

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia**

17 February 2006

**Open letter to Somali Political and Militia Leaders,  
Elders and Community Representatives**

I should like to bring to your attention the issue of the drought that, as you are aware, has been spreading throughout parts of Somalia compounding already appalling humanitarian conditions in the country. As the Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, and in cooperation with you as the Somali representatives, I am responsible for coordinating the relief efforts of the international aid community, and ensuring that timely assistance reaches those in critical need as quickly and efficiently as possible. I am also responsible for the safety and security of UN personnel - and its assets – as they deliver assistance and protection to all affected Somalis.

Somalia is facing the worst drought in a decade. As a consequence of three consecutive failed rainy seasons, over two million Somalis are presently in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. This number includes up to 400,000 internally displaced who over the years have fled their places of origin because of continued insecurity and/or other dramatic environmental disasters. The 2005 *Deyr* season was a complete failure in southern Somalia and around 1.4 million people in Gedo, Middle and Lower Juba, and areas of Bay and Bakool are feeling the dreadful brunt of it. Some of these areas have been experiencing chronically grim humanitarian conditions for years.

Severe water and asset depletion is affecting all livelihood systems: pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and riverine agriculturalists. Cereal production is the lowest in over ten years. Depleted water and pasture availability is causing resource-based conflict and in some areas families are reportedly spending between 70-80% of their income to buy water. Many – particularly women and children - are moving to urban centers throughout the country in search of assistance. Cattle deaths in the worst affected areas have reached 20-30%, and could reach 80% by April. Pastoralists are culling weak animals and young calves, and inducing still births to save their resources. Livestock prices have dropped drastically while food prices have increased substantially. Malnutrition has reached morally unacceptable rates of 25% in areas of Gedo, while measles outbreaks have been reported in many areas.

Given that the next rains are not expected before April, the effects of the drought are expected to aggravate as the *jilaal* dry season progresses. Conditions in northern Gedo and the riverine areas in the Juba regions are already such that should the situation deteriorate,

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famine could unravel. Any hope of improvement in the situation will depend largely on the appropriateness and timeliness of emergency responses, and on support from the international community to enable aid organisations to respond. It will, however, also hinge on the extent to which assistance can access and reach the affected populations, and the sustainability of this access.

Some of you have already shared with me your concerns on this issue; that in this time of grief, priority must go to alleviating the suffering of Somalis whose means of livelihood are being disrupted and decimated by the drought. We are already working with you to ensure that aid reaches those in need. At the same time, much remains to be done. As Somali leaders and representatives, you are accountable for upholding basic principles of unhindered humanitarian access and safe passage of aid assistance. I am thus appealing to your leadership to undertake the necessary actions in this regard.

We are presently working with local authorities and community leaders on the adherence to a set of "guiding principles for unhindered access to populations in need of humanitarian assistance and protection". I should like to share with you some of the key principles that the United Nations, of which Somalia is part, insists upon.

As a priority, I call upon you to publicly reaffirm your commitment and accountability in ensuring and facilitating unhindered access for all humanitarian assistance and protection to populations in your areas of control, and to the extent possible to populations living in border areas. This includes all humanitarian convoys and flights coming in and out of your areas of control.

You are urged to fully cooperate with the UN to ensure the safety and security of all personnel and assets, which includes the full protection of UN premises, vehicles, equipment and missions as well as the security of airstrips and roads used by the UN. No UN personnel will be harassed within your area of control whether or not on official duty.

For the purpose of assessments, consultations or provision of assistance and protection, we count upon your commitment as authorities to facilitate access to any community in your area of control and to 'sensitise' those communities that humanitarian response is provided on the basis of assessed needs and might thus need to be targeted to specific groups in certain cases. We count upon your cooperation to assist aid partners with community mobilization for better programme implementation.

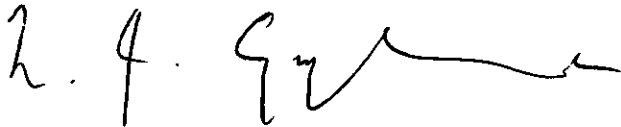
Fulfilling these obligations can be a challenge, particularly in a complex environment and context such as Somalia. Still, these principles are there to protect and save lives and as such are non negotiable.

Many communities are doing commendable work in initiating self-help activities and providing support where they can. The UN and other aid partners are there to help as much

as they can. Throughout many parts of Somalia, however, we are hindered in doing so due to outbreaks of fighting, prolonged insecurity or acts by opportunists. Years of lack of sustained access and restricted operating space have been major factors affecting human survival. It is thus incumbent on you, as representatives of your communities, to do what is in your power to put an end to hostilities, foster reconciliation, and control freelance militia to help create an environment conducive to free and sustained access, as well as impartial and independent humanitarian operations. Aid organisations have the right to be protected from attacks, piracy and lootings.

I am confident that Somali authorities and communities, the UN and aid partners can work together to address soaring needs resulting from the drought. We are trying our very best to garner support from the international community so as to boost our capacity to respond. This, however, will not go far if we cannot then deliver on the ground. We need a firm commitment from you, that you will honour your moral obligations to facilitate assistance to your own communities, which ultimately will hold you accountable.

I will be leaving Somalia soon to take on another duty but my colleagues in the UN system will be more than happy to further discuss these issues with you at any time. During my four years as Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, I have been repeatedly pleased and reassured by our open collaboration, which I am sure will continue into the future.



Maxwell Gaylard  
UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator

Cc: UN Country Team for Somalia  
International and local media  
Somali Aid Coordination Body