



UNMIS

Press Conference

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Near-verbatim transcript of the Press Conference
by the World Food Programme Sudan Representative,
Kenro Oshidari
UNMIS HQ, Khartoum

UNMIS Director of Public Information, Khalid Mansour: Today we have with us the Regional Director for the United Nations World Food Programme, Kenro Oshidari. Kenro spent more than 25 years in international public service, most of it with the UNWFP. He has been in Sudan since May 2006 heading the largest humanitarian operation in the world – the WFP is the largest operation in Sudan, maybe not only of WFP operations, but the largest of all humanitarian operations.

Before arriving in Sudan, Mr. Oshidari served as the Deputy Regional Director for Asia for the WFP; he was Special Representative in Kosovo and the Balkans and he had other senior appointments with the WFP. He was also WFP Deputy Country Director in Cambodia, Senior Emergency Officer in Bosnia and Croatia, and he spent about 13 years living and working with the UN in Africa, taking him into places like Kenya, Lesotho, Zambia and Libya.

Kenro is a citizen of Japan and he was the first WFP Emergency Coordinator in Darfur. As a matter of fact, when he came here in 2004 for the first time, he designed the WFP operation in Darfur.

I say all of that because Kenro is leaving us soon. He is leaving us next month after about three years in Sudan. He is going to become the Regional Director for the WFP in Asia.

We will miss Kenro not only because of his leadership and insight but also because of his great musical skills. An accomplished guitar player – today he doesn't have his instrument – but the skill has made many of us spend so many joyful evenings in Khartoum. So good luck for the audience in Bangkok.

In addition to sharing the findings of the latest assessment that was conducted in southern Sudan, I thought Kenro would also reflect back on his years of service in Sudan - especially on the work being done in Darfur - and share with us some reflections about what is indeed the largest humanitarian operation in the world.

I give the floor to Kenro to have some opening remarks and then we would take your questions.

WFP Representative, Kenro Oshidari: Thank you very much, Khalid. Welcome everyone, good morning and *Ramadhan Kareem*. Many of you were here two weeks ago when Ms. Lise Grande, the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator for the South did a press conference. She promised you in that press conference that the WFP would provide you with more details regarding the food security situation in southern Sudan. That is where I am going to start this morning – talking about southern Sudan.

You all know that most of the people of southern Sudan are subsistence farmers or pastoralists and many of them are sort of surviving on the edge of food insecurity. When there are some shocks like conflicts or even natural problems like draught, they easily fall over the edge. In 2009, we had several worrying factors in southern Sudan as Lise had already briefed you on. The first shock is that in 2009 we have seen a lot of conflicts, many tribal conflicts, in states like Jonglei, Upper Nile, and we also have the Lords' Resistance Army (LRA) problem in Western Equatoria.

Besides these man-made shocks, the number two shock was that we experienced poor rains in May particularly. And this affects the sorghum crop of the short-term nature which they usually expect to harvest in August. Because of the poor rain in the early parts of May and June, this harvest in August is very negatively affected. What happens therefore is that the hunger period is prolonged until October or November when the medium-term sorghum crop is harvested.

The third shock in terms of food security is that in general this year, food prices, especially sorghum and cereals are very high in Sudan. The price of local produce is high and the price of cereals coming in from neighbours like Kenya and Uganda are also high. This affects the people. On top of that, livestock prices are actually low. This means quite a lot in southern Sudan because what happens is that when people are food insecure and have food stress, they tend to sell their livestock to buy food. But because cereal prices are high and the price of livestock is low, when they sell the animal they only get half the amount of sorghum that they used to get by selling one cow, for instance.

These three shocks – the fighting, the poor rain and high food prices have definitely affected the food security situation in southern Sudan.

Normally, how the WFP decide on how much food assistance we should be providing in southern Sudan is that every year we conduct what we call the Annual Needs and Livelihoods Assessment (ANLA). The last one we undertook was in October 2008, which then gave us some idea of what kind of assistance we should be providing in 2009. According to that October 2008 ANLA, we were planning to assist about 1 million people in southern Sudan in 2009. Because of the shocks that we have seen in 2009, the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) requested WFP, UNICEF and FAO to join them to do a mid-term review of this ANLA. This was done quite recently and this was what Lise was referring to in the last press conference. The result was that because of these shocks, there are additional needs in southern Sudan. The estimation is that on top of the 1 million people we already planed for assist this year, there would be about another 300,000 people who would need to be provided assistance quite urgently between now and December this year.

