



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

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**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief
Coordinator
Press briefing on Horn of Africa crisis
1 August 2011**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm going to brief on the current situation in the Horn of Africa where, as you know, the crisis is intensifying.

12.4 million people - in Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti – are in dire need of help, and the situation is getting worse.

A little less than two weeks ago, we declared a famine in two regions in Somalia. Today we are warning that, unless we see a massive increase in the response, the famine will spread to five or six more regions.

Tens of thousands of Somalis have already died, and hundreds of thousands face starvation, with consequences for the entire region.

The stories we see and that we hear are dreadful. It is hard to imagine the horror of mothers forced to leave their infants behind to die, as they trek for weeks to reach safety. The sense of loss felt by orphans as they reach overcrowded refugee camps, sick and malnourished, alone, and with no future.

These stories, these images, are a wake-up call. They remind us why we cannot spare any effort to ease the suffering; why we must do all we can to stop it happening again.

Some in the media, I know, have expressed a terrible sense of familiarity and to a certain extent, fatality, about what is happening in terms of the Horn of Africa crisis. And in particular, asking why we did too little too late, or what we can really do now, faced with the complexity of the situation.

I think it is important to remember that this drought – the worst in 60 years – did not take us by surprise.

Our early warning systems worked, and we sounded the alarm last year, when we appealed for \$1.6 billion to tackle the situation. As of mid-year, around half of that money had been raised, and as of last week, donors had committed more than \$1 billion dollars.

It is not enough, but neither was the crisis ignored, as some have suggested.

And even as we ask ourselves some important questions, we can't allow those to distract us from the task at hand.

We need to deal with the here and now, as well as with the longer term.

Today, we urgently need another \$1.4 billion to save lives, and we need it now.

We expect our donors – not just those who have given generously in the past – to play their part. And of course we have to reach out to corporations, to foundations, to private individuals.

We are also asked why more wasn't done structurally to prepare for drought.

Across the UN system we have of course been looking at these longer term issues, and there has been progress, such as Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme, and Kenya's employment programme to promote natural resource management in drought-prone areas.

If it were not for this essential work, the situation may have been worse. We have to remember, of course, that in Somalia, we have a situation of conflict. We have to build on these programmes. Increasingly frequent droughts need not lead to recurrent hunger.

We know what we have to do; but we have to do it more consistently, and on a greater scale.

We must also be honest about the particular nature of this crisis in Somalia.

We, of course, stand ready to increase our response on a massive scale. We have the capacity.

But we also face armed groups who say they do not want us there. We are doing all we can, through negotiations, to change that situation.

We are repeating the facts, which all point to famine. We are making sure that everyone understands that the work that we do is to save lives. We can use other tools at our disposal; airlifts, building relationships with local communities, using way stations.

We're stressing our concerns over the effect of renewed fighting, and appealing to all parties to uphold international humanitarian law and to protect civilians, as well as aid workers.

But of course we all know that ultimately, Somalia needs peace. Without peace, our ability to act will remain limited, and we risk seeing this happen time and time again.

There is a limit, in that situation, to what we as outsiders can do.

As the international community, we are the third line of response.

The first line – is of course national governments, institutions, and, of course, the people themselves – but in Somalia, they are weak and malnourished from the situation they face.

The second line of response is from regional organizations such as the African Union, IGAD, and the wider East African Community.

We are, of course, there to support them – in a strictly neutral and impartial manner. But this is a time for the region to pull together; to show what its growing solidarity can achieve.

I am pleased that the African Union is prepared to hold a funding conference this month, and we've already been in touch with them on that. We, in the UN, will do all in our power to make that conference a success – to raise the funds we need for the crisis now, of course to prepare for the next one, but also to help to build the resilience of countries in the region.

This is a crisis that we must all address, and that we all have to address now. I look forward to taking your questions.

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