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**Drought in the Horn of Africa: Background Note Prepared by Eritrea and Ethiopia**

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**Eritrea background note from Simon R. Nhongo, RC/HC Eritrea**

**Humanitarian Situation**

The border areas of Ethiopia and Eritrea have been particularly hard hit by the prevailing drought in both countries. In Eritrea, the most severe effects of this drought are now becoming increasingly evident in all six regions of the country. Two-thirds (2.3 million) of Eritrea's population, as described in the pie chart below, is facing food and water shortages. The global malnutrition rate is now between 15 and 28 per cent while the cost of cereals has increased by 100 per cent. Livestock prices have gone down by 30 per cent while children are walking long distances, ranging between three and five hours' duration, in search of drinking water. The prevailing drought and the lingering effects of the two-year border war between the two countries as well as the non-recovery in many areas from previous droughts, have considerably weakened the coping mechanisms of millions of people as well as food security in the region.

Despite numerous efforts to highlight the funding shortfalls to donors, including donor briefings in the Nordic countries, Geneva, New York and Asmara, the overall response to the CAP remains low. The situation is worsening in the face of the slow pace of donor support for food, which now stands at about 25 per cent. Support for non-food items is less than three per cent. This lack of adequate and timely donor support has clear implications for an already serious situation as food supplies from the Government and the World Food Programme (WFP) are expected to run out by May. Subsequent months would see a rapid deterioration in the overall situation, unless adequate food and non-food aid resources are mobilized. Water tables have now fallen by up to ten meters in many areas, with the breadbasket regions of Gash Barka and Debub the worst-affected.

Equally worrying is the lack of adequate preparation and absence of support for agricultural supplies in anticipation of the March/April "Aszmera" light rains. Serious concerns remain for the population at risk, as existing food aid pledges will take time to resource and transport to Eritrea. A potential conflict in Iraq will increase insurance costs and may disrupt shipping in the Red Sea. Even now, current food aid distribution is running at reduced rations of 60 percent of normal. Continued pledges of food aid (including supplementary and therapeutic feeding programmes) and non-food relief are essential to avoid an interruption of the humanitarian pipeline.

Both poor and middle-income households are severely affected. The dilemma is that prioritizing sectors among the emergency requirements by focusing more on immediate life-saving needs (food and water) over life-sustaining needs (health, HIV/AIDS, sanitation, education, livestock) not only exacerbates the gap in response between food and non-food sectors, but, more importantly, undermines the recovery of affected populations.

First background document of the Drought in the Horn of Africa

While the two countries are fighting the impact of the drought, they are also dealing with the challenges of consolidating a two-year peace process, with the critical phase of border demarcation only a couple of months away. The escalating mine incidents resulting in a number of deaths in Eritrea and the exchange of gunfire between militias of the two countries, resulting in two deaths and many serious injuries in the last few days, are reasons for concern. The anticipated humanitarian, human rights and legal issues that could arise as a consequence of the demarcation process and transfer of territory are yet to be addressed.

The return of Eritrean refugees from Sudan has been delayed by the closure of the Sudan-Eritrea border since October 2002. More than 35,000 persons have been registered to return while over 103,000 have already returned and are in need of reintegration support. In addition, if drought conditions persist, their voluntary return may be further delayed and tension between the two countries may increase. It is hoped that inter-state relations in the Horn of Africa could improve and enhance cooperation and synergy with neighbouring Sudan that would lead to the resumption of the stalled repatriation programme.

