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**SEVERE FOOD SUPPLY DIFFICULTIES IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES OF
CENTRAL ASIA DUE TO DROUGHT**

As part of a wider climatic phenomenon that has adversely affected a number of countries in northern and eastern Africa, a serious drought has devastated crops and livestock in several countries in central Asia. In addition to large livestock losses due to lack of water and feed, there are mounting concerns that the drought is now claiming a growing number of human lives, as the harsh winter season sets in. The latest situation by country is given below.

AFGHANISTAN

A very serious food crisis has emerged in Afghanistan following two consecutive years of drought and the continuing civil conflict. The 2000 drought has decimated crops and livestock across the country, with more than 3 million people severely affected. In addition, intensified civil conflict, particularly in northern parts, has resulted in fresh waves of population displacement, aggravating the precarious food situation. Large-scale movement of people, particularly from remote districts in Ghor, Badghis and Faryab Provinces has already begun with destitute households now being accommodated in camps at the edge of Herat, the main urban centre in the west. Nearly 2 000 households are reported to be in these camps with more expected in the coming months. In Dari Suf in southern Samangan, a number of starvation-related deaths have been reported.

An FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission which visited the country earlier this year warned of the emergence of a serious food crisis in the country due to severe drought and continuing economic problems. The Mission estimated total cereal production in 2000 at 1.82 million tonnes, about 44 percent below 1999 and 53 percent compared to 1998. Cereal import requirements in the 2000/01 (July/June) marketing year, estimated at a record 2.3 million tonnes, are more than double the 1999 estimated volume of 1.1 million tonnes. With commercial cereal imports anticipated at about 1 million tonnes, and pledged emergency food aid at 250 000 tonnes, there is a deficit of 1 million tonnes which needs to be covered by additional food aid. Low precipitation last winter and insufficient vegetation growth in most highland pastures in the western and southern regions during the spring have resulted in extremely high losses of livestock for the nomadic population. In many areas the selling off of livestock began with the drought last year. It is anticipated that households in most parts of the country will completely deplete their herds within the next few months, leaving families without breeding stock and draught animals, representing the loss of virtually all productive assets.

Prospects for the winter cropping season, which normally starts in October/November, are not promising as the drought persists. Even if precipitation improves in the next few months, harvests will not be available until May/June 2001. But, if rains fail again the magnitude and dimensions of the food crisis would be enormous. In view of the rapidly deteriorating food

supply situation, donors are urged to make additional pledges and to support speedy delivery and distribution of relief assistance, particularly during the coming harsh winter months.

ARMENIA

Persistent hot and dry conditions this summer have resulted in a poor harvest, estimated at only 219 000 tonnes of grain, some 27 percent less than last year and below average. Crops in the Ararat valley, which had access to irrigation water, were satisfactory but elsewhere crops and pastures have been affected by drought, particularly in the northeast and in all upland areas. Output of potatoes, a major staple in upland rural areas could be reduced by more than half. Output of fodder crops and natural pastures for livestock grazing have been seriously affected and substantial de-stocking will be necessary. Income from the sale/barter of livestock products accounts for an important share of rural household budgets and is crucially important if rural households have to revert to the market to cover a part of their needs.

In 2000/01 the domestic cereal requirement is estimated at 731 000 tonnes, including 481 000 tonnes for human consumption. This represents 192 kg per caput, higher than usual in view of the reduced availability of other domestically produced food. Cereal imports are estimated at 515 000 tonnes, including 458 000 tonnes of wheat. Commercial imports are estimated at 370 000 tonnes in the current year, reflecting growing debt and severe budget constraints. Food aid needs are estimated at 145 000 tonnes, including 108 000 tonnes of wheat for human consumption and 37 000 tonnes of barley to enable 60 000 cattle in the worst affected area to be kept alive during the winter and released into spring grazing in reasonable condition for milk production. Against the food aid requirement, 70 000 tonnes have been pledged to date leaving an uncovered requirement of 75 000 tonnes.

GEORGIA

Georgia faces a severe food crisis. Agricultural production in 2000 has fallen sharply because of the serious drought, which has affected both rain-fed and irrigated areas. Six regions, namely Kakheti, Mtskheta Mtianeti, Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Imereti, have been the most affected. Cereal crops have largely been lost in the eastern part of Georgia. Although production improved moving further west and north, yield reductions were still assessed at 50 percent or more in these areas, whilst the quality of the grains produced was also very poor. In the irrigated areas, irrigation was generally inadequate, reducing yields by up to one half. By late October, some 115 000 tonnes of small grains had been harvested from 128 000 hectares, with yields of 0.9 tonnes a hectare compared to 2.3 t/ha last year. Grain production including maize in 2000 is provisionally estimated at 340 000 tonnes, including 93 000 (1999: 226 000) tonnes of wheat and 240 000 tonnes of coarse grains. At the forecast level, aggregate cereal output in 2000 would be only 44 percent of the estimated 1999 total cereal production and 52 percent of the average of the last five years.

The drought has affected all crops, not just cereals. The yield of potatoes, an important staple in the upland areas, is also poor particularly in the non-irrigated areas. Sunflower output has been hard hit, as have the fruit, vegetables and grape harvests. Pasture and fodder crop production is affected, and will necessitate a reduction in animal numbers particularly in the east.

