# Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

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00:00:15 Speaker 2

Hello and welcome.

00:00:16 Speaker 3

To a World Food Day, 2022.

00:00:20 Speaker 3

My name is Tim Odegaard.

00:00:22 Speaker 3

I'm program director at here at Global Minnesota, and we're really pleased that you can join.

00:00:26 Speaker 3

Us today for.

00:00:27 Speaker 3

What we expect to be a a really timely and important discussion.

00:00:35

Oh well, we'll full day.

00:00:38 Speaker 3

Is is always a day of critical importance this year, this year, day seems to carry some special urgency.

00:00:46 Speaker 3

For our world today, still.

00:00:48 Speaker 3

Reeling from the COVID pandemic.

00:00:51 Speaker 3

We also see worldwide inflation, supply chain disruptions and the ongoing effects of climate change.

00:00:59 Speaker 3

And war.

00:01:01 Speaker 3

All of these combining to threaten millions around the globe with food insecurity.

00:01:07 Speaker 3

Today's program we will examine two sides of this issue on the one hand.

00:01:14 Speaker 3

We'll discuss how hunger is being used as a weapon in some of today's most pressing geopolitical conflicts.

00:01:22 Speaker 3

But we'll also see the some of the really amazing work that organizations are doing, some of them based right here in Minnesota.

00:01:31 Speaker 3

To provide food relief and to advance global stability, we're really grateful today to welcome Margo Squire as moderator for today's programs.

00:01:43 Speaker 3

Margo is a career foreign service officer with more than three decades of experience.

00:01:50 Speaker 3

Her most recent posting being at the US Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan.

00:01:56 Speaker 3

Stand where she saw and dealt with many of these issues first hand.

00:02:02 Speaker 3

To kick things off today.

00:02:05 Speaker 3

Discussing how how hunger is being used.

00:02:11 Speaker 3

As a, as a.

00:02:11 Speaker 3

Tool of war.

00:02:13 Speaker 3

In conflict, we are delighted to have chase Silva with us.

00:02:19 Speaker 3

Chase as a senior director of Public Policy and research at the World Food Programme Programme USA.

00:02:26 Speaker 3

And with a with a really extensive background in the effects of climate change and agricultural development and agricultural policy, his experience spans different continents, having worked in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia.

00:02:46 Speaker 3

His academic background is in political ecology and climate change and agriculture, where he has a pH.

00:02:53 Speaker 3

D from Oxford University.

00:02:58 Speaker 3

Please join me now in welcoming Chase to our program.

00:03:03 Speaker 3

And Chase, I will, I will hand over the MIC to you and thank you again for for joining us and sharing some of the work that you do and of course the really critically important work that the World Food Program is doing.

00:03:19 Speaker 3

Well, thanks for joining us.

00:03:20 Speaker 2

Thanks, Jim.

00:03:21 Speaker 2

I appreciate it.

00:03:21 Speaker 2

I hope you're hearing me OK.

00:03:22 Speaker 2

Everything is looking good technically great.

00:03:25 Speaker 2

Well, great to.

00:03:26 Speaker 2

Be here.

00:03:26 Speaker 2

And I was talking to Tim and Margo a little bit before the.

00:03:30 Speaker 2

All I kind of I grew up in in northern Wisconsin in a little town called Spooner.

00:03:35 Speaker 2

So to be with global Minnesota today, I'm I'm sure some of you have been up to vacation land or know the area.

00:03:41 Speaker 2

So it feels a.

00:03:42 Speaker 2

Little bit like a homecoming for me.

00:03:44 Speaker 2

But a belated happy World Food Day to all of you.

00:03:47 Speaker 2

My name is Chase, so I'm the senior director of public policy.

00:03:51 Speaker 2

And research at the World Food Program, USA.

00:03:55 Speaker 2

WP USA is a non profit organization that that works out of Washington DC and we really exist to support the mission of the United Nations World Food Program here in the United States.

00:04:07 Speaker 2

And we do that in a couple different ways.

00:04:09 Speaker 2

Sometimes it is through private sector partnerships and support making sure that Americans who want to give.

00:04:16 Speaker 2

Philanthropically to this important mission are able to do so engaging with foundations and private sector organizations and and companies to make sure that their expertise and funding can make it to organizations like W.

00:04:31 Speaker 2

P the other thing that we do at WFP USA is engaged with Congress spend a lot of time making sure that American lawmakers know of the value of the World Food program they know and are up to speed on the latest thinking and activity and challenges that we're facing on the global scale.

00:04:51 Speaker 2

And that's really where I spend most of my day job.

00:04:54 Speaker 2

In fact, typically working with lawmakers up and staff up on Capitol Hill, the United States is the single largest donor to the United Nations World Food Program.

00:05:04 Speaker 2

And we want to make sure that that legacy of leadership continues year in and year out.

00:05:09 Speaker 2

So that's where I spend a lot of my time, also get to engage with academia and think tanks and other organizations in another sort of part of my job where I I speak to some of the latest thinking.

00:05:24 Speaker 2

Critical topics in global food security including food related instability that we're going to talk about today.

00:05:30 Speaker 2

So it's just a pleasure to be here to talk through all of those things.

00:05:34 Speaker 2

There's a there's a few.

00:05:35 Speaker 2

I want to just outline what I want to talk about today, right?

00:05:38 Speaker 2

I want to give this audience and update on the state of play of global hunger today.

00:05:43 Speaker 2

I want you to understand.

00:05:44 Speaker 2

The scale of this current crisis crisis, the opportunities that exist to sort of tackle that.

00:05:51 Speaker 2

But then I want to talk a little bit about food related instability itself and I want to talk about how food insecurity itself can lead to instability and around the world and how we're seeing that manifest.

00:06:04 Speaker 2

And then I want to make a few comments near the end on the use of food as a weapon of war, because I find that we're fine.

