

MR. MARTTI AHTISAARI TO VISIT ETHIOPIA

The UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa drought, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, is returning for a further visit to the Horn in early April. After visiting Eritrea, he is expected in Ethiopia on 2 April and departs on 6 April. Preparations are being made for a field visit. The mission will be accompanied by representatives from WFP, UNICEF, OCHA and a special assistant.

START OF SHORT RAINS REPORTED FROM SEVERAL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY

Signs of the start of the short season "Belg" rains have been reported in recent days from several parts of the country, beginning 15 March. Forecasts for the "Belg" season are for normal to below normal rainfall for western parts of the country and normal to above normal rains in the rest of the country. However, unseasonable rains in the last two weeks of January were used by farmers in some areas to plant "Belg" crops early, but with delayed normal short season rain, wilting has been reported, and replanting may be necessary. Pastoral areas of southern Somali Region expect "Gu" season rains beginning April; widespread and increasing water shortage problems across the Region are currently reported. While water shortage is normal during the dry "Jilaal" season, the situation is being carefully monitored in areas where water tankering interventions may be required. Food distributions continue in Somali Region to approximately 1 million people. Nationally, planned beneficiaries numbers for March total 4.7 million people.

UNICEF COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVE AND HEAD OF OCHA MEET WITH SNNPR PRESIDENT

The UNICEF Country Representative and Head of OCHA met the SNNPR President on 16 March as well as other senior regional government officials to discuss future UN support and coordination arrangements. The President fully supports that the Rural Development Coordination Bureau assume responsibility for a broad coordination forum of humanitarian and development partners in the region for 2004. While emergency coordination support is phased down, WFP, UNICEF, and other UN agencies are shifting significant activities to longer term approaches for assistance.

LIVESTOCK SITUATION IN OROMIYA AND AFAR REGIONS

Two teams of livestock experts from FAO and MoA visited Oromiya and Afar region in February and March 2004. The objective of the missions was to observe the livestock emergency /recovery situation in the regions following the 2002/2003 drought. The Afar region team reported that water and pasture availability has improved as a result of near normal rainfall in 2003. However, livestock in some pocket areas such as Afambo, Dubti, Elidar, Ewaa, Awash Fentale, Bure Mudaytu and Gewane are exposed to feed shortage due to insufficient rains in 2003, bush encroachment and incidence of flood. The team also reported a very serious shortage of vaccines and drugs in the region which might prevent timely control of disease outbreaks. Similarly the Oromiya team region reported that the overall livestock situation is much better than the previous two years, particularly in the highland woredas. However some parts of lowland areas of East and West Hararghe, North, East and West Shoa, Arsi, Bale and East Wollega received less than satisfactory rains and are at risk of disease and parasite outbreaks. The most crucial problem in the delivery of animal health service is the poor drug and vaccine supply system in the region, which is reported to have deteriorated following the recent decentralization process. The interventions recommended include the improvement of the drug and vaccine supply and the diagnostic capacity of woreda veterinary clinics.

SUPPLEMENTARY IMMUNIZATION ACTIVITIES (SIA) IN OROMIYA AND BENSANGUL REGIONS

Over a period of 14 months (Nov 2002 – Dec 2003) more than 20 million children between 6 months and 14 years of age had received measles vaccination and a dose of Vitamin A in 41 Zones of Ethiopia. This achievement was made possible by the close cooperation of members of the Interagency Coordination Committee (ICC) made up of the Federal Ministry of Health (MoH), UNICEF, WHO and Donors. As a result, there was no major Measles outbreak in the country throughout 2003, in spite of the increased children's vulnerability brought on by the recent drought. This year's national vaccination campaign kicks off in late March, when 3,204,790 children will be targeted for measles vaccination in Oromiya and nearly half will receive one dose of Vitamin A. In the Benshangul-Gumuz region, 296,178 children will be targeted for measles vaccination and 120,605 will receive one dose of Vitamin A. All funding and needed supplies (operational costs, vaccines, Vitamin A, syringes, safe-disposal boxes and scissors) have been delivered by UNICEF and WHO to each zone, and the field activities will take approximately 7 days at each site. Over 6 million more children will be targeted for measles vaccinations between April and June, to finally crown the national measles target of more than 31 million children vaccinated over 20 months (2002-2004).

RESETTLEMENT WORKING GROUP RETURNS FROM INITIAL RAPID ASSESSMENT

The UN/Donor/World Bank resettlement working group, which is facilitated by OCHA, will meet on 24 March to discuss the findings from the initial rapid assessment of the resettlement situation. 9 teams comprising 34 staff from 5 UN agencies, 3 donors and IOM are currently visiting four resettlement regions (SNNPR, Amhara, Oromiya and Tigray) to test the monitoring framework and ascertain the current humanitarian situation.