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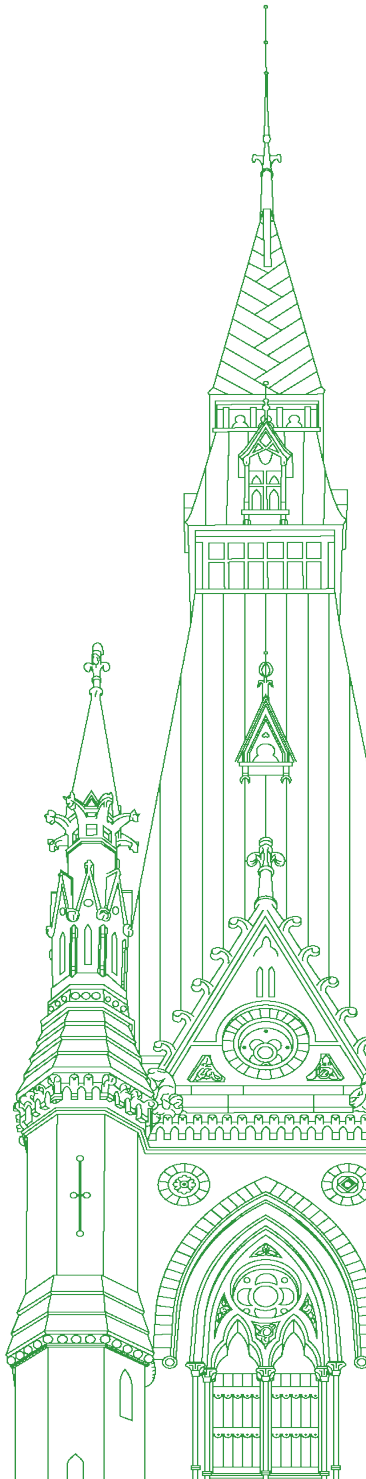

Chair: Mr. Marwan Tabbara

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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● (1300)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.)): I'll call the meeting to order.

Thank you all for being here.

I'd like to introduce Mr. Beasley and Mr. Rugholm. Thank you for coming to our international human rights committee, a subcommittee of foreign affairs.

The World Food Programme in Canada is the largest humanitarian assistance partner. In 2019, Canada contributed almost $200 million to the World Food Programme, making it its seventh-largest partner.

Also to introduce Mr. Beasley, he was appointed executive director to the World Food Programme in March 2017. He was first elected to public office at the age of 21 as a member of South Carolina's House of Representatives. Mr. Beasley served as governor of the State of South Carolina from 1995 to 1999.

Without further ado, Mr. Beasley, if you want to present to the committee, you're more than free to do so.

Mr. David Beasley (Executive Director, World Food Programme): Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. It's great to be back.

I wish I had some good news to give you. Just when we thought it was as bad as it could get out there with war, conflict and destabilization all over the world—particularly in the Middle East and the Sahel region, like Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, the Horn of Africa and Yemen—then come the desert locusts. We thought that was bad enough. Then all of a sudden—boom and bam—we have the coronavirus. It's not a good situation. I think 2020 is very well going to go down as one of the worst humanitarian years since World War II. I don't see how that's not going to be the case.

If you don't mind, maybe I'll just give an overview. First and foremost is thank you. The people of Canada have been extremely supportive of the World Food Programme. The taxpayers of your nation clearly understand the role that the World Food Programme plays in stabilizing countries around the world and what that means to their national security interests and to the interest of just being good citizens in a global world today. We very much thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Fundraising has been difficult for a lot of agencies in a lot of ways. We've been very successful the last few years. When I took this role, as I think I'd mentioned when I was here over a year ago, the greatest concern was that the United States would actually cut back their funding. In fact, quite to the contrary, where it seems like Republicans and Democrats in Washington are just fighting over everything, they have come together on food security and working with us. I've had long-term relationships with key senators on both sides of the aisle, Democrats and Republicans, as well as in the House. The funding from the United States, which is extremely important, went from $1.9 billion to $3.5 billion for the year 2019. The United States sent messages, through me, to allies like Canada and the Europeans that they're not backing down, so please continue to step up.

I think the White House—both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue—see and understand the same thing that you as leaders in Canada see, which is that food security is a fundamental building block for the stability and security of any nation and region in the world. That's why I now state today that with the $8.4 billion we had in 2019, we were able to save lives and reached about 90 million people.

In the last three years, the number of people who are hungry has spiked for the first time in decades, from 777 million to about 815 million people, give or take. The question you would ask is why. The answer is actually very simple. It is man-made conflict. That's the number one driving force.

The second driving force is climate shocks, extremes or climate change. You can debate what causes the climate to change, but what you cannot debate is what we see on the ground. We were in Niger or Mali and places like that and those people are trying to survive the droughts and the flash floods. We can't just sit back and debate what is causing it. We have to be on the ground rehabilitating land, working alongside them and trying to bring them peace and security.

What's very sad is that extremist groups like al Qaeda, ISIS and Boko Haram try to exploit these very fragile environments. The hunger rate has gone back up. The severe hunger rate, meaning those who are on the brink of starvation, has spiked from 80 million to about 115 million people in the world in the last few years.

