



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF URGES ACTION TO AVERT FAMINE IN SOMALIA

Mogadishu, 7 March 2017 – The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O’Brien, urged the world to rally behind the people of Somalia to avert a repeat of the famine that resulted in the loss of a quarter of a million lives six years ago. He made the call during a two-day visit to Somalia to assess the impact of the severe drought, which has led to a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation.

“The situation unfolding in Somalia is deeply concerning and we need to act now. I saw first-hand the devastating impact of the drought on families. Many families abandon their homes in search of food and water,” said Mr. O’Brien. “Inadequate access to water, food and to other basic services is putting many lives in danger.”

Somalia is in the grip of a severe drought and famine is a strong possibility in 2017 if action is not taken now. Half of the population – 6.2 million out of 12.3 million people – are acutely food insecure and in need of humanitarian assistance. Of these, nearly 3 million are unable to meet their daily food requirements and need urgent life-saving assistance. Some 363,000 acutely malnourished children need urgent nutrition support, including at least 71,000 severely malnourished children who require life-saving treatment.

“Humanitarian partners are scaling up assistance to avoid a repeat of the 2011 famine. I met displaced families who have lost their livelihoods due to the drought and have nothing to go back to. The level of suffering, particularly for women and children, is horrendous. I urge the Federal and state authorities to facilitate unhindered humanitarian access to the people most in need. Many children have dropped out of school and are arriving in settlements already severely malnourished. Grave violations against children and women are also on the increase,” said Mr. O’Brien.

Rates of malnutrition and of drought-related diseases such as acute-watery diarrhea (AWD)/cholera are rising. Displacement and water shortages are increasing. In February, some 121,000 new drought-driven displacements were reported. There are already worrying similarities to the conditions ahead of the 2011 famine, including collapsing labour prices, increasing food and water prices, an increase in animal deaths, and the rising malnutrition rates.

On the second day of his mission, the Emergency Relief Coordinator joined Secretary-General António Guterres for meetings with President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed and senior government officials. Mr. O’Brien also accompanied the Secretary-General on a visit to Baidoa in Bay region, where they talked to internally displaced people and visited an AWD/cholera clinic.

Humanitarians have launched an Operational Plan for Famine Prevention, seeking \$825 million to scale up the response and reach 5.5 million people through June 2017. Given the existing humanitarian footprint in Somalia, the response can still be rapidly scaled up to avert famine, but sufficient and timely support is required.

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