

## MEDIA RELEASE

### UNICEF DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR HILDE F. JOHNSON CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION FOR CHILDREN IN DROUGHT AFFECTED ETHIOPIA

ADDIS ABABA, 22 June 2008 – UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Hilde F. Johnson today appealed for a more robust and rapid response to the urgent needs of severely malnourished children in drought-affected areas of Ethiopia.

“It is our assessment that the situation in the hardest hit areas is extremely serious,” said Johnson. “Children are now at risk of dying in numbers in several areas if help is not provided urgently. The government and partners are doing their utmost to help, but needs are not being met, at present, with adequate speed. More resources need to be provided.”

Johnson spoke at the conclusion of a four day mission to Ethiopia which included visits to emergency hot-spots in drought-affected parts of the south.

“We talked to children, mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers and all actors in the field, the health officials of the zones, the health extension workers, the professionals deployed and key partners among the NGOs,” said Johnson. “This picture was confirmed by all of them, and a clear message was conveyed: There is no food. The assistance needs to be taken to scale, and it has to happen urgently.”

UNICEF’s Deputy Executive Director outlined the most critical and urgent steps for responding to the emergency starting with scaling up life-saving therapeutic feeding in all affected areas, with parallel scaling up of supplementary feeding.

“Supplementary feeding is a fundamental part of the response related to the survival of children,” said Johnson. “It is urgent that supplementary feeding in large quantities is provided in these areas, both to avoid children from falling into acute malnutrition, and to prevent those having undergone treatment from falling back into severe malnutrition.

The World Food Programme has started to receive resources, but as yet, has not got adequate support from donors to cater for these needs. It is critical that these needs are also met for the survival of children.”

Johnson also urged careful monitoring and addressing of health hazards that threaten child survival including Acute Watery Diarrhoea (AWD), pneumonia, measles and malaria. This will require emergency provisions of safe drinking water, as well as supporting sanitation and hygiene education, especially in areas of increased risk for disease transmission such as Therapeutic feeding-centres and stabilization-centres.

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To cater for the needs as outlined in the requirement document of 12 June, UNICEF will need around 28 million USD.

Johnson noted reports of additional emergency hotspots in areas of Oromia, Somali and Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' Region, as well as potential challenges in Amhara and southern Tigray.

With the harvest not due until late September, the emergency situation may worsen over the next three months. While steps are being taken by government to provide food supplies, present funding levels will only cater for half the food aid needs required for June and July.

“Our main concern is that lack of an adequate response in the short term can further exacerbate the situation for children,” said Johnson, “as they are also dependent on the availability of adequate food in their households.”

Should the situation worsen, we all need to be prepared. We need mitigating measures. “UNICEF is therefore committed to strengthen the monitoring and surveillance system and –capacity,” said Johnson. “This includes training of local government staff to address these dynamic and evolving emergency challenges. This is absolutely essential in view of the speed with which we have seen these life threatening conditions for children develop. The strategic pre-positioning of essential supplies for children, such as therapeutic food, essential medicines, water purification and sanitation materials is critical for our capacity to respond. This is high priority for us.”

These measures will enable us to respond adequately should the situation worsen the next critical months. At the moment, UNICEF does not have sufficient supplies available. We will ask donors for additional support to be able to put in place these critical mitigating measures. They amount to around USD 20 million.

Johnson reiterated UNICEF’s agreement with the Ethiopian government and partners on the present assessment of the food and nutrition situation in the country. In view of the rapidly evolving situation, she called for an urgent nationwide assessment of the nutrition situation covering all affected regions including pastoralist areas and in particular Somali region. At present it is agreed that 4.6 million people are in need of food aid, of which 75,000 children are directly affected by severe acute malnutrition.

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