What's been really great news, when you think historically, 200 years ago, 95% of the people on earth were in poverty and 85% were in extreme poverty. That was when the world was at 1.1 billion. We had just turned the corner in such a magnificent way. Now with 7.5 billion people we had reduced the extreme poverty rate below 10%. We've developed, designed and implemented programs and systems around the world that are sharing wealth better than any other time period, arguably, in the history of mankind.

However, for the last three years we've been going in the wrong direction with man-made conflict, climate extremes and destabilized governments. These very difficult scenarios are now compounded with what we're facing with the coronavirus. Not many people realize that the World Food Programme is the logistics hub for the United Nations. We're also the containment mechanism on pandemics like Ebola.

● (1305)

Coronavirus is going to be a totally different game. We're concerned, obviously, like everybody, about the coronavirus, but then we get into more complex issues like supply chains. Let me give you an example of what we were seeing in China. It was one thing to have the coronavirus impact a particular area, but all of a sudden, the supply chains started breaking down. Chicken feed couldn't get to the chicken farmers. Pig feed wasn't getting to the pig farmers, etc., which compounded an already desperate situation.

In Africa, an already fragile system, we see the coronavirus moving in that direction, and it could be devastating. What could be probably more devastating is the economic downturn upon economies around the world. For example, Lebanon, your home country, Mr. Chair, is in desperate economic condition. That compounds the problem in Syria.

Syria's been at war for nine years. I was in Syria in the Idlib area just a few days ago. It was about as bad as you can possibly imagine: nine years of war, children having no futures and a generation of children completely without schools. We now have 780,000 children with school meals in schools in Syria because of our programs, thanks to the support of the Canadian people.

Now, what was already a bad situation.... Most people have been focused on Idlib in the last couple of months. That's bad, but there's still the rest of Syria in a desperate situation. Compounding that was the economic downturn in Lebanon, which is truly a desperate situation because the Syrian economy is dynamically tied to the Lebanese economy and banking system. Syrians who did have any money at all had it in Lebanese banks. Now they can't get their money out, so it has compounded the problem inside Syria.

In Yemen we're feeding about 13 million people on any given day out of 29 million people. That's a problem in itself.

Sudan—two years ago I would have never believed I would ever say this—is the brightest hope in all of Africa right now, but the window will close if we don't act substantively, comprehensively and quickly. You have a leader there with a team that truly wants to move the nation forward but to stabilize it and to prevent the extremist groups from exploiting what is a desperately declined economy, time is of the essence.

The Sahel region is deteriorating as we speak. Thousands of schools are closing. Thousands of civilians are being killed as a result of the extremist groups. Many of them came out of the Syrian war, moved into the Sahel region and are partnering with ISIS, with al Qaeda and Boko Haram in ways we've not quite seen before. They're more aggressive, exploiting a very fragile part of the world, anyway. Compound that with climate extremes as the Sahara continues to push down and now is knocking on the door of western African countries such as Togo, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire. When you think about all this in the Sahel region, then you think about how Libya is destabilized. Libya is the portal for sex trafficking, the slave trade, weapons trafficking, and migration by necessity into Europe.

We are the containment mechanism. Quite frankly, what we do know is that people don't want to move. They don't want to leave home. They've lived there all their lives and for decades. When you feed 90 million people on any given day, you know what's going on in the neighbourhood. If I fed every one of your families and your neighbourhoods for two years, I'd know what's going on in your neighbourhoods. It's just the reality of the World Food Programme. We see things. We watch things. People tell us things. People don't want to leave home.

In Syria, we can feed a Syrian for about 50¢ per day, which is almost double the normal rate, but it's a war zone, so the logistics are a little more expensive. If that Syrian were in Berlin or Brussels, the humanitarian supports would be 50 to 100 euros per day. The Syrian doesn't want to be in Berlin, quite frankly. It's nothing against Berlin; they want to be home. I haven't found a mother or father yet, no matter where I've gone.... I go probably to more countries than about anyone on earth per year, and I haven't met a family yet who wanted to leave home. They don't want outside support, but they're trying to survive.

In many cases, we are the first line of offence and defence against extremism. If a mother or father can't feed their child, and their only hope is an extremist group, they'll do probably what any of us would do to keep their child alive.

● (1310)

The Canadian support of the World Food Programme is a powerful weapon for peace. We use food as a weapon of peace, while others try to use it as a weapon of recruitment or weapon of war.

We will continue to put our lives on the line. That's one of the things I love about the humanitarian aid workers. They put their lives on the line every single day, because they know what's at stake and they have the heart for people. Regardless of their sex, their religion, their culture, it's all about humanity and we as people around the world.

Mr. Chair, I will answer any questions about any particular programs we are involved with, whether it's gender equality or school meals programs or countries in conflict, to the degree that I know what's going on.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beasley, for that testament of yours.

Now we'll move to Mr. Sweet, for seven minutes.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Mr. Beasley, thank you for being here, but more importantly, thank you very much for the critical work you do and the people whose lives you and your organization are saving on a daily basis. I can't say enough about the good work that the World Food Programme does.

Some years ago, a district attorney partnered with an organization called the International Justice Mission and they wrote a book called *The Locust Effect*. You just described pretty much what the book was about, that you can pour all kinds of money into aid, but if you have organizations like al Shabaab, ISIS and al Qaeda that are robbing people every day after you feed them, that creates a real problem.

