



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Investing in rural people



World Food
Programme

Rome 16 March 2020

Excellencies,
Distinguished Permanent Representatives to FAO, IFAD and WFP,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, we intended to hold a virtual joint briefing of the three Rome-based Agencies (RBAs) last week to apprise you of our preparedness measures and ongoing response to the current novel Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) virus outbreak. Taking advantage of technology, Permanent Representatives would have been able to participate by remote audiovisual connection.

Since the decision was taken to hold the virtual meeting, the COVID-19 situation continued to evolve rapidly. Through decrees of the Council of Ministers, the Government of Italy announced the creation of a single protection zone on 9 March and imposed more restrictive measures throughout Italy on 11 March. In light of these decisions and measures put in place by the Italian Authorities, we decided instead to provide you with an update on action taken by our three agencies through this joint letter.

During these difficult times, it was heartening to have received full support from the Secretary-General given the current context and uneasiness of all concerned.

Over the last five weeks, we have implemented a series of precautionary measures to ensure the health and safety of all our employees and their families, irrespective of location, against the threat of the COVID-19, while safeguarding business continuity for the benefit of our stakeholders. These measures have been implemented in accordance with guidelines and protocols set by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Italian Authorities.

The FAO Director-General is the UN Designated Official for Italy with responsibility for the safety and security of all UN employees in the country. To this effect, FAO has been coordinating briefings and support to the UN Security Management Team since the beginning of the crisis.

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Senior-level teams that coordinate actions and manage the situation have been in place for several weeks in all three agencies under the leadership of Deputy Director-General, Laurent Thomas, FAO, Associate Vice-President of the Corporate Services Department, Guoqi Wu, IFAD and Deputy Executive Director Amir Abdulla, WFP. These teams are meeting regularly within the respective organizations to assess the situation, develop precautionary measures and responses. The scope of their work covers business continuity and continued services to stakeholders, as well as employee health, safety and security.

There is also a constant interaction among the RBAs, regularly exchanging information, meeting at least once a week and benefiting from direct interaction with the Italian Authorities.

As Italy is deeply affected by COVID-19 all three agencies have implemented a number of preventive measures at their respective headquarters to ensure the well-being of all employees. Each organization is extending these measures worldwide, as necessary.

Based on WHO's recommendations, guidance has been issued to all employees via email and other internal communications. Hygiene measures have been strengthened.

Employees have been encouraged to maintain social distance in the office, lifts, cafeterias and other common areas. Seating in cafeterias and restaurants has been reduced and the hours extended, thereby limiting the number of people present at any given time. Vendors and service providers have been advised to adopt precautionary measures.

Staff members who have travelled in any of the affected areas have been asked to self-quarantine under the supervision of our medical services.

With regard to business continuity plans and related remote working modalities: i) staff members with children were permitted to work from home following the Italian Government's decision to close all schools. The option was also made available to expectant mothers; ii) following successful pilots, the RBAs activated their headquarters Business Continuity Plans, deploying only skeleton staff at headquarters with a remote working plan in place to reduce our risk of exposure to the virus. The remainder of employees are working from home, with flexible measures in place.

These measures were developed in consultation with the staff representatives and each organization is now also extending these measures to field locations as necessary.

At the same time, the RBAs have been progressively postponing or cancelling large gatherings scheduled for late February and the month of March, meetings, workshops, training, group visits, fairs, exhibitions and film screenings. The scheduled observance of the International Women's Day on Friday, 6 March 2020 at FAO headquarters, for example, was turned into a virtual one, with no live audience but people following on webcast.

While staff travel is reduced to the absolute minimum and most employees work from home, we are committed to ensuring delivery of services and smooth functioning of the Rome-based agencies.

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Permanent Representatives to FAO, IFAD and WFP,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve in Italy and around the world, the RBAs remain vigilant, with their crisis management teams working around the clock assessing risks, adjusting measures and issuing further guidance to our institutions. We will thus continue to monitor the situation in other countries to ensure our staff in the field receive adequate support.

We consider the well-being of our employees to be our top priority in these trying times and we will continue to keep you abreast of any new measures taken.

We will do whatever we can to minimize the negative impact on our programme delivery.

FAO is now assessing and responding to the developmental and humanitarian dimensions of this crisis from work on animal-human interface together with WHO and OIE, to strengthening laboratory capacities in member countries together with IAEA, to assessing the impact of this pandemic on food systems - which is expected to be major - and planning for enhanced support to affected populations while keeping pace under major operations such as the locust outbreak response. At the same time, IFAD is striving to fully maintain the Fund's ability to deliver on its inclusive rural transformation mandate in support of poor rural communities, both, by its workforce at HQ and increasingly in duty stations around the world. WFP is working to ensure it can continue to serve its 87 million beneficiaries, building surge capacity and prepositioning three months of food. It is offering expertise to support the wider humanitarian world through air, sea and land transportation, and continuing to support local governments to maintain their own supply chains.

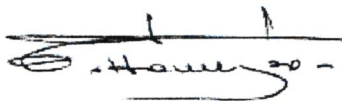
For those of us at headquarters as guests of our Host Country, and those in the field, we are fully aware of our shared responsibility, to help stop, contain, control and reduce the impact of this virus.

The RBAs remain committed to focusing their efforts in supporting the safety of the staff while also taking measures to ensure business continuity. In closing, we would like to express our full solidarity with our Host Country, Italy as well as all the RBA Member States who may be exposed to the current situation and wish you and your families good health.

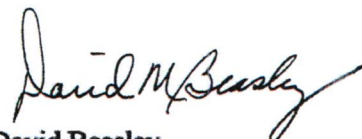
Cordially,



QU Dongyu
Director-General
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Gilbert Houngbo
President
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David Beasley
Executive Director
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