00:06:09 Speaker 2

We're seeing a lot of references to this, of course, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but also in a lot of other conflict related food and security events around the planet. But before I do all that, I should I should mention one thing.

00:06:24 Speaker 2

You know WFP briefly. WP is the world's largest humanitarian organization fighting hunger. We are operating in almost 100 different countries. We serve about 12 billion meals a year to folks.

00:06:38 Speaker 2

It is a massive operation and WP has 6000 trucks on the road. There's over 100 aircraft, 30 ships on the high seas moving food from where it is to where it needs to be.

00:06:50 Speaker 2

WP in many ways I like to think about.

00:06:52 Speaker 2

It really is the world safety net when it comes to hunger.

00:06:57 Speaker 2

But let me also say this I mean.

00:06:58 Speaker 2

We're going to talk about food related hunger today and and food is a weapon of war, but WFP is an organization.

00:07:05 Speaker 2

That is nonpolitical.

00:07:07 Speaker 2

It's an organization that is purely neutral, objective and impartial.

00:07:11 Speaker 2

It's not an organization that points fingers as to the as to the individual costs of hunger.

00:07:16 Speaker 2

We respond to hunger no matter what the cause is.

00:07:20 Speaker 2

So some of the things that I'm relaying to you today are really especially as it relates to the use.

00:07:25 Speaker 2

The food as a weapon of war.

00:07:26 Speaker 2

These are my personal conclusions and the thinking and writing that we've been doing over the years on this topic.

00:07:31 Speaker 2

But WFP again is a is a completely impartial organization, so I don't want to misconstrue.

00:07:37 Speaker 2

That still we have to grapple with this inextricable truth, that without peace there really can be no end to hunger, right?

00:07:48 Speaker 2

And so this means we have to wade into some of these messy issues from time to time, and I'd be happy to be able to do that today.

00:07:55

So let's say.

00:07:56 Speaker 2

Let's start out with a sort of.

00:07:58 Speaker 2

Assessment of where we are on the planet right now in terms of global hunger.

00:08:02 Speaker 2

The world is facing, as you know from headlines, one of the most severe hunger crises in modern history.

00:08:08 Speaker 2

Really, it hasn't been since the Second World.

00:08:10 Speaker 2

War that the.

00:08:11 Speaker 2

Global food system has experienced so much appeal.

00:08:14 Speaker 2

Evil and so many millions have suffered from this scourge of hunger, right? Right now we've got about 345 million people across more than 80 countries who are facing life threatening hunger.

00:08:27 Speaker 2

That's the highest number we've ever seen, right?

00:08:30 Speaker 2

They're not just coping with less food or inadequate and inadequate nutrition.

00:08:35 Speaker 2

We have about 800 million of those people and another 3 billion who can't afford adequate diets. But know what I'm talking about here? These 345 million people, these are people who are facing starvation or the imminent threat of it. They don't know where their next meal is going to.

00:08:52 Speaker 2

Come from, you know, our executive director of the World Food Programme, David Beazley, said that early in this summer that, you know, what was a wave of hunger is now a tsunami of hunger.

00:09:02 Speaker 2

And I think he's probably right.

00:09:04 Speaker 2

Global hunger was already trending in the wrong direction before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, right? So at the start?

00:09:12 Speaker 2

Of the year, the world.

00:09:13 Speaker 2

Food programme and World Food Programme USA were warning of a year of catastrophic.

00:09:19 Speaker 2

Here, you know, we had COVID-19 that had completely upended the world economy. It disrupted supply chains. There were millions of people out of work. And more importantly, even governments were really spread thin by the investments that they were having to make to try to deal with this and to try to stop the spread of that crisis and that.

00:09:39 Speaker 2

And and that.

00:09:40 Speaker 2

That virus, right? So governments were already operating from a sort of weak end point, and then the war arrived at the shores of one of the world's greatest bread baskets in Ukraine.

00:09:51 Speaker 2

You know, reclaim Ukraine, of course, was responsible for 10%.

00:09:53 Speaker 2

Of global wheat.

00:09:55 Speaker 2

Exports 80% of of sunflower oil exports.

00:09:59 Speaker 2

In the country.

00:10:01 Speaker 2

Had provided the World Food Programme, this organization, with about 40% of the wheat that we used in humanitarian organizations around the world.

00:10:09 Speaker 2

You know, WP was in Ukraine prior to this crisis, but it was really acting as a buyer of food.

00:10:14 Speaker 2

This was a great bread basket region.

00:10:17 Speaker 2

Right. For months we had 10s of millions of metric tons of grain that were stranded in Ukraine, and it caused high food prices to skyrocket even further because of Russia's isolation.

00:10:30 Speaker 2

The war costs fertilizer and oil prices to rise in tandem, creating this really potent cocktail for global food prices.

00:10:38 Speaker 2

So where we're at today, right now, global food prices are at a 10 year high.

00:10:43 Speaker 2

We've had some.

00:10:44 Speaker 2

Improvements over the last couple months and sort of.

00:10:46 Speaker 2

The the FAO.

00:10:47 Speaker 2

Global Food Price Index has been creeping down slowly recently, but year on year increases in in the price of food are now at their fastest in this century.

00:10:58 Speaker 2

And the gap between food inflation and general inflation is among the largest we've ever.

00:11:04 Speaker 2

We've ever seen, or it's ever been, right?

00:11:06 Speaker 2

Now we had some successes in Margo.

00:11:08 Speaker 2

I hope we can talk some about this in the discussion afterwards, but you know most of you will know that we signed that there was an agreement signed back in in July with Ukraine, Russia and Turkey, something called the Black Sea Grain Initiative that has allowed some grain to move out of Ukraine, a lot of that.

00:11:27 Speaker 2

Stranded product moved out of.

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But even with.

00:11:31 Speaker 2

That diplomatic breakthrough?