Is there a growing consciousness amongst the networks of leaders, whether it's NATO and NORAD, or it's G8, G20, that security needs to be linked more and more with aid?

● (1315)

Mr. David Beasley: David, yes. In fact what is quite remarkable is that a year ago, the United Nations Security Council was able for the first time to pass a resolution very clearly stating that food security is critical to the security of any nation. You wouldn't have had that years ago.

In fact, the Russians and the Chinese on the Security Council, which don't seem to get along about anything, sort of like Republicans and Democrats, came together on this particular matter.

When you see trends and you're watching people's movement, you sort of see where it's going. You're in politics. You monitor people. You're listening. Two and a half years ago when I began expressing my grave concerns about what was taking place in the early stages in the Sahel region, a lot of people said that couldn't be happening. Now everybody's truly woken up to realize the reality on the ground. Without food security, you really will have no other security at all. It is a fundamental building block for any society.

The beneficiaries don't care whether it's a humanitarian dollar or a development dollar; they're just trying to survive. What we try to do is take even a humanitarian dollar in a non-short-term context, because the old paradigm was that in short-term humanitarian disasters—a cyclone, an earthquake, volcano, whatever it might be—you were in and you were out.

Today it's protracted conflict like in the Sahel, like Syria, like many other places and such. We try to take the humanitarian dollar and leverage that dollar to build community, give them some hope. The women are the most amazing. I mean they are absolutely amazing. With some of the men in some of these places, if you give food or money to the men, sometimes you don't know what will happen to it, but if you give it to the women, they get it to the children.

What we are doing more now is that in our program we want an exit strategy in every country. How do we achieve our goals and objectives? We want to be able to go in and ask what we can do to help them as a family no longer need outside support: food for asset programs, school meals programs, homegrown school meals. Historically we would just bring in commodities. Today, out of our $8.4 billion, $2.1 billion is cash-based transfers, so we put liquidity into the marketplace, give it to mothers who then put that cash into the community, help stimulate the economy, buy from local small-holder farmers, homegrown school meals. Instead of bringing in the commodities from the outside, we will meet with the local school teachers, the local moms and the local small-holder farmers. We will buy from the local small-holder farmers and then the children eat home-cooked meals and we help them with the nutritious diets they need. Some of them have a cultural way of eating that is not quite so healthy. Like you would see in Guatemala, they have calories, but they have the wrong calories.

In a context like the Sahel region, what we are doing is rehabilitating land. I have seen mother after mother stand on a hill with so much pride. I remember one particular woman who said, “Mr. Beasley, before, we had no hope”, but we've designed these half moons and they dig. A half moon is what you would think half a moon is. It is about 30 feet in diameter in a trench about this deep, about this wide and in an area like the Sahel you might get this much water a year, both flash flood or drought. When the flash flood hits, the water gets caught in these little trenches and you ought to see the pictures in one year. Well it stabilizes the area. One mother said, “No longer do I need help from the World Food Programme. Now I own five acres of land and I'm going to buy five more acres of land and now I'm no longer just needing your help, but I'm feeding my family, I'm feeding my village and I'm now selling into the marketplace”.

That's what we want, even in the most troubled, difficult areas of the world. Last year, our beneficiaries rehabilitated about half a million acres of land. We want to scale that up and we literally built over 15,000 kilometres of roads, feeder roads to get products in and out, these types of things. Water canals, thousands upon thousands of holding ponds, water reservoirs, so that they don't have to depend upon us.... It is a wonderful thing to see that take place.

● (1320)

However, if we're not there in these building blocks.... This is one of the things that we ask the ministries around the world from the different governments because it was always a development silo and a humanitarian silo. We're asking the governments to be more flexible and fluid with these funds so we can achieve objectives and leverage that dollar to do more in each particular situation.

Mr. David Sweet: I have 30 seconds.

Tell us quickly, the U.S. went from $1.9 billion to $3.5 billion. That's a 75% increase. How did you make the case for more aid money?

Mr. David Beasley: I've had a long history of relationships at the White House, as well as in the Senate and the House. Having been a United States governor, I served with many of them, and many of them are my Republican and Democrat friends.

When Trump got elected, everyone was mortified that he was going to zero-out international aid. I told my friends, because a lot of them were working at the White House, that I knew I could sit down and give the President the reality of what this meant. I knew at the time he had Mattis. So many other leaders—at that time there wasn't Pompeo; he was later—were all very supportive of the World Food Programme. Mattis had said, "If you want to buy more bullets, then cut the World Food Programme", that it was time to cut international aid.

If you go back to the election year, there was a real, strong movement of the Tea Party and conservatives, so I immediately went to them, sat down and said, "Let me show you what we're doing." I had to get talked into taking this job myself. That was not an easy decision because my first impression was that I wasn't going to work for the United Nations. I thought it to be inefficient, ineffective, incompetent—

The Chair: I'm sorry, we have to move on to the next speaker.

Mr. David Beasley: —and here I am, the biggest advocate in the world now for the World Food Programme, because liberals and conservatives lay aside their differences and come together when it comes to food security.

