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United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor

## UNMISSET PRESS RELEASE

### *Flooding in the south: UNMISSET, UN agencies helping nearly 600 people*

(Dili, 18 June) – Nearly 600 people have now been displaced by the severe flooding in the southern districts of Timor-Leste and are being sheltered by PKF in the Suai area. One person died [on Monday] and two are missing, including a UNDP project staff [in Manatuto]. The unseasonal monsoon rains have also caused widespread damage to crops, livestock, houses and roads in Cova Lima, Manufahi and Viqueque over the past few days.

The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Timor-Leste, Mr Sukehiro Hasegawa, this morning held an emergency disaster response coordination meeting with the Acting Prime Minister, Ana Pessoa, and the Ministers of Health [Rui de Araújo] and Interior [Rogério Lobato], as well as development partners, and briefed them on how the UN is responding to the emergency.

At the moment, the flooded areas are still cut off by road and air but the situation is manageable. Suai is the worst affected area, with the vast majority of displaced people. They are being sheltered by the Thai Battalion of PKF in four locations, and PKF is providing them with food and water. An immediate priority is access to safe water, and WHO is providing chlorinated tablets that PKF will transport to the area as soon as conditions allow. At the same time, PKF is flying in portable water testing kits from Darwin today. Yesterday, UNMISSET released 500kg of rice from warehouses in Suai, and it estimates that local UNMISSET stocks could feed the displaced people for about one month. The government for its part has 6 and a-half tonnes of rice at warehouses in Dili that could be transported to the area if required.

Access to the areas is another immediate priority, and today the Japan Engineer Group of PKF is hoping to start a survey of the damage to the road network. Initial estimates indicate that it may take at least two weeks to reopen some main roads.

This morning's meeting also looked forward to longer-term concerns, with the risk of food shortages being the most critical. Drought in the earlier part of the year and smaller yields of some crops had already led the FAO and the WFP to issue a food warning in recent weeks, saying that some 150,000 people could be at risk, and that an estimated 14,000 tonnes of food relief could be needed from October until March next year. The widespread damage to crops

caused by the current freak weather conditions will compound the problem. Some villages have lost their entire crop. The FAO and WFP will now review their report, and will discuss with the government and other agencies the setting up of a mechanism for the coordination and distribution of food relief that could be triggered quickly if needed.

As for the prospects for the next few days, it is still raining but the floods are receding slightly. The latest weather report forecasts that showers will continue for the next couple of days but should be not be so heavy.

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