00:11:32 Speaker 2

Monthly exports out of Ukraine are still only a fraction of what they once were, and there's a backlog of ships coming in and out of those ports.

00:11:40 Speaker 2

That's sort of straining the movement of grain from the country supports.

00:11:44 Speaker 2

So far we moved about seven and a half million metric tons of grain out.

00:11:48 Speaker 2

That frees up a lot of space for the upcoming harvest.

00:11:50 Speaker 2

But we're not out of the woods yet and prices are only starting to fall globally.

00:11:54 Speaker 2

Because of these these benefits, we're now seeing some threat from Russia to pull out of this agreement when it expires in November.

00:12:00 Speaker 2

Or I don't think they believe they're benefiting from their own grain and fertilizer exports.

00:12:05 Speaker 2

That's something that we're watching very closely.

00:12:08 Speaker 2

And of course we want to do everything we can to to encourage the continuation of this arrangement and make sure that we're getting as much of this grain out as we can to feed a really suffering world.

00:12:21 Speaker 2

The thing with the war in Ukraine.

00:12:22 Speaker 2

Is it really struck at an inopportune?

00:12:24 Speaker 2

Time, right?

00:12:25 Speaker 2

It was there were overlapping threats, something that we've always called the four seas over the past year, right?

00:12:31 Speaker 2

Climate change, COVID-19 conflict and costs, right? If you look around the world today, right, we have flooding in Pakistan that has upended the lives of 33 million people. We've got a drought in the Horn of Africa.

00:12:44 Speaker 2

Right now, that has left millions of people waiting literally years for rain.

00:12:50 Speaker 2

In Lebanon right now we've got the price of food that has jumped 16 fold over the course of three years.

00:12:57 Speaker 2

And this was already a place for about 25% of the population were were refugees, right? The civil war in Yemen right now is in its 8th year. Syria conflict is in its 11th year. And the list really goes on and on.

00:13:11 Speaker 2

Right now we've got about a million people around the planet who are facing famine right now, places like Somalia, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Yemen.

00:13:23 Speaker 2

All of this happening in the background or driven by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

00:13:31 Speaker 2

And the same the really scary thing about a famine declaration is that.

00:13:35 Speaker 2

It is a.

00:13:35 Speaker 2

Pure acknowledgement of failure from a global perspective, right?

00:13:40 Speaker 2

By definition, it means that people are already dying, right? During our last famine that we experienced in, in 2011 in Somalia, there were 260,000 people who lost, lost their lives in that famine, and about half of them died before the famine was even declared. So you have to imagine with a million people right now facing famine.

00:14:00 Speaker 2

Across the world there are millions of people dying, right?

00:14:03 Speaker 2

Now and famine is this completely man-made phenomenon today.

00:14:08 Speaker 2

Right, we have the tools.

00:14:09 Speaker 2

We have the resources to respond.

00:14:11 Speaker 2

Our humanitarian systems are robust, they're complex and they're very sophisticated, right?

00:14:17 Speaker 2

The reason that we can can't get to people is clearly a political question or a question.

00:14:23 Speaker 2

With funding and urgency, right?

00:14:26 Speaker 2

So famine is this entirely man-made?

00:14:29 Speaker 2

Uh, Margo, I'm going to.

00:14:30 Speaker 2

I'm going to kind of gloss over some of the WP response right now 'cause I hope we can get to some of this in in the question, in our discussion afterwards.

00:14:39 Speaker 2

But let me just tell you briefly about how WP is responding, and I hope we can get more into this later, but WP is trying to reach about 153 million people this year.

00:14:50 Speaker 2

That's a record number more than we've ever seen, right?

00:14:54 Speaker 2

It's going to cost the organization about 24 1/2 billion dollars to do that.

00:14:59 Speaker 2

When I started with WP USA about six years ago, the operational costs for WP were only around $6 billion.

00:15:06 Speaker 2

So we have seen this incredible growth, a fourfold growth in what the organization needs to be able to meet meet the people.

00:15:14 Speaker 2

To meet the needs of the people that it's serving.

00:15:16 Speaker 2

But anyway WP is is is trying to reach that number of people for do that in a couple different ways.

00:15:23 Speaker 2

Some of it is through providing direct assistance in terms of.

00:15:27 Speaker 2

Out of these?

00:15:28 Speaker 2

Bringing that in on food, on trucks and doing general distribution.

00:15:32 Speaker 2

Sometimes we are doing cash based assistance, providing people with conditional or unconditional cash transfers to be able to buy the food that they need or other supplies that they need.

00:15:42 Speaker 2

We're scaling up social protection systems around the world making sure that we're not.

00:15:48 Speaker 2

Being sort of simultaneous overlapping systems of food delivery when when some of these things exist in countries themselves, we don't want to duplicate those things.

00:15:58 Speaker 2

We want to build social protection so that the World Food Programme can leave a sort of foundation of social protection behind it and really robust national systems.

00:16:07 Speaker 2

We're expanding school.

00:16:08 Speaker 2

Meals program and we are investing heavily in resilience.

00:16:12 Speaker 2

You know, a couple years ago I listened to the former executive director of the World Food Programme say we cannot afford at the World Food Programme to save the same live twice.

00:16:22 Speaker 2

And that's really important.

00:16:23 Speaker 2

It means that we got to start investing in changing the way that we're thinking about humanitarian programming and thinking about the way that humanitarian assistance looks.

00:16:31 Speaker 2

We need to get ahead of emergencies.

00:16:33 Speaker 2

There's simply not enough resources for conflicts and humanitarian emergencies to persist year in and year out, and that's happening in a lot of places.

00:16:43 Speaker 2

But we really can't afford it.

00:16:45 Speaker 2

So one thing that I wanted to flag because we have such great partners from Minnesota here and want to talk about just briefly the private sector response as well.

00:16:54 Speaker 2

You know, we're witnessing this incredible response from the corporate sector as it relates to the global COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine really outpouring.