The Chair: With that, I'll move to Mr. Fonseca for seven minutes.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Beasley, for being here with us today, and for sharing your experiences with us. I know you're a very busy person, but your testimony is very important to us.

I'm new to this committee. I want to take you back to when you were here and I believe it was in December 2018. You had stated that the two areas that concerned you were the lack of digitization in the UN system and gender parity. How do you think those have changed now? What steps have been taken? Where are we? Can you give us some insight?

Mr. David Beasley: Yes, I can. In fact, we've now digitized some 50 million people. Biometrics are on about 18 million people. We're the world's largest operation in this sphere in the humanitarian world. Our ability to now use blockchain technology, artificial intelligence and satellite imagery is quite remarkable. How we use it in so many different contexts is quite remarkable. Small-holder farmers are now using cellphones to get access to markets so they're not bound to one particular buyer, in addition to what to plant, when to plant and whatever it might be. It is quite remarkable.

Also, especially in many of the areas that we're in, women have been oppressed for a long time. We now do 2.1 billion dollars' worth of cash-based transfers. When we come in, particularly with cash-based transfers, at least half of those are women controlling the money. What happens is domestic violence starts going down and the empowering of women in communities is absolutely remarkable.

In terms of gender numbers at the World Food Programme, since I arrived we've hired an additional 1,278 women. Our numbers have gone from 30% to 35% on national hires. You can imagine when your employees are in Yemen and Afghanistan, it's not so easy to find the numbers, because women haven't been out there in the workforce. Now we're building an incredible team from the top and the bottom. My leadership group was one out of five women, and now it's three out of six. My regional bureau directors were one out of six. Now, with the new numbers we're putting in, it's three out of six. Then we've hired the 1,278 women. It's probably more in the last 48 hours, but anyway, it's remarkable progress.

The school meals program is one of the most powerful weapons for gender equality, particularly in areas where girls don't get an opportunity to go to school. We will not implement a school meals program without that equality. We know that if the girls around the world get the same education as boys, it's a $30-trillion impact on the global economy.

We now have over 10 million women involved, being empowered, in the food assistance for assets programs. With small-holder farmers, opportunities are remarkable. It's truly quite exciting. I'd go on and on, but—

● (1325)

Mr. Peter Fonseca: I just want to say congratulations on those achievements.

In light of COVID-19 that we are going through right now, how will that data, the digitization, help you on the ground?

Mr. David Beasley: When it comes to Ebola, for example, we're the containment mechanism, and we work with the WHO. Containment here is going to be much more difficult. I don't know how you're going to contain it.

What we're concerned about, as I was saying earlier, is the supply chain. It remains to be seen. Our teams are literally working on this right now on a country-by-country context—how we use our technologies, availabilities and strengths—and we'll see.

One of the things that has impacted us, and I was doing an interview yesterday with I forget who, but he was asking how.... Our headquarters are in Rome—you know, touching everybody from it all—and we left two weeks ago. I don't want to say we saw it coming, but.... I've been tested twice since then, by the way, so you can relax.

It has created an extreme problem for us, because you can't shut down the World Food Programme. We are here for emergency operations. We are keeping people alive all over the world. Our teams are using technology and data, digital streaming and video conferencing. We have headquarters with about 1,900 people. We have 1,500 or 1,600 people working from home this week—we're trying to see how that's working—because Rome is shut down. If you want to visit Rome and see everything without crowds, this is the time to go, if you can get there. But it is a complex problem.

When you start dealing with the supply chain.... It's one thing if our people can't go to conferences; that's not a big, big deal. However, we have to move supplies and we have to move programs and policies along, because people will die if we don't. We can't just say that the coronavirus is here and we have to take a break. This is why I've not slowed down. I've been very keen to find the doors of opportunity...to come here, for example. I'm afraid the economic downturn that may happen from the coronavirus is going to impact not just Canadians, but it's going to extremely impact the already poverty-stricken places in the world that are going to need our continued help.

This is why I'm continuing to go out, hitting the drums and sounding the horns: We need help, and don't forget about the people who are starving to death. There are 25,000 people who die every day from starvation—every single day. I'm concerned about the coronavirus, but I also continue to be concerned about the 25,000 people who should not be dying but for the fact that we don't have the money and the access to reach them.

The Chair: There are 15 seconds remaining.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: I want to thank you very much, again, for those achievements.

It looks like the digitization, the work you've been able to do, is going to at least help in stemming some of what's going to happen with the fallout from COVID-19. That puts you in a good place, but there's a lot of work to do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. David Beasley: Let me add one comment, if you don't mind, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. David Beasley: Some of the new technology we're using is software, allowing us to acquire.... We now have a system that's unbelievable in terms of identifying products around locations that we otherwise couldn't have access to. It's saving us money, saving us time, and it's allowing us to move supplies at a much quicker pace.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lemire, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. My thanks for taking the time to say that in French. I am grateful to you.

Mr. Beasley, thank you very much for your testimony. I was very touched by it. I acknowledge your contribution and the interesting personal path you have taken.

I am struck by one of the sentences you used: food is a weapon of peace. I find that particularly interesting, as is your reminder of the importance of education and of its impact on the economy everywhere in the world. It is indeed a solution; these are things that I also believe in strongly.

