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## Grain deal. Cutelli (WFP): “Suspension is pointless shock for 345 million hungry people.”

"The suspension of the grain deal between Russia and Ukraine is a pointless, unnecessary shock for 345 million people who are currently suffering from acute hunger around the world. Of these, 153 million are children," says **Emanuela Cutelli**, communications manager for Italy at the World Food Program, the United Nations agency present in 123 countries and active in more than 80 to fight world hunger. It employs more than 23,000 people, including about 2,300 at its headquarters in Rome. In addition to distributing food during conflicts and emergencies, WFP works to build community resilience by feeding schoolchildren, building irrigation canals, fighting desertification, planting trees, and educating women and youth about food waste and crop preservation. Over the past few days, Cutelli has been attending the Summit on Food Systems at the FAO in Rome until July 26, organized by the Italian government together with the three UN agencies at the Rome Food Hub (FAO, IFAD and WFP). "Thanks to the agreement," she explains, "32 million tons of wheat and other staple foods were delivered to 45 countries last year. The U.N. Security Council meets today, July 26, to discuss Russia's withdrawal from the Kiev grain export deal and Moscow's warning against the transit of any ships in the Black Sea to or from Ukraine. Following the suspension of the grain deal, which was signed in July 2022 thanks to UN and Turkish mediation, prices jumped 10-15 percent, reaching a record high on July 19, as soon as the Russian decision was announced. "We hope that the agreement can continue and that prices will come down again," the Wfp hopes.



[Obviously, we are very concerned about the non-renewal of the Grain Trade Agreement following the Russian Federation's decision to withdraw. The agreement allowed food to be exported from Ukrainian ports and served to calm food prices on world markets. This benefited the whole world, both the countries that received food directly from Ukraine and those that benefited from lower food prices for their imports.](#)

[Thanks to this agreement, 32 million metric tons of grain and other staples were shipped to 45 countries last year. We had 24 ships cross the Black Sea under the auspices of this initiative to support our field operations.](#)

[to address food insecurity in many parts of the world, particularly in African countries \(Horn of Africa\), Afghanistan and Yemen. During the months of the Wheat Initiative, we purchased 725,000 metric tons of wheat for our operations. The suspension of this agreement is an unnecessary shock to the 345 million people in the world who are currently suffering from acute hunger, of whom 153 million are children, the future of the world. The increase in prices on world markets has dramatic consequences for these populations, who are already suffering from a combination of shocks: conflict, climate change, economic consequences of the pandemic, global economic slowdown, and incredibly high rates of inflation, such as those in Lebanon, Venezuela, Zimbabwe and Argentina. \*\*How much will your fieldwork be affected?\*\* WFP is facing one of the most difficult times in its 60-year history. This year, we expect to reach 171.5 million people and we will need \\$25.1 billion. In 2022, we reached a record number of people, 160 million, which is 25 percent more than in 2021. This means that needs are growing faster and faster. WFP currently has a projected contribution of about \\$10 billion, but we are 60 percent short of our goal. This severely limits our ability to respond on the ground to the growing challenges of hunger and malnutrition. Today's humanitarian cuts will inevitably increase tomorrow's needs. It is a perfect storm that continues to rage in many parts of the world, especially among the most vulnerable and poor, who have fewer tools to respond to this](#)

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dramatic crisis. We must ensure that emergency food aid is complemented by longer-term support. Responding to emergencies is essential, but it is equally urgent to address the underlying causes of food insecurity. **Why are your appeals underfunded by governments?** It is a difficult time for everyone: for international organizations and governments, due to the impact of the pandemic, the economic situation, the increase in climate crises. Clearly, if it is challenging for the whole world, it is even more so for those countries that do not have tools like social protection or school meals, the workhorse of WFP. Providing food for children and schools allows new generations to grow up educated and healthy, thanks to the complete and nutritious meals provided at school, which often include local foods. Families have a greater incentive to send their children to school instead of having them work in the fields or keeping girls at home. **Russia has also announced that it will give free grain to African countries. Is there any hope that it will revise its position?** Our job is to fight food insecurity, so any decision that can help in this regard is absolutely welcome. What is important is that we rebuild the channels around a continuation of the agreement, which has helped so many countries and millions of people not to aggravate food insecurity. Our job is to make sure that more and more people have access to enough nutritious food for a healthy life.

We hope that this deal can be continued and prices will come down again. This can help everyone to some extent.

**What is your assessment of the Italian government's announced "Mattei Plan" for the stabilization and economic development of African countries?** Whenever we can form a partnership with African countries, that is absolutely positive. Because we need to not only be working on food emergencies. We also have to work hard on building and strengthening resilient and sustainable food systems so that communities become self-reliant to grow their own crops. Italy is a very important country globally in terms of food issues. It is no coincidence that Italy is hosting these important Summits.

The plan for Africa is entirely worthy of support, and we are committed, as we always have been, to working with the governments of donor and recipient countries,

so that an integrated collaboration can lead to greater food security. We are already set to work with various governments to implement long-term resilience-building activities to help the stability of these countries from a food security perspective, which of course has repercussions in other areas such as migration. We know how much hunger factors into the decision to migrate.

Patrizia Caiffa