00:17:05 Speaker 2

Of support, right in already in this year, in 2022, we've seen a doubling of.

00:17:10 Speaker 2

Turning to the organization from private donors relative to what we saw last year and we're not even through the end of this year.

00:17:17 Speaker 2

And Minneapolis, I think is a really big hub for some of our most committed partners at WP USA, right in, we're talking about Cargill, we're talking about General Mills, we're talking about target, which recently joined our sort of circle.

00:17:32 Speaker 2

This year, if you are in the audience today from Minnesota, you should be very proud of what the companies in your state are doing to help tackle this crisis.

00:17:41 Speaker 2

You know, cargos worked with the World Food Program since 2001. They've supported a range of programmatic areas, school meals, support to smallholder farmers, emergency.

00:17:52 Speaker 2

Assistance when those events crop up around the world.

00:17:55 Speaker 2

When WFP was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2020, Cargill matched that $1,000,000 prize. And then this year just in August, there was a $10 million contribution from Cargill to the World Food Program. That's going to be some of that is already at work in cash based transfers in Ukraine.

00:18:15 Speaker 2

That the rest of that money is being programmed with offices in cooperation with WFP field staff, it's going to be part of our sort of saving lives and changing lives portfolio.

00:18:26 Speaker 2

So a lot in emergency, a lot in resilience building.

00:18:29 Speaker 2

It's a really.

00:18:29 Speaker 2

The really important endeavor, right?

00:18:32 Speaker 2

General Mills similar focus on support to school meals over the years.

00:18:37 Speaker 2

Rice fortification.

00:18:38 Speaker 2

This is a company that's helped mainstream rice fortification in school meals programs in India.

00:18:43 Speaker 2

So if you are in the audience from Minnesota you you can be very pleased about what your corporations and.

00:18:49 Speaker 2

And corporate leaders are doing to engage, especially with the problem of hunger globally.

00:18:53 Speaker 2

And I can tell you that we are very grateful at the world.

00:18:56 Speaker 2

Food Program USA and the World Food program.

00:18:58 Speaker 2

So let's transition a little bit here to talk about some of the meat of the issue that that that we're here to talk about which is food related instead.

00:19:05 Speaker 2

Ability, right, I think.

00:19:07 Speaker 2

That for years and years and years we've known that war produces hunger, right?

00:19:12 Speaker 2

It's been true of every single major conflict in human history.

00:19:15 Speaker 2

By some estimates, more people died of hunger and hunger related diseases in the Second World War than by conflict itself.

00:19:23 Speaker 2

Starvation is just a natural.

00:19:25 Speaker 2

Inevitable outcome of war, right? And 80% of the emergencies that we're responding to today at the World Food progg.

00:19:33 Speaker 2

Are driven by conflict.

00:19:35 Speaker 2

So eight of our ten worst humanitarian crisis, the largest humanitarian crisis are driven by man-made conflict.

00:19:41 Speaker 2

And it should be obvious why right war drives up the price of food.

00:19:46 Speaker 2

It destroys farm infrastructure and other critical infrastructure it displaces.

00:19:52 Speaker 2

People from their home it.

00:19:53 Speaker 2

Separates them from their livelihoods.

00:19:56 Speaker 2

So it should be obvious that when you have conflict, food insecurity is quick to follow.

00:20:02 Speaker 2

And that's been true for every conflict across, across.

00:20:07 Speaker 2

But what's important here is I think we're also learning that this relationship travels in both directions.

00:20:12 Speaker 2

We're learning that hunger itself can produce conflict and instability around the planet.

00:20:18 Speaker 2

Now, like I said, I spend a lot of time up on Capitol Hill and I think over the last, you know, decade or so, we've heard a lot of anecdotal evidence of.

00:20:26 Speaker 2

This up on Capitol Hill.

00:20:28 Speaker 2

You know, you hear folks like Senator Lindsey Graham say.

00:20:30 Speaker 2

Things like feed him now or fight him later, or General Mattis of U.S. central Command very famously told lawmakers that if you don't fund the State Department, then I have to buy.

00:20:41 Speaker 2

More bullets, right?

00:20:42 Speaker 2

These sort of anecdotes have long existed.

00:20:44 Speaker 2

We know that hunger can produce instability around the planet and that responding to hunger events and food insecurity.

00:20:51 Speaker 2

Is one of the best.

00:20:52 Speaker 2

Uh, tools that we have to respond to and prevent instability around the planet.

00:20:58

But we've done.

00:20:59 Speaker 2

A lot of work in this space at WP USA over the last couple years and I would encourage you all to look up our winning the peace, hunger and instability report.

00:21:08 Speaker 2

This is a document that, when I first joined WP USA, I spent a lot of time on.

00:21:12 Speaker 2

It was really a systematic review of the literature on this topic.

00:21:15 Speaker 2

We're trying to move from the realm of these anecdotal.

00:21:19 Speaker 2

To the realm of the empirical right, and we looked at about 54 peer reviewed studies from back in that area. And across those studies, researchers had tested at least nine separate types.

00:21:30 Speaker 2

Of food insecurity, things like price spikes and drought events, and link them to 9 separate types of instability ranging from simple protests all the way up to Interstate conflict.

00:21:43 Speaker 2

Right.

00:21:44 Speaker 2

So sometimes what we found is that food insecurity produces conflict because of competition over agricultural inputs like land and water, right?

00:21:52 Speaker 2

Other times, it's the result of a shock, a climate shock and human migration.

00:21:58 Speaker 2

We also know increasingly, and we're seeing this anecdotally, but also in evidence based coming in a lot of new peer reviewed work that food insecurity is often exploited by violent extremists and violent movements.

00:22:12 Speaker 2

Sometimes we call this the opportunity cost theory right if the benefits of joining.