With a minimum national cereal consumption requirement (including food, feed seed, losses) estimated at 1.07 million tonnes, Georgia's cereal import requirement in 2000/01 is estimated

at 748 000 tonnes (620 000 tonnes of wheat, 88 000 tonnes of maize, 35 000 tonnes of barley and 5 000 tonnes of rice). Commercial imports are difficult to estimate precisely in view of informal imports and the volume of transit trade, but are estimated at 437 000 tonnes, while pledged food aid amounts to 88 000 tonnes. This leaves an uncovered deficit of 223 000 tonnes (112 000 tonnes of wheat; 80 000 tonnes of maize; 30 000 tonnes of barley; 1 000 tonnes of rice) which will need to be covered by additional food aid.

TAJKISTAN

A severe drought has reduced the 2000 cereal harvest to 236 000 tonnes, down by 47 percent compared to 1999. Output of all other crops, including potatoes, vegetables and cotton have also been affected. Both the winter and spring rainfed wheat crop, harvested during June-July, had almost totally failed in most places as a result of drought. The irrigated wheat and other crops have also been affected, often severely as water levels in rivers and canals have been much less. The problem was compounded by the poor condition of the irrigation systems due to lack of maintenance and the use of poor quality seed. The impact of drought this year has been particularly severe, as it has hit when agriculture has already been in decline because of persistent economic problems.

The cereal import requirement in the 2000/01 marketing year (July/June) is estimated at 794 000 tonnes. After taking into account a projected commercial import of 403 000 tonnes and the pledged food aid of 94 000 tonnes, the uncovered food aid requirements remains at 297 000 tonnes. A shortfall of this magnitude for this impoverished country, if not addressed by the international community, could have disastrous implications for the population. In addition, the country urgently needs assistance with the provision of seed for next year's production, to be planted as of next month.

The drought has virtually destroyed an extremely limited coping capacity of the majority of the population, after many years of economic hardship. Given that an estimated 85 percent of the population is poor, the steep drop in cereal production this year spells very bleak prospects for food security. Many households are already in dire conditions and the situation will worsen for increasing numbers in the winter and spring as they exhaust whatever food stocks they have as well as other means of coping that they may possess. An estimated 3 million people fall in this category, with about 2 million facing a desperate plight. Thus, with access to food through self-production steeply reduced or destroyed and with virtually no means (inadequate employment opportunities and other sources of income) of accessing food through markets, these people cannot meet their basic minimum nutritional requirements during 2000/01, unless assistance is provided by the international community. The evolving critical food supply and cereal production conditions and access of the needy to food need to be monitored carefully with a view to making adjustments to the ongoing assistance programmes and/or designing appropriate new ones.

UZBEKISTAN

An FAO/WFP mission which visited the country in October found that lower harvests of both wheat and cotton are to be expected as a result of a shortage of irrigation water following a mild winter and poor management of water resources. The drought has had catastrophic impacts on agriculture in the down river regions of the Amu Darya, the Autonomous Region of Karakalpakstan (KK) and Khorizem, but particularly the former.

In KK, the 2000 wheat harvest (which was planted in September/October 1999 and escaped the water shortage as of last spring), was good, (92 000 tonnes) but spring crop production has been reduced by between 35-90 percent depending on type of crop. In particular, the potato production failed, rice, maize and other spring grain production is down by about 80-90 percent, while most other crops (cotton, fruit, fodder) is down by a half to a third. Crops on both the public farms and on the household plots, vital for survival, have been affected.

In Khorizem, Oblast crops the shortage of irrigation water also caused crop losses but to a lesser degree than in KK. Indications are that the 2000 wheat harvest, at 152 000 tonnes is about average, but that output of rice is likely to be halved due to reductions in the areas sown and in yields while output of cotton is likely to contract by about 25 percent.

At the country level, winter cereals suffered less from the water shortages along the Amu Darya River in the summer than, for example cotton, but rainfed cereals were affected. Aggregate wheat production in 2000 is officially reported to be 3.4 million tonnes, with 3.1 million tonnes from the public sector and 300 000 tonnes from the household plots. Coupled with lower rice and spring coarse grain output, the 2000 grain harvest is likely to remain below 4 million tonnes, at least 10 percent less than last year. Preliminary indications are that output of cotton, a major export crop with which imports of wheat and machinery are financed, is likely to fall to around 3 million tonnes, compared to 3.6 million tonnes last year. Higher world prices for this commodity will help to offset the smaller quantity.

Imports of foodstuffs have declined in recent years in part due to a sharp increase in cereal production (notably wheat), and in part, because imports have been kept low to maximize funds available for the creation of import substituting industries. Nevertheless, the import requirement for wheat in 2000 is expected to increase to 800 000 tonnes and larger volumes than normal will have to be transferred to drought affected populations. Aggregate output of rice is expected to fall sharply. The bulk of cereal imports will be mobilized commercially but the government has requested (and received) 38 200 tonnes of durum wheat for pasta production. Budget constraints may not enable the government to make adequate provision for the affected populations. Social security payments are made regularly but, due to financial constraints, are inadequate to cover needs.