In particular, six states are affected more than others. These are Jonglei, Upper Nile, Northern Bahr-el-Ghazal, Western Bahr-el-Ghazal, Warrap and Eastern Equatoria. Talking about the tribal conflicts, we brought a map here on my left side which roughly shows where the conflicts have occurred and the number of people affected by these conflicts.

In order to provide the additional assistance to 300,000 people or so, we would need an additional 22,000 metric tonnes of food. The difficult part of this is that more than half of that 22,000 metric tonnes of food will actually have to be ferried by aircraft. Many of these areas in southern Sudan, as you well know, get cut off. Road access becomes impossible during the rainy season particularly in areas like Akobo in Jonglei where there was a big tribal conflict. We have tried to bring in food there first of all by barges through the Sobat River but, as you probably heard a few weeks back, the barges were sank and we lost over 700 metric tonnes of food with the boats. Since then with the help of UNMIS helicopter and a small cargo plane, we have been taken food into Akobo but it has not been sufficient. We can not take enough food in there. What we would need to do is probably hire larger aircraft and we would start air-drops. We have done this many years during the war time and stopped this back in 2007 and now have to revive the air-drops again for this purpose. It is going to be very costly but at the same time it is going to be very much needed.

The total appeal for the food assistance is 22,000 metric tonnes, including the air-drop costs, will come to \$44 million. It is not just food; UNICEF and FAO are also part of the appeal for the areas of health and nutrition and also for providing agricultural inputs. All this was officially appealed a week ago in Juba with His Excellency Vice-President Dr. Riek Machar chairing the meeting. All the Governors of the ten states, all ministers, donors and a representative of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs from the north and [Humanitarian Aid Commissioner] Hassabo were also there.

Over the last three years, WFP has made much effort in shifting our assistance from emergency relief in the Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) days during the war to something more recovery-oriented – food-for-work, providing food for children in schools, etc. I think by now we have close to 400,000 primary school children in southern Sudan receiving WFP food assistance. This is a good sign. We have also worked much on the roads repair. WFP has done over 2,500 kilometres of road repair in the past four years and we would continue to do this assistance as soon as we receive more funding for this.

The important thing about southern Sudan is that the international community, the donor community and the Government are all trying very hard to help the rehabilitation and recovery of the region. However, this year, the worry has been that we are slipping back to emergency relief and this is the concern that I must express right now.

I would like to talk a little about Darfur as well. About 70% of WFP assistance for the entire Sudan actually goes to Darfur. We are currently assisting about 3.6 million people in Darfur – roughly two million of them are IDPs mainly in camps but some are not in camps but are nevertheless displaced and in areas in towns in places like Kass, Habila, etc. Another 1.6 million people are not IDPs but are receive WFP assistance in the rural areas. This is a seasonal assistance and not an all-year round assistance. It is mainly provided during the hunger season, the rainy season right now. We provide limited assistance of about 3 to 4 months' food to the rural population in villages. Totally 3.6 million people.

As Khalid said, I did come here in 2004 to help WFP set up massive assistance in Darfur. I might as well mention that in those days, thinking back, the logistics challenges were very big. However, I recall that I was driving in every place in Darfur beyond the main capitals of El-Geneina. El-Fashir and Nyala to places like Kutum, Kabkabiya, Habila, Mornei, Mukjar, Zalengei and all over the place without much worry. Now it is a different story. You know that over the last three to four years, the security situation has seriously deteriorated. Honestly it is almost like a lawless region and this is one of the biggest challenges we have as humanitarian workers in delivering assistance in Darfur. We are very concerned as this year we have seen three cases of kidnapping – one of them still not resolved. That is a new concern for humanitarian workers in general.

