

MEDIA RELEASE

UNICEF appeals for US\$18.3m for Ethiopian flood victims

ADDIS ABABA, 29 August 2006: The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) today launched an emergency appeal for US\$18.35 million to help save the lives of tens of thousands of people affected by flash-flooding throughout Ethiopian lowlands.

The floods, caused by persistent heavy rainfall, have already killed over 630 people and left thousands of women and children homeless and vulnerable to deadly water-borne diseases. Many more are now facing a battle for survival as the floods destroy houses, livelihoods and food stores across the country.

"We need to get more aid to these areas urgently," said Bjorn Ljungqvist, the head of UNICEF in Ethiopia. "We have been working hard to help people affected by this flood throughout August. But our humanitarian supplies are now exhausted.

"As ever, children are bearing the brunt of the crisis. And in many areas we fear the worst may not be over. Key river dams are now full to overflowing and the latest weather reports show no let-up in the heavy rainfall for at least another month."

UNICEF, The Ethiopian Government and other agencies have already started sending out emergency supplies – everything from plastic sheeting and clothing to food supplies and vital medicines.

Nine out of Ethiopia's 11 main low-lying regions have been hit, from Tigray in the north to Somali region in the south, from Gambella in the west to Dire Dawa in the east. An estimated 200,000 people have been affected so far.

In Dire Dawa Region the flooding has so far killed 256 – many of them trapped by flash floods in their sleep. The cost of rebuilding destroyed homes, businesses and infrastructure in Dire Dawa alone could equal US\$3.1 million (Birr 27million).

More than 360 people were killed in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) after The Omo River burst its banks. More than 3,200 cattle were also swept away.

More than 13,362 people are now reported to be living in temporary shelters in the central Amhara Region. Overcrowding in the region's two Internally Displaced Persons' camps is increasing the risk of water borne disease. The majority of the inhabitants are women and children.

The Gambella, Somali and Tigray regions have all suffered from swamped agricultural land and destroyed homes.

UNICEF estimates that a further 524,000 people remain vulnerable in the wake of this disaster.

Temporary shelter sites, set up to house escaping flood victims, will face a health and sanitation crisis if adequate medical and sanitation supplies are not delivered. Experts believe Acute Watery Diarrhea (AWD) and malaria among children will become serious dangers due to the lack of basic hygiene.

Many of the displaced families have also lost all their possessions to the flooding. Necessities such as cooking and eating utensils, blankets and basic plastic sheets for shelter need to reach 40,000 displaced households.

The US\$18.3 million includes US\$ 5.5 million for emergency health care, US\$5 million for the prevention of Acute Watery Diarrhea and US\$3.7 million to ensure the supply of clean water.

The UNICEF appeal forms part of the US\$ 27.1 million national flood appeal launched by the Ethiopian government and other aid agencies earlier this week.

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