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LIFE-SAVING THERAPEUTIC SUPPLIES ARRIVE IN ETHIOPIA FOR EMERGENCY RELIEF

More urgently needed to scale-up operations

Addis Ababa, Geneva, 1 July 2008 – A massive airlift of the ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) Plumpy’Nut arrived in Addis Ababa last night as part of UNICEF’s emergency response to meet the urgent needs of severely malnourished children in drought-affected areas of Ethiopia.

The Government of Ethiopia estimates that 75,000 children in over 100 drought-affected districts are suffering from severe acute malnutrition at this time.

“We are in a race against time as we try to bring in enough supplies to save lives,” said Bjorn Ljungqvist, UNICEF Representative to Ethiopia. “These malnourished children cannot wait.”

According to the well-respected Lancet medical journal, a child with severe acute malnutrition faces a 9-10 fold risk of dying unless properly treated with therapeutic foods.

UNICEF’s mammoth order for 772 tons of Plumpy’Nut, purchased with loans secured for the emergency response, started arriving on 13 June and will be delivered through a major airlift operation of two cargo flights per week over a four week period.

The supplies will be dispatched to regional health bureaus and non-governmental organizations for distribution to severely malnourished children.

The estimated number of malnourished children that will benefit from these provisions stands at around 18,800 per month during the next 3 months.

UNICEF’s order falls short of present needs considering the total number of children that are affected.

UNICEF has appealed for \$49 million to respond to the emergency nutrition, health, education, water, sanitation and hygiene needs of children and women in drought affected areas of Ethiopia.

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To date, however, UNICEF has only secured \$5.6 million and received pledges for an additional \$23 million.

“We urgently need more resources to take us through to the next harvest when we expect things to get back on track,” said Ljungqvist.

The next major harvest is not expected until at least September yet general food aid requirements for affected communities for the month of July onwards are only partially secured.

“Children are the first to become weak and die in these circumstances, which is what we are witnessing in hot spot areas right now,” said Ljungqvist. But children with severe acute malnutrition do not have to die. We know how to save their lives.”

Together with the Ministry of Health UNICEF has been training health workers and health extension workers across the country to treat severe malnutrition using methods that have reduced mortality rates from 30-50 per cent to less than 5 per cent. Compared to previous drought emergencies there is much greater capacity in Ethiopia today to respond to their needs. Health extension workers operating at village level are poised to deliver these life-saving products.

Meeting the funding gap will allow UNICEF to continue the distribution of this lifesaving food.

Plumpy’Nut is a form of "Ready to Use Therapeutic Food" (RUTF). It is a scientifically formulated nutrient-dense, peanut-based paste with the right balance of proteins, energy, fats, vitamins and minerals to treat severe malnutrition at home for children without medical complications or serious illness. Treating the child at home avoids exposing the child to possible infection at specialized feeding centers and frees up the mother to look after her other children and engage in income-earning opportunities that is so critical to those living on less than a dollar a day. The food is conveniently packaged in sachets or small pots to remain free of contamination for up to two years and requires no cooking or preparation. It tastes like a slightly sweeter kind of peanut butter, and consist of peanut paste, vegetable oil, sugar, milk powder, vitamins and minerals. Each 92 gram sachet provides 500 kilocalories.

In February 2007 the fourth and largest Plumpy’Nut production plant outside of France opened on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. While the plant is operating at 24-hour full

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capacity mode and contributing to the emergency response, its present output is not sufficient to meet emergency needs. Ethiopian Airlines is flying in the Plumpy'Nut order from Europe at minimal charge.

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