

**REMARKS OF THE EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR AND
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS
DROUGHT EMERGENCY MEETING, ROME
25 JULY 2011**

[Checked against delivery]

**Minister Le Maire,
Mr. Diouf,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I have been asked to represent the UN Secretary-General at today's meeting. I would like to thank the French Government and FAO for convening this important meeting as well as my fellow panellists, especially Josette Sheeran, for the leadership being shown on this issue.

Last week the UN declared a famine in two regions of Somalia. We believe that tens of thousands of people have already died.

If we do not act, this famine will spread to the rest of south Somalia within two months, and its effects could spill over to countries across the region. The new FEWSNET figures out today support that view.

Famine is not a word we use lightly. The last time we did so in Somalia was nineteen years ago. Famine reflects extreme food shortages, severe malnutrition on a massive scale, and spiralling mortality rates.

We must respond now before thousands more lose their lives.

Across the Horn of Africa, 11.6 million people are in urgent need of our help. 3.7 million people in Somalia. 4.56 million Ethiopians. 2.4 million Kenyans. Close to 150,000 people in Djibouti. And, potentially many more in Eritrea.

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This is the gravest food crisis in the world, and the numbers are getting worse. Today we are focusing on the implications of food insecurity – but we must also remember health and other implications.

This will not be a short crisis. The United Nations and its partners fully expect to be dealing with this situation for at least the next six months.

We need to step up our assistance to people in their own countries, and to the increasing number of refugees who have fled drought and insecurity across borders. My thanks to the UN and other partners who have done so much to further scale up their efforts in the last few weeks. Three UN agencies have declared a corporate emergency, WFP, UNICEF and my own organization, OCHA.

I thank both Kenya and Ethiopia for keeping their borders open at this difficult time.

The situation in Somalia is particularly difficult. Peace has eluded us for two decades.

Persistent insecurity and a major reduction in food aid have severely constrained our capacity to respond. We are working to address this.

Drought is not a new problem in the Horn of Africa, but it is happening more often. Once-a-decade crises are now occurring every two years. I heard this for myself when I visited the Somali region of Ethiopia recently.

As global attention focuses upon the region, many are asking why more has not been done to pre-empt this crisis, to build resilience, to put in place the reserves we need, and set agriculture and livestock management on a stronger footing.

These are essential questions.

The humanitarian community has been preparing for this situation and has helped build resilience through long-running projects, such as the inter-agency Horn of Africa Plan of Action, and the Productive Safety Nets programme in Ethiopia.

We know that the situation today would be worse if significant gains had not been made in the past.

As we respond, we must ramp up our efforts to address the underlying causes of fragility, and do more to prepare for what will inevitably happen again.

There are no easy answers. We face declining rainfall, increasing populations, environmental degradation and persistent conflict.

Whilst our priority today is to save lives – we must do more to link short and longer term interventions.

The Secretary-General points to ways in which we can address these issues. His statement is as follows:

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE TO EMERGENCY MINISTERIAL MEETING ON THE HORN OF AFRICA Rome, 25 July 2011

*Delivered by Ms. Valerie Amos, Emergency Relief Coordinator
and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs*

We gather on an emergency basis because a catastrophic combination of high food prices, drought and conflict has left more than 11 million people in the Horn of Africa in desperate need. People are now starving.

The members of our High-Level Task Force on Food Security – and their thousands of dedicated field staff – are working in coordination with national governments, the African Union, civil society, businesses and scientists on both immediate and long-term responses.

These responses – to the drought, and now the famine – must not only ensure that people are fed, but also encourage sustainable livelihoods and food and nutrition security, especially among pastoral people.

The needs are spelled out in the Task Force’s Comprehensive Framework for Action. Short-term relief must be linked to building long-term sustainability. This means an agricultural transformation that improves the resilience of rural livelihoods and minimizes the scale of any future crisis. It means climate-smart crop production, livestock rearing, fish farming and forest maintenance practices that enable all people to have year-round access to the nutrition they need.

Pastoralist communities are the most vulnerable, with women and children on the front line. Providing accessible nutrition must be our top priority. To do this we need about \$1 billion for the rest of this year. So far, we have only received half that amount.

I hope this meeting will encourage a broad political commitment – in the African Union, the G20 and the Committee for Food Security – to a comprehensive and sustained response. It is not just lives that are at stake, but the security and sustainability of a whole region.