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The Food Aid Organization of the United Nations

WFP News Release

22 October 2008

WFP DELIVERS NUTRITIONAL BOOST FOR SOMALI CHILDREN

NAIROBI – The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is to begin delivering emergency supplies of a highly nutritious, peanut-based food to Somalia in a bid to combat the growing threat of severe malnutrition amongst children in the war-ravaged nation.

“Children are the first to suffer when food is scarce and conditions harsh, which is why we are taking this step to protect them from the ravages of the very worst stages of malnutrition,” said WFP Somalia Country Director Peter Goossens. “This specialised product is expensive, but worth every penny for its ability to save lives, particularly given the depth of current crisis in Somalia.”

The shipment of food - known by its brand name, “Supplementary Plumpy” - arrived in Kenya over the weekend and will be moved by air and road to Somalia, where it will be targeted at 63,800 children over the next six months. This is the first time that WFP has used Supplementary Plumpy on a large scale and it will be delivered through WFP’s existing network of feeding centres run by international, national and local NGOs.

Supplementary Plumpy -- a ready-to-eat food that is delivered in sealed sachets -- has both curative and preventative properties. Trials have demonstrated that malnourished children who take a daily dose for two months, recover quickly, and are normally protected from malnourishment for a further four months.

Somalia is in the grip of a deepening humanitarian crisis, brought on by conflict, successive failed or poor harvests, and hyperinflation. Recent assessments indicate critical rates of malnutrition throughout South Central Somalia and among internally displaced populations in the North. The median rate of acute malnutrition in 20 surveys conducted this year has been found to be more than 18 per cent – which is well above the 15 percent emergency threshold.

WFP is currently expanding its operation to reach 2.4 million of the 3.25 million people expected to need food by the end of the year, a 77 percent increase since the start of the year.

This year, Somali waters have been plagued by piracy as never before, and naval escorts have become essential to guarantee the safe passage of ships carrying WFP food into the country. Ninety percent of WFP’s food for Somalia arrives by sea. The Canadian navy is just

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concluding its naval escorts and the Dutch navy is due to take over escort duties before the end of October. WFP has been further heartened by recent announcements from both NATO and the European Union that they will be joining the effort to safeguard food deliveries to Somalia.

“Since November we’ve shipped more than 137,000 tons of food into Somalia under escort – food that is saving lives. Without the support of France, Denmark, the Netherlands and Canada, the situation in Somalia would be even worse right now,” said Goossens.

Rampant insecurity inside Somalia remains a major obstacle to the delivery of humanitarian supplies. However, even though aid workers have been targeted in recent months, WFP continues to get food supplies through, reaching 1.6 million people in September.

Donors to WFP’s ongoing operation in Somalia include United States (US\$205 million), Multilateral funds (US\$57 million), United Kingdom (US\$24 million), Canada (US\$20 million), Netherlands (US\$10 million), Japan (US\$9 million), Italy (US\$5 million), Germany (US\$4.6 million), Saudi Arabia (US\$3.3 million), Norway (US\$3.2 million), Switzerland (US\$3 million), (US\$2.8 million), UN CERF (US\$2.5 million), Finland (US\$2 million), Belgium (US\$1.6 million), Denmark (US\$1 million) and several others.

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WFP is the world's largest humanitarian agency and the UN’s frontline agency for hunger solutions. This year, WFP plans to feed 90 million people in 80 countries.

WFP now provides RSS feeds to help journalists keep up with the latest press releases, videos and photos as they are published on WFP.org. For more details see: <http://www.wfp.org/english/?n=999>.

WFP now has a dedicated ISDN line in Italy for quality two-way interviews with WFP officials.

Video and photo images from Somalia are available. Please contact Marco Frattini at marco.frattini@wfp.org for video images and Rein Skullerud at rein.skullerud@wfp.org for photos.

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