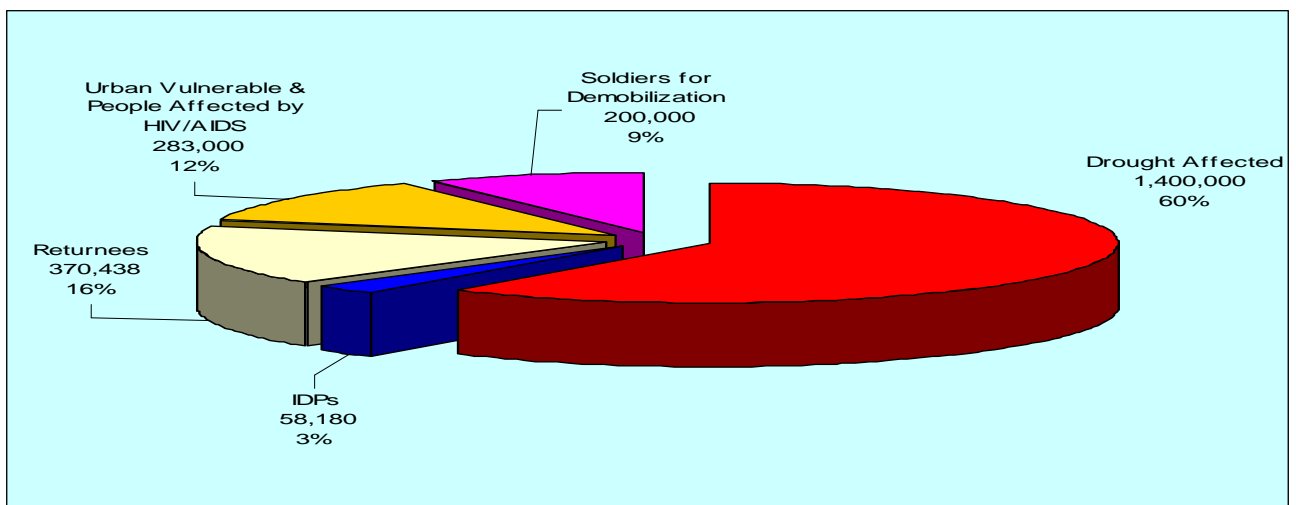
Following the end of the border war, some 58,180 IDPs and 16,811 expellees have been unable to return to their home villages owing to the threat posed by landmines and/or other security concerns. Others had earlier returned only to find their houses partially or completely destroyed. The drought could also have a slowing effect on the reintegration efforts of the IDPs in the country.

On the positive side, the drought and other humanitarian challenges are already offering opportunities for enhanced national food security strategies and disaster management, and development of a more comprehensive post-war recovery programme. In this connection, the Eritrean Government and United Nations agencies have jointly developed an Integrated Recovery Programme (IRP) aimed at bridging the gap between relief and development for specific target populations (returning refugees, IDPs and expellees) in Gash Barka, Debub and Southern Red Sea regions. This caters for needs not covered by current or planned programmes. Similarly, special Government coordinating bodies have been formed or strengthened to boost the effectiveness of drought relief in the two countries.

The latest drought in the Horn of Africa is symptomatic of a chronic condition that demands a holistic approach encompassing emergency response interventions and development interventions focusing on structural reforms. Such an approach forms a more sustainable basis for recovery. Farmers and herders are also looking for more tangible answers in agricultural recovery activities that will help avert such crises in the future.

### Populations of Concern in 2003

- Total Estimated Population: 3.29 million
- Total Population of Concern: 2.31 million



## **Major Issues of Concern & Suggested Actions.**

1. Lack of adequate and early donor support

**Action:**

- IASC in Geneva and New York to engage donors at headquarters level for early and adequate responses.
- SG to issue a statement highlighting the countries' CAPs to prevent a complete rupture of the aid pipeline.
- IASC to urge donors to de-link political preferences from humanitarian needs.

2. The challenges of border demarcation relating to humanitarian, human rights and legal issues. The increase of mine incidents and increasing militia clashes by the two parties give a major challenge to the peace process therefore there is need to:

**Action:**

- Continue to advocate for cooperation between the two parties
- Continue to encourage the peace guarantors to secure cooperation of the parties.

3. Suspension of the repatriation of Eritrean refugees from Sudan.

**Action:**

- Engage AU to be more involved by talking to the two parties.
- The intervention of the Secretary General.

4. Lack of support for the Integrated Recovery Programme (IRP) by the donors – (Although the donors have welcomed the idea of countries in emergencies to plan transition programmes going from relief, recovery and development, the development of such a programme in Eritrea is not getting the anticipated donor support.)

**Action:**

- IASC to advocate for donor understanding and support of IRP.

5. The implications of a possible war in Iraq

It is believed that an attack on Iraq is very likely to disrupt shipping movements. Therefore, transportation of humanitarian supplies will be affected by lack of shipping lines or very high insurance costs.

