

**UN Secretary-General's opening remarks at joint press conference on humanitarian crises in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen**

The Secretary-General

Opening Remarks at Joint Press Conference

with UNDP Administrator, Ms. Helen Clark; Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien; Ms. Ertharin Cousin, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (by video conference); Ms. Carla Mucavi, Director of FAO Liaison Office in New York, and Mr. Justin Forsyth, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF

New York, 22 February 2017

SG: Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you very much for coming.

I am here with my colleagues to draw the world's attention to the fact that today, more than 20 million people in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and north-east Nigeria are going hungry, and facing devastating levels of food insecurity.

Famine is already a reality in parts of South Sudan. Unless we act now, it is only a matter of time until it affects other areas and other countries. We are facing a tragedy; we must avoid it becoming a catastrophe. This is preventable if the international community takes decisive action.

The situation is dire. Millions of people are barely surviving in the space between malnutrition and death, vulnerable to diseases and outbreaks, forced to kill their animals for food and eat the grain they saved for next year's seeds.

Throughout South Sudan, almost 5 million people desperately need food; famine has already been declared in two counties. Across North-East Nigeria, some 5.1 million people face serious food shortages. Women and girls are disproportionately affected, and nearly half a million children are suffering severe acute malnutrition. Even if they survive, this may affect their health and development throughout their lives.

In Somalia, food prices are rising, animals are dying, and almost one million children under the age of 5 will be acutely malnourished this year. Yemen is facing the largest food insecurity emergency in the world, with an estimated 7.3 million people needing help now.

United Nations agencies are deployed with plans in place for all these countries, and we are scaling up the response. In North-East Nigeria, humanitarians are reaching more than two million people with food assistance. In South Sudan, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners aim to assist 5.8 million people this year; in Somalia, 5.5 million people and in Yemen 8.3 [million].

We are also stepping up cooperation between humanitarian and development agencies, including the World Bank, strengthening collaboration, coordination and alignment and working [towards] common goals. Saving lives is the first priority, but we are also looking to build longer-term resilience to shocks.

I have asked the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and the Emergency Relief Coordinator to take immediate action to ensure a coordinated long-term approach. They will set up a steering committee to link the United Nations Development Group and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee for humanitarian assistance.

One of the biggest obstacles we face now is funding. Humanitarian operations in these four countries require more than \$5.6 billion this year. We need at least \$4.4 billion by the end of March to avert a catastrophe. Despite some generous pledges, just \$90 million has actually been received so far – around two cents for every dollar needed. We are in the beginning of the year but these numbers are very worrying.

Funding shortages have already forced the World Food Programme to cut rations in Yemen by more than half since last year. Without new resources, critical shortages will worsen within months.

These four crises are very different, but they have one thing in common. They are all preventable.

They all stem from conflict, which we must do much more to prevent and resolve.

But even now, we can prevent the worst effects, if we act urgently and strongly.

I urge all members of the international community to step up and to do whatever is in their power, whether that is mobilizing support, exerting political pressure on parties to conflict, or funding humanitarian operations.

I want to make a personal appeal to the parties to conflict to abide by international humanitarian law and allow aid workers access to reach people in desperate need. Without access, hundreds of thousands of people could die, even if we have the resources to help them.

The lives of millions of people depend on our collective ability to act. In our world of plenty, there is no excuse for inaction or indifference.

We have heard the alerts. Now there is no time to lose.

Thank you. I would like to ask my two colleagues to complete my introduction. We will be distributing also a small fact sheet with the key data relevant to this crisis.