For my first question, can I ask you if you are satisfied with Canada's contribution? Do you feel that we could do more as a country?

● (1330)

[*English*]

Mr. David Beasley: Have you ever heard of the program called *60 Minutes*? It is probably the most impactful documentary program in North America. A guy named Scott Pelley is a commentator. Scott was doing an interview with me. It was a 30-minute program just on Yemen.

I had known Scott. He had known me as a United States governor. At the end of the interview, we were taking down the microphones and Scott told me, right from the heart, that I have the greatest job on earth: saving people's lives. I agreed that I really do. It's absolutely remarkable. Then, I said I would tell him something that he hadn't thought of and it was going to bother him. He looked at me in bewilderment, wondering what that could be. I told him that I don't go to bed at night thinking about the children we saved. I go to bed at night weeping over the children we couldn't save because of a lack of money or a lack of access.

When you think that there's 300 trillion dollars' worth of wealth on earth today and that a single child goes to bed hungry, much less dies—every five seconds a child dies from hunger—it's unacceptable. When we don't have enough money, guess who has to decide who eats and who doesn't eat and who lives and who dies. I asked Scott how he would like to have that job. He looked at me and he said that he had never thought about that. I told him that we don't have a choice. We have to think about it and decide upon who eats and doesn't eat every day.

I don't want to say there's never enough money. We do need more money. We're so appreciative of what Canada has done, but as to the world's plight today, all nations need to step up more. If you don't, I think it's going to compound and it will cost you a hundred to a thousand times more. Thank you for what you're doing. We have more to do.

Let me say that it's not just about doing more. It's also about doing more strategically and effectively. I do think foreign aid and international organizations have learned a lot in the last 10, 20 or 30 years about the programs that aren't effective. Whether you're from the left or from the right, I think we all have an obligation to evaluate which programs are the most strategic, given that we have limited dollars. Where should they be most effectively placed?

We would love to see more money. We're appreciative of what we get. Let me leave it at that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I am also wondering about the distribution.

[*English*]

Do you understand French?

[*Translation*]

Mr. David Beasley: I understand it a little.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: No problem.

I am wondering what kind of verification is done in terms of the distribution. We sometimes hear about food being diverted and money stolen by corrupt groups.

How do you make sure that those who are really in need receive and can use the money and, above all, the supplies?

Mr. David Beasley: I understand your question.

[*English*]

In Yemen, there's a classic example of a catastrophe, in terms of monitoring and assessment. In places where we have the authority, the independence and the neutrality to operate, we can pretty much guarantee all of our food and assistance goes to the right people. One reason we use digitization and biometrics today is so we can assure taxpayers that their money is going to the intended beneficiaries. That's why monitoring and assessments are so important, which is why Yemen is such a disaster.

The Houthis have been a disaster to work with. It's the food diversion and not giving us the access we need for monitoring and assessment. This is one of the reasons we are pushing biometrics hard in Yemen right now. I don't want to say we're at a standstill, but the next few weeks are going to be critical as we negotiate this impasse. Why do you think they don't want us to have access? Why do you think they don't want us to have the assessment? Why do you think they don't want us to have the monitoring? It's because they're diverting food aid for a war effort or the underground economy. It's just deplorable what's taking place there.

We feed about 12.8 million out of the 29 million people there. It's all commodities. We've been moving cash into the government-controlled areas in the south using biometrics and digitization, but if we can get it into the Houthi-controlled areas.... The other 16 million people are buying in the commercial market, which is very difficult. They have very limited money and commodity prices have been going up and up. If we can bring in cash and know the cash is getting into the hands of the beneficiaries, it's putting liquidity into the market. Then the commodity pricing for those who we don't support will come down, which means we can benefit all the people.

Some of these Houthis and hardliners and Ansarullah don't care one single bit about their people. There are some Houthi leaders, though, who do. We are in a fight right now with regard to this issue. In fact, the United States is talking about suspending aid—not just food aid, but all aid—into Yemen until the Houthis agree to the basic fundamental humanitarian principles.

Quite frankly, if we can't push them forward to do the right thing, you could argue we're aiding and abetting in the violation of the most fundamental humanitarian principles.

● (1335)

The Chair: Thirty seconds remain.

Mr. David Beasley: Last September, when I did a suspension in the Houthi-controlled areas, it was mean. It took about a week or two, and they came around, but it was tough. It's a hard decision to make. It is. It's hard.

The Chair: With that, we're going to turn it over to Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you so much, Mr. Beasley. It has been lovely listening to you. I'm a newly elected parliamentarian and my career prior to this was in humanitarian assistance and international development, so a lot of this is very much resonating with me.

I will encourage you to be blunt. I'm from the opposition side, so I'm allowed to be blunt, but I'm quite enjoying the fact that I now can be partisan in my efforts. I couldn't do that as an international development person.

Could you talk about what the World Food Programme needs from Canada right now? Perhaps, if you wouldn't mind, you could touch on not just the dollar number, but the funding mechanisms that we have, the length of the contracts you'd like, the leadership you'd like to see in terms of what that looks like regarding the coronavirus and other challenges that we're facing. Maybe you could tie it in a little bit with some of the things that my colleague Mr. Sweet brought up in terms of security and how that support will assist with security in different regions.

Mr. David Beasley: Thank you.

