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**Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**

**More Than 400,000 Facing Food Shortages In Lesotho**

(Johannesburg: 12 June 2007): Nearly 400,000 people face severe food shortages due to Lesotho's most severe drought in the last 30 years , according to a UN report.

The report, issued by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) on 12 June 2007, estimates that 410,000 people of the country's 1.9 million inhabitants will struggle to meet their basic food needs due to extensive crop failure and exorbitant maize prices.

"All told, more than several million people in the region are at risk," said Kelly David, Head of Office, OCHA Regional Office for Southern Africa. "It is imperative that the international community act now to support governments in their response. We must assist them in meeting the immediate and acute needs of those severely affected by the drought while strengthening longer-term initiatives to increase people's resiliency to shocks and address the problems of chronic vulnerability that continue to plague the region."

Soaring temperatures and low rainfall during the critical crop growing months of January, February and March caused large-scale damage to crops. The drought was most severe in the lowlands, where the main production areas are located.

According to the UN report, Lesotho will require approximately 30,000 tonnes of cereals and 6,700 tonnes of other foods to meet its minimum food consumption needs. Overall, the country's national cereal production forecast is estimated at about 72,000 tonnes, representing a substantial shortfall of 42 percent as compared to last year's harvest.

The situation is particularly serious for the poorest households who depend heavily on agricultural activities to produce their own food or for employment. Drought conditions have also adversely affected maize production levels across the region, resulting in steep increases in maize prices. The price hikes will make it even more difficult for the most vulnerable, who purchase most of their food, to cope.

Lesotho is not the only country in the region facing food shortages in the coming months. More than 400,000 people in Swaziland and 2.1 million people in Zimbabwe will struggle to meet their basic food requirements due to regional drought conditions and other factors, according to FAO and WFP assessments. National-led vulnerability assessments to determine household food security are also underway in Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

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