

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN DISTRIBUTES AID TO FLOOD AFFECTED IN UGANDA

(New York, 19 September 2007): In Uganda, the United Nations is distributing aid to those affected by recent severe flooding due to the heaviest rain in 35 years, which has been falling across eastern and central regions of the country since July.

The floods have affected at least 50,000 households – some 300,000 people – a number that could increase in the weeks to come as the seasonal rains are expected to continue until the end of October. Many people have lost their homes as well as basic household items. In the worst affected areas, 65% of households have lost 90% of their first season harvest, which provides their main source of annual income. Planting of second season crops, which are used for household consumption, has also been delayed. As the next harvest cannot be expected before February 2008, the yearly two month ‘hunger gap’ is expected to extend for ten months.

Additionally, the most affected areas are primarily those in which a significant proportion of the population are internally displaced people living in camps. Immediate needs are most critical in the Teso sub-region, where some 11,000 households have been displaced.

Priority needs include shelter, blankets, food, clean drinking water, sanitation and transport for relief supplies. The continued heavy rainfall is making access difficult, with the most affected areas all but cut off. Roads and bridges have been submerged beneath the rising waters, making transport by boat and helicopter necessary. In the longer-term, most households will require agricultural assistance to recoup the losses they have suffered.

At present, the humanitarian response is focused on Teso Region, and specifically Katakwi and Amuria districts, where needs are most critical. Distributions of food, tarpaulins, tents, buckets and household goods have begun. The World Food Programme (WFP) has already completed a food distribution of a one-month ration for 15,000 people. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and partners have distributed water purification and water control kits to more than 15,000 families, as well as more than 4,800 family kits containing basic household items to those most affected. Additionally, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and partners have distributed 500 plastic sheets and 1,000 buckets in the hardest hit camps, and plan an additional distribution of tents and blankets in the coming days.

The aid community is also stockpiling medicines and medical supplies in the region, in preparation for any outbreak of waterborne disease – a serious concern once the flood waters start to recede, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Agencies working in health have undertaken sensitization campaigns designed to prevent transmission of cholera and malaria in the affected areas, and have distributed long-lasting insecticide treated nets (LLINs).

Most immediately, the United Nations is working to secure urgently needed helicopters and boats to carry out assessments in areas already cut off and to transport vitally needed aid; an UNHAS helicopter from Sudan arrived on 17 September to carry out assessments, evacuations and aid deliveries, beginning operations today.

“We need access to get food and other aid to people in the short-term and to support the restoration of livelihoods in the long run,” said John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. “We would particularly welcome the Government’s provision of a military helicopter for humanitarian operations.”