Let me just touch briefly on the post-ICC expulsion of the NGOs. WFP was also very much affected by this. Four of the NGOs that were expelled were big WFP partners for food distribution. They left behind like 1.1 million beneficiaries without the NGOs to distribute the food. What we did was that WFP went straight in, hired some of the NGOs' Sudanese staff left behind and we did the food distributions ourselves. Now we have found some new partners, both international and national NGOs. They are helping us out but WFP is still doing our own distribution to about 50% of that area.

Generally speaking, the access problem has eased. This year we have had fewer problems in getting our trucks to all the different places. That doesn't mean that the humanitarian workers are safer but at least in terms of delivering food, we have been more successful than in the past years. Our assessment shows that the food security situation have improved to some extent in the Darfurs because, six years into being IDPs, people have developed coping mechanisms, there are more labour opportunities in the urban areas, there is a lot of construction work going on, etc.

In Darfur, the next challenge is the issue of returns. In some areas, we are seeing people moving. In many cases people may go back to their villages to do some cultivation during the cultivation season. However, most times, they seem to have some of their families remaining in the camps so that they do not de-register from the camps – the kids go to school in the camps, they still collect WFP rations in the camps – but there are movements. If the conditions are right and safe, I think some returns could become a more permanent return. But there are many challenges to returns. The number one challenge, of course, is insecurity. For the IDPs to feel secure to go home is the main issue but also for the humanitarian workers to feel safe to work in the remote areas is also another important factor. Assistance for returns will need to be provided in hundreds of scattered villages in the deep field. This is much more difficult than trying to assist people in a concentrated area such as a big IDP camp. This is a big challenge for agencies like WFP to be able to assist the returns in many deep field areas and it will be costly as well. However, this is a challenge that we need to be proactively looking at together with the government and other humanitarian players.

Finally, I would also like to mention that WFP also assists in others areas in Sudan. We have substantial assistance in the Three Areas – Abyei, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile. We also do have more developmental assistance providing school meals and such assistance in places like Red Sea, Kassala, and Northern Kordofan. In WFP we take much pride in the fact that we work all over Sudan and, more than anybody else, in the deepest field.

One last thing: the funding needs for food assistance in Sudan is very huge. For 2010, we are talking about \$870 million. In my last three years, one of my big responsibilities and challenges has been finding the funding from our donors. Our donors have been very generous and we have been tremendously grateful for that but I hope this generosity will continue on.

Q & A

Radio Miraya FM: Could you give us more details about which regions of Upper Nile State are affected by the food crisis?

Al-Jazeera TV: There are reports that the UN has partially suspended humanitarian operations in areas that are affected by LRA attacks in southern Sudan. Is this correct? Could you also confirm reports of looting of UN relief items in those areas and what the conditions of the humanitarian workers are like there?

To what extent has the expulsion of the NGOs affected the humanitarian situation in Darfur?

WFP Representative, Kenro Oshidari: On the question on Upper Nile, I can not answer you in detail. But if you look at this map in terms of the conflict, there have been three areas: the western side of Upper Nile, then there is the Nassir incident where our barges were sank on the way to Akobo. At the same time, as I said, the poor rains have also affected non-conflict villages. I can not pinpoint to you exactly where other than those two areas but we looked at all those states and, as I said, we found six of those including Upper Nile as the most vulnerable.

On the LRA, about a week ago there was a fresh attack on Ezzo and, yes, the humanitarian community has suspended activities there and the humanitarian staff were evacuated out of Ezzo. The attack occurred during or right after the food distribution so there has been some food that was looted or taken. However, the warehouse we have in Ezzo has not been affected – so that is at least good news. The idea is that the need is there and that we would go back in there to Ezzo area as soon as we see that security is restored but for this, we believe, we would need the help of the SPLA.

On the expulsion of NGOs from Darfur, as I said, the WFP is carrying out distribution to about 50% of the gap areas and the distributions are ongoing. Everybody who is supposed to get food is getting food and it is an issue of that we would like to handle over to our NGO partners at some point as soon as possible because it is not really our job to do the distribution. The people are getting the food so here is no problem on that. It is just that it is more costly for us to do it and it takes a lot of time for the WFP to do this alone.

Khalid Mansour: Just a clarification: You mean that the suspension is only affecting Ezzo area and not even the whole of Western Equatoria and definitely not the rest of Sudan?

