter Maurer at the Red Cross has been a great ally: we are funding teams that work together—cross-pollinating, so to speak. They work on access—I mean that in a broad context. How do you work with militant actors, particularly non-state actors? How do you negotiate more effectively?

It is interesting, because we are going into a lot of places where some of these non-state actors and militant actors will not let anyone from the UN go down those roads, but they will let the World Food Programme go. What we try to do is explain, be up-front and let them know our neutrality—our goals and objectives are not to support any regime or Government on this side or that, but truly to be there to help innocent people. That type of honesty and transparency has had an impact on our ability to do things that others cannot.

We have gone into some areas, like the CAR, that are extremely difficult and where our vehicles actually need to take the UN label off. A UN label can be a problem, but the WFP is different. I tell our team, "Do not let your ego get in the way. You need to put nothing on there, if that is what it takes to help children. We are not about ego—we are about helping children. If we can do it as invisibly as we can, that is a wonderful thing too."

- Q25 **Stephen Gethins:** Finally, I know that you are doing work at the moment on engaging with non-state actors—I am looking at your colleagues behind you as well. Would it be possible for the Committee to look at some of that work?

David Beasley: Yes. We actually have secondments and send teams back and forth to Geneva. About three months ago, we had about 150. Again, it used to be that we were only dealing with a couple of countries, but now it is dozens, in many contexts with extremist groups—Philippines, Rohingya, the Sahel region and of course the Middle East. When you start adding all that up, our people need to be more proficient in addressing this. Other



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agencies are now looking to us to help them. We fund a lot of this, but Peter Maurer's organisation, the Red Cross, has been really great to work with. We joint-fund a lot of these types of programmes because we see the need. Not only does it save lives, it saves money.

Let me add this: the cost of war is \$15 trillion dollars around the world—12.5% of the GDP. Just for WFP, the cost of food delivery and logistics, which is normally about 31 cents per person, is 50 cents in a war zone. It costs us \$1 billion more to assist people in conflict areas than in non-conflict areas. It adds up, and when you have to deal with extremist groups as well, it can mean saying, "We can't go that way, so we can't get there at all unless we go 1,000 miles another way." What is the cost of that? The cost is that either people die or they don't.

I do not know how many of you watch "60 Minutes"—it is a United States programme, but you are probably familiar with it. It is a tough documentary with Scott Pelley, and we were doing a pretty hard story on Yemen about a year ago. Scott and I had known of each other for years; after the interview when we were de-miking, Scott looked at me and said, "Governor, you've got the greatest job in the world, helping people like that." I said, "Scott, I do, but I will tell you something you have not thought of, and it's going to bother you." He looked at me, and I said, "I don't go to bed at night thinking about the children we have saved; I go to bed every night thinking about the children we couldn't save. When we don't have enough money or the access we need, my teams and I have to make the decision which children eat and which children don't; which children live and which children die. How would you like that job?" He looked at me and said, "Oh my God, I never thought about that." I said, "Well, we don't have a choice. We have to think about it every day."

When you have so much wealth in the world today, conflict or not, children should not go to bed hungry for lack of food and lack of access. In the World Food Programme, my people put their lives on the line. It is quite a team to work for.

Stephen Gethins: Thanks to your team for all the work they do.

Q26 **Mr Seely:** I apologise if this has been asked before but I don't think it has. How do you avoid your food being used as a weapon? The problem is if you are dealing with al-Shabaab and they control territory, and indeed with the Assad regime. There have been accusations that organisations—maybe not yours—have allowed yourselves to be used as a weapon of war.

You say you decide who you save and who you don't—not quite like that—but actually, al-Shabaab decides who dies and who lives, because tribes that are loyal to them get food and those children live, and for the tribes that aren't, they do not let you go down that road.

David Beasley: It is a heck of a problem. We struggle with it every day. We have our standards and objectives; we work with our donors. It is something we struggle and fight with every day. We hold our standards. There are times when the international community has to make a decision.



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Do you pull out because the food has been diverted? It is not easy. There is not a formula there. Sometimes it is a gut thing. I have little doubt that the standards we have in place and the goals and objectives we maintain are the best, but the context shifts from day to day, from geography to geography.

The most powerful thing that we do is the transparency and honesty when we sit down with extremist groups and explain to them what we want to achieve. If you do not sit down with them, you will be given no access. When you have access, how do you do it in such a way that you know it is going to their intended people?