One of the things that helps us in long-term planning is multi-year flexible funding. As you can imagine, if you're running any kind of program anywhere and you know you only have money for a year, you wonder how you can have long-term planning. How do you develop the programs and put the people and the systems you need in place? It is with more long-term, flexible funding. Canada has been a great advocate in the UN system globally in this regard.

We break down the silos, whether for school funding, school meals for children, nutrition programs or general food distribution programs. We could always use a little bit more money in each of these categories. Canada has a very important voice to be heard because they are one of our top donors, and I think Canada is given tremendous respect around the world.

The third thing is probably more important than anything. Everybody seems to be distracted. If you turned on the news in the last two years, what was it? It was Brexit, Brexit, Brexit, Brexit, and Trump, Trump, Trump Trump. Only in the last couple of weeks has it been coronavirus, coronavirus, coronavirus, and it's still Trump, Trump, Trump. People don't know what's going on around the world, how bad the calamities and catastrophes are—what we're talking about—in the places I've mentioned.

I do believe that people in Canada care, just like people in America do, but the leaders of the free world have become so distracted with so many things. I want to tell everybody to slow down a little bit. Let's bring the leaders of power together and solve South Sudan. Let's solve Yemen. Let's solve Syria. If we could just solve two or three of those, I believe we could end hunger by 2030—I really do—but it seems like we're all taking a piecemeal approach.

Let me say this, and it's one of the things for which I've been kind of hard on our friends, including the United States and the donors. Take any country—this would be the geographical location—and the United States will come in to do a little program here; Germany will come in to do a little program there; the U.K. will do a little program over here, and Canada will.... It's all good stuff, but I think we have to come together more strategically and comprehensively.

I have been pushing that. Nations need to come together and think things through with a more comprehensive approach. Some of these nations probably need more of a Marshall plan approach, quite frankly. I've been in some of these countries, and—I don't want to say who—one of my friends at one of the agencies said proudly that they had been there for 30 years. I asked, “Are you proud of that?”

In certain contexts you do need to be in place for 30 or 40 years, but sometimes, like in a humanitarian dynamic or a development dynamic, if you're still there after 30 years, you might want to back up and consider doing something a little differently. Our goal is to put ourselves out of business so that we're no longer needed. These are fundamental questions that need to be asked.

One of the greatest problems I see in the Sahel region and some of the sub-Saharan African countries is the lack of scalability. I could show you anecdotal evidence from, for example, Niger. When we come in with food rations, rehabilitate the land, and complement that with a school meal program, holy mackerel, migration by necessity drops off the chart; the marriage rate for 12-year-olds drops off the chart; teen pregnancy drops off the chart; recruitment by ISIS drops off the chart, and conflict between the herders and the farmers drops off the chart. You can quantify each one of those economically, and when you do that, you start to see that it's a lot cheaper to come in with a comprehensive program than it is to not address the root cause.

I'll give you an analogy. I'm a country boy, and I'd say it's like being at the old home when you have four or five water lines in the ceiling that are leaking. Well, one is leaking over there, and the carpet's now getting messed up, and the furniture's ruining, and the chair's ruining. Sometimes our political leaders are all fighting over where to put the buckets. We need to get up there and fix the leaks.

● (1340)

We need to fix the root cause. It's a lot cheaper to address the root cause, and this is where I call upon our allies, our friends, because Canada does a fantastic job. When I meet with the leaders here, they really listen, and I think everybody's trying to adjust to a new era of conflict, destabilization and protracted dynamics with what we're facing, with new climate extremes that are quite unprecedented as well as protracted conflict with ISIS and al Qaeda and these extremist groups and non-state rebel forces that you see from country to country.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I have 30 seconds. I would just finish by saying thank you very much. Certainly you alluded to the 2030 agenda and the SDGs, and that's something I hope we can work together on. I hope we get there.

Mr. David Beasley: Yes, thank you.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I will be pushing to get a little bit more money out the door.

Mr. David Beasley: Well, we appreciate that more than you know. I think it's a very delicate time right now. I'm very worried about the next six months.

The Chair: With that, we'll move to Madam Vandenbeld for *cinq minutes.*

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much. It's good to see you once again. Thank you for your previous appearance before the committee.

I, too, before politics did a lot of work with UNDP and UN Women, and I think that what you're saying about the costs up front versus how much it costs at the end by not investing is absolutely accurate.

I'd like to focus on what you said about the second-largest cause of food insecurity, which you said was climate change. To what extent can governments like Canada help countries with mitigation and adaptation and the kinds of measures that are going to be needed? I think I saw a statistic that climate change alone could push as many as three billion people into hunger. What is it that we could be doing to help mitigate that?

Mr. David Beasley: We're actually looking at several hundred million people displaced over the next 30 years. I have those specific numbers in terms of our analysis with the climate extremes that are continuing to take place on a much more routine basis than they were before.

I've explained to some of my friends who have questions about the climate changing. They said that the average temperature and average rainfall didn't change in that country. I said that the average rainfall didn't change and the average temperature didn't change, but let us look at it by season. By season it did change. The average rainfall was quite different that season and the average drought was quite different that season. In certain countries it still averaged out the same. In other countries it doesn't average out.

