

MEDIA RELEASE

European Commission head tours UNICEF-supported child nutrition sites in Tigray

Mekele, Ethiopia, May 29, 2007: The European Commission delegation to Ethiopia has provided 7.6 million Euros to UNICEF during the past year in support of the Enhanced Outreach Strategy (EOS)/ Targeted Supplementary Food (TSF) programme, which is saving thousands of lives in Ethiopia by providing mothers and children with key survival interventions.

Head of European Commission in Ethiopia Tim Clarke visited a UNICEF-supported nutrition project in the country's Tigray Region last week as part of a tour of EC-funded projects there.

Speaking at the EOS site in Saesie-Tsaedamba woreda (district) in Tigray, Mr. Clarke said, "We've just seen a child here who is 18 months' old. Her normal weight should be 13 kilos but she's only 5 kilos, so she's really at risk...through this programme we can give her therapeutic feeding and give her a chance to survive.



"With this programme [EOS/ TSF] which is executed by the Federal Ministry of Health with UNICEF support and primarily financed by the European Commission...we are trying to see if we can address this problem."

The Commission has funded EOS/ TSF in Ethiopia's four biggest regions - Oromia, Amhara, SNNPR and Tigray.

In Tigray, more than 41 per cent of children-under-five experience stunted growth and an estimated 11.6 per cent suffer from acute

malnutrition. Drought and the food security situation in Tigray and elsewhere have undermined the coping strategies of millions of women and children. Nationally, the 2005 Demographic and Health Survey shows that 47 per cent of Ethiopia's children are stunted and 11 per cent wasted.

The Enhanced Outreach Strategy/ Targeted Supplementary Food programme is a joint initiative between the government, WFP and UNICEF. In its fourth year, the strategy aims to give the most vulnerable access to food, primary health care and nutritional awareness. It also monitors the nutritional status of populations for better emergency preparedness and response.

Amongst the interventions provided to children and pregnant and lactating women are vitamin-A supplementation, de-worming, measles immunization, malaria prevention through long-lasting insecticide treated nets distribution and screening for malnutrition.

Children found to be malnourished are referred to the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency supported by the WFP's Targeted Supplementary Food Programme. The severely malnourished children are referred to Therapeutic Feeding Programme run by the Ministry of Health and supported by UNICEF.

During the past EOS/ TSF conducted in December 2006, more than 549, 000 children and 86, 990 pregnant and lactating women were screened for malnutrition in Tigray thanks to the crucial

MEDIA RELEASE

support of the European Commission. At national level, the EOS/ TSF provides twice per year key Child Survival Interventions to over 6 million children and 1 million pregnant and lactating women.

Children with no appetite and complications are referred to In-patient Therapeutic Feeding Units (TFUs), while children with no complication are referred to Out-patient Therapeutic Programme (OTP). On his visit, Mr. Clarke stopped at one such UNICEF-supported unit at Ferewn Health Centre to observe the professional administration of therapeutic milk and Plumpy'Nut by health centre staff.

UNICEF Head of Nutrition and Food Security section Dr Iqbal Kabir explained that much more needed to be done, he said: "At present, Tigray has just over 500 places within the Therapeutic Feeding Programme (TFP) throughout the region. For complete coverage we need roughly 14,000 to cope with on-going severe malnutrition needs – that is still a huge gap."

Mr. Clarke also congratulated EOS/ TSF partners on their co-operation in child survival activities whilst also stressing the importance of humanitarian agencies to tackle to causes of malnutrition as well as providing care to those affected.

Addressing TFP staff, Mr. Clarke said: "I think [EOS/ TSF] is a wonderful programme which will provide support to you and your colleagues and will save lives..."

"I think it is a wake-up call to people like myself and my organization to try to provide basic health care to children in rural areas where problems of transport and access remain difficult."

The European Commission delegation also inspected other projects in Seasie Tsaeda Emba Wereda supported by the EC as part of the organisation's assistance to the Tigray Region.

UNICEF Communications

Indrias Getachew, Communication Officer, Tel: (251-11) 551-51-55, (251-11) 544 43 64,
(251-91) 125-40-18, e-mail: igetachew@unicef.org

OR

George Morris

Communications Officer

Tel: (+251) 0115 444 171/ Mobile: 0911 55 00 33/ email: gmorris@unicef.org