

For Immediate Release

Somalia: Food prices swell, crisis expected to deepen

June 20, NAIROBI –The humanitarian crisis in Somalia is expected to deepen in the 2nd half of 2011 with food prices hitting a new record high, the United Nations warned on Monday. This is following two consecutive poor rainy seasons, -- depriving many more people of food in the Horn of Africa nation.

The number of Somalis in need of emergency humanitarian assistance is now 2.5 million, a 25 per cent increase since mid 2010, representing 1 in 3 of the population, and expected to increase in coming months, once the full impact of the poor rains is determined.

“In the last one month alone, an additional 100,000 fell into crisis due to the soaring local cereal prices in the south, with prices 200% higher than the same time last year in some places,” said Grainne Moloney, the head of the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU).

Somalia normally experiences two major harvests a year, January and August, mostly in the southern regions. The last season failed due to the drought and the next is likely to reach about half of normal, again due to poor rains. This has led to a very low supply of local cereals on the market, pushing the prices out of the reach of many. Coupled with that, the poor rainfall also resulted in a significant number of livestock deaths and reduced value of livestock for the pastoralists, as they have lost body condition.

Conditions have slightly improved in most parts of the northern regions due to localised rains. While some rains have been reported this season in the central and north eastern regions of Somalia, given the last four years of mostly poor rains, many poor pastoralists have lost all their animals and become destitute. Others still require several good seasons to fully recover their herd sizes to viable levels.

However, the epicentre of the current crisis is in the southern regions, including Hiran, where 58% of the 2.5million in crisis reside. This is due to the depletion of local cereal stocks following the previous crop failure, coupled with the imminent poor harvest, which has resulted in skyrocketing cereal prices simply unaffordable for many of the poor households. The south is also mostly affected by restricted humanitarian access due to the ongoing conflict, severely hampering aid efforts to reach those most in need. Malnutrition rates in Somalia are amongst the worst in the world, with one in four children in southern Somalia being acutely malnourished.

Due to the desperate situation in the south, thousands are forced to flee to neighbouring countries of Kenya and Ethiopia to get access to assistance. UNHCR report an average of 10,000 new refugees arriving in Kenya’s Dadaab camp per month and 5-6,000 to Dolo Ado camp in Ethiopia. The condition of the new arrivals is dire, with a recent nutrition survey report from UNCHR in the two Dolo Ado camps reporting 33% of the children as acutely malnourished. In the same survey, very high mortality rates are also being reported, again illustrating the conditions they have left behind in southern Somalia.

FSNAU with partners, is currently conducting a countrywide assessment of the nutrition, food security and livelihood situation with results expected in August. Managed by the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization, FSNAU gathers and analyzes food security, nutrition and livelihoods information for humanitarian and development partners working in Somalia.

Somalia has not had a functioning national government since 1991 and has been plagued by civil insecurity despite recent peace accords.

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Note to journalists: Copies of the report will be available on the website www.fsnau.org or www.faoswalim.org.