00:22:18 Speaker 2

A rebellion of violent movement exceed that which you can make in your current setting, your current livelihood.

00:22:28 Speaker 2

Then the conditions are right for exploitation and drawing people into those movements. And what we know is that Al Shabab, for example, when you interview folks who have joined that group, some of the most common motivators for joining are simply socio economic, a mobile phone $50.00 a month.

00:22:48 Speaker 2

Isis and the Islamic State offered refugees and food and cash up to $1000 to join the movement.

00:22:54 Speaker 2

Boko Haram is doing something similar, providing meals and loans to prospective recruits.

00:23:00 Speaker 2

When you cannot feed yourself or your family, you turn to desperation.

00:23:05 Speaker 2

You become dangerously hungry.

00:23:07 Speaker 2

And that's a situation that we're seeing around the world.

00:23:10 Speaker 2

So the food related instability literature I think is growing.

00:23:13 Speaker 2

We're learning more about this.

00:23:15 Speaker 2

We're learning more about competition over agricultural resources as it exists between agricultural lists and pastoralist communities.

00:23:23 Speaker 2

In in the Sahel, for example, we're learning more about these recruitment techniques.

00:23:28 Speaker 2

From violent extremist organizations and in particular we're learning a lot about the way that climate change is driving instability right and causing food prices to rise or or availability, food availability to fall and leading to instability.

00:23:43 Speaker 2

So these are all things that are sort of becoming a little bit more clear in the literature.

00:23:48 Speaker 2

But one of the most reliable ways that we know that food insecurity can produce instability is through rapid price spikes that affect urban areas.

00:23:56 Speaker 2

Right. In 2007 and 2008, during the last major food price spike that we saw, this was driven by production losses and major breadbaskets. There were there was panic buying and speculation.

00:24:08 Speaker 2

And the result was what the former executive director of the World Food Programme, Josette Sheeran, called a silent tsunami.

00:24:16 Speaker 2

And the silent tsunami produced some social unrest in at least 40 countries.

00:24:20 Speaker 2

It led to the toppling of at least one country and one leadership team.

00:24:25 Speaker 2

In 2007 and 2008, the global food price crisis was made worse by protectionist behavior. There were export bans that went in place.

00:24:35 Speaker 2

It caused the price of food to rise even higher and you saw this cascading event of instability, especially in urban areas where people had the ability to come together, they had communications.

00:24:46 Speaker 2

Infrastructure to be able to mobilize and this is where you saw a lot of that instability.

00:24:51 Speaker 2

Right. We saw it again in 2011 with another spike in prices. The spikes in.

00:24:57 Speaker 2

A production loss in Eurasia and food prices have been linked to the rise of the Middle East of the Arab Spring.

00:25:04 Speaker 2

In the Middle East, you may remember the fruit vendor, for example, that lit himself on fire in Tunisia, kicking off the protests and violence in that country was protesting corruption.

00:25:14 Speaker 2

He was protesting the price and.

00:25:16 Speaker 2

Availability of food.

00:25:18 Speaker 2

We saw one peer reviewed study from that time period in the Arab Spring found that food insecurity was driving an increase in refuge refugee flows to Europe and WPS don't allow work on this or self.

00:25:31 Speaker 2

You know one thing, one thing that you have to keep.

00:25:33 Speaker 2

In mind is that bottom line is people don't want to leave their homes, right?

00:25:37 Speaker 2

They are going to move several times.

00:25:39 Speaker 2

Within their country before they ever flee or migrate. But what we have found is that approximately a 1% increase in food insecurity in really fragile settings leads to 2% increase in migration. And that's just from.

00:25:51 Speaker 2

And study.

00:25:52 Speaker 2

Uh by WFP a couple years back, I encourage you to take a look at that as well.

00:25:58 Speaker 2

We've seen this also in Syria, right?

00:26:00 Speaker 2

It lead up to the Civil war there in 2011. The war experienced what one commentator mentioned was the worst long term drought and most severe.

00:26:11 Speaker 2

Crop failure since agricultural civilization began in the Fertile Crescent and millennia ago, right?

00:26:17 Speaker 2

This was a sustained massive drought in Syria.

00:26:20 Speaker 2

Area combined with with insufficient policies on well water pumping place unsustainable pressure on aquifers in that region.

00:26:28 Speaker 2

You saw many people in the southwest of the country migrate and the influx of migrants into certain areas was was responsible for some of the first sites of social unrest.

00:26:40 Speaker 2

In the country.

00:26:41 Speaker 2

This is a country, of course, that was already hosting.

00:26:43 Speaker 2

A million Iraqi refugees.

00:26:46 Speaker 2

So here we are today in Ukraine and we're seeing it again today, right since the invasion.

00:26:51 Speaker 2

Since the invasion of Ukraine, we have seen no less than 20 examples of food related instability, protest, riots, etc.

00:26:58 Speaker 2

Around the planet.

00:27:00 Speaker 2

The first country to fall this cycle with Sri Lanka, protests began there in March of this year.

00:27:06 Speaker 2

Was started as a perceived mismanagement of the country's economy by leadership there. There was also pushback in that country from a program designed to eliminate the use of chemical fertilizers there. It's an experiment that went poorly, those two efforts increasing prices, the chemical fertilizer situation in the country.

00:27:26 Speaker 2

Led to rioting and sustained protests over those high prices of food and fuel, and rioters eventually occupied the home of the president, causing him to flee the country.

00:27:36 Speaker 2

So you see.

00:27:37 Speaker 2

There are very clear examples now of food related instability, especially as it relates to food prices and food price increases in urban area.

00:27:46 Speaker 2

And what we find is what is undeniably true in the literature and and in in practice, is that one of the greatest threats to global stability is a person who cannot feed themselves or their family.

00:28:00 Speaker 2

Right. One thing I want to note really quickly is that the US national Security Strategy was just launched a couple days ago and there is more reference to food in this national security strategy than any other previous document produced over the last 30.

