



Funding Appeal to the Korean Minister of Unification Lee In-Young on behalf of the UN World Food Programme

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DEAR HONOURABLE MINISTER IN-YOUNG LEE:

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), allow me to extend our deep appreciation for the Ministry of Unification (MoU)'s previous contributions to WFP's operations in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). I am writing to request further cooperation support from the Korean government for our ongoing operations leading into 2021. I am sincerely grateful for the strong partnership between the Republic of Korea (ROK) and WFP, and I hope that we can continue this trend in the upcoming year.

According to a speech by Director Hyoung-Joon Lim of the WFP Korea Office, WFP has been present in North Korea since 1995, and partnership with authorities has made significant progress to reduce hunger and malnutrition (Lim). An analysis by UNICEF shows that chronic malnutrition for children under the age of 5 has fallen significantly since 2012 from 28% to 9% (Lim). Currently, WFP runs food assistance programs in North Korea designed to address specific needs for pregnant and nursing women, children under the age of 12, distributed over a network of over 1,000 kindergartens, food, organizations, and hospitals (Lim).

I would like to elaborate on why WFP, among other organizations, deserves particularly urgent attention at this time. Although many organizations within and outside the UN are working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, there is a reason why zero hunger (eradicating world hunger) was selected as the second goal. In 2018, 9.2% of the world population was defined as severely food insecure (Roser): the other goals, including education, gender equality, and health simply cannot be addressed when entire populations are starving to death. Malnutrition contributes to an estimated 45% death of children in developing countries during the early ages of 0-5 years (Prendergast 1), also causing stunted growth and insufficient weight (Ahmed 1). Additionally, undernourished

children have often been linked to low academic achievement, school dropout, and delinquency in their later years (Victoria). In light of such examples, I believe that the World Food Programme deserves ROK's intentional and strategic funding as a key partner in delivering Korean Official Development Assistance (ODA) to other countries.

HISTORY OF ROK WFP

To emphasize the importance of strengthening the ROK-WFP (Republic of Korea-World Food Programme) partnership, I would like to provide background context on the history of WFP operations after the Korean war.

As many Koreans are well aware, WFP has played a key role in the development of the ROK economy. Their relationship began in 1963 when the ROK Ministry of Agriculture requested emergency humanitarian food aid. Since the end of World War II, various reconstruction activities were carried by the United Nations until the end of the 1950s, thereby greatly contributing to ROK's post-Korean War recovery ("Top 20 Donors").

During the first 20 years (1964-1984), WFP assisted ROK through a total of 23 projects. From the 1960s, assistance from the international community shifted away from the existing post-war recovery assistance, to that of economic development for ROK. Under this circumstance, WFP began to provide food assistance to ROK as grants for agricultural production and reforestation projects. In particular, WFP gave cereals to workers participating in Food for Assets projects for agricultural land reclamation, road construction, flood-control work, and erosion-control work ("Food Assistance for Assets"). This helped ROK citizens better overcome lean season and establish infrastructures for ROK's rapid economic development.

ROK graduated from the list of WFP recipient countries in 1984 and became WFP's 14th largest donor after only one generation in 2020 ("Contributions to WFP in 2019"). ROK's constant strive to overcome hardships of the past is highlighted through ROK's history in moving on from being one of the world's poorest countries with

a per-GDP capita of USD 70 (Chun 5) to now the world's 10th largest economy (IMF). With its unique experience of rapid economic and social development, ROK is said to be a living history of achieving zero hunger. With its ability to empathize with current recipient countries under difficult circumstances, I believe that ROK can become a model donor that plays a leading role through its own experience of hunger. More than any other country, DPRK stands as a brethren and neighbor to ROK: despite the residual hostility and trauma of war, we cannot deny that those in DPRK once shared history with the Republic of Korea as well, and it is our duty and responsibility to feed the mouths of our faraway relatives.

ROK COVID 19 RESPONSE

Furthermore, I wish to highlight the expertise and advantage that ROK has acquired in providing health-related humanitarian assistance after the COVID-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ROK was able to quickly curb and contain the spread of COVID-19 due to its swift response plan (Kang et al.). As of October 2020, ROK's number of recoveries amounted to nearly 24,000 people, resulting in a 92% recovery of all patients. After social distancing rules were eased to the lowest level on October 12, the national GDP grew by 1.9 percent in July-September, showing the first signs of growth after the spread of COVID-19 ("Korea's Economy Returns to Growth"). The government's COVID-19 response plan included three key aspects: detection, with over 600 testing centers and 2.6 million tests conducted, containment through quarantine monitoring, and treatment with additional medical workforce and temporary hospitals. Innovative responses such as drive-through testing, self-quarantine monitoring, and stabilization of mask supply and distribution are considered as part of Korea's success, making Korea an exemplary model for other countries ("Korean New Deal 2020").

As the leading country for COVID-19 response, ROK has received heightened interest from the global community. During this critical time, I strongly urge your excellency to take advantage of this attention and expand strategies, particularly in the direction of food assistance and COVID-19 response for North Korea. According to the 2021 Comprehensive Implementation Plan for International Development Cooperation, the Korean government announced its goals to play a leading role in the global community by sharing its successful experiences and knowledge regarding COVID-19 through the K-model ("Plan for International Development Cooperation"). The official document states plans to initiate projects in

various sectors such as policy/administration, prevention/monitoring, diagnosis/examination, and treatment/management in developing countries ("Plan for International Development Cooperation"); I believe that these strategies strongly align with WFP's health programs, including the WASH (improving water and sanitation) project, Iron and Folic Acid Supplementation, and various social protection investments ("Wellbeing of Children"). Through close cooperation with WFP, ROK can provide swift and efficient aid to North Korea as well. Although I understand these are turbulent times for the Korean economy as well, I believe that now is the chance for ROK to take the lead as one of WFP's largest government donors around the world and contribute to human rights in North Korea.

