

## World Health Organization

### Talking Points for ECOSOC Special Meeting on the Impacts of the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon: reducing risks and capturing opportunities

May 6, 2016

- Mr. President, thank you for giving me the floor. The discussion earlier was indeed very useful to hear about effective measures and practices that can be put in place to reduce the socio-economic and environmental impacts of El Niño.
- El Niño increases the probability of extreme weather conditions in certain regions in certain seasons that exacerbate and trigger a range of health risks. The magnitude of health impacts associated with El Niño will vary depending on local health vulnerabilities, and preparedness and response capacities, as well as how intensely El Niño influences the local climate of an area.
- I want to take some time to highlight the health effects, and what we are doing, and can do to mitigate the health effects of El Niño, as well as build resilience and preparedness for the future.
- El Niño is affecting more than 60 million people worldwide, mainly in Eastern and Southern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Asia-Pacific. The health consequences are expected to increase throughout 2016.
- Severe drought and associated food insecurity, flooding, rain and rising temperatures are causing a wide range of health problems, including disease outbreaks, malnutrition and disruption of health services.
- In parts of South America, above-average rainfall caused by El Niño has caused floods and increased diseases spread by mosquitoes such as malaria, dengue, chikungunya and the Zika virus.
- In Guatemala and Honduras, two years of drought and El Niño left 2.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in meeting their food, healthcare and livelihood needs. By May 2016, one in five households will face critical food consumption gaps and acute malnutrition.
- Between November 2015 and March 2016, parts of Papua New Guinea received only 30% of normal rainfall. With nearly 1.5 million people feeling the effects of El Niño, the health sector is focused on providing access to water and medical supplies to ensure health facilities can continue to provide life-saving services.

- In southern Africa, in addition to increasing malnutrition and disease risks, there are growing concerns about the interruption to anti-retroviral therapy for people living with HIV.
- These are just some examples of the health consequences of El Nino that WHO and its partners are working to mitigate in nearly 30 countries.
- Specifically, WHO is working with Ministries of Health and other health partners in affected countries to address the health needs and effects caused by El Nino. Some priority activities include:
  - management of medical consequences of malnutrition
  - continued access to health services
  - disease surveillance, early warning and outbreak response
  - safe water and sanitation services for communities and health facilities
  - vaccinations for epidemic-prone diseases
  - emergency health supplies
  - coordination of health response efforts.
- With regards to preparedness, activities include increased advocacy to Health ministries and partners to enhance preparedness measures such as developing national health contingency plans, set-up of disease surveillance for El Nino-related health risks, coordination of El Nino preparedness and response with Global health cluster partners, country health clusters and nutrition and WASH clusters. Further to that, a joint WHO/WMO office for climate and health was established in 2014, which supports WHO to improve health preparedness and decision making through enhanced use of weather and climate information.
- Although adverse weather effects of El Nino are expected to lessen by mid-2016, the health impacts are expected to last throughout 2016 and beyond. Urgent attention is needed now. Unfortunately, while we are working hard to prepare and respond, there are significant funding gaps.
- Of US\$ 3.6 billion required for the humanitarian response to El Niño, the health cluster needs nearly US\$ 185 million. WHO requires US\$ 51 million to provide urgent healthcare. As we move forward, the number of people affected as well as funding needs, are expected to increase. However, beyond looking at only immediate funding, we need to ensure that El Nino affected countries build resilience so they are better prepared in the future.
- On a related note, as the ECOSOC President has already mentioned, I am pleased that today, the Secretary-General established the UN Zika Response Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), to finance critical unfunded priorities in the response to the Zika outbreak. The trust fund provides a

rapid, flexible and accountable platform to support a coordinated response from the UN system and partners. Urgent funds are required to support the implementation of national response plans and address the broader social and economic challenges that lie ahead. The UN Zika Response MPTF will directly support the Zika Strategic Response Framework, developed by WHO, in consultation with UN Agencies, partners, and international epidemiological experts. This is a very important and welcome development, as the response thus far has been severely underfunded.

- Before I close, I want to reiterate one point. Preparedness is vital. It is more economical in the long run, as we know, investing in the future saves costs down the line. But more importantly, the human cost of delayed action is one that we cannot afford. Whenever we know that future illness, injury and death can be prevented, we need to take action.
- Thank you for your attention.