



5 May 2000

***Update of the UN Country Team
on the current humanitarian situation in Ethiopia***

UN Secretary-General Appoints Regional Humanitarian Coordinator

On 1 May, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Manuel Aranda da Silva to serve as UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Drought in the Horn of Africa. Mr. Da Silva, who is a senior WFP official and a Mozambican national, will ensure coordination at the regional level of the UN inter-agency response to the drought in the Horn of Africa. This will include drought-related humanitarian efforts in Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya and Eritrea, among other countries.

The Regional Humanitarian Coordinator will cooperate closely with the UN Country Team and other humanitarian partners, including the Red Cross movement and NGO community, with the aim of ensuring a coherent response from a regional perspective. He will also work closely with governments in the region, on all issues related to the international response to the crisis, in order to ensure safe and unimpeded access to the people in need. One of the first tasks of the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, who begins his initial five-month assignment to the region today, will be to prepare a regional inter-agency consolidated appeal for the countries affected by the drought. As the majority of the drought affected people and activities are in Ethiopia, it is anticipated that the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator will be based in Addis Ababa.

Food Aid and Logistics

The arrival in the past few days of 118,000 MT of relief food sent by the US Government, the European Union and the UN World Food Program heralds the beginning of a busy period at the ports of Djibouti and Berbera with more than 365,000 MT of food aid scheduled to arrive over the coming three months. The shipments now being discharged at Djibouti include the MS Fairbanks loaded with 86,000 MT of food donated by the US Government, including 36,000 MT in repayments to the Emergency Food Security Reserve. The vessel is the largest of its type to call at Djibouti and as it is too big to berth the ship will be unloaded by means of three daughter vessels. It is anticipated that the process of unloading into the smaller vessels will be completed within two weeks.

With the arrival of these large shipments, total food deliveries against pledges for the current year as of May 2 amount to 112,703 MT, of which 85,836 MT is for relief operations. This is not the complete picture, however. As of the end of April WFP report total food aid arrivals this year (including pledges made in 1999 and previous years, local purchases, and repayments to the Emergency Food Security Reserve) to be just over 290,000 MT, of which 156,000 MT arrived in April alone. The local purchase programme of the Government of Ethiopia is also moving ahead with around 30,000 MT mobilized as of the end of April.

In other developments, the European Union has been given a go-ahead by the Government for the local purchase of 36,000 MT of cereals. WFP, meanwhile will soon start a pilot programme aimed at the purchase of 4,200 MT of sorghum from Sudan. This new initiative, which will employ Sudanese trucks to transport the grain to warehouses in Gondar, could be expanded if it proves successful. Meanwhile, a WFP special operation to improve facilities at Djibouti port is making progress with the demolition of one shed at berth 13 now complete and the second underway. The work will create additional space enabling the berth to handle larger vessels more efficiently. As part of the same programme, WFP will be constructing an additional 5,000 MT in storage capacity at the port. In addition to support for port improvements, WFP is also seeking donor contributions for the emergency rehabilitation of the road from Djibouti to the Ethiopian border, the procurement of additional mobile storage units, the establishment of a logistics coordination unit, a proposed assessment of the Ethio-Djibouti railroad and air transport services.

Relief Operations in the Somali Region

With efforts to provide emergency relief to the several thousands of drought affected migrants in the central Ogaden area of the Somali region well underway, the UN Country Team has finalized arrangements to establish a common Field Unit in Gode town. The Field Unit will be working to support the coordination functions of the zonal Task Force recently established by the regional authorities as well as providing a logistics and communications support base for relief operations in the area.

One of the recommendations arising from the recent visit to Ethiopia of UN Special Envoy Catherine Bertini concerned the undertaking of a security assessment in the Somali Region with a view to allowing UN staff greater operational flexibility in drought affected areas. This is now underway with a team visiting a number of key locations around the region where they will be meeting with local officials and community leaders. Following completion of the initial security review, in conjunction with the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission the UN Country Team will be mounting a rapid assessment of needs in areas of the region worst-affected by the drought. The teams will comprise participants from the UN specialized agencies, DPPC, local government, NGOs and donors. The assessment will be undertaken in two phases with the first phase concentrating on the central areas of the region where the situation is most worrying and where there is very little information available at present.