Q27 Mr Seely: It will go to their intended people but it will not go fairly to the populations they control. That is the problem.

David Beasley: I remember talking to Priti about this about a year and a half ago. When I arrived, we believed not just for the donors but for the people, that if we could digitise the beneficiaries and use biometrics, we could minimise risk and maximise success for all the people. We have now digitised more than 32 million people. We now have biometrics on about 12 million or 13 million people. We are scaling that up; we are the world's largest in this dynamic.

We use artificial intelligence, blockchain technology and every dynamic you can imagine, but on the ground in these areas we know when we come in with our protocols in place, we maximise the delivery of food to intended beneficiaries and minimise the diversion of food. It is an ongoing quest, because you do not know who is going to show up over there next week and what that means to your logistics and supply teams. We deal with it, but it is not easy, as you can imagine. I don't want to be funny, but I see you walking around some rough folks sometimes. It is important to go out in the field. If anyone wants to go out in the field, I don't suggest you go to certain areas but you will get a realistic perspective of what you are dealing with. That doesn't mean we back down on humanitarian principles. I have found, by and large, that no matter who we are dealing with, if we stand strong and make our case, not in a belligerent, pointing-in-your-face way but in a humanitarian and compassionate way, not all of the time but most of the time whoever it is—even the militant non-state actors—their human nature will recognise the need to help the people. But it isn't always easy and clean.

Q28 Stephen Twigg: I can bear out what you said, from the experience of the International Development Committee seeing the fantastic work that the World Food Programme does on the ground. We were in east Africa in November and we met some of your people on the ground. One of the issues we were looking at was climate change. I am interested to hear where climate change fits in, in terms of the work of the World Food Programme.

David Beasley: Well, the severe increase in extreme hunger in the last few years, most of that is driven by man-made conflict. There's another percentage of that that is driven by climate extremes. You know, I'll get a



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lot of, "Well, Trump don't know!"—I say, "Look. The last thing I want to do is offend my top donors. But at the same time, let me be very clear: the climate's changing. Now, you can debate what causes it all day long, but let me just show you what we're facing. The Lake Chad basin is just one area; we could get into the entire Sahel region, of how its dynamic is changing." And quite frankly, even my conservative Republican friends will say, "Yeah, we agree." They just debate what's causing it.

I said, "Well, let me tell you what we're doing. We're trying for better seeds, better fertilisers, changing the type of products and the type of seeds and crops that you need to grow." For example, in southern Africa, where maize was pretty much imposed by influences a hundred years ago—it's not a heat-resilient crop. Not only that, but there's not a lot of nutritional value. Well, sorghum is more heat-resilient and more nutritional. So we're going to take advantage of this bad potential situation to create a better nutritional opportunity.

In the Sahel region, I can go from country to country to country and what we're doing to rehabilitate land. We can talk about Afghanistan. Mazar al Sharif was an area where there were flash floods, drought, flash floods, drought, and we had one of the worst droughts in Syria, by the way, than we've had in quite some time—28 years. But we came in in Mazar al Sharif and in a historical perspective we were just bringing in commodities. But we decided, "Let's change that dynamic".

So you had Mazar al Sharif more on the western side, and you had the Taliban and other extremist groups that were trying to take advantage of the vulnerability. In these very dry areas, like the Sahel and the Afghanistan areas, the water hits the ground and the ground is so hard that it flash-floods. So what we did was we came in and said, "All right". We met a farming community in a particular area that could grow grain. We said, "We'll buy the grain from you if it's of this quality and this quantity. So we'll pay you." Guess what? They started hiring people, bought the trucks and equipment they needed. We went to the mills and said, "All right, we want you to mill it", and they started buying the equipment, buying the trucks, hiring the people and doing the training. So, job creation right there.

Then we took that same grain that we would have been bringing in from the outside, but now we've purchased it from the inside, creating jobs and economic opportunity, and that just really—I could talk about that for an hour.

Then we took that to Mazar al Sharif. And because the water comes out of the mountains, just flash-flooding, if they have a crop, it gets wiped out. If they don't have a flash flood, they have a drought and the crop doesn't grow. So we worked with the local leaders of Mazar al Sharif. We did water-diversion canals, so that when the flash-floods would come they would be diverted into holding pods. Then we put in the irrigation systems down into the valley, so that when there is a drought the water pods for the irrigation systems would provide sustainable development.



