

**Remarks of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and
Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment 2011
“Special Event on the Humanitarian Situation in the Horn of Africa”
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[Checked against delivery]

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As the Vice-President has already said, yesterday the UN declared a famine in two regions of Somalia. We believe that tens of thousands of people have already died, and hundreds of thousands more may be starving.

If we do not act, this famine will spread to the rest of south Somalia within two months, and its effects could spill over to countries across the region.

Famine is not a word we use lightly. The last time we did so in Somalia was nineteen years ago. Famine reflects extreme food shortages, severe malnutrition on a massive scale, and spiralling mortality rates.

We must respond now before thousands more lose their lives.

Across the Horn of Africa, 11.5 million people are in urgent need of our help. 3.7 million people in Somalia. 4.56 million Ethiopians. 2.4 million Kenyans. Close to 150,000 people in Djibouti. And potentially many more in Eritrea.

This is the gravest food crisis in the world, and the numbers are getting worse.

We have already asked for some US\$1.9 billion to help people in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. Of this, less than half has been funded, leaving a gap of over a billion.

We need to fill the funding gaps now.

I call on all of our donors to give generously. Many of you have already announced additional resources – I hope you can do more.

And those of you who have yet to respond – I hope you will do so. The people of the Horn urgently need our help.

This will not be a short crisis. The United Nations and its partners fully expect to be dealing with this situation for at least the next six months.

We need to step up our assistance to people in their own countries, and to the increasing number of refugees who have fled drought and insecurity across borders.

Over the course of July, 1,300 Somalis have arrived every day in the Dadaab refugee camp in northern Kenya – 80 per cent of them are women and children.

Many have walked for weeks, in gruelling conditions, to get there. Approximately half the children are malnourished on arrival - many have been separated from their families.

Dadaab, already the largest refugee camp in the world, is dangerously over-crowded with more than 380,000 refugees – and faces a backlog of 26,000 more awaiting registration.

The Kenyan government has agreed to the opening of a new camp, which can house an additional 80,000 people, but it too will quickly reach capacity.

In neighbouring Ethiopia, 2,000 people a day are arriving at the Dolo refugee camp – in an area also affected by drought.

I thank both Kenya and Ethiopia for keeping their borders open at this difficult time.

Humanitarian agencies are responding as best they can. The entire UN system is pulling together, acting in concert.

But we do not currently have the resources we need to deal with the scale of the problem.

During the last two weeks alone, I have approved more than \$50 million worth of projects under the Central Emergency Response Fund.

But this is only a stop-gap, and clearly not sufficient to deal with the magnitude of this disaster.

The situation in Somalia is particularly difficult.

Persistent insecurity and a major reduction in food aid have severely constrained our capacity to respond.

Since June, 270,000 people have received food rations in the southern regions of Hiraaan and Banadir, including 85,000 people in Mogadishu. 54,000 more people have received food assistance from NGOs in Bay, Lower Shabelle and Mogadishu.

But with 3.7 million people in need, this is not enough.

The recent announcement by Al-Shabaab that they will open areas under their control to the humanitarian community is welcome. Agencies are currently looking at ways to return – and to do so quickly.

But we need guarantees that humanitarian workers will not be taxed or targeted. We need assurances that the 11 conditions previously put on WFP by Al-Shabaab are not imposed.

If these guarantees are given, I ask Member States to find all ways possible to provide the assistance we need.

Drought is not a new problem in the Horn of Africa, but it is happening more often. Once-a-decade crises are now occurring every two years.

As global attention focuses upon the region, many are asking why more has not been done to pre-empt this crisis, to build resilience, to put in place the reserves we need, and set agriculture and livestock management on a stronger footing.

These are essential questions.

The Humanitarian community has been preparing for this situation and has helped build resilience through long-running projects, such as the inter-agency Horn of Africa Plan of Action, or the Productive Safety Nets programme in Ethiopia.

We know that the situation today would be worse if significant gains had not been made in the past.

As we respond, we must ramp up our efforts to address the underlying causes of fragility, and do more to prepare for what will inevitably happen again.

There are no easy answers. We face declining rainfall, increasing populations, environmental degradation and persistent conflict.

Peace in Somalia has eluded us for two decades.

But if we are to stop this situation from becoming an annual event, there are things we can do.

Practical interventions, drought-resistant seeds, irrigation, rural infrastructure, livestock programmes. These projects can and do work.

We have also made significant improvements to our early warning systems.

We knew this drought was coming and began issuing warnings last November. Looking ahead, we must find ways to ensure those warnings are heeded in time.

Our priority today, however, is to save lives.

This crisis has already destroyed too many families; devastated too many communities. It is difficult to imagine when those who have fled will be able to return home.

We cannot allow this crisis to deepen further.

I urge you all to give it the urgent attention it requires.