**2025 Norman E. Borlaug International Dialogue**
**Session Title**: Legacy of Leadership: Driving Global Humanitarian Solutions
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**Speakers**

- Valerie Guarnieri | Assistant Executive Director, Programme Operations, World Food Programme

**Transcript**
Valerie Guarnieri:

It's such an honor to be here with you today. The World Food Programme Executive Director, Cindy McCain, is sorry not to be here. She sends her congratulations to everyone involved in this year's prize, and to the distinguished leaders who are gathered here for your inspiring work. And, I really want to thank Secretary Vilsack, Mashal Husain, and the rest of the World Food Prize team who have brought this exceptional event to life. This symposium here in Iowa is very special.

US farming has played a central role in the creation of the World Food Programme, an organization that I've been proud to serve for the past twenty five years. And already, back in 1961, WFP was created with the support from US farming. So, this event feels a bit like coming home. Each year, this is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on Norman Borlaug's legacy and achievements, and it feels like particularly good timing in today's context. Not so long ago, the world's most pressing issue was how to produce enough food for everyone.

And thanks to the breakthrough work of Norman Borlaug, and the subsequent work of generations of scientists and the world's farmers, we now can produce enough, more than enough food for everyone. Bold ambition and scientific advances have helped to make this possible. And, we owe a debt of gratitude to the great pioneers, some of whom have received the World Food Prize, and some of whom are here today. Feeding the world is like a dance, a dance of science, and trade, and policy, and innovation and partnership combined with hard work, dedication, patience and passion. And these forces for good have powered miraculous developments in agriculture production and have powered economies in recent years. But, unfortunately, these advances are no longer enough to tackle global hunger.

In recent years, food insecurity levels have reached stratospheric levels, driven up by war, weather, economic stagnation, apathy and inaction. We're living in a time where there's food enough to feed everybody, yet we have two man made famines. Millions of people face starvation and even death. One famine in Gaza and the other in Sudan. I was in Sudan last month, where half the country's population, 25,000,000 people, are facing acute food insecurity.

Two million children face acute malnutrition. WFP and our partners are getting life saving food assistance to over four million people each and every month. It's a huge operation, and it's taken some time to scale it up. But, at the very moment, where we are scaled up to reach that number of people still short of the overall need, we're having to pull back the support due to lack of assistance. It's heartbreaking.

I spent time when I was in Sudan meeting with families who send their children every day to collect a tin of food and take it home to feed the family. These families, other than this tin of food, don't know where this meal is coming from. And they want to be able to produce or buy the food that their families eat. They want to be able to cook a meal and serve a meal at the table for their families, or on a mat on the floor, just as all of us would want to be able to do. So, it's heartbreaking to have these conversations, especially when we're not even sure if we're going to be able to provide that tin of food tomorrow.

Many of you will have seen last week's news about the ceasefire in Gaza. Now, that's a relief, and it offers a window of hope, and we're using that window of hope in order to deliver food and nutrition support to children, to families. The effort here is that we can roll back famine, and we can combat this malnutrition that is threatening lives. Now, beyond the nightmare scenario of famine, we're seeing hunger, acute hunger, in far corners of the world. And there's been a ripple effect, as donors slash their official development assistance budgets for a variety of reasons.

And for the World Food Programme, this translates to 40% less funding for our programs this year, as compared to last year. The toll of these cuts is staggering. We've been forced to reduce the number of people we feed in the Democratic Republic of Congo by almost 75%, cut millions of people off distribution rules in Somalia. We've reduced our hot meal programs in Haiti, where families are now just receiving half of what they were receiving before. Now, we ignore these crises at our peril.

There will be lives that will be lost, and there's a risk that global instability will increase. Because rising hunger today destabilizes regions and can spur migration and global instability tomorrow. The good news is there are solutions to turn this around. This symposium is taking place in America's bread basket, where the United States' generous contribution to feeding the world is so evident. Farmers and leaders here know that contributing to solving the hunger crisis is a moral and national security imperative, where programs like Food for Peace can also have economic benefits right here at home.

Food grown on American farms is helping WFP to save lives right now around the world. From American sorghum for refugees in Ethiopia, to corn in South Sudan, to special soy based nutrition products and soy-based vegetable oil in Haiti and in Sudan. In places where markets are disrupted by the front lines of war, or by other factors, these commodities are a lifeline to millions and a sign of America's bounty and generosity. WFP stands ready, as it always has, to partner with American farmers and the U.S. government to save even more lives. We also buy food locally and regionally, close to people we serve.

And, the U.S. has supported WFP to do this, as have our other donors. And, of course, this room represents a global community, a community of humanitarians, of innovators, of policy experts, of business leaders, of diplomats. And, this coalition of the willing is capable of delivering humanitarian solutions that meet the moment. Together, we can reverse the current crisis of global food security. Already, you've helped agencies like WFP provide faster, more effective, more scalable solutions that enable communities to feed themselves.

This year's theme of Soilutions is a fantastic example. It reminds us of how critical soil health is to ensuring agricultural production. And innovation with soil health can lead to improving crop yields. And that can reduce the reliance of millions of people on emergency assistance, and we need to reduce that reliance and help people grow and feed for themselves. For example, on one project in West Africa's Sahel region that I've had a chance to visit, WFP and our partners have been helping communities to put back into production barren land, and manage the soil better, so that they can be more resilient to extreme weather like droughts or floods.

And the results were incredible. In Niger, 80% of the villagers that participated in this program didn't require emergency assistance, despite a drought that forced their communities, their neighbors to rely on that assistance. 500,000 people lifted off of humanitarian aid, thanks to this kind of work. Now, we rely on our private sector partners' expertise and financial support to deliver. Whether it's deploying artificial intelligence for disaster response, introducing climate resilient crops, pioneering new financing models, or building the world's largest blockchain based humanitarian platform, science, innovation and funds are helping us to be smarter and more efficient in fast paced shifting environments.

I'm looking forward to discussing this further with partners in just a couple of minutes. And I want to leave you with this. At the World Food Programme, we talk about saving lives and changing lives. Well, the research that Dr. Borlaug pioneered and that we are all carrying forward has saved and changed billions of lives.

And year in and year out, the World Food Prize represents our collective commitment to carrying that legacy forward together. Thank you so much.