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Now, they no longer need us there. I was standing on the hillside, with the elder, proud as he could be, and I said, "Now, what do your children say about all of this?" And he said, "Our children felt like they had no hope. They were leaving—migrating—or they would join non-state rebel groups—Taliban." And I said, "What about now?" He says, "They're now getting their friends from other areas to come and see what they have. There's so much pride now in what's taking place.

This is what we see as the hope for the future and how the UN needs to go to this way of doing business. This is what we want to do throughout the Sahel region, taking the funds we get from the UK and using them more strategically and effectively, leveraging that dollar to achieve. I have asked some donors: "With your dollar, if you want us to achieve A, B, C, and I can achieve A, B, C just like you want it but can also do D, E, F, would you be opposed to me doing D, E, F with it?" Every now and then you will run into someone who starts wavering a bit, but that is a rare thing now. The UK, I think, is wanting us to really be more practical and effective.

Q29 Ian Murray: You have talked a lot about the UN, and your relationship there. We are the Foreign Affairs Committee, obviously, so what more do you think our diplomats can be doing there, and also on the ground, to help support the work you do?

David Beasley: You had Matthew Rycroft there. Matthew was great to work with and now he's back here. In my opinion, the United Nations is needed today more than ever. It has an opportunity to prove itself to be relevant in today's context, but it must prove itself. It is critical that all nations, but especially a few nations that I believe have tremendous influence—the UK is one of them, and the US of course—I have had some pretty hard conversations with some of my friends in Washington over the last two years, both good and bad. The world needs the United States to be engaged with the United Nations. The United Nations needs the United States to be engaged. It is the same thing with the UK and many, many other countries.

A UN reform needs to be an ongoing process. I believe that probably certain agencies will outlive this life. Certain agencies have already probably combined. That is not my job, and I won't get into that, but I do believe that the UN is at a critical juncture going forward. I am hopefully that this Secretary-General can move them all forward. I think he's a good person, but the General Assembly is something else. There are a lot of good people at the UN. There are a lot of people who are, I think, for progress and things happening, but that is not my job.

I think that the capitals need to be more engaged, because I have seen at first hand that what New York hears and sees and says is a lot of times different than what London—I am not speaking about Matthew—or Berlin or Brussels does. Sometimes there is a disconnect. I will be in those meetings and I am like, "Have you talked to your capital in Berlin?"—I am just being hypothetical—"I am not sure you're from the same country from what I was hearing in that capital just a week ago". That has to be



understood to a certain degree, but there needs to be more effective collaboration. I think that the Security Council has to go through some soul searching about where it is right now, but again that is above my pay grade.

Q30 Ian Murray: The support you get from diplomats on the ground in-country is very supportive.

David Beasley: That is a whole other set of issues. By and large, they are extremely supportive. When I go to a country I usually try to have dinner or lunch for about two hours with the diplomatic corps, particularly those who are providing most of the funding, to talk about issues and explain what we are doing and what is going on. They will hear and see things that we don't hear and see. As you can imagine, a lot of these diplomats get a lot of their insights from what we know on the ground. When you are assisting millions of people, you know what's going on on the ground. That collaboration is extremely positive.

We have struggled with it too. I get this from my people in the field of the World Food Programme. They feel like there is a disconnect between headquarters and the field. That's natural. There should always be healthy tension.

We just did a global survey and our field felt like headquarters is putting more paperwork on them; with the Grand Bargain, we are getting more paperwork requirements. So, how do we minimise those types of things? More collaboration and more communication is important with headquarters, whether it is London or Berlin or Rome, where we are. The headquarters of the World Food Programme is in Rome. It goes back to post World War Two.

Q31 Chair: As people are talking a lot about UN reform at the moment, and you recognise the difference between national Government legitimacy and international organisation legitimacy, you could look around the world for examples of where international organisations are losing legitimacy. One of the great challenges for UN agencies such as yours, but certainly not just yours, is maintaining not just the legitimacy of the donor states or the recipient states but actually of the global community in delivering something, in bringing people together. Can you talk a little bit about how you see legitimacy inside the United Nations, because that is something we are struggling with as an international organisation?