We push several things with donor countries. One, whether it's a humanitarian dollar or a development dollar, give us the flexibility to come in and rehabilitate land to help people survive. Last year, beneficiaries rehabilitated over half a million acres of land. That means they can survive. It's really that simple.

Give us the tools and the flexibility to not just provide cash, not just to provide a commodity but also allow the people with that same dollar to leverage that dollar so they can become more food secure, more resilient and more sustainable.

The other thing—and this is a decision that's particularly going to be difficult in the next year or two—is that there's not enough money for everything right now. I think you're going to have to prioritize. Quite frankly, I'm not saying this because I'm at the World Food Programme, but food security is fundamental to every family and nation on earth.

Development dollars—we don't get a lot of development dollars. No one impacts development on food security more than we do. So, we have to get the development dollars, because we are, in my opinion.... We can scale up and I say develop, but we're not building buildings and things like that. We're talking about water systems, irrigation systems, holding ponds, reservoirs and these types of simple building blocks, but they stabilize communities where water is an issue.

Let me give you an example of something we just did in Afghanistan. In the Mazar-e Sharif area, we would historically just bring in commodities. Well, okay, great; we were keeping people alive, but were we going to do that for 50 years? So, we went to the other side and asked our donor to give us flexibility and give us the cash. We went and met with the farmers in the stable area of Afghanistan and said we would buy from them, but we needed this quality and this quantity. Well, guess what happened. They hired more workers and bought more trucks and more equipment. Then, the milling operations needed to buy more equipment, buy more trucks and hire more people. It was the same dollar. Then, we bought it from them and took that commodity over to Mazar-e Sharif where, in the valley, they have droughts and flooding from the mountains. If they have a good crop it gets wiped out by the flood or the drought.

We met with the leaders and said we would provide this food to them with these conditions. Let's rehabilitate the mountainside. We began re-landscaping the foothills, and water was diverted into holding ponds and reservoirs with diversionary canals and small dams. The water was diverted such that, when a flash flood came, it didn't wipe out the crops in the valley. Then, when there was a drought—guess what—we had irrigation lines coming from the holding ponds.

I had this tribal leader stand there and proudly say that their children are no longer leaving; their children are no longer joining the Taliban or the anti-government rebel forces. They proudly are showing their friends from other tribal areas what it means to be in a beautiful land again. It was a remarkable success story.

We're no longer needed there, or we can now move on and do something else. This is what we want to do more of, because it really dramatically dynamically changes the fate of an area.

● (1345)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

The Chair: You have two more minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I would like to go into something that you started talking about in terms of gender. You said that when you give money to the women, they reinvest that into the community and into the children. You used the term “leverage that dollar”. When women are part of the design, the development and implementation of programs—not just recipients—how does that then impact?

Mr. David Beasley: That's extremely important. When I arrived at the United Nations, one of the first meetings of the first week was one of these drawn out, long meetings, and my first experience. I actually walked out after about six hours and told the Secretary-General, “You have to fire me. I'm not sitting through any more of that kind of stuff again.” It was just talk, talk, talk. Anyway, forgive me for saying that.

The end of the meeting was on gender equality and hiring more women. I was blown away. Of course, I was new, and they were like, “Is this a Trump guy? Is he going to be...? What's he going to say? What are his views on women?” There were all these kinds of perceptions and stuff. I was just listening. I had been quiet all day because I was new at the table, but finally, I said, “I can't believe you're talking about this.” The women didn't know what to think, “What's he going to say next?” I said, “How long have you been talking about this, 20 years? Why don't you just do it? It's not that complicated. Hire more women.” Then the women were like, “Ah, he's on our side.”

The point is that in the UN and in the corporate world, they focused on hiring just one or two women at the top and totally failed to understand the impact when you hire women all throughout the organization for a variety of reasons. The most important reason, as to your question, is that, when women are in the designing of systems, women have a different perspective, and it allows men and women to come up with better solutions, because women see things that men just don't. In the World Food Programme, we're more productive and we're more effective when women are in that decision-making process.

● (1350)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beasley. Unfortunately, we have to go to Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): What do you mean, "Unfortunately, we have to go to Mr. Genuis"?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: It was a great topic, but....

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's great to have you here with us today. I appreciate your comments. I want to ask two specific questions to jump off things you said.

The first is, can you dig in a bit further on the situation in Sudan? There's an amazing political transformation happening, a great source of potential hope, but obviously there are a lot of challenges ahead. What's your perception of what's happening there on the ground and the next steps for the future? It seems that a lot of this political change has happened with very little western engagement. What can we do to be more supportive of the forces of change and democracy there?

Mr. David Beasley: I've been in Sudan and South Sudan at least three times in the last couple of months, and it is a very delicate situation, but a remarkable opportunity. I contact Hamdok through WhatsApp literally several times per week to help him and leadership work through a maze of issues that have compounded the future because of the past. The state-sponsored terrorism list, in my opinion, has to be resolved quickly, immediately.

There are a lot of people around the world, especially in Washington, who wanted to think that this new government is nothing but the old government in new clothing. I can tell you quite frankly it's the farthest thing from reality. Hamdok is truly committed to the future.

