

PRESS RELEASE  
United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS)

UN Special Representative for Somalia Urges Generous  
Donor Response to Growing Humanitarian Crisis

Nairobi – 19 January 2006: The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia (SRSG), Francois Lonseny Fall, today appealed to international donors to respond quickly and generously to the humanitarian drought crisis now engulfing Somali communities.

UN agencies have warned that 1.7 million people are in need of urgent assistance.

"Time is not on Somalia's side," Ambassador Fall said. "Many communities, especially those in the Central and Southern regions are already in deep nutritional deficit. Dams and other watering places are running dry. Crops have failed, rangelands and animal herds are depleted. Measles and other barometers of crisis are taking their toll on the young. The international community must move now to avoid a massive loss of life."

FAO's Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU) estimates crop production for this year to be just 50 per cent of Somalia's post war average - the lowest cereal production in over ten years. According to the FSAU, cattle deaths in the worst affected areas are already reaching 20-30 per cent and could reach 80 per cent by April. Malnutrition rates are above 25 per cent in some areas and are expected to worsen in the coming months.

The current emergency is complicated by some 14 years of fighting between warlords and chronic insecurity in much of the country. Continued conflict and piracy on the coast have prevented delivery of humanitarian food shipments to Somali ports while rival militia controlling roads and checkpoints demand payment for safe passage.

"We must have unimpeded access everywhere and at all times for humanitarian supplies and for those who accompany them," Ambassador Fall said. "It is unacceptable that a nation in crisis should be held hostage to bandits demanding tribute from the humanitarian organizations and workers who are sent to assist."

The humanitarian crisis was among issues discussed during individual meetings in Nairobi this week between Ambassador Fall and Somali President, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, Prime Minister Ali Mohammed Gedi and the Speaker of the Parliament, Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden. Ambassador Fall said he was encouraged by local Somali efforts to combat the drought and by the support given by the Transitional Federal Institutions to the humanitarian efforts already underway.

"Each of the leaders assured me this week of their commitment to work with the international community to meet the needs of their people. There is no way for me to overstate the importance of their word or their ability to deliver peace and safe transit for aid in the face of the current emergency," Ambassador Fall said. "I implore everyone concerned to recognize that we are facing a humanitarian challenge of historic dimensions. We must all pull together if we are to avoid extraordinary suffering and loss of life."

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