ARGUMENTS AND CONTROVERSIES

Of course, I do not wish to overlook the heated controversy within ROK over providing humanitarian assistance to DPRK: Korean citizens are wary of WFP's food assistance to DPRK, especially with the recent heightening of inter-Korean tensions. Even until 2018, North and South Korean relations seemed to have improved after the two inter-Korean summits. However, relations soon escalated after DPRK demolished a liaison office in June of 2020, worsening with the recent shooting of a South Korean official in September. I am deeply sorry to recall how in June 2019, the Ministry of Unification's contribution of 50,000 tons of rice aid to DPRK was put on hold due to the joint military drills between ROK and the US (Yonhap News). I understand that the MoU was deeply let down by these events and we lacked the capability to change or impact these governmental decisions.

Additionally, I am well aware of the criticism MoU has received from the domestic media for contributing a large sum of money to DPRK, bringing up suspicions that Pyongyang was discriminately feeding children from families loyal to the regime and dispensing the aid among the army (Bennett 6). Additionally, the UN has been reinstating sanctions on DPRK after multiple nuclear tests were conducted, making long-term aid difficult (Lee). Because of these past issues, I acknowledge it must be a challenge for you to make such a risky commitment, especially in the midst of this political and economic instability.

REFUTATION #1

However, I plead that you will allow me to elaborate why, despite these challenges and opposition, it is so important to support DPRK at this time. According to the presentation of Director Hyoung-Joon Lim of the WFP

Korea Office during the 2020 Korea Global Peace Forum, “Humanitarian aid is based on the principle of equality: we believe that anyone in this world has the right to receive aid to ensure their basic rights, and that is the basis of humanitarian aid” (Lim). As a global citizen, I believe that humanitarian assistance should always be provided regardless of political interests and tensions.

In case you have not heard, let me provide several details on DPRK’s situation: after the recent monsoon, the DPRK newspaper reported that North Korean farmers were struggling with crop destruction, disease, and pests. The intense rains in the country’s two Hwanghae provinces led to danger of food production disruption (“Monsoon Rains”). Furthermore, DPRK is facing an economic downturn since the mid-1990s famine, due to the drastic measures the country has taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Terry). COVID-19 restrictions against travel, daycare centers, schools, and food supply suspended WFP’s school feeding programs in DPRK, forcing us to close all offices outside of Pyongyang (Lim). Market activities were a huge source of economic aid to families in DPRK, but the lockdown suspended this as well (Lim). It is in these circumstances that we look to you for support: WFP will not give up on the women and children in DPRK, and we hope that you will stand with us in this fight.

According to Director Lim, the UN has been taking various measures to aid people who were hard-hit by COVID-19, providing emergency aid worth USD 40 million in the field of healthcare. While other organizations have left the field due to COVID-19 restrictions, WFP resumed activities in July, providing nutrition-fortified biscuits for North Korean children and handing out published booklets holding important messages about nutrition (Lim). This is an opportunity for ROK to send out a global message to other donor countries as well: as part of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, we believe that this type of food assistance could actually alleviate tensions between North and South Korea and provide one more step towards establishing peace on the Korean peninsula.

REFUTATION #2

The second defense that I wish to make in terms of the risks of providing food assistance to the DPRK is that WFP has been addressing these issues throughout recent years of developing and fixing various programs to prevent such mishappenings.

Recently, WFP has strengthened its monitoring and evaluation programs in each childcare center (Executive Board). According to Director Lim’s speech, WFP has been

strategizing its operations to provide super cereal rather than rice, which requires a specific cooking method and is not as accessible for normal citizens to eat on their own. (Lim) Therefore, this has made it much more difficult for the DPRK government or the DPRK army to steal the food assets. The super cereal contains essential micronutrients for pregnant and lactating women, as well as children, and can be used to make bread or porridge with the right recipe. (Lim) As the world’s largest humanitarian organization, WFP can assure you that the food assistance we provide will indeed be delivered to the hands of those who truly need them, under our best possible monitoring system in place.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to thank your excellence once again for all your interests and contributions to WFP. In 2019, we provided aid in DPRK to about 662,570 people, mostly pregnant and lactating women and children (Lim). Currently, we have 11 production plants in DPRK that produce super cereals and nutritious biscuits and are planning to scale up projects for the following years (Lim). In 2021, we will carry out a one-million-dollar project to tackle malnutrition and hunger in DPRK, and we would like to invite ROK to participate in this project through next year’s multilateral contributions. We are deeply grateful to the ROK government and people for consistently funding our operations over recent years, recognizing that neutrality and impartiality are fundamental principles that underpin our work. As I mentioned previously, in just one generation your nation went from a recipient country to a donor country. It’s a truly inspirational journey that proves that with commitment and hard work, zero hunger is achievable. ROK is a tremendous example of everything WFP shares and strives for, and we hope this journey can continue in your closest neighboring country DPRK. As stated in the 2021 Comprehensive Implementation Plan for International Cooperation, the amount of ROK’s ODA demand for 2021 has increased from the budget of 3.42 trillion won this year to approximately 4.99 trillion won: this high budget growth reaffirms the government’s firm commitment to expanding ODA (“Plan for International Development Cooperation”). Regardless of political and economic challenges, UN WFP believes that providing humanitarian aid to DPRK is an essential responsibility for the entire global community, and we strongly encourage ROK to take the first step as our most reliable donor to bringing peace, health, and zero hunger across the Korean peninsula.

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