00:28:20 Speaker 2

There are 30 references to food security in this national security strategy.

00:28:24 Speaker 2

It means that.

00:28:25 Speaker 2

The US government is considering food security to be as great a security threat as great power competition with China as Russia's aggression and things like the existential threat of climate change. So this is this is very real.

00:28:40 Speaker 2

Margo, I'm just going to, I'm going to say one thing here on food is a weapon of war and then maybe we can we can dabble in this too in the discussion 'cause I know we're getting close to time here.

00:28:51 Speaker 2

One thing I want to say is, and this is really where I want to take my WP USA hat, now that we're talking about food as a weapon of war.

00:28:57 Speaker 2

There were a couple of developments that have taken place over the last couple years, right the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2417 a few years ago condemning the use of food as a weapon of war. It was really the first time that the Security Council weighed in.

00:29:11 Speaker 2

On a semantic topic like this, right, it was instigated by the four famines that we'd experienced back in 2016 in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen.

00:29:22 Speaker 2

Simultaneously, or just after, the United Nations World Food Programme was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of the important link between conflict and hunger and the critical role that food assistance plays in supporting that those steps towards peace.

00:29:37 Speaker 2

And then in July of this year, the US Senate passed a resolution that in much the same way as the United.

00:29:44 Speaker 2

As the UN Security Council would condemn the use.

00:29:46 Speaker 2

Of food as.

00:29:46 Speaker 2

A weapon of.

00:29:47 Speaker 2

War, right?

00:29:48 Speaker 2

But here is the.

00:29:50 Speaker 2

None of these actions, none of these steps, whether it's whether it's 2417 at the Security Council or Senate S res.

00:30:00 Speaker 2

669 none of these things grapple with the fact that assigning individual responsibility for hunger and conflict is a very difficult issue, right.

00:30:10 Speaker 2

The easiest cases.

00:30:11 Speaker 2

Are when people are blocking the delivery of humanitarian assistance in clear violations of international humanitarian law.

00:30:18 Speaker 2

There's also cases where you're seeing the forced displacement of civilians leading to hunger.

00:30:23 Speaker 2

Those are relatively cut and dry issues as well.

00:30:28 Speaker 2

But 2417 at the Security Council does not go as far as to assign criminal responsibility. Doesn't threat process threaten prosecution in domestic or international courts?

00:30:40 Speaker 2

There's no mention of the ICC at all, the international community, the International Criminal Court.

00:30:45 Speaker 2

Right. So it's.

00:30:46 Speaker 2

Hard to point to a head of state.

00:30:48 Speaker 2

Or other high value political target, right?

00:30:50 Speaker 2

Most people haven't documented their attacks on food systems in the way that Hitler did in.

00:30:55 Speaker 2

The Second World War.

00:30:56 Speaker 2

We have made some advancements in international humanitarian law, international humanitarian rights.

00:31:03 Speaker 2

Law, but there are questions.

00:31:05 Speaker 2

That we need to continue to grapple with and finding answers to them in in this sort of Canon of international law.

00:31:11 Speaker 2

Because food will not be a fundamental human right and using food as a weapon of war will not bring punitive.

00:31:17 Speaker 2

Justice until we we clarify some of this in international law.

00:31:22 Speaker 2

So let me let me stop.

00:31:23 Speaker 2

There, Margo and in the interest of time and maybe we can, we can go back and forth.

00:31:27 Speaker 2

Here a little bit.

00:31:29 Speaker 4

Good morning and and hello everyone and thank you very much chase for those remarks.

00:31:35 Speaker 4

You've certainly given us a very depressing, a very thorough overview of the global tsunami of hunger so that you described.

00:31:46 Speaker 4

First I would just like to say for those of you who have come.

00:31:49 Speaker 4

A little bit late into the program.

00:31:52 Speaker 4

That we've just heard from Chase Soba, who is with the World Food Program USA.

00:32:00 Speaker 4

I am Margo Squire and I'm going to follow up with some questions.

00:32:04 Speaker 4

I'm a retired foreign service officer diplomat.

00:32:07 Speaker 4

And I wonder, Chase, you threw me a number of balls as you were speaking, but I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about the World Food Program's distribution process. You've talked about the overall program problems.

00:32:24 Speaker 4

Uhm, but how do you distribute the food, especially in places of conflict where donor countries do not don't trust necessarily the government or official administrators?

00:32:37 Speaker 4

Or you just can't reach the most needy because of conflict and need to work with different warring sides.

00:32:41 Speaker 2

Right.

00:32:43 Speaker 4

I'm thinking of Afghanistan where I was.

00:32:45 Speaker 4

I'm thinking about, you know, Syria.

00:32:49 Speaker 4

So please, I'd love to hear how how that works.

00:32:52 Speaker 2

Yeah. Well, I mentioned early on how, how widespread and how large the WFP operation is, right. We're talking about 80 plus different countries, 25 or 26,000 staff and so part of the effectiveness of the World Food program.

00:33:09 Speaker 2

Is to having long term presence in the countries where we are operating in.

00:33:14 Speaker 2

And as you know in these really complicated war zones in particular you have so many actors involved, right, whether they're non state actors, the governments themselves, some recognize, some not, you end up with these situations.

00:33:29 Speaker 2

Where negotiating humanitarian access becomes very, very complicated.

00:33:35 Speaker 2

But WFP only operates in places where we are there by invitation from some sort of recognized government or leader.

00:33:43 Speaker 2

Ship and then negotiate access with however many partners or however many players there are in a particular space, meticulously to be able to garner access to the people that need it.

00:33:56 Speaker 2

Now there are places on this planet, you know, eastern Ukraine is a good example of this, where we cannot move humanitarian.

00:34:03 Speaker 2

Resources in.

