

SPECIAL ALERT

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**The Humanitarian Emergency worsens in Southern Somalia
as thousands of families flee Mogadishu**

The escalations of conflict and civil insecurity in parts of southern Somalia, especially in Mogadishu, have resulted in a wave of thousands of people fleeing to the surrounding regions. These displacements add to the already serious humanitarian emergency. According to recent reports, about 20 000 people on average leave their homes each month. The road from Mogadishu to Afgooye alone, a mere 29 kilometres, currently hosts some 250 000 displaced people. The humanitarian situation has particularly deteriorated in the Shabelle, Hiran and Central regions. Overall, about 2 million people – including about 1 million IDPs – are estimated to be in need of basic humanitarian assistance and livelihood support for at least the next six months.

Disruptions in trade activities and looting in the Bakara market in Mogadishu (the main marketplace in southern Somalia) have resulted in price hikes of staple food commodities which had been rising since May 2007. The increase in prices of basic commodities has been even more pronounced in the northern-eastern (Puntland) region due to the crippling inflation that followed the huge currency inflow. In Bossaso, the region's commercial capital, the price of 50 kg of wheat flour had almost tripled, in a year, from an equivalent of US\$ 12 to US\$ 33 or 900 000 Somali Shillings. The increase in prices, depreciation of the Somali shilling and increased fuel and transport costs are creating serious problems of access to food for the population, especially the poor.

According to a recently issued warning by Somalia's Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU), another poor "gu" rainy season from April to June would further aggravate the already precarious food security situation – increasing the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and leaving many facing high to extreme levels of food insecurity. Locally known as "gu", these rains constitute the main agricultural season which contributes the bulk of annual crop production. Gu season crops are normally harvested from August on. Cereal production from the last gu season in southern Somalia was estimated at 48 600 tonnes, representing only 31 percent of the 1995 to 2006 post-war average and 43 percent of last year's gu production. Another poor gu season crop will seriously add to the misery.

Latest estimates put the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance at nearly 2 million people. Nearly one-fifth of these people are classified in Humanitarian Emergency (HE), requiring life saving interventions, while a third are in Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis (AFLC), requiring livelihood support. Humanitarian organizations are advised to intensify ongoing livelihood-support interventions such as water distribution and veterinary services. Contingency plans are also needed for a possible major drought and resultant humanitarian crisis from April through at least the end of 2008, especially in central regions and Hiran. Further information and analysis can be accessed from the Food Security Assessment Unit (FSAU) at: www.fsasomali.org.



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS, ROME

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