I've met with Hemeti and Burhan on many occasions and had very frank, hard conversations with the doors shut and everybody out and literally getting down to the past, present and future. The government there has given us access and support in every location where we did not have it before, so we've been bringing people together. We brought Abdelaziz, the leader of the SPLM-N down in the south, and Hamdok together. We used that WFP equipment and helicopters and brought them together. People said that just can't happen. I have found when you don't negotiate through the press but bring people heart to heart.... It's just a great tradition when people will sit down heart to heart and face to face and run out everybody; it's amazing what happens.

The progress has been remarkable, but the extremist groups wait. They're waiting for the magic moments to come in, and if the west—I say the west, but if international donors, and they'll be primarily the west—do not come in with safety net programs.... We're there now in a substantive way, but you've got fuel subsidies, bread subsidies, and when the IMF....

First, we have to get the state-sponsored terrorism list off and that needs to happen quickly. I can spend a good bit of time talking about that, because I've been spending a lot of time in Washington meeting with staffers, meeting with senators, meeting at the White House, meeting with Pompeo and the state department going through these issues. I think many of those who were more hesitant to think there was a bright future have now come into the reality that this is a great opportunity.

The amount of finances that are going to be required will be significant, because you've got fuel lines now. I talked to Mohammed bin Zayed, the head of the UAE, about this last week. We talked for quite some time. I think you will see the gulf countries step up. One of the things I've been pushing is that the gulf countries must step up more, particularly in their part of the world, and not depend just on the western dollar. There are too many problems for just the West alone.

I could keep going on on this issue.

● (1355)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I want to squeeze in one more question that's in a different vein.

It's about the role of China in the world aid. There are concerns about strings attached, belt and road kind of aid being used as sort of a quasi-colonial project, espionage and all that.

What is your engagement like with the Chinese government and Chinese-backed entities? How do you see their influence in the aid space?

Mr. David Beasley: That's an interesting question. I need to be careful how I answer this thing.

China gives us a small amount of money. We're making the case to them that if they want to be in the multilateral world, they need to step up more. We're hopeful that they will. I think they've seen mistakes made in their past and I think they're trying to move in the right direction. We'll see. At the same time, what they did on food security in China over the past 40 years is an absolutely remarkable story. Their drive to end food security issues; how did they do it?

They have other issues like we all do, but China just made a major drive to put in place the new director at FAO. FAO is a lot smaller than us, but they're the expertise operation. China is all hands on deck to acquire this position. If the United States, for the west, backs up this much in the UN, China fills it. They've been very strategic.

This new Chinese leader takes over FAO and everybody's like, "Oh my gosh. WFP with a U.S. person there and FAO with a China person." He and I have really worked hard to say that we must take advantage of the relationships we have from both our countries to try to do what we can to end hunger in countries. We all have a lot to learn from one another. We have a lot of opportunity, so let's not blow this opportunity. Whether you like him being there or not, that's not my decision. That's above my pay grade, but it is my obligation to try to help him be effective. He's a doer. This is a get-it-done kind of guy. We'll see what happens.

Let me give you a good example. I was down in Zimbabwe. I was very concerned and meeting with the leadership of Zimbabwe. You know the issues in Zimbabwe. China had just committed to 400 boreholes in Zimbabwe. I heard about it and I thought that they needed to put those boreholes where we are, so we won't need to be there anymore. I picked up the phone and called him. I told him that since he knows who to talk to in Beijing, how about he get on the phone and tell them to sit down with us and let us overlay our operations, because it's primarily U.S. dollars and Chinese boreholes. We were taking advantage of our relationships and now we're coming together to try to overlap and strategically align boreholes where there are droughts and the need for this type of collaboration.

There are a lot of issues. I think China's struggling with this. A new book that's coming out soon talks about China's past—meaning the last 50 years—and the mistakes they made. It's interesting. It's written by a professor at Tsinghua University. My daughter's in the masters program at Tsinghua.

This is one of the things that I've said to a lot of my friends.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beasley. Could you just wrap up in a couple of seconds.

Mr. David Beasley: We will do everything we can to help any nation, including China, move in the right direction to be a good player in a multilateral world. I think we all can improve and do better.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Beasley and Mr. Rugholm.

[*English*]

In this committee, we really appreciate the vast array of information we got today.

You mentioned the severe hunger going from 80 million to 115 million. You mentioned the reasons for that are the instability around the world, whether it's political instability or conflict. We're seeing more need for the World Food Programme. We want to really thank you and your team and Mr. Rugholm for all the work you're doing. We know when there's a crisis or a disaster the World Food Programme is there.

We will take this back to our officials in Canada and make sure that we do what we can to continuously contribute to the World Food Programme.

Thank you very much.

● (1400)

Mr. David Beasley: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Daniel Rugholm (Deputy Director, Public Partnerships and Resourcing, World Food Programme): Thank you.

The Chair: I have two reminders for the committee. Submit your topics of study by 4 p.m. tomorrow, which is Friday. Also, on March 24 there will be a briefing with Cheryl Hardcastle and Sven Spengemann on the current situation in Rohingya.

Mr. David Sweet: It's Rachael Harder.

The Chair: What did I say?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira): You said Cheryl Hardcastle.

The Chair: Oh, sorry. She was the member on the previous committee. It was Rachael Harder and Sven Spengemann who visited the region there.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.