Coordination Issues

Within the UN agencies in Ethiopia, management and coordination of the response to the drought emergency is being handled through the Disaster Management Team (DMT). Comprising the heads of agencies, technical staff, and emergencies officers, this group is currently meeting weekly under the chairmanship of the UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Samuel Nyambi, to monitor developments, share information and determine how best to deploy the resources and expertise available to the UN system. In a recent initiative, a number of sectoral task forces have been convened by members of the UN Country Team to cover the main areas of activity with respect to the current emergency, including water and sanitation, health and nutrition, food and logistics, education, agriculture and migration. The groups comprise key actors from the NGO community, government and donors and will be reviewing how best to supplement government and other efforts to identify sectoral priorities, develop common strategies and propose initiatives for joint action.

Meanwhile, the main NGO umbrella group in Ethiopia, the Christian Relief and Development Association, is convening regular meetings of its Emergencies Task Force, a group that has played an important coordinating and information-sharing role in past crises in the country. The CRDA Task Force is also attended by donor, government and UN representatives and is viewed as an important mechanism for exchanging information, analysis and views on the drought emergency.

Latest Developments

After weeks of unseasonably dry weather, more favourable conditions returned around mid-April with localized light showers reported from many parts of central, northern and western Ethiopia. Influenced by moist air moving north-eastwards from Central Africa, the cloudy conditions have persisted with the rains gradually becoming more extensive and frequent. Since the beginning of May, the rains appear to have extended into southern parts of Afar and northern and central parts of the Somali region with heavy showers occurring around Jigjiga and localized storms reported for the Ogaden area and Liben Zone to the south of the Shebelle River. While good for the recovery of pastures, the impact of these rains on the replenishment of ground and water resources has yet to be determined.

According to meteorologists, the current configuration of weather systems remains untypical for the time of year. Rather than the normal positioning of the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) over the Horn of Africa and the strong influence of moist air currents moving from the Indian Ocean, current weather is under the influence of moist air moving from the Atlantic Ocean over the Congo Basin. The pattern is said by meteorologists to be similar to that which persisted during the 1984-85 period and is likely to bring unpredictable rainfall.

According to a recent report released by the Drought Monitoring Centre in Nairobi, weather over the Greater Horn of Africa for the coming five months will be influenced by the present El Niña (cool) episode in the eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean. El Niña episodes are associated historically with below normal and/or poorly distributed rainfall over the equatorial areas of Africa during the March to May season and above normal rainfall over the northern sector of the sub-region during the June to September season. Climatic modelling suggests that the current El Niña will persist for a further three months at least and that this will couple with above normal sea surface temperatures over the Atlantic Ocean and below normal temperatures over the Indian Ocean. Meteorologists argue that this means an enhanced probability of below normal rainfall for much of south-eastern Ethiopia (Somali region, Borena Zone of Oromiya Region and South Omo Zone of the SNNP Region) and a high probability of normal to above normal rainfall over the northern and central highlands of Ethiopia.

While the rains are too late for a normal *belg* season, field reports suggest that many farmers in the northern highlands are planting anyway in the hope that favourable conditions later in the year will enable them to obtain some harvest. The recent rains are also seen as positive in terms of land preparation ahead of planting for the main *meher* growing season. In Afar, good rains in the southern part of the region have led to some recovery of pastures around Gewane to where Afar pastoralists are now moving with their animals. Elsewhere in the southern and south-eastern lowlands, though bringing some new vegetative growth, the immediate impact of the scattered light rain, especially in Borena, has been a marked increase in animal mortality. The rains may also pose a serious threat to human health. Falling temperatures could increase the risk of pneumonia, while outbreaks of serious diarrhoeal disease and malaria, which are often associated with the main rains in the lowlands, could have a devastating effect on an already weakened population.

Field assessments in the southern lowlands have highlighted the possibility that there may be a number of forgotten or so far overlooked pockets of acute need. In Burji Special Wereda of the SNNP region a recent Red Cross mission found people facing severe hardship with evidence of high levels of malnutrition among children, including cases of Kwashiorkor. Local health services in the wereda capital of Soyama were unable to cope due to shortages of drugs and ORS and the situation has been made worse by a severe shortage of water. A similar situation was also reported for Derashe Special Wereda. With the assistance of the Federation of Red Cross Societies, the Ethiopian National Red Cross Society is proposing a rapid response in these areas to prevent any further deterioration. The situation in Burji and Derashe contrasts with that in nearby Konso Special Wereda where relief efforts have been on-going for several months and where with targeted supplementary food assistance and general ration distributions it has been possible to mitigate the impact of the drought.

Ends

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