David Beasley: People will say comments. I hear, "Well, the UN" and you will hear some negative comments, and "Yeah, but we like the World Food Programme." It's like doctors or lawyers: "I don't like lawyers, but I like my lawyer." You know?

When they begin, not as much in the humanitarian context but on the development side, this UN reform—I do believe there needs to be UN reform in this regard—I told the Secretary-General, I said "Please make certain you don't destroy, through this reform, the operations that are getting it done." I said, "Please be careful there." So they got this



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empowered resident co-ordinator. It sounds right. I have told the Secretary-General.

Three or four of the big agencies, we try to collaborate as much as we can and we are collaborating more than ever. We are co-operating and collaborating in ways that were just unthought-of three or four years ago. I don't need New York to tell me to do that. We do it because we believe we need to do it. The collaboration that is taking place right now with Unicef has just been amazing. In proper context, UNHCR in refugee areas. It's just a different ballgame.

So this resident co-ordinator on the development side, as I have told the UN leadership, I said, "Look, I have been running big systems, Governments, and you can put the best structure in place and if you have the wrong people, it won't work. You can put the worst structure in place, and if you put in the right people, it will work. It might not work as efficiently and as effectively as it could, so the best is to have the best structure and the best people.

With these resident co-ordinators, I told the Secretary-General, "You have got to put the right people in place. You cannot yield to pressure from some of your General Assembly members who want their friend hired and this kind of thing. You have got to commit with us." In some of these countries, we have got 75% of the footprint. I said, "I don't mean this in an arrogant way but I want to achieve goals and objectives and if you are giving me the money from the United Kingdom, or the United States is giving us the funds to achieve goals and objectives, and some resident co-ordinator wants to act with some arrogant, egotistical mindset because they want to be in charge," I told the Secretary-General, "I don't think you want to be there when I'm there. It won't be a pretty scene." I said, "We want you to put in the best people."

I put the RCs into three categories, what I have seen. There is a certain element, about a third or so, that are just fantastic. They are great to work with. Their egos are out of the way and they are trying to get the UN teams to work together more efficiently, more effectively. That is the spirit we want. You have got about a third who are—they're there. And then you have a certain element—I say a third, I don't know, it could be 10%, some of my friends say it is a lot higher—that don't need to be in the system. The Secretary-General needs the authority to be able to move them out. I think he needs to pressure—let me rephrase that: I think the major donor countries need to bring to bear the pressure on the system to make sure we have the right people in place.

Q32 Chair: Some countries argue that the host nation should have a strong say in who the resident co-ordinator is. You would argue that it is really a UN co-ordination body.

David Beasley: I think it needs to be in New York. The host country does need to have a say-so over who is coming in, but not the total say-so. You have to be careful there. A country that has one of the greatest poverty



rates in the world should have a say-so, but you don't want to get the same old, same old, same old.

What we are trying to do now is evaluate it. I have asked our top agencies to come together and agree on who we really think are the best fits. A person who might be a fit here may not be a fit over there. We struggle with this, too—finding the right people for the right context. If you are in a true, short-term, emergency context and you are scaling up from 100,000 people to 1 million in about six months, you don't need just anybody on the ground. That is why we have what I call our special force teams. We come in with our special force teams in those types of situations—L3 emergencies—and say, "What we have in place is good, but they are not ready for this." We want to make sure they don't fail, so we bring in special teams, particularly in these contexts—not in all contexts.

There is a lot of wasted money, in my opinion, in the UN system. If we put our heads together and are a little more practical, I think we can make the RC system work. It just needs some work. I am hoping the UN will move us in the right direction.

Q33 Priti Patel: Can I come on to another element of reform, David? You will recall this. It is the whole issue of abuse within the system. That is something that the Secretary-General raised back in 2017. I absolutely kicked off about it, and still kick off about it. What we don't see enough of is what has happened in terms of UN reform.

My question to you is, how are you supported by New York? The Secretary-General was very clear that sexual abuse in the system had to be completely dealt with. The British Government were very clear that there should be prosecutions. How are you being supported by New York, in terms of following through on that? Obviously, there have been cases in the past. You work with authorities in the vast, difficult, challenging areas where you operate, in horrific circumstances, to prevent that and make sure you have the safeguards in place. How are you relaying that back to your donors?

David Beasley: The Secretary-General has been very clear, outspoken and, in my opinion, pretty dynamic on women's empowerment, sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation. There are different contexts in these countries.