Kenro Oshidari: Definitely not. In Yambio area, for example, we are still operational.

XINHUA: In your opening remarks, you said that the WFP faces obstacles to its relief operations to rural people or IDP populations who exit from the camps. This means that it is a difficult operation and that it would be easier to provide them with assistance if they are in organised communities such as the IDP camps. I do not understand, but does it mean that you encourage the IDPs to remain in their camps?

Kenro Oshidari: Not that at all. I don't think the IDPs should stay in the camps at all. In the long-term, our goal is to have people go back to the villages and we certainly would want to assist in that. Like in southern Sudan many people have gone back to their homes in the south and WFP has provided assistance to these returnees at their homes where they returned to. The only question here is that there has to be a voluntary return that they feel it is safe to return to their homes. And of course, food alone is not enough; we need to re-build schools, new water wells have to be set up; health care has to be there; all these things have to be there for people to re-establish themselves at their points of return.

So let me try to clarify: we would want to assist the people to go home but the conditions seem like it is not yet ready for a massive return. But there are some movements and we would try to do our best to help in the areas of return.

Al-Wassat: How many incidents targeting humanitarian actors have been reported in Darfur during the course of this year?

Does the WFP procure food from the local markets? Against the background of ongoing debates about the use of genetically modified food, has the government accepted such kinds of food stuff?

Al-Ahdath: You talked of the need for \$44 million for the provision of additional assistance to the needy in southern Sudan. Does the WFP currently have those funds at hand or are you facing a gap in funding?

Secondly: based on your comments on the suspension of humanitarian activities in Ezzo, what is the number of affected people in those areas?

Kenro Oshidari: In terms of attacks of our trucks in Darfur, last year we had over 100 trucks attacked. But this year, thanks to some escorts from the police, we have had much less attacks. In those terms, there is an improvement. But what we are seeing is more attacks on office premises and houses of humanitarian workers in places like Nyala, El-Geneina, etc. This has increased. We have stopped using Land-Cruisers in towns so we have less cases of carjacking. But the criminality still continues on. Fortunately, this year the WFP has not had any serious incidents on our staff.

On the local procurement of food, WFP's preference is local procurement. Last year WFP purchased over 100 tonnes of sorghum in Sudan. However, I am told that this year, as I mentioned earlier, the price of sorghum is very high in Sudan. For the same amount of money, we could purchase more wheat or other cereals from outside the country. Therefore, this year we have not purchased locally in Sudan, unfortunately.

On genetically modified products, we do not bring in any and the Government of Sudan does not wish us to bring any.

On the question of funding requirements for the \$44 million dollars new appeal for southern Sudan, we have not yet received any pledge from any donor so far. We are hoping that they do come in place.

On the suspension in Ezzo, I am afraid I do not have the exact number of people affected in Ezzo now but I can easily get that from our office in Juba. So if you need it, we would provide that to you, of course.

Sudan Vision: What is the amount of assistance given by the WFP to returnees to the south, whether they are IDPs or refugees? Has this assistance, in any way, been the cause of conflict between the returnees and the resident communities in the area?

Kenro Oshidari: Food assistant to returnees in the south is sort of a package, an entitlement, I would say. So the returnees, whether organised or spontaneous, receive from the WFP a minimum of three months of food assistance – normally much longer because it usually takes a longer period until when they can harvest their own supplies. In average, it has been seven months' of assistance but sometimes longer or shorter depending on when they return.

It is a very good question about whether we have provided assistance to the host communities. It is a case by case approach. We look at the food security situation of that community. If the food security situation of the host community is very serious, then we include the people who were there before as part of our beneficiaries. Or we may do food-for-work for communities where the general food distribution is not necessary that means that the host community would have the opportunity to get food by doing something at the community level. School feeding is also another way of assisting the overall community of that area.

Khalid Mansour: Thank you very much. I know some of you might want to have more information on one issue or another. The Public Information of the WFP, Amor, is here. So you can get in touch with her if you need any more details.

We would have the transcript of this press conference mailed to you and posted on our website, hopefully this afternoon. We would also have a regular press briefing next week and will inform you about the timing.

Thank you once again for coming and thanks for bearing with us.

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