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Somalia's humanitarian crisis demands world's continued attention

Mogadishu (20 January 2012) – Six months after famine was declared in parts of Somalia, humanitarians are calling on the world not to forget the plight of four million Somalis in urgent need of assistance.

“We were able to halt the downward spiral into starvation for 500,000 of the people who were most at risk last year,” said the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Mark Bowden. “Despite significant progress achieved in pushing back the famine in southern Somalia in 2011, four million people are in urgent need of aid in the country, where famine continues for up to 250,000 Somalis.”

“The progress can very easily slip backwards if high levels of assistance are not sustained. The crisis in Somalia remains the largest in the world and will continue up until September. It demands the international community's attention and commitment,” he said.

Humanitarians are appealing for US\$1.5 billion to save lives and give Somalis the opportunity to become self-reliant in the future. Humanitarian projects this year are designed to provide the most vulnerable four million Somalis with urgently needed assistance, such as food, clean water, sanitation facilities and medical care, while around \$486 million will be used to help people restore livelihoods lost in the drought.

“The donor support that flowed into Somalia after famine was declared last year had a tremendous positive impact on the humanitarian situation,” Bowden said. “The number of people receiving food each month more than tripled to 2.6 million. More than 450,000 children were treated for acute malnutrition.”

The scaled-up response also helped to stem the spread of diseases such as acute watery diarrhoea and measles – proving that a timely and well-resourced response can be effective, despite the considerable obstacles humanitarians face in Somalia.

“The funding received after famine was declared was crucial to what we achieved last year, especially considering experts' forecasts in July that the entire South would deteriorate into famine. Within months, the rapid scale-up in response brought three regions and half a million people out of famine” Bowden said. “But we need to build on that to help avoid a continuing cycle of drought, famine and crisis in the country.”

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