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Remarks of President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies Laura Boldrini, to the World Food Programme

Rome, WFP headquarters

I am delighted to be here today at this session of the World Food Programme. I would like to extend my greetings to the President of the Republic of Ghana, who opened today's session with a speech containing many highly interesting points, and to congratulate him for the manner his country has supported international efforts to address the Ebola crisis. My greetings also to the Ambassadors in the room, the members of the Executive Board, its Director, H.E. Ertharin Cousin, and all WFP staff.

Being here is like a homecoming for me.

As some of you may know, I worked in this Organisation for five years. My time coincided with some terrible international crises: the genocide in Rwanda, the wars in the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, conflicts in former Soviet republics. These were, more than anything, wars conducted against civilians, and they led to a great loss of human life and large numbers of refugees in need of assistance. For me, it was an unforgettable experience that shaped my professional and personal path.

With the benefit of hindsight I can now see more clearly the truth of what I had perceived when I was part of this Organisation: its real strength lies in human capital. The financial resources that countries allocate to the WFP would never be sufficient to achieve its objectives: it is the men and the women who work here, acting with a high sense of humanity and responsibility, who turn those resources into practical aid and ensure basic food commodities arrive as quickly as possible in the remote places where they are needed.

I know it is a very rewarding job, but one that requires a lot of self-sacrifice. This self-sacrifice can extend even to the loss of one's life, as testified to by the plaque in the entrance lobby displaying the names of the many heroic WFP staff who died doing their good work, some of whom I had the privilege of knowing in person. Let me in particular recall that 15 years ago, on the 12th of November 1999, a WFP-chartered aircraft crashed north of Pristina in Kosovo. 24 passengers and crew lost their lives. Three of the passengers were WFP staff, among them Paola Biocca, a friend who had some time before taken up the post of WFP spokesperson.

I remember them with great sadness, and with affection.

During my work as WFP spokesperson when these crises were unfolding, I realised how crucial information is to mobilising public opinion. Today I find myself working on a different sort of front line, this time in politics. It may seem a world away from the work you are doing here, but it is not so different after all. I decided to enter parliamentary politics because I felt that each and every one of us must play their part in their country when asked to do so, especially in times of crisis calling for radical change.

Indeed, in many European countries, politics and public institutions are regarded with considerable mistrust, and dismissed as incapable of dealing with the complex problems of the contemporary world.

This tendency, especially when it is aimed at undermining democratic institutions, leads to nothing good. It feeds exclusively on negative feelings, which do nothing to resolve the most pressing issues that people face. We need to resist this tendency. But how can we respond? What is to be done?

I believe the most effective way to renew politics is by focussing on principles and values.

Let's go back to basics, to the essential meaning of politics: that is, being at the service of citizens.

In practical terms, we need to implement policies that are effective, transparent, based on competence and capable of inclusiveness.

Looking at the major emergencies that WFP is dealing with, whether it is Ebola, Southern Sudan or the threat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, it becomes clear that we need a type of politics that is ready to take on issues and seek answers. Unfortunately, Western countries fail to pay attention to serious crises until the effects begin to be felt along their own borders. Less than two years ago, as part of a UNHCR mission, I was in the Zaatari refugee camp on the border between Jordan and Syria. The stories of the thousands of refugees arriving at the camp already illustrated the enormous human tragedy that was taking place in the country. And yet it was decided to wait and see rather than act with the necessary determination. The crisis has since grown into a global threat and a serious cause of destabilisation for the entire region and beyond.

The Ebola story is not much different. As you all know, the disease has been present for some time in a number of African countries. We find ourselves now in an extremely alarming situation also as a result of the gradual deterioration of the systems of research, prevention and healthcare in the countries affected by the disease. This, in turn, is a consequence of the drastic fiscal policies adopted by countries in economic difficulty that have cut public spending and privatised services. Ebola has become not only a health emergency for everyone, but a threat to the political, economic and social stability of the affected region. The international community must address this challenge with a holistic approach that tackles all facets of the phenomenon. In this regard, allow me to take this opportunity to thank all those - doctors, nurses and

logistics workers - who are on the front line in the battle against Ebola. They are the highest expression of self-sacrifice and generosity.

Political considerations also underpin the whole question of food security, the achievement of which, sadly, remains a remote prospect in many areas of the world. Quite clearly, it is not simply a matter of producing more food; rather, the challenge is political: it is to ensure that countries in difficulty are given fair access to what is produced. This cannot be done until everyone has a level of income and education that allows them to live an independent and dignified existence. Here, too, the only viable approach is global. Food security is an issue that calls into question our entire system of production and consumption - even our very way of life.

The indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources that our current models demand have had dire consequences: climate change, hydro-geological devastation and drinking water shortages. We are straining the capacity of ecosystems to provide the resources needed for food production, and more generally, for quality human life. Another serious consequence of all this is the increasing inequalities between the rich and the poorest parts of the world, and between those who can always be certain of access to goods and those who will find it increasingly difficult.

The World Bank estimates that by 2050 climate change, unless corrected, will lead to a decrease of more than 25 percent in world food production, resulting in price increases that will once more penalise the world's most vulnerable regions. The recent report of the UN panel of experts has shown that effective action can still be taken against global warming, but only through the coordinated effort of the major industrial countries.

In conclusion I would also like to express my satisfaction for Italy's support of WFP's activities by providing these headquarters in Rome, as well as the headquarters of other international organisations. In this connection the Brindisi Hub is a special reason for pride. Italy is convinced of the value of hosting and, to a great extent, financing such an important logistics base for humanitarian operations. Brindisi is an airport of hope, the point of departure for airplanes carrying vital assistance to people affected by conflict and natural disasters.

Italy's commitment in this respect is also reflected in its decision to dedicate the World Exposition of 2015 to "Feeding the Planet. Energy for Life." In fact, the Expo will not only be an exhibition but will also, I hope, serve as an ideal opportunity for genuine political debate on nutrition and environmental sustainability.

After this overview of the challenges confronting us, policy-makers and institutions, both at national and international level, are at a crossroads: now is the time to accept one's responsibilities and finally take action.

Thank you.