



Joint Statement

15 February 2012

URGENT CALL FOR UNITED ACTION IN THE SAHEL REGION OF WEST AFRICA

JOINT STATEMENT BY UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND USAID ON THE DETERIORATING SITUATION IN THE SAHEL

Rome – Leaders of United Nations agencies, representatives of affected governments, and major donors today called for an urgent scale up of humanitarian, rehabilitation and development assistance to address rising levels of hunger and malnutrition caused by the combined effect of drought, high food prices, displacement and conflict affecting the Sahel region of West Africa. After an emergency meeting at the headquarters of the UN World Food Programme (WFP) in Rome, participants agreed that the time for humanitarian action in the Sahel is now.

Leaders attending the meeting called for a comprehensive, rapid and robust response to the crisis to address the needs of the most vulnerable – especially women and children - among the millions who have been affected by drought. They called for a combination of relief with early recovery and longer term development actions.

In addition, they resolved to work together to meet immediate food security and nutritional needs of affected people, while supporting programmes that address the root causes of problems and help to strengthen resilience of communities living in areas that are affected by chronic drought. This would include support to smallholder farmers to improve self-reliance and resilience in the face of difficult climatic and economic conditions.

All agreed on concrete steps to pave the way for a successful transition to early recovery and lay the foundation for sustainable development.

Participants agreed on the following course of action:

- Support for short-term food security and nutrition crisis response, developed by and between national governments across the region, and regional organizations that can increase access to food, with a positive impact on the nutritional status of the most vulnerable populations. Scale up of existing safety net programmes as part of well-designed social protection systems and leveraging existing national

food reserves, while safeguarding the productive assets and income sources of the most vulnerable to boost local food production.

- Delivery of targeted emergency food assistance, including- where appropriate – cash for work programmes, cash transfers and food vouchers, strengthening local markets and linking local production and consumption. Assistance would include delivery of targeted emergency food programmes through nutritionally enhanced products for young children and nursing or pregnant mothers, as well as therapeutic foods for children suffering from severe acute malnutrition.
- Deployment of early warning information management systems that support the repositioning and consolidation of needs assessments and provide regular, timely, and accurate updates on the evolving humanitarian situation. Use of this information to guide targeting of interventions, to help monitor progress to facilitate the development and implementation of comprehensive, integrated plans at the country level to reduce the risk of such crises recurring.
- A quick and effective response to the current internal and external displacement of populations in Mali as a result of fighting between the insurgents and Malian military forces, which will compound the already severe situation, most particularly in Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso.
- Development and implementation of plans that simultaneously provide for immediate assistance to avert a more severe humanitarian crisis during the coming lean season, while addressing the underlying causes of the crisis and allowing for early recovery of communities living in areas hardest hit by drought and lack of access to food.
- Continued support to the Governments of the Sahel and regional organizations to strengthen their capacity to address the structural causes of the recurring food crises in the region, including by targeted approaches to overcome obstacles in meeting the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goal 1: reducing by half, the proportion of people living in hunger and poverty by 2015.
- Development of strategies and approaches that take into account the prevailing insecurity and recognise the need to incorporate disaster risk reduction, community security and conflict prevention interventions as integral to the response to the region.
- Build household, community, national and regional resilience to external shocks by supporting sustainable agricultural development, encouraging investment in smallholder agriculture and livestock systems and the creation and full implementation by ECOWAS of a pilot regional emergency humanitarian food reserve system, complementing the national food security instruments.
- Enhance coordination among UN agencies, national governments, regional institutions, non-governmental organisations, civil society groups, donors and other development partners to support an integrated and efficient response to

humanitarian needs and medium to longer-term development needs of affected populations that will constitute an enduring response to the crisis.

- Immediate action by international donor community to mobilise the resources necessary to support the humanitarian, rehabilitation and development response to emergency needs affecting over 10 million people in the Sahel region, as well as longer-term recovery and food security programmes.
- Build partnerships for integrating humanitarian and long-term development approaches as part of a comprehensive strategy to build up resilience in the Sahel countries.
- Mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction into national development frameworks with a special attention to food security, and support for social protection programmes to assist the most vulnerable populations.

At the Rome meeting, participants included, the leadership of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department, joined by senior representatives from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), representatives of the African Union (AU), Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS), the International Council Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), and a broad representation of donor governments, as well as WFP board members.

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