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## Ambassador Cousin: An important choice for the World Food Program

By Marshall Matz

The U.S. ambassador to the U.N.'s Rome-based food agencies, Ertharin Cousin, has been chosen as the next Executive Director of the U.N. World Food Program. U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva jointly made the decision based on the recommendation of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

The World Food Programme is the world's largest humanitarian program fighting hunger worldwide. The work of WFP has gained greater visibility in recent years as the result of several international disasters, drought and an increase in the world's population. The annual budget of WFP exceeds \$5 billion, US, depending upon the emergencies of the year. So, in addition to its humanitarian mission, WFP represents a major market for agriculture.

Started in 1961, WFP's highest priority is responding to emergencies, WFP is also working with countries around the world to strengthen their own internal capacity to reduce hunger. In this regard, there is greater coordination with the US Agency for International Development (AID) and other similar government agencies than in previous years.

In 2010, WFP delivered 4.6 metric tons of food assistance to 109.2 million people in 75 countries. Beneficiaries included:

- 89 million were women and children;
- 21.1 million school children;
- 48.5% of the schoolchildren were girls (as a result the girls got married later, had fewer children and were more resistant to AIDS);
- 2.5 million people affected by AIDS received WFP support because the drugs don't work without food;
- 24.3 million people received the WFP food as an incentive to build assets, attend training and preserve livelihoods; and

- American agriculture.

Last year, the United States contributed more than \$1.75 billion to WFP and the other UN agencies, much of this assistance in the form of agriculture commodities. The largest supplier of corn-soy blend, for example, is Didion Milling in Wisconsin. Didion Milling processes ten percent (10%) of the Wisconsin corn crop. John Didion, the president of Didion Milling, a family owned operation, noted “We are proud to be the biggest US supplier of CSB to WFP and send grain from the US heartland to help feed children all over the world. WFP provides a direct economic benefit to American farmers in addition to its humanitarian mission.”

Ambassador Cousin previously served as executive vice president and Chief Operating Officer of Feeding America (then known as America’s Second Harvest), the nation’s largest domestic hunger organization. Ambassador Cousin also has a significant background in the retail food sector, including as senior vice president of Albertsons Foods and vice-president for government and community affairs for Jewel Food stores. While working for Albertsons, she also served as president and chair of the company’s corporate foundation, managing the organization’s philanthropic activities. Ambassador Cousin is a native of Chicago and a graduate of the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Georgia, School of Law.

In her letter to His Excellency Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Secretary Hillary Clinton noted that Ambassador Cousin was chosen as the U.S. candidate for WFP through an inter-agency group of government officials. Clinton said Cousin would bring “an intimate understanding of the World Food Program and its partners.”

Ambassador Ertharin Cousin has been the U.S. Representative to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture since August 17, 2009. Her duties include representing the United States at the World Food Program, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Ambassador Cousin will take over the reins of WFP at a critical moment. The eyes of the world are on hunger, agriculture production and its importance to economic development and world stability. Almost 1 billion people are struggling with hunger every day. Most of them are children. The social, economic and political impact of hunger on this scale is extraordinary impacting all of humanity.

The last three Executive Directors have been Americans, Catherine Bertini, Jim Morris and, currently, Josette Sheeran. Cousin will be the fourth American in a row. Known for her “red cup” world-wide, Josette Sheeran will become the Vice Chairman of the World Economic Forum which seeks to engage corporate and government leaders in order to address pressing international challenges.

President Obama has made “Feed the Future” a high priority and has put agriculture development on the agenda of the G8. In addition, the African Union is urging all African countries to devote at least ten percent of their respective budgets to agriculture.

Secretary Vilsack, upon learning of the UN announcement, said “Ambassador Cousin is uniquely qualified to assume this prominent position. She has served as the U.S. Representative to the UN Agencies for Food and Agriculture in Rome for more than two years, helping to carry out President Obama's global food security policy and other matters related to the production of food and agriculture. We greatly appreciate Ambassador Cousin's support in fulfilling the United States' strategic objectives with FAO. We know she will bring the same level of dedication to her new role.

"The WFP is an important organization to the United States and a significant partner of USDA in fighting hunger around the world. In fact, WFP is the single largest implementer of USDA's McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program.” The McGovern-Dole program provides a school lunch to children, attracting them to school. This is particularly important for the young girls who might not otherwise be allowed to attend school. When the girls attend school, they get married later, have fewer children and it reduces the incidence of AIDS.

To help build support for WFP here in the United States, the World Food Program USA (WFP USA) has been established as a nonprofit organization. WFP USA engages individuals and organizations, shapes public policy and generates resources for the United Nations World Food bipartisan Board of Directors, WFP USA has become a significant supporter of WFP. See: <http://usa.wfp.org/>

Commenting on the Cousin announcement, Rick Leach, the President of WFP USA, noted: “Ambassador Cousin brings the vision, commitment and energy required to unite the international community around solutions to global hunger. With her decades of experience in national and international corporate, non-profit and government leadership, I am certain that she will effectively engage both the public and private sectors to help lift those in need from hunger and extreme poverty. In her service as U.S. Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture in Rome, Ambassador Cousin has proven her deep knowledge of food security policy and her commitment to fighting world hunger.”

#30

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