



**Joint statement by the Principals of FAO, WHO, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and UN OCHA
on ending the scourge of malnutrition in children**

14 July 2019

As principals of the United Nations humanitarian system, we have all looked into the blank stare and nearly lifeless body of a badly malnourished child, whose ever-so shallow breathing is often the only sign of life.

We have all been deeply affected when a child could not be saved.

But we have also witnessed the tireless work that United Nations staff and partners do every day – often in dangerous environments – so that children on the brink of death can recover and so that hungry children lacking enough nutritious food never fall to that level.

Every year, the United Nations provides 10 million children suffering from acute malnutrition (“wasting”) with services they need to recover, including nutrition treatment, treatment of infections such as diarrheal diseases, hygiene and sanitation services, and access to clean water and the nutritious diets needed for healthy growth. Two million malnourished pregnant women and new mothers received food supplementation to improve their nutrition and that of their baby. Furthermore, the United Nations also supports millions more children every year so that they do not fall into a state of malnutrition, by promoting, protecting and supporting breastfeeding and adequate access to healthy and nutritious diet at all times.

Yet, after decades of falling, the number of hungry people in the world has increased in recent years. Now they number 820 million. In addition, nearly 50 million of children under the age of five are “wasted” – that is children suffering from acute malnutrition, marked by their being underweight for their height. And 149 million are “stunted” – that is suffering stunted growth in height and development caused by malnutrition.

For many children, undernutrition begins in the womb due to mothers not being able to access the healthy diets they need. The children who survive these risky pregnancies and the first critical months of life are more likely to have some form of malnutrition - being stunted or wasted - and millions suffer both forms at the same time. These children are much more likely to die before the age of 5 because their immunity to infections is weakened by a lack of nutrients. Those who survive may go on to suffer poor growth and mental development. In many cases, their cognitive development is permanently impaired, and they perform worse in school and are

less productive as adults. They are at greater risk of living a life in poverty, which means their children will be more likely to suffer the same fate. Breaking the intergenerational transmission cycle of malnutrition is key to eradicating malnutrition in all its forms and to reach Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The United Nations is working to put a more unified response in place. To draw attention to the growing problem of malnutrition and bring the international community together for an integrated response, the United Nations will launch the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World tomorrow to share the latest information on the number of individuals in the world suffering from hunger and more importantly the number of children still wasted and stunted.

The United Nations is learning from existing studies to improve the tools we have to treat and prevent malnutrition. We are supporting research to ensure improvements to existing treatment guidelines are based on the best possible evidence. In the light of that, the World Health Organization will publish comprehensive, updated guidelines on treating acute malnutrition (“wasting”) by the middle of 2021. We are working to build environments that ensure access to healthy and nutritious diets at all times and ensure families with acutely malnourished children can access life-saving treatments, including in their communities and outreach clinics so they do not have to travel up to hundreds of miles to get a child to a clinic. More importantly, the United Nations is also working to prevent malnutrition with increased efforts, especially for households with infants and children, in livelihood development, social protection measures, and accessible health services that can result, increased consumption of healthy and nutritious diets, and healthy growth and development.

With conflict driving much of the growth in hunger and malnutrition in recent years, we are streamlining treatment and prevention for acute malnutrition in complex emergencies. Recognizing, however, that the larger burden of malnutrition in terms of absolute numbers affected is outside of conflict, we are also working with governments to enhance prevention and treatment programmes for all forms of malnutrition.

Before the end of the year, we will launch the UN Global Plan of Action on Wasting to underscore our commitment to global action over the next decade to stop malnutrition before it occurs and to give children the chance to reach their full potential, while ensuring that all children and women suffering from acute malnutrition receive the treatment they need.

To succeed, the United Nations is ready to support the member states to further develop and implement their policies, programmes and strategies, to address the burden of all forms of malnutrition. For success, we need the world’s commitment to be matched by the required funding. It is a good investment – for every dollar spent on preventing child malnutrition there is a US\$16 return in reduced health costs and increase productivity.

The future of millions of children hangs in the balance. We must not let them down.

ENDS

Signatories:

David Beasley, Executive Director, World Food Programme
Henrietta Fore, Executive Director, UNICEF
Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization
Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
José Graziano da Silva, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization
Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief
Coordinator

For further details, please contact:

In New York: **Russell Geekie**, +1 917 331 0393, geekie@un.org

In Geneva: **Vanessa Huguenin**, +41 79 444 4065, huguenin@un.org