

UN emergency fund allocates US\$45 million to stave off famine risk in the Horn of Africa

(New York, 5 June 2019): Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock today allocated US\$45 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to immediately scale up food and nutrition assistance, safe water provision, livelihoods protection, and other urgent humanitarian support to drought-affected people across parts of Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya who are facing acute food problems following another season of failed rains.

CERF's allocation will complement the three governments' efforts through targeted assistance to men, women, girls and boys, especially those with disabilities.

The bulk of the funds, \$30 million, will go to Somalia where 2.2 million people are projected to face acute food insecurity by September, over 40 per cent more than in January this year. A further 3.2 million people are expected to struggle just to meet minimum food requirements over the same period.

"CERF's rapid response allocation will allow humanitarian organizations to quickly scale up assistance to save lives, especially in Somalia, where drought has intensified faster than has been seen over the last decade, leading to a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation," said Mr. Lowcock. "What was forecast to be an average rainy season in Somalia is now one of the driest on record in over 35 years."

The failed April to June rainy season follows below-average performance of the short rains, which fall between October and December.

"Communities that were already vulnerable due to past droughts are again facing severe hunger and water scarcity and are at risk from deadly communicable diseases. Aid agencies in Somalia are also overstretched and grappling with a severe lack of funding," said Mr. Lowcock.

On 20 May, aid agencies launched a drought response plan seeking \$710 million to urgently help 4.5 million people. Somalia's overall Humanitarian Response Plan for 2019, requiring \$1.08 billion, is only 22 per cent funded. The Somalia Humanitarian Fund is currently depleted.

Meanwhile, the neighbouring Somali region of Ethiopia is experiencing a second consecutive drought season while still reeling from the effects of the prolonged drought in 2016 and 2017. Announcing CERF's contribution of \$10 million, Mr. Lowcock urged donors to increase their support for drought response, in addition to critical assistance to the ongoing nationwide response to internal displacement.

In Kenya, CERF's allocation of \$5 million will complement the government's hunger safety net programme. Parts of the arid and semi-arid regions of Kenya are hard hit by drought following a delayed start to the March to May rains.

With droughts remaining a recurrent weather phenomenon across the Horn of Africa region, Mr. Lowcock has been calling for more systematic early action, including the release of funds, based on early warnings, to help mitigate expected humanitarian consequences through a range of activities carried out before the onset of a crisis.

"We need to move to a system where we act much earlier on the warning signs of drought and hunger so that we can cut response times and costs and reduce deaths and human suffering," he said.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and humanitarian partners are laying the ground work for a CERF-supported anticipatory action pilot in Somalia to prevent famine from taking hold. Funding would be released when a pre-agreed threshold based on forecasting information and early warning data is reached and would be tied to a pre-agreed early action plan.

Mr. Lowcock highlighted the need to address other underlying causes of perennial food insecurity. Nearly half of all the people facing acute food insecurity or worse in Somalia are internally displaced and those living on the margins.

CERF funds are a critical enabler of effective, timely and life-saving humanitarian action, helping front-line partners on the ground to kickstart or reinforce emergency activities.

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