

**Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief
Coordinator, Mark Lowcock- virtual briefing on the humanitarian situation in
Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia**

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As delivered

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm delighted to be able with a fantastic panel to spend some time today on the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. We have with us Dr. Catherine Sozi, the UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Ethiopia; Mr. Ahmed Ibrahim, the Convener of the ASAL Humanitarian Network in Kenya; and Ms. Nimo Hassan, Director of the Somalia NGO Consortium. We also have representatives from the Missions of Ethiopia and Kenya.

Humanitarian needs are rising across Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. Communities are grappling with a triple threat: the worst Desert Locust upsurge in generations; recurring and increasing floods, which are affecting millions of people; and the COVID-19 pandemic. All of these issues are on top of conflict-related humanitarian problems, including displacement. The 2020 Humanitarian Response Plans the UN prepared for Ethiopia and Somalia, which were put together before the locust situation or the floods or COVID were upon us, already required more than a billion dollars each to address needs, before this new triple threat began to devastate the region.

There is COVID-19 in all three countries. We see an impact on healthcare systems already, including an immediate impact on routine immunizations and sexual and reproductive healthcare.

At the same time, we've seen a lot of disruption and displacement from flooding, and that brings with it the risk of waterborne diseases, potentially including malaria and acute watery diarrhea. From January to mid-June, Somalia experienced a three-fold increase in acute watery diarrhea compared to the same period in 2019. Ms. Hassan will share more details on the flood response in Somalia with us in a moment.

Lots of you have will have been to previous briefings that Qu Dongyu (Director General of the FAO) and I have been giving, on the threat posed by the Desert Locust upsurge. It's an extremely serious threat and it remains very serious. Ironically the above average rains that caused the flooding – normally good news – has consequences, creating even more conducive conditions for locusts to breed.

Let me say a little more on each of the countries we are discussing today.

On Somalia, there are long-standing humanitarian challenges and the country has done a lot to move forward over the last year or so, particularly in normalizing its position with the international financial institutions and taking more responsibility for managing its own affairs which is something we welcome. The locust impact in Somalia could be significant and is one our major current worries. Some projections suggest that the 2020 season crop harvest could be 20-30 per cent lower than the long-term average. 3.5 million people are projected to fall into Crisis or Emergency food insecurity levels in the 3rd quarter of the year and because of this future risk, the Central Emergency Response Fund which I manage has made an emergency allocation in anticipation of the coming problems in Somalia, to fund live-saving interventions and stave off even more suffering by acting *before* that suffering manifests.

In Ethiopia, we are also concerned about food security. The locust problem is there too. There are swarms in important cropping areas in the northern highlands and a further swell in locust infestations is expected during the summer breeding season. The authorities are doing a lot to implement locust control measures. There is a risk of the situation deteriorating and a risk of the locusts spreading to neighboring countries. We have also seen floods in between February and April, as in Somalia. We think that potentially some 20 million people could be in need of humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia later in the year. Dr. Sozi will tell us more about this shortly.

In Kenya, humanitarian needs are increasing for the same reasons. In February 2020, there were 1.3 million severely food insecure people. That number is now expected to grow to 3 million by next month (August). The situation is most acute in the arid- and semi-arid regions in Kenya. Ahmed will speak more about this shortly. The urban poor are also now at greater risk. Some projections indicate that COVID-19 could reverse socio-economic gains made in recent years.

The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics have calculated that 13.4 per cent (or 1 in 7) of the workforce have been laid off as of May, many of those people in the informal sector and daily wage earners. Without daily wage, there is no food on the table. Alongside that, access to health services have been disrupted, with risks of severe acute malnutrition increasing significantly and declining attendance at some health clinics for

reasons due to the COVID pandemic also. There is a very high degree of food insecurity in Nairobi's informal settlements.

I am also worried about increasing protection risks in the face of these simultaneous emergencies. Across the region, as people face the prospect of losing their livelihoods, and children are out of school, we see more and more people adopt negative coping mechanisms such as transactional sex, early marriage, and child labor. We also see, in so many regions around the world, significant increases in reports of domestic and gender-based violence since the COVID-19 outbreak began.

Across the three countries, more than 5.7 million people remain displaced—4.5 million internally displaced people and 1.2 million refugees. Borders have been closed which has impacted access to asylum in the region. Some countries have seen a rapid return with little notice of migrants, from neighboring countries in the Middle East – an additional concern for governments to manage.

I want to emphasize that in spite of the current challenges, including COVID-19, aid organizations are staying and delivering, ensuring that life-saving programs continue.

In Somalia, humanitarian organizations have scaled up food assistance. In March, humanitarian agencies reached an average of 700,000 people a month with food or cash; by April it had been increased or doubled up to 1.6 million people; and reached nearly 2.3 million people in May. NGOs play an essential role in this delivery. I am pleased that we have been able to have a strong focus through the OCHA managed Somalia Humanitarian Fund on support for NGOs. Ms. Hassan will also tell us more about the NGO response.

Organizations in Ethiopia have reprogrammed over \$150 million in support of the government's national strategic preparedness and response efforts. The COVID-19 challenge has affected the humanitarian response with some activities having to be rescheduled or reprogrammed.

The UN has also been trying to help compensate for declining availability of logistics services, in particular air services. As you may know, we expanded the role of the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS). WFP has put in place new air routes and Addis Ababa plays an essential role as a regional hub.

Humanitarian agencies are doing what they can but funding is a major constraint.

I would like to reiterate that our UN response plans for the three countries are significantly underfunded and need support.

We have been doing what we can to address funding of NGOs, at a time when private funding for international NGOs has reduced dramatically because of the impact on COVID on the countries from where they raise resources and also because of slower decisions by national governments. The UN has tried to increase the funding we channel through NGOs. Through the CERF we made an innovative new allocation to support international NGOs in six countries and, through them, support national NGOs as well. We have also allocated additional resources through CBPFs for NGO activities.

Flexible and unearmarked funding is more efficiently used. Unearmarked contributions to core funds or to CERF or CBPFs have the virtue of being targetable by humanitarian agencies, for the biggest problems through most effective partners at the local level.