

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

CRISES IN AFRICA'S HORN REACH EMERGENCY LEVELS

Nairobi, 2 July 2008 - Large areas of the Horn of Africa are facing - or rapidly sliding into - a state of humanitarian emergency with more than 14 million people requiring urgent food aid and other humanitarian assistance over the coming months.

A combination of drought conditions and rising food prices is driving the crisis which is affecting populations already food insecure due to conflict, displacement and a drop in food production. The emergency is exacerbated by the erosion of livelihoods among the landless, pastoralists, internally displaced persons and the urban poor across the region. Disease outbreaks fueled by poor hygiene and sanitation in drought affected areas, and poor health and nutrition services including low immunization coverage, are additional high risks for mothers and children.

Alarmed by the situation, members of the Regional Humanitarian Partnership Team in Nairobi¹ call upon governments in the region and all humanitarian partners including donors to act promptly to save lives and prevent an escalation of the crisis.

In **Ethiopia**, a joint assessment by the Government and humanitarian partners shows that 4.6 million people are in need of emergency food support. This is an increase from 2.2 million in the period from January to March 2008. An additional 5.7 million drought affected people in areas targeted by the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) will require extended support (food or cash) as a result of the drought, according to WFP. Drought and ongoing conflict in the Somali region of Ethiopia have generated a complex challenge for the Government and humanitarian agencies. The Federal Ministry of Health has estimated that there are 75,000 severely malnourished children in the drought affected areas and UNICEF has warned that many more children will be at risk in the coming three months and has airlifted food to Addis Ababa. Diseases such as Acute Watery Diarrhoea, Meningitis and Measles compound the situation. At the same time, the inflation of food prices has reached 29.6 percent, according to the Central Statistics Authority.

The food and livelihood crisis in **Somalia** is already critical after very poor rains in the southern and central parts of the country this year combined with violence and limited or no access to the affected populations. The price of imported rice, for example, has increased up to 350 percent between January 2007 and May 2008 in several markets. Consequently, the number of vulnerable people in need of humanitarian assistance has increased by 40 percent since January 2008 to 2.6 million people, representing 35 percent of the population. The new figure includes 600,000 urban poor, an increasingly vulnerable group due to record high food prices. The latest nutrition assessments indicate Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) levels between 18.4 and 24.1 percent². The situation is likely to deteriorate in the coming months with 3.5 million people facing a humanitarian emergency³.

¹ The Regional Humanitarian Partnership Team is comprised of United Nations regional humanitarian agencies, non-governmental organizations and the Red Cross family. Behind this press release are the **United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Programme (WFP), World Vision International, CARE International and Handicap International.**

² The international emergency threshold for GAM is 10 percent.

³ FSAU Somalia, Quarterly Brief, 9 May 2008.

Kenya is experiencing widespread food insecurity with 1.2 million people in need of food assistance⁴ and an estimated 70 percent of the overall population affected by rising food prices. Staple food prices have gone up between 30 and 50 percent over the past year putting many groups at risk of hunger. At the same time, inflation has reached 26.6 percent⁵. A main driver behind the price rise is the drop in food production caused by post-election displacement in January and February 2008 mainly in the highly food-productive Rift Valley province. According to the Kenya Red Cross Society there are still 68,519 displaced people in 100 camps as of 1 July. An equally high number of displaced is estimated to live outside established camps. Compounding the situation is the risk of the animal disease *Peste des Petits Ruminants* (PPR) spreading over pastoral districts. PPR has an epidemic mortality rate of 60 to 80 percent.

In **Uganda**, the northeastern Karamoja region is experiencing a prolonged dry spell and crop diseases in addition to conflict and under-development. There is serious concern that a third consecutive year of widespread crop failure could afflict the region, which is fast approaching a worst-case food security scenario⁶. WFP is distributing emergency rations to 707,000 people in Karamoja, representing 64 percent of the region's population, through the next harvest in September. At the same time, anecdotal evidence suggests an increase in food prices of 20 to 50 percent in parts of the country, although the relative isolation and local production capacity of the market is expected to minimize the local impact of the global food crisis.

In **Eritrea**, the likelihood of drought this cropping season is high. The *Bahri* rains from October 2007 to February 2008 failed and as such most of the secondary crops which make for 20 percent of the country's cereal needs. The *Azmera* rains from March to May 2008 have been below average except for the April rains. There is cautious optimism for good *Kremiti* seasonal rains from June to September. However, even in a good cropping season, the country's domestic food production covers at most 60 percent of annual consumption. The combination of drought and the knock-on effect of global food price increases could affect a significant portion of the population.

In **Djibouti**, rainfall is 50 percent below the normal pattern which has eroded in particular pastoralist livelihoods. A total of 80,000 people are in acute food and livelihood crisis⁷, while Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates for children under five years of age are has reached 17 percent, with a peak of 25 percent in the northwest.

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⁴ WFP Emergency Operation project document, May 2008.

⁵ FEWSNET alert, May 2008.

⁶ OCHA Uganda Consolidated Appeals Process mid-year review, June 2008.

⁷ Joint UN Country Team/Government estimate.