HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES SCALE UP WATER RESPONSE IN TRIPOLI

(New York/Zarzis 30 August 2011): Humanitarian agencies in Libya are scaling up the provision of water to Tripoli to fill a critical gap after recent fighting and lack of fuel shut down the city water supply system on 22 August.

“I am very concerned about the lack of potable water in Tripoli. The situation is being dealt with urgently to avoid a potential health crisis,” said Panos Moumtzis, Humanitarian Coordinator for Libya. He added that the situation “has not yet reached critical levels” and pointed out that people are finding ways of coping with the lack of tap water by making use of water from many old wells available in some parts of the Libyan capital. However, the quality of this water is not known.

Local authorities are working to restore the infrastructure necessary to resume the flow of water for drinking and cleaning to some four million people in Tripoli and surrounding areas, but access to the well fields near the oasis of Sabha and Jabal HassOUNA in the south has so far been hindered by insecurity.

Most of the commercial companies providing bottled water are not functioning due to power cuts and other challenges. The UN Children’s Fund, UNICEF, with logistical support from the World Food Programme (WFP) is delivering bottled water to residents in Tripoli in coordination with the National Transitional Council (NTC). Distribution is done from mosques and 213,000 litres of drinking water have already been provided, meeting the basic needs of some 20,000 people in the last four days. Arrangements are being made to provide a minimum of three litres of drinking water per person per day for two weeks. This is intended to meet the needs of some 500,000 people. Meanwhile, shops with food and bottled water are gradually reopening in Tripoli.

The Humanitarian Country Team for Libya is looking at ways to sustain the relief effort in the medium term as a stop-gap measure until the water system is fully restored. The NTC has requested support of the international community to provide bulk drinking water.

“I call on nations in the region and beyond to assist our joint efforts to provide water for the people of Libya, and in particular bulk water to the residents of Tripoli. I thank those governments who have already indicated their willingness to support this critical and life-saving humanitarian operation,” Mr. Moumtzis said.

WFP is sending food and other urgent supplies including medicine and fuel to Tripoli. WFP is dispatching around 600 metric tons of staple food commodities to the Libyan capital for distribution by the Libyan Red Crescent (LRC) to more than 35,500 conflict-affected and displaced people for one month.