

Vision for the United Nations: Policy Manifesto from Elena Tekle – candidate for Secretary General of the United Nations

To seek the office of Secretary-General is to declare a commitment to the United Nations, its principles, its purpose, and its historical legacy. It is to carry forward more than 75 years of hope, of hard-won progress, and of failures we have not yet had the courage to name.

Yet across the world, support for the UN is waning. Suffering has been normalized, administered and reported rather than eradicated. Tonight, over 363 million people will go to bed hungry¹; not because we lack the knowledge or the resources to feed them, but because the system built to do so has learned to manage hunger rather than end it. That is not a technical failure. It is a political one.

The UN Charter was built on the refusal to normalize human suffering. I am running for Secretary-General because that refusal must be renewed, and because two decades working from the fields of Haiti and Rwanda to the corridors of Rome and New York have taught me exactly where the system is broken and how it can be fixed. To defend the United Nations is to have the courage to change it, and I am ready to do both.

Renewal means refocusing on our purpose, delivering results and building for the future.

As Secretary-General, I will propose to make these my three priorities:

Pillar I – Building a Predictable Foundation:

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one of the world's most fertile countries, more than twenty-five million people continue to face acute food insecurity despite decades of international engagement². The persistence of this crisis is not only a failure of peace and governance; it is a failure of the international system's financing model.

Humanitarian operations remain overwhelmingly dependent on short-term, voluntary contributions that fluctuate with donor politics, media attention, and competing global emergencies. As funding cycles shrink and pledges arrive late or unpredictably, agencies are forced into continual crisis management: scaling down food assistance, interrupting nutritional programs, and delaying investments in agricultural resilience precisely when continuity is most needed. The result is a system that reacts expensively to catastrophe rather than preventing it sustainably.

This is not inevitable. It is a choice, and it can be changed.

¹ A global food crisis | World Food Programme. (n.d.). Retrieved May 23, 2026, from <https://www.wfp.org/global-hunger-crisis>

² WFP/FAO: Millions trapped in deepening hunger crisis in the DRC as needs far outpace humanitarian response - Democratic Republic of the Congo | ReliefWeb. (2026, May 13). <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/wfpfao-millions-trapped-deepening-hunger-crisis-drc-needs-far-outpace-humanitarian-response>

As Secretary-General, I will advocate for a more predictable and rules-based financing architecture for the United Nations: one that includes multi-year funding commitments rather than annual pledging cycles; dedicated contingency reserves for protracted crises, insulated from short-term donor politics; the inclusion of private capitals to combine and assist the member States' contributions; and transparent public tracking of all funds measured against independently assessed humanitarian need.

Financing must follow need, not visibility. No population should face hunger because international attention has moved elsewhere.

Key commitments:

- Establish multi-year assessed funding commitments across UN food security agencies, replacing annual pledging cycles with predictable, need-based financing
- Create a jointly governed multilateral contingency reserve fund for protracted crises, insulated from bilateral donor politics
- Mobilize private capital as a complementary funding stream, through a governed partnership framework that ensures accountability to Member States and prevents programmatic capture by donor interests
- Introduce mandatory public tracking of all contributions – public and private – measured against independently assessed humanitarian need, with annual reporting to the General Assembly

Pillar II – Building with Communities, Not for Them:

In Rwanda³, the World Food Program has demonstrated what genuine local partnership looks like in practice: smallholder farmers, particularly women and young people, accessing formal finance for the first time; refugee communities building economic independence rather than aid dependency; programs designed from the outset with a handover date, a local institution to receive them, and a government invested in their continuity. These are not exceptional results, but the product of an exceptional approach.

In Madagascar⁴, between 2019 and 2023, a different story unfolded. Despite significant financial resources and genuine commitment from international staff, WFP operations struggled to move beyond emergency relief. Standardized responses were applied to a structurally diverse context; short-term measures addressed immediate hunger without touching its causes; and when funding cycles ended, so did the programs – leaving communities no more resilient than before. The problem was not the people implementing the response. It was the system within which they were forced to operate.

