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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

SOUTHERN AFRICA SCALES UP DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AHEAD OF RAINY SEASON

Johannesburg, 18 December 2007: Faced with the worsening impact of floods and cyclones, disaster managers in eight Southern African and Indian Ocean countries have agreed to work more closely together to combat the devastating effects of these natural disasters.

In 2007, flood and wind damage caused by heavy rain and cyclones destroyed the livelihoods of more than one million people across the region.

Among other commitments, the emergency responders agreed in a draft *Declaration of Intent* to share information and capacities for emergency response, establish regional rapid response teams, and develop protocols that allow for the free circulation of emergency personnel and relief materials in the region. The group further agreed on the need for Southern African Development Community (SADC) leaders to demonstrate the political will and financial commitment necessary to ensure the full implementation of their recommendations, including the reactivation of the SADC Disaster Risk Management Team. In recognition of the high HIV prevalence levels throughout Southern Africa, the group also agreed that special attention will be paid to integrating HIV prevention and care into emergency preparedness and response.

Two countries, South Africa and Madagascar, wasted no time in cementing their commitment to regional cooperation. They signed an agreement to collaborate in the exchange of technical and human resources and equipment in response to floods and cyclones in 2008.

“This year, many governments in the region have taken steps in their own countries to be better prepared for current rainy and cyclone season, in particular undertaking contingency planning for disasters,” said Ms. Kelly David. “And now they are looking beyond that to how they can help each other and draw on international resources and technical expertise to better manage the impacts they all face from natural hazards.”

Ms. David is the head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Regional Office for Southern Africa, which hosted the *Emergency Preparedness and Response Workshop* at which the concerned governments and other stakeholders agreed to strengthen regional cooperation. The event took place from 5 to 7 December 2007 in Johannesburg. The workshop included international aid workers and officials from countries vulnerable to floods and cyclones, including the Comoros, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, as well as South Africa.

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