00:34:05 Speaker 2

Tigray in northern Ethiopia is another place where, because of government restrictions or because of actions of opposition groups, it's very difficult to gain access to populations and those people are not receiving the scale of nutrition and intervention that they need.

00:34:23 Speaker 2

But I can tell you that hat being.

00:34:25 Speaker 2

Around and being on the ground, having reputation that the World Food Program does as an objective, impartial, neutral organization is what you need to be able to enter into the.

00:34:36 Speaker 2

These countries and deal with multiple sides of a conflict and negotiate access to people.

00:34:41 Speaker 2

So WP once that access is negotiated and it's a complicated thing and it comes and it goes of course and you have new leadership and you have new organizations and and combatants that are involved.

00:34:53 Speaker 2

So it's an ongoing process of negotiation.

00:34:56 Speaker 2

Then the decision is what modality of assistance is going to be best used or best applied to the people that need that assistance, sometimes in conflict zone.

00:35:08 Speaker 2

Once we find that bringing commodities in is really the only solution, you need to bring bulk grain.

00:35:14 Speaker 2

You need to bring bulk product into a country where there are no functioning markets because you can't give people cash in those environments.

00:35:22 Speaker 2

There are simply no functioning markets for them to be able to receive that in places, and a good example.

00:35:28 Speaker 2

This may be western Ukraine.

00:35:29 Speaker 2

Now, in places where there are functioning markets, we can increasingly provide people with cash based assistance.

00:35:36 Speaker 2

Sometimes that comes in the form of vouchers, sometimes it comes in the form of a credit card, just as you and I would use in a shopping market everyday.

00:35:45 Speaker 2

Those sorts of things can be used to provide people with monthly, monthly rations of cash.

00:35:50 Speaker 2

To access access food or other products that they need.

00:35:55 Speaker 2

But another bigger part of what WFP is doing is, you know, this year we've got 60 million children who we believe will be pushed into severe malnourishment because of conflict, because of the war in Ukraine, because of food prices around the world.

00:36:11 Speaker 2

Children who are severely malnourished cannot be brought back by any quantity of bulk grain or general commodity.

00:36:19 Speaker 2

They need specialized nutritional products to be able to to rebound from that.

00:36:24 Speaker 2

So increasingly what the World Food Program is doing is looking at support for pregnant and nursing mothers, providing some.

00:36:32 Speaker 2

Comments to pregnant women and then for children who are very severely malnourished, using supplemental foods, paste, things like plumping out, which are peanut butter like pastes that are delivered in little sachets.

00:36:47 Speaker 2

Those are things that are really dense with micronutrients and we need to reach those children.

00:36:52 Speaker 2

With those sort of specialized products and that's been a real game changer because for a long time when you had a.

00:36:57 Speaker 2

Child living in a remote part of the world who didn't have access to a clinic or the cost of setting up a mobile clinic was so great these specialized nutritional products have become have changed the game.

00:37:13 Speaker 2

In those settings they can have three a day.

00:37:15 Speaker 2

It replaces the need for these mobile clinics.

00:37:18 Speaker 2

It's not a perfect.

00:37:19 Speaker 2

Solution, but frankly it's it's a life saver for many children.

00:37:22 Speaker 2

Around the planet.

00:37:23 Speaker 2

So that maybe give you a sense of negotiation and and how and what sorts of things we deliver.

00:37:27 Speaker 4

And just a quick follow up in terms of those clinics your are you actually running those or there are those going through local organizations, local medical, you know clinics that are?

00:37:37 Speaker 2

Well, this is this is where.

00:37:38 Speaker 4

Already there.

00:37:38 Speaker 2

The partnership with other UN agencies and local partners really matter, right?

00:37:43 Speaker 2

So the WP works with UNICEF pretty closely on the ground when it comes to delivering specialized nutritional product.

00:37:51 Speaker 2

UNICEF is often providing support to local clinics in terms of getting them up and running and WFP is providing a sort of logistics backbone to move the product into those those clinics.

00:38:01 Speaker 2

And so it's really a question of of partnership with local institutions, partnership with other UN agency.

00:38:09 Speaker 2

We're not in the business of building.

00:38:10 Speaker 2

Hospitals are administering rural clinics, but we certainly supply those clinics with the with with logistical support and with the specialized nutritional prod.

00:38:22 Speaker 4

Great, thanks.

00:38:22 Speaker 4

Thank you very much.

00:38:24 Speaker 4

Uhm, you touched on the the situation with the war in Ukraine and the the Black Sea grain Agreement that that the UN, Turkey brokered to successfully get grain shipments started out of the country.

00:38:40 Speaker 4

How is that going on the other?

00:38:42 Speaker 4

And on the distribution end, I've really not heard anything about that.

00:38:46 Speaker 4

Are they actually getting to places that people need them?

00:38:52 Speaker 2

Well so support remember when Ukraine was was such a large exporter of wheat in particular but also sunflower oil and and a lot of other commodities and so when that when when the war in Ukraine began and all of those commodities were stranded there were there was really A2 fold crisis one was the fact that.

00:39:11 Speaker 2

All of a sudden you had a major bread basket that was shut down and global supplies not reaching global markets.

00:39:17 Speaker 2

At the same time, you also had a situation where we were coming up to harvest in Ukraine and we didn't simply didn't have storage potential to be able to store that grain.

00:39:29 Speaker 2

Something had to give.

00:39:30 Speaker 2

Either you're going to see grain rotting in fields in in Ukraine or you were going to see increased prices for food and.

00:39:38 Speaker 2

And those things were going to happen simultaneously.

00:39:41 Speaker 2

So the boxy grain initiative was really important to open up Black Sea access, which is the way that food is moved traditionally out of Ukraine on bulk carriers out of out of the port of Odessa and others.

00:39:54 Speaker 2

What essentially happened was there was 20 million metric tons of grain locked up in those ports and Ukraine was moving previously several million metric tons a month before the.

