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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN SUPPORTS BANGLADESH LANDSLIDE RESPONSE

(New York: 14 June 2007): United Nations agencies are providing support to the Government of Bangladesh in the wake of a series of landslides triggered by torrential rains in Chittagong District.

On 12 June, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) jointly sent four teams to conduct an emergency assessment in the landslide-affected areas. The two agencies are closely monitoring and coordinating with the district and city corporation administrations.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is providing support to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN agencies on health sector management, and the WFP is also providing technical support to the Directorate General for Health Services (DGHS). Additionally, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has mobilized logistical support and provided five vehicles, including fuel and drivers, to reinforce rescue and relief operations.

To date, the UN has received no formal request for international assistance, and, according to those agencies present in Bangladesh, local authorities currently have sufficient search and rescue capacity, and food and medicine stocks.

On 11 June 2007, a series of landslides triggered by torrential rains swept through areas of Chittagong District in Bangladesh. Initial reports suggest that large numbers of people have been buried under the mud and debris, while others were swept away by the powerful current. The joint UNICEF-WFP assessment has reported mud eight to nine feet high in some of the worst-affected areas. According to Government figures, 120 deaths have been confirmed to date, while the WHO reports an additional 60 injured. These figures are expected to rise as search and rescue teams continue their work.

At refugee camps run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Cox's Bazaar, a shed collapsed in one camp and two boys suffered minor injuries due to a falling tree. The road network was temporarily interrupted, but access to the camps has now been restored.

For its part, the Government of Bangladesh has allocated a cash grant of nearly \$30,000 (2,000,000 Bangladesh taka) and 200 metric tonnes of rice for affected families. Local officials, Red Crescent staff, health volunteers and NGO workers continue to search for survivors; however, search and rescue operations have been hampered by the flooding and continuing heavy rains. There is also a lack of equipment for excavation.

The DGHS has visited the affected area in Chittagong to assess health initiatives and activities and nine medical teams and one mobile unit have been assembled to assist victims. The Chittagong City Corporation has opened three emergency camps in high schools as temporary shelters, and has distributed rice, molasses, and other supplies to those affected.

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