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USG briefing to Member States on the situation in the Horn of Africa

15 July 2011

North Lawn Building, UNHQ New York

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

More than 10.7 million people across the Horn of Africa urgently need help.

The Horn of Africa is facing its driest period in sixty years, and people are increasingly unable to cope. Added to the drought, this is a region which suffers insecurity and conflict, population growth, poverty and over-utilization of land. We need to help people in their own country but we are also seeing an alarming rise in refugees in Kenya and Ethiopia.

Over the course of the past two weeks, more than 1,200 Somalis have arrived every day in the Dadaab refugee camp in northern Kenya – 80 per cent are women and children.

Many have walked for weeks, in gruelling conditions, to get there. Approximately half the children are malnourished on arrival - many have been separated from their families.

Dadaab, already the largest refugee camp in the world, is dangerously over-crowded with over 350,000 refugees – and faces a backlog of 23,000 people awaiting registration. The

For further information, please call:

*OCHA-New York: **Stephanie Bunker**, +1 917 367 5126, mobile +1 347 244 2106, bunker@un.org;*

*OCHA-Geneva: **Elisabeth Byrs**, +41 22 917 2653, mobile +41 79 473 4570, byrs@un.org*

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Kenyan government has generously agreed to the opening of a newly established camp, which can house an additional 80,000 people, but it too could quickly reach capacity.

In neighbouring Ethiopia, 2,000 people a day are arriving at the Dolo refugee camp – in an area also affected by drought.

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

Humanitarian agencies are responding as best they can. But we do not have the resources to deal with the scale of the problem.

We have asked for US\$1.6 billion to help people in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. Of this, US\$780 million has not been funded; and we expect those requirements to increase.

We already face the most severe food security emergency in the world, and the situation is getting worse.

If we are to avoid a deepening of this crisis, we need support.

In **Somalia**, an estimated 2.85 million people now need help, constrained by security concerns and a major reduction in food aid.

The recent announcement by Al-Shabaab that they will open areas to us under their control is welcome, but we need guarantees that humanitarian workers will not be taxed or targeted. Agencies are already looking at how swiftly they can return. We also need guarantees that the 11 conditions previously put on WFP by Al-Shabaab are not imposed.

Kenya, which is hosting thousands of refugees from Somalia and other neighbouring countries, also faces an extremely serious situation of its own. Drought conditions have disrupted livelihoods across the arid regions, and rains are not due until October.

All of this is aggravated by low national food reserves, and compounded by price increases for fuel and for maize. Conflict over pasture and water amongst pastoralists has increased; high food and fuel prices are also pushing the urban poor to the edge.

Global Acute Malnutrition has now reached emergency levels in 11 districts; and the number of people needing food assistance is expected to rise to as many as 3.5 million.

In **Ethiopia**, I saw last weekend how a lack of food, water, basic services, and dwindling livestock is devastating pastoralist communities. Making matters worse, the country also faces the threat of flooding in the second half of the year (particularly in the west).

The number of people targeted to receive food assistance in the coming six months was increased at the beginning of this week from 3.2 million to more than 4.5 million. The need is urgent.

And in **Djibouti**, at least 120,000 people are affected by drought, including many in urban settings – who face sustained high food and fuel prices. Only one third of a required \$39 million has been funded.

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.

Our priority now is to save lives. But as we do so, we must also ramp up our efforts to address the underlying causes of this crisis, and do more to prepare for what will inevitably happen again.

There are no easy answers to this. We face declining rainfall, increasing populations, environmental degradation and persistent conflict. But if we are to stop this situation from becoming an annual event, we can and must do more.