

**INTER – AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE**

**Rome, 9 April 2002  
FAO Headquarters**

**Draft IASC Statement on  
Food Insecurity in Southern Africa**

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) expresses its concern that a number of countries within southern Africa will require a significant increase in humanitarian assistance in 2002. The present food security situation in the region is the worst since 1992 when effective collaboration among Governments, SADC, humanitarian partners and donors averted famine in the face of a devastating drought. Today, ten years later, the factors contributing to the food crisis are numerous and vary from country to country. They include: drought, floods, disruptions to commercial farming, depletion of strategic grain reserves, poor economic performance, foreign exchange shortages and delays in the timely importation of maize. Significant increases in the price of maize have undermined access to food for large segments of the population within the region. The crisis is compounded by the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Inadequate food availability and consumption places an even greater strain on those affected by HIV/AIDS and the family members struggling to care for them. HIV/AIDS increases household vulnerability to food insecurity by disproportionately affecting working age people. It reduces the amount and quality of land cultivated as well as incomes and purchasing power for those employed in other sectors. It also adds to the disease burden (tuberculosis, cholera and others) that the population faces along with the food insecurity.

Although the approaching harvest season (April-June) should provide short-term relief for some of the 2.7 million persons currently affected, many vulnerable households will continue to require emergency assistance. For many vulnerable populations, assets have already been depleted and coping strategies exhausted. The food security situation in the second half of 2002 and into early 2003 is expected to significantly worsen in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Households in pockets of Lesotho, Mozambique and Swaziland are also experiencing serious food shortages. Among those affected are 125,000 refugees in Malawi and Zambia who depend upon food aid for their survival. The 117,000 refugees in Zambia have only received half rations during the first quarter of this year due to gaps in resources.

Joint assessment missions focusing on crop production, access to food, nutrition and health, will be undertaken at the country level in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe during April and May in order to analyze the dimensions of the humanitarian crisis and plan appropriate response. The IASC stresses the importance of monitoring early warning information related to a possible El Nino event. If another weather phenomenon were to occur, erratic rainfall and other climatic shocks could further undermine crop production and food security within southern Africa.

The IASC expresses its commitment to work with affected Governments and regional partners on multisectoral assessments of needs, the design of appropriate response strategies and in ensuring effective coordination of all interventions including logistics related to the delivery of urgently needed relief cargo. The Committee also calls upon the international donor community to help prevent the current crisis from becoming a humanitarian disaster. The IASC wishes to emphasize that with prompt response from the international community, this crisis can be averted.

N.B. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is comprised of both members (FAO, OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, WHO) and standing invitees (ICRC, ICVA, IFRC, InterAction, IOM, SCHR, RSG/IDPs, UNHCHR, and the World Bank). ICRC, a standing invitee, maintains its independence from policy statements issued by the IASC and its subsidiary bodies.