I personally am not waiting on New York. My chief of staff and I co-ordinate it and say, "What do you know that we need to know? What can we do better? What best practice is out there? What are the best policies?" I say that because policies are important, but how many policies have been rewritten and rewritten in the last 25 years on sexual abuse and harassment? That is important, but management is the key. It is the key. What are you hearing in the coffee shop? What are you hearing in the hallway about that person and this person? You are trying to figure it out. In some of these countries where women have been abused for 1,000 years, it is not so simple. The United Nations needs to be the best of the best and set the model when we go into those countries.



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There are two things that I was very surprised about in the UN system when I got into it. First, I was surprised about the lack of advanced technology. We are leading the case on that. That is why I have an AT&T senior guy with me. The second area was gender parity. I remember that in one of my first meetings—I think I told you this story a year and a half ago—they were talking about gender parity for about 30 or 45 minutes. I said, "How long are you going to be talking about this? 25 years?" I was this Trumpesque person and they didn't know me that well, and they thought, "Oh my gosh." Then I said, "Why don't you just get it done?" The women didn't realise, but people said, "He's okay, he's okay."

In that regard, we have already achieved in 18 months—gender parity at WFP—what took six years before. How did we do that? It is about management. We set benchmarks and goals. It's simple on gender parity: 50%, give or take. That is not so complicated. But every country has to process it like you do in Afghanistan with 500 or 600 people. It is not going to be as easy in a sub-office as it would be in Rome. You have got to push. Every quarter and every six months, my country office has to report to me whether they have met those goals. We send them their numbers, goals and benchmarks—if they don't achieve them, they have to give me justification. If I don't think it is valid enough, getting promoted or reassigned becomes a problem for them. We work with them, giving them tools to address these issues. The World Food Programme is the largest in the UN system, and we need to prove it. We need to be the model for the rest of the UN system.

We are basically a system that was designed on \$3 billion or \$4 billion, but we are now a \$7 billion or \$8 billion operation. One of the things I did last year was put in \$4 million more money for inspectors who can address these issues, as you are dealing with diversion and fraud issues in this country and a war conflict. You've got sexual abuse and harassment over here, and the inspectors are spread so thinly. How do they prioritise? We are saying, "Look, we can't ignore this. We have to put more money into the budget for risk management, sexual harassment and foreign investigations." We are building up those teams so that donors will have confidence.

More importantly, we are making sure that women have a safe working environment. I bring in the entire team at every country office that I go to. My leadership group will tell us that I am pretty tough on this. I tell the men, "I'll put you in three categories." For the men—and now the women—who do it right, you pat them on the back and encourage them. Then you have men who are really not bad-hearted, but will say something stupid from time to time—men do that. I say, "Women, sit down with them and tell them, 'Look, I know you didn't mean that to be bad, but don't say it that way'. Work with them. If that doesn't work, let us know." Then you have a third group that is a problem. I will let them know, "If I can find you, I am going to get you out of here as fast as I can."



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When I got there, I was sending out emails and saying things. I thought that the women would be really proud and respond, but they were like, "Oh, here's just another executive director saying the same old thing." If you talk to the women now, they will tell you, "He means it." We are triaging information to find out who, what, when and where. Zero tolerance sounds good: "Yeah, we're zero tolerance." "But are you? Are you getting it done? Are you saying the things that the leadership group wants to hear?" I have had problems in a couple of places, so I asked the leadership group, "Who put that person there three years ago? Who was on the assigning committee? Why didn't you know about it? Was there any evidence five years ago? The chances are that there's a pattern." My assignment committee team are now thinking, "We're going to be held accountable if there's sexual abuse or harassment by this country office director or personnel here, and I want to know who recommended him. Why didn't you know about it?" It's not always so easy, but that is management. It's practicality, and it's pushing and pushing.

Chair: Can I thank you? We are going to have to go to vote in a minute. This has been fantastic, and we are hugely grateful. Can I also pass on our thanks to all your staff around the world?

David Beasley: We can provide in-depth information, whether it's who we are feeding and where—Palestinians and how many people. My colleagues know that I've got extra numbers here. I thank all of you. Anytime we can help, let us know. Anytime you want to go to the field of any particular type or context, let us know and we will set that up and make it happen.

Chair: Thank you.