



Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia

Approximately 1.7 million people in need of assistance in Somalia due to Humanitarian Deterioration

Nairobi, 19 January 2006 – The humanitarian situation in Somalia has drastically deteriorated following failed rains at the end of 2005. Around 1.7 million Somalis are now in need of urgent humanitarian assistance until June 2006. Southern Somalia in particular faces a widespread Humanitarian Emergency.

According to the recent food security and livelihood survey by FAO's Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU), an estimated 1.5 million people in North, Central and Southern regions are in a state of Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis or Humanitarian Emergency, and a further 200,000 are on alert status and at high risk of Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis. These figures do not include up to 400,000 internally displaced previously identified by the aid community in need of assistance and protection. Immediate causes of the crisis are a severe drought combined with localised conflicts. FSAU estimates crop production for this year to be 50% of the post war average – the lowest cereal production in over ten years. Cattle deaths in the worst affected areas are already reaching 20-30%, and could reach 80% by April. Malnutrition rates have reached over 25% in some areas and are expected to get worse in the coming months.

The worst affected are in the southern regions of Gedo, Lower Juba, Middle Juba, and areas of Bay and Bakool. Given the severity and the potential for rapid deterioration, FSAU has stated that there is a moderate risk of famine for Gedo region and surrounding areas before the next expected rainy season in April-June 2006.

“The drought compounds what was already a dire humanitarian situation, and is affecting communities in areas beset by years of high malnutrition and morbidity rates, chronic food insecurity, clan fighting, and suffering from consecutive bad harvests.” comments the Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Mr. Maxwell Gaylard. “We have now a common understanding of the magnitude of the crisis. It is the worst drought in a decade and the number of people in need of immediate assistance and protection has drastically increased compared to six months ago when 1 million people were identified in need of assistance, and aid agencies were preparing the 2006 Humanitarian Appeal.”

In mid-January 2006, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) established a Ministerial Disaster Committee – chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Salim Aliyow Ibrow - to handle the drought and liaise closely with the humanitarian community on the drought response. The Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia will ensure a coordinated response by the aid community with the TFG and other local and regional authorities.

Since drought early warning signals at the end of 2005, UN agencies and NGOs have been stepping up monitoring, expanding field assessments, and enhancing preparedness plans. While the drought is impacting heavily on food security, food is not the only source of concern. “When we speak about 1.7 million people in need of urgent assistance, we refer to a food security, water, health, nutrition and protection crisis” said Mr. Gaylard. “The drought will thus require an integrated and timely response.”

In various regions, in cooperation with its partners, UNICEF is mobilising a response in water, sanitation and nutrition, and distributing school tents and education kits to drought affected areas in Bakool, Bay and Gedo regions. UNICEF together with WHO is preparing a measles and Vitamin A campaign for the south starting in March 2006. WHO is also pre-positioning and making available emergency health kits for use by its partners.

In view of the crisis, WFP is increasing its food aid programme from 18,000 to 95,000 metric tons (MT). Taking into account resources available for 36,000 MT, there is still a deficit of 59,000 MT to meet the needs of the most vulnerable Somalis.

Affected by a spate of piracy in 2005, WFP has secured different means of transporting food aid into southern Somalia. Now, having developed food distribution plans with its implementing partners to address drought needs, sourcing food regionally is becoming a challenge due to the regional drought that has affected neighbouring Kenya and Ethiopia as well.

While humanitarian needs have increased in southern Somalia, the operational environment remains insecure and volatile. Obtaining sustained and unhindered humanitarian access remains a challenge. "To address the situation, the aid community will have to increase its operational capacity in the southern regions to better address the needs of affected populations" says Mr. Gaylard. "We have seen some encouraging developments. A humanitarian inter-agency assessment in southern Gedo in December 2005 was possible thanks to support from the local authorities, and an agreement has been reached with the TFG to ensure unhindered access to affected communities."

In northern Somalia, the rains were generally normal enabling continued improvement in rangeland and livestock conditions. Yet, some localized pockets in the North received very little rain, placing recovery of communities at risk. In north and central regions, 290,000 people thus remain in need of continued assistance.

On 14 December 2005, the 2006 Humanitarian Appeal for Somalia was launched targeting 1 million Somalis, which donors are now being requested to strongly support. A reviewed Appeal will be considered at a later stage although it is already known that food requirements have substantially increased.

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