³ WFP_Africa. (2026, May 20). Seeds of solidarity: Rwanda's refugees and local communities build ties and harvests. Medium. <https://wfp-africa.medium.com/seeds-of-solidarity-rwandas-refugees-and-local-communities-build-ties-and-harvests-319bd1b06dc5>

⁴ O'Connor, D., Boyle, P., Ilcan, S., & Oliver, M. (2017). Living with insecurity: Food security, resilience, and the World Food Programme (WFP). *Global Social Policy*, 17(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468018116658776>

When international organizations apply uniform responses to structurally diverse contexts, prioritize donor visibility over community continuity, and design programs for populations rather than with them, they reproduce a logic of assistance that is not only inefficient; it is self-defeating. It assumes that knowledge flows exclusively from the outside in, and that local actors are recipients rather than architects. Decades of evidence point in a different direction: where local institutions are genuinely empowered, where communities own the design and implementation of programs, results are more durable and legitimate.

We know what works. The question is whether we have the political will to make it the rule.

As Secretary-General, I will push for a requirement that a growing share of operational budgets be channeled directly through local and national actors; that all multi-year programs include mandatory exit strategies; and that local staff, volunteers, and community partners (who currently constitute the overwhelming majority of field-level workforces, yet hold the least institutional power) be granted enough decision-making authority, not merely operational responsibility.

Key commitments:

- Require a minimum and growing share of operational budgets to be channeled directly through local and national actors, with binding timelines for compliance
- Mandate exit strategies with measurable handover indicators in all multi-year programs from the first day of implementation
- Reform decision-making structures within UN field operations to grant local staff, volunteers, and community partners institutional authority commensurate with their operational responsibility

Pillar III – No Ceasefire for Hunger:

In Yemen⁵, the United Nations had the data. By 2016, joint assessments already flagged catastrophic food insecurity. Yet the humanitarian response plan remained barely half-funded, the Security Council paralyzed, and millions of people pushed to the brink of famine by a conflict in which food access had become a deliberate instrument of war. Yemen is not an anomaly. It is a pattern.

Conflict is today the leading driver of acute food insecurity worldwide. Where wars are fought, harvests fail, markets collapse, and aid corridors close. The UN's food security architecture was not designed for this reality. When the Security Council is blocked, when access is denied, when food is weaponized, the system has no automatic response. That must change.

⁵ Sihaloho, R. A. H., Prabowo, T. B., & Kusuma, R. P. (2022). Food Crisis in Yemen: The Roles of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) from 2015 to 2020. *Nation State: Journal of International Studies*, 5(1), 59–74. <https://doi.org/10.24076/nsjis.v5i1.504>

The 2022 Black Sea Grain Initiative⁶ demonstrated what is possible when the Secretary-General acts with urgency and creativity outside paralyzed multilateral frameworks, brokering an agreement that brought 32.9 million tons of grain to global markets and reduced food prices by 23%. But that agreement collapsed in 2023⁷. Ad hoc diplomacy is not enough. We need permanent architecture.

Key commitments:

- Establish a multilateral food security early warning system with automatic Security Council notification triggers when crisis thresholds are reached, removing political discretion to ignore documented need
- Negotiate pre-agreed humanitarian food corridor protocols between major powers, modeled on existing arms control frameworks; agreed before crises, not during them
- Leverage new technologies, including satellite monitoring, AI-assisted crop failure prediction, and real-time supply chain tracking, to strengthen early warning systems and ensure that data cannot be denied or delayed by parties to a conflict

A Final Word:

These two commitments are not separate agendas. They are two expressions of the same conviction: that hunger is not a natural condition to be managed, but a political failure to be corrected.

To seek this office is to accept a responsibility that is larger than any one candidacy. The United Nations belongs to its Member States and to the people it serves. But this moment demands honesty about what is broken, and the courage to rebuild it. I have spent twenty-five years learning where the system fails the people it was built to serve. I am ready to change it.

⁶ Nations, U. The Black Sea Grain Initiative: What was achieved? Why was it important? United Nations. United Nations. Retrieved May 23, 2026, from <https://www.un.org/en/black-sea-grain-initiative/achievements>

⁷ Wintour, P., & editor, P. W. D. (2023, July 20). What was the Black Sea grain deal and why did it collapse? The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/20/what-was-the-black-sea-grain-deal-and-why-did-it-collapse>

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