**Action:**

- Continue to advocate for peaceful means.
- Early donor support would lead to early procurement and transportation of supplies.

### **Ethiopia background note from Samuel Nyambi, RC/HC Ethiopia**

The current critical humanitarian situation in Ethiopia is the result of complex influences of nature and man. The response to the crisis necessitates a comprehensive application of relief measures integrated with development approaches that allow for the saving of lives while protecting assets and livelihoods and contributing to an environment conducive to development.

The drought that hit Ethiopia in 2002 affected a broad swathe of territory from the northeast to the southwest of the country with the quantity of rainfall equaling less than 50% of the previous five years' average. The short rains started late in March and ended early in May. This resulted in failed *belg* (minor) season crops and compromised land preparation and long-cycle crop planting. The *kiremt* (long) rains for the *meher* (main) agricultural season were delayed by as many as eight weeks resulting in the destruction or stunting of those crops that had been planted on time. An extension of the rains beyond normal cessation patterns did not materialize. The overall result was a 25% reduction in crop production.

The poor rains particularly affected lowland pastoral and agro-pastoral areas, destroyed maize and sorghum crops and deprived animals of pasture and water. The resultant high volume of livestock deaths also removed important elements from these peoples' regular diets. With 11.4 million people requiring immediate assistance during the first half of 2003 and an additional 3 million requiring close monitoring, an estimated 20% of the 70 million people living in Ethiopia will require significant and sustained humanitarian assistance until the next harvest (late in 2003). In the immediate term, emphasis must be placed on providing inputs for the *meher* planting cycle, it being already too late in most instances to supply inputs for the *belg* planting. Additionally, emphasis must be placed on needs across all sectors defined as non-food components of the emergency response, including water, health, nutrition, agriculture, livestock, education and HIV/AIDS.

Added pressures on populations competing for fewer resources have resulted in population displacement, a rise in destructive coping mechanisms, the depletion of assets and a rise in tensions and conflicts between and within ethnic groups.

While the drought is the main contributor to the 2003 Ethiopian humanitarian crisis, the spiraling descent of populations into destitution is also the result of inadequate markets and infrastructure, underdeveloped human capacities and inefficiencies in the delivery of social services. The clear and present dangers of the HIV/AIDS pandemic also pose a long-term threat to the productive capacities of the country. To deal appropriately with the emergency and to stem the tide of falling victim to the next natural disaster, it is important to assist simultaneously and comprehensively in the development of Ethiopia.

To date, the response from donors has been encouraging in some respects (see the attached tables and graphics). 55% of cereal needs for 2003 have been committed. But, contributions through United Nations agencies (see attached table) for non-food sectors totals only \$3.21 million at a time when responsibilities of the UN to provide coordination and implementation support to Government is crucial for the success of the overall emergency response. Supplementary food distributions stand at only 45% of the requirement while those to non-food sectors need to be received in the early stages of the emergency response so as to minimize the anticipated negative effects of the drought on populations in the coming months and to prepare for urgent interventions that will be required more and more as the emergency approaches peak levels. It must also be emphasized that the response to the emergency in Ethiopia will need to be sustained throughout 2003, that the arrivals of assistance will need to occur on a timely basis and that the delivery of the assistance will need to be coordinated and efficient.

Beyond the exigencies of the drought emergency, the UN country teams of Ethiopia and Eritrea are also exploring ways in which assistance could be equitably provided on both sides of the border in response to any humanitarian developments that might arise in relation to the border demarcation process and any eventual exchange of territories.

Support opportunities from the IASC:

1. Given the urgency of the provision of non-food material resources to enable the UN country team, Government and non-governmental and international organization partners to effectively address the needs of the emergency in Ethiopia, the IASC can further the support efforts on the ground by creating and reinforcing awareness of the crisis in the country and by encouraging a generous donor response to the same.
2. With the level of beneficiaries expected to reach its peak in the coming few months, the delivery of assistance will be conducted at previously unattained levels and for a duration until the first *meher* harvests in November 2003 for some communities and into early 2004 for others. This will necessitate a continued momentum in all aspects of the response, including support from the IASC in maintaining donor interest and support both for all aspects of the emergency and for the anticipated road to recovery and development that will follow soon thereafter --- as long as the rains are plentiful and the input support timely and adequate.