

The First Famine of the 21st Century Demands Greater Response

Somalia NGO Consortium Says, "Act Now to Save Lives"

July 20th, 2011 – With the crisis in Somalia¹ today declared a famine by the FSNAU and FEWSNET, the Somalia NGO Consortium (representing 78 agencies working in Somalia) urgently calls on the international community to act now to respond to this catastrophe. Relabeling this disaster as a famine means very little to the people of Somalia who are continuing to suffer. The scale and severity of the crisis demand an immediate large scale response. We need to ACT NOW to save lives!

More than 3.7 million Somalis, or half of the entire population, are in need of humanitarian assistance. In some areas in South Central more than half of the population is malnourished and more than one in four people are severely malnourished². This is twice the threshold for a humanitarian emergency and the highest malnutrition rate in the world. A quarter of the Somali population is now displaced; the majority need assistance within Somalia. The situation is unlikely to improve until January 2012.³ The primary needs are food, nutrition, clean water, sanitation, health care, livelihood support, protection and shelter. UNHCR has reported an average of 1,300 new Somali refugees arriving in Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp each day since 19 June. Far too many children die after reaching overflowing refugee camps; many more die on the way as people migrate in search of assistance.

Aid agencies must be given sufficient support to respond to the crisis wherever people require help, including inside South Central Somalia, in order to prevent the flow of refugees. Access to those in need has been very difficult but not impossible. There is a window of opportunity enabling greater access, but security guarantees remain fragile. We are doing everything we can to scale up our response, as the needs are overwhelming.

Aid agencies have been working in Somalia for decades, as the country has faced conflict and cyclical drought. However, humanitarian response in Somalia has been chronically underfunded, and inadequate to meet emergency needs and to adequately respond to the deteriorating situation. Today, funding is needed not only for emergency relief, but also for investment in livelihoods and disaster risk reduction activities that address the vulnerabilities of communities, strengthening their coping strategies, and building their resilience to future disasters. We immediately require more bilateral, unconditional, diverse and long-term funding to meet the range of needs.

All parties to the conflict must ensure that aid agencies are granted full, unhindered, secure and continuous access to those in need. All parties must respect the humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality; and only if this is guaranteed will we be able to reach those in need of assistance. Aid should be based on need alone.

A regional response is required for Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. Those seeking refuge must be granted free movement and access to areas where help is available. Governments, donors and aid agencies must ensure swift registration processes in refugee camps and provision of shelter and assistance for all refugees, for both current populations and new arrivals. Protection must be provided to reduce the threats camp residents face both inside the camps and on the outskirts. Neighboring countries must be given resources to respond.

¹ Famine was declared today in Bakool and Lower Shabelle; it is predicted that the entire South will face famine within the next two months.

² SAM rate of 30%.

³ FSNAU/FAO rains predictions (*Food Security and Nutrition Analysis, FAO July 2011*).