HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS REQUEST $1.6 BILLION TO HELP 18.7 MILLION CRISIS-AFFECTED PEOPLE IN SAHEL

(Geneva, 19 June 2012): The United Nations and humanitarian partners today launched new and updated humanitarian appeals for the crisis-stricken Sahel region of West Africa. The combined request for the region now amounts to US$1.6 billion for food, nutrition, health services, sanitation and other urgent assistance to 18.7 million people.

Three new appeals were launched for Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania, while two existing appeals for Chad and Niger have been revised. Life-saving and life-sustaining humanitarian aid is also required in Cameroon, Gambia, Nigeria and Senegal.

"It is crucial that momentum be maintained in the months to come, not only to address critical needs but also to prepare for rebuilding lives and livelihoods of people affected by the crisis," said David Gressly, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Sahel at the appeal launch in Geneva.

The humanitarian situation in the Sahel region has deteriorated dramatically through 2012 due to a lethal combination of drought and sporadic rains, poor harvest, rising food prices, displacement and insecurity. Cereal production in the region has dwindled 27 per cent compared to last year and food prices have soared. In Mali, the price of the staple food, millet, has increased 116 per cent compared to the 5-year average.

In Niger, the number of food-insecure people has gone up by 18.5 per cent between January and April to reach 6.4 million people. During the same period, the number of affected people has shot up by 125 per cent to reach 3.6 million in Chad.

As a result, more than 1 million children under five are at risk of dying from severe acute malnutrition and require immediate relief. An additional 3 million children are at risk of moderate acute malnutrition.

The widespread displacement triggered by the conflict in northern Mali is an aggravating factor. More than 372,000 people have been displaced, including 205,000 refugees to neighbouring countries, and continuous insecurity limits access to those in need.

Humanitarian organizations have supported governments in the region to respond to the crisis by deploying staff and scaling up programmes. So far, donors have generously provided 43 per cent of the funding required; however, the concern remains that if assistance is not sustained, the transition from acute emergency to recovery may fail.