

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Japanese Vice Minister Visits Local Producer of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food

Addis Ababa, 24 November 2008 – UNICEF last week was honored to host H.E. Nobuhide Minorikawa, Japanese parliamentary vice minister for foreign affairs and the secretary general of the Japan-UNICEF Parliamentary Friendship League. Mr Minorikawa visited the UNICEF-supported plant that produces Plumpy'nut®, the ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) that has helped revolutionize the treatment of severe malnutrition in Ethiopia.

Accompanied by H.E. Kinichi Komano, the Japanese ambassador to Ethiopia, and Bjorn Ljungqvist, head of UNICEF Ethiopia, Mr Minorikawa was led on a tour of the Hilina Enriched Foods Processing Center by the company's managing director, Mr Belete Beyene.

Mr Minorikawa, who had expressed interest in seeing “a project where UNICEF is playing an important role in Ethiopia,” seemed to come away with a highly favorable view of the operation.

“It's really amazing,” he said. I'm very impressed, and I like the fact that 70 percent of the ingredients are domestically produced.”

Local production of RUTF significantly reduces import costs, as well as supporting the local economy.

Ready-to-use therapeutic foods, of which Plumpy'nut is the most widely used, are soft, medicinal foods developed specifically to treat severely malnourished children. Their composition and packaging makes them especially practical for use during emergencies—they require no mixing with water or other foods, can be stored for long periods without spoiling and can be consumed directly from the packet.

An added benefit—and one that has tremendously enhanced efforts to treat malnutrition—is that RUTF does not have to be administered at a health facility. The product can be given as a take-away ration, allowing caregivers to treat children at home.

Thanks in large part to the expansion of a national initiative to promote home- and community-based management of malnutrition, access to the treatment was greatly expanded in 2008. Over the course of the year, Ethiopia greatly improved its capacity to treat affected children. At the same time, a mix of drought, worldwide price hikes and other factors defeated the ability of many families to meet their food needs.

This year in Ethiopia saw one of the largest responses to malnutrition ever undertaken globally. Among the 6.4 million people estimated to be in need of emergency assistance, 1 million are children at risk of becoming either moderately or severely malnourished. Over 84,000 children are already severely malnourished and require therapeutic feeding each month.

“Global food, fuel, finance and climate shocks along with local drought conditions have exceeded the resilience of poor people locally to cope,” Ljungqvist said. “As we have seen dramatically in 2008, it is mainly the children of the world's poorest who suffer the brunt of the burden.”

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