Somalia’s humanitarian crisis must stay on the global agenda

Nairobi (20 July 2012) – One year after famine was declared in parts of Somalia on 20 July 2011, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Mark Bowden, is calling attention to the plight of 3.8 million Somalis who need assistance.

“Last year, we were able to halt the downward spiral into starvation for hundreds of thousands of people,” said Bowden. “Famine conditions have not been present since January. This is largely due to the exceptional harvest at the beginning of the year and innovative approaches to food security, which address changes in world food prices and obstacles to access people. However, the humanitarian situation in Somalia remains critical with 2.51 million people in urgent need of aid and a further 1.29 million at risk of sliding back into crisis.”

“The progress we have made since last year can easily slip backwards if high levels of assistance are not sustained,” Bowden said. “We need to act now to build on the gains. Parts of southern Somalia are already expected to deteriorate to emergency levels in coming months and the underperformance of the April-to-June Gu rains will likely result in a harvest that is smaller and later than usual.” In addition to the likely deterioration in agropastoral parts of southern Somalia, pastoralists in coastal areas of Somaliland and Puntland are also at risk.

Following the mid-year review of the consolidated humanitarian appeal for Somalia, humanitarian NGOs and UN agencies in Somalia are urging donors to provide $576 million to address the enormous needs over the next six months. The revised appeal for all of 2012 is $1.16 billion, half of which has been received. “Humanitarian actors need funds to provide the most vulnerable Somalis with urgently needed assistance, such as food, clean water, sanitation facilities and medical care. These funds are also needed to build sustainable livelihoods for people who have few or no resources after years of drought and conflict, thereby increasing their resilience to future crises” said Bowden.

Conflict and lack of access to people in need remain major challenges that complicate aid efforts. “ Civilians have borne the brunt of conflict for 20 years. All parties must make every effort to protect civilians and allow humanitarian access to people in need,” Bowden said. “At the height of the crisis last year, we worked with new local partners and enhanced the use of cash transfers, vouchers and employment schemes to reach the most vulnerable in areas where access was extremely limited. However, without a durable solution to Somalia’s political and security issues, conflict and inadequate rainfall will continue to be drivers of food insecurity, which is at the heart of the humanitarian crisis.”

“Famine conditions developed last year because impoverished people were unable to withstand the drought and the massive rise in food prices, at the same time that humanitarian actors faced increased obstacles to reach those in need,” Bowden said. “We could have saved more lives if funding had been in place earlier. Now we must help people who have lost everything to get back into a productive life. If we act now, we can help avoid catastrophe in the future.”