

**Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**

**CENTRAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND GRANTS US\$ 8.75 MILLION FOR ASSISTANCE TO BANGLADESH**

(Geneva, 20 November 2007): As more detailed information becomes available on the immediate humanitarian needs and the scale of destruction caused by super cyclone Sidr that struck Bangladesh last Thursday, the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has authorized the first disbursement of US\$ 8.75 million in support of life-saving relief assistance in the country. Thanks to this rapid response grant, several UN agencies, including the World Food Programme (WFP), UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), will immediately be able to undertake emergency relief in food and nutrition, shelter, water and sanitation, and agriculture. The CERF has granted over US\$ 320 million this year alone to help people affected by natural disasters and other humanitarian crises.

"I hope this first allocation of CERF funds will enable some important and immediate life saving needs to be met. But I am well aware that much more is likely to be required both from the UN and other donors, and over a significant period--such is the scale of the disaster affecting so many people," said John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. "We hope that Bangladesh will see an expansion of the many offers of support offered so far," he added.

As of November 19, the Government of Bangladesh confirmed 2,408 people dead, with a further 1,063 missing and 1,491 injured. This toll is likely to rise as reports from the remote areas start to arrive. The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) estimates that the number of casualties may exceed 10,000. Sidr, the second strongest of three major storms in recorded history to have lashed Bangladesh, made landfall during the evening of November 16. According to initial reports, the torrential downpours and winds of up to 240 kilometres per hour, which devastated at least 28 out of the 64 districts in the south and south-west of the country, affected at least 3.1 million people. As many as 273,000 homes were completely destroyed, another 650,000 habitats were partially damaged, and an estimated 761,361 acres of crops were lost.

Prior to the cyclone's arrival, the Government of Bangladesh relocated as many as 3.2 million people from 15 districts, with some 620,000 of the evacuated being taken to over 2,000 cyclone shelters and the remaining 2.6 million moved to the highlands. This has contributed to a significant reduction in the loss of life. Moreover, relief and rescue items had been stockpiled ahead of the disaster, including food, medicines, tents, and lighting materials. In the aftermath, the Government began to distribute food and non-food items as well as shelter materials and deployed multiple ships and aircraft to assist with rescue, evacuation, relief and reconnaissance operations.

The United Nations is currently distributing 208 tonnes of high-energy biscuits to an estimated 850,000 persons affected by the storm. In addition, shelter materials are being provided to 18,000 households and 240,000 packets of water purifying powder are reaching about 48,000 families. Multiple medical teams and tens of thousands of Red Crescent volunteers continue working in response to the situation, while international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including Save the Children, CARE, and Oxfam are intensifying their activities within the country. International donors are offering bilateral and multilateral financial assistance. As the Disaster Emergency Response group continues to coordinate the response on the ground, the Government and the United Nations team is completing a joint needs assessment, the results of which are expected shortly. The International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) has also deployed a field assessment and coordination team on Thursday and continues to carry out assessments in 10 districts of the country in collaboration with its national partner, BDRCS.

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