

UNITED NATIONS LAUNCHES APPEAL FOR AID TO SYRIA

(New York, 1 October 2008): The United Nations today launched an appeal for \$ 20,228,570 to work with governmental partners and non-governmental organisations to help up to one million drought-affected people in Syria for a period of six months.

Syria is currently experiencing a drought that is by far the worst over the past four decades. The Syrian Government has estimated that up to one million people--predominantly herders and subsistence farmers--are at risk of losing their livelihoods and of increased malnutrition. An assessment conducted by the UN country team in Syria confirmed that the situation is considerably worse than initially estimated.

As a result of poor and erratic rains in the 2007/2008 cropping season, the average yield of basic crops dropped significantly in both irrigated and rain-fed areas. Similarly, the drought has resulted in decreased vegetation in the natural ranges. Up to 59,000 small herders lost almost all their herds and 47,000 herders lost 50-60 percent of their livestock. The Government has distributed feed on loan to be repaid next season, and has also provided free veterinary medicines and vaccines for free. Most recently, the Government distributed emergency assistance to 29,000 families. However, the needed assistance is beyond the Government's capacity and resources.

In addition, food prices have risen at a rate that has outstripped household incomes and the purchasing power of the general population, especially in the drought-affected areas. The UN inter-agency mission found that many people are eating less, selling assets, or migrating. Anaemia, malnutrition and diarrhoea are on the rise, especially among children under the age of five, as well as among pregnant women. Availability of drinking water has also decreased in the rural areas of north-eastern Syria, particularly in those villages depending on protected wells as their only water source.

The situation is not expected to improve until the spring 2009, if the rains do not fail for a second year in a row.

In the appeal, the vast majority of funding is required for agriculture and livelihoods (\$14 million) and food (\$5 million). The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has already allocated \$1.97 million to three projects in the appeal.