00:40:06 Speaker 2

Or that that moved to a small trickle and the Black Sea grain Initiative allowed that to to open back up.

00:40:13 Speaker 2

You can't move this grain by truck.

00:40:14 Speaker 2

You can't move it by rail.

00:40:16 Speaker 2

There's there's no real way to get the volume out except for.

00:40:19 Speaker 2

Through the black seat.

00:40:21 Speaker 2

So the Black Sea Grain Initiative started in July.

00:40:25 Speaker 2

It was a a tremendous.

00:40:27 Speaker 2

Diplomatic breakthrough so far. Of that trapped grain, WPA and other organizations, commercial traffic has moved about 7,000,000 metric tons of grain out.

00:40:39 Speaker 2

About 25% of that has.

00:40:41 Speaker 2

Made it to.

00:40:42 Speaker 2

Very low income countries that are highly import dependent.

00:40:45 Speaker 2

And the rest is going where commercial markets dictate, UM.

00:40:50 Speaker 2

So there has been tremendous success.

00:40:52 Speaker 2

The risk here of course and the challenges that the corridor for entry is narrow, right?

00:40:58 Speaker 2

The rest of this C is still quite a dangerous place, and there are there are mines in in many directions keeping that corridor open.

00:41:05 Speaker 2

That narrow corridor open is a challenge.

00:41:08 Speaker 2

The size of the ships coming in tend to be rather small to offload. So you've got a queue of ships and they might be 7000 metric tons or 10,000 metric ton tankers when what you really need coming in and out are are 50,000 and 100,000 metric ton tankers to be able to move things out with.

00:41:26 Speaker 2

So there are some challenges there.

00:41:28 Speaker 2

But it is on the whole been very effective and it has caused global food prices to fall in the last three months.

00:41:36 Speaker 2

So this breakthrough was was absolutely critical and needs to extend beyond November when it currently is.

00:41:44 Speaker 4

So thank you for that. One last quick question if you if you don't mind. We had been talking before about the, how the US itself is responding to the global food crisis. You talked about partnerships with private business, how about the?

00:42:02 Speaker 4

U.S. government.

00:42:04 Speaker 4

We've only, we hear that it's a huge donor to the World Food program.

00:42:08 Speaker 4

How is how is that you know continuing this is a pre election time.

00:42:12 Speaker 4

There are crises everywhere.

00:42:14 Speaker 4

Say a few words.

00:42:16 Speaker 2

Yeah, of course.

00:42:17 Speaker 2

Well, I mean this.

00:42:19 Speaker 2

Is something I think you know.

00:42:20 Speaker 2

I talked about how Minnesotans in particular can be very excited about their, the companies that are stepping up in their backyard to support this issue.

00:42:27 Speaker 2

But all Americans can be excited about the ways that the United States as a whole has responded to this global food crisis and previous global food crisis.

00:42:36 Speaker 2

The United States government provides WFP with this year close to 50% of its contributions, right? So if WFP has, you know, $10 billion in contributions around the world this year, WFP or US has provided about half of that. It is an incredible commitment.

00:42:56 Speaker 2

To multilateralism, it's an incredible commitment from the American people to the to helping solve the problem of.

00:43:03 Speaker 2

And what's most important in motivating about this is that it's a bicameral, bipartisan effort.

00:43:10 Speaker 2

When, you know, like I said, most of my.

00:43:12 Speaker 2

Job really is.

00:43:14 Speaker 2

Is going up and communicating the lawmakers and Staffs on the importance of the World Food program and importance of International food assistance, and I can tell you that.

00:43:23 Speaker 2

It is both Republican offices and Democratic offices hand in hand, who are leading the effort on this, and they've done it all the way back to the Eisenhower administration and before the World Food Program itself.

00:43:36 Speaker 2

I like to say is is as American as apple pie, right?

00:43:39 Speaker 2

It's an organization that was stood up.

00:43:41 Speaker 2

In the aftermath of the Second World War was an idea by Eisenhower was brought into life by President Kennedy, and ever since then there has been bicameral, bipartisan leadership to make sure that WP has the support of the American people.

00:43:55 Speaker 2

Right now, the organization is led by a former governor of South Carolina, David Beasley.

00:44:00 Speaker 2

That alone signals.

00:44:02 Speaker 2

The US is continued leadership in the World Food Program and the the problem of international hunger. We've also seen incredible supplemental funding coming from Congress in addition to really robust funding levels this year.

00:44:15 Speaker 2

And then you realize we're in a position here of of fiscal constraint in the United States, we spent $5 trillion in the COVID-19 response.

00:44:24 Speaker 2

We are still writing checks though to the World Food Program and other humanitarian organizations to deal with these secondary effects of COVID-19 and the Russia.

00:44:35 Speaker 2

The invasion of Ukraine to deal with the global hunger emergency, and we should be proud of that.

00:44:40 Speaker 4

One, I lied.

00:44:41 Speaker 4

One quick thing what can individual Americans do?

00:44:44 Speaker 4

How can how can we donate?

00:44:46 Speaker 2

Yep, if you want to.

00:44:46 Speaker 2

Get involved. Head to wfpusa.org and when you do that you'll be directed to a uh giving page.

00:44:53 Speaker 2

You can figure out which way helps you the most or is most effective for you to give.

00:44:59 Speaker 2

It can become a monthly donor, provide one off, whatever it might be.

00:45:03 Speaker 2

There's also plenty of opportunity to get involved.

00:45:06 Speaker 2

Across social media and channels there to be helping spread the word of this global hunger crisis and of of the mission of the World Food Program. So you'll find all of that at WFP usa.org.

00:45:19 Speaker 4

Thank you very much, Chase, and thank you very much for this discussion, for your participation in this program today, for your work at the World Food Programme and for saving lives.

00:45:30 Speaker 4

Ah, and.

00:45:31

Thank you, mark.