

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMMES IN KYRGYZSTAN
ARE SEVERELY UNDER FUNDED DESPITE HARD TIMES**

(Bishkek/Dubai/New York/Geneva, 23 January 2009): Despite the best efforts of the government and a relatively mild winter, vulnerable individuals and critical social infrastructure in Kyrgyzstan remain under severe stress from continued power cuts during the cold season and a precarious food security environment. In December 2008, concerned over the results of a series of needs assessments and the deteriorating energy and economic environment in Kyrgyzstan, the United Nations and its partners issued a Humanitarian Flash Appeal for US\$21 million to fund a prioritized set of interventions to support critical facilities and to meet the basic humanitarian needs of the 800,000 most vulnerable people in the country for a six month period.

Unfortunately, only 11% of the request has been funded. This severely undermines the original plan to assist 580,000 severely food insecure people in their nutritional needs; 210,000 people - of whom 10,000 are children - in their basic shelter needs; and to provide backup power systems to 336 priority health care institutions to ensure continuation of life saving services.

Despite extraordinary measures taken by the government, the whole population of Kyrgyzstan has to live through the winter with severe energy rationing ranging between 6 and 14 hours per day. This has resulted in health and other critical social services frequently being interrupted in the season when the need is the greatest. Forecasts indicate that the average day/night temperature for all regions of Kyrgyzstan will be below 0°C in February. Along with rising seasonal morbidity and mortality, a number of new alarming trends have been on the rise. For example, the monoxide poisoning rate has more than doubled in the capital Bishkek as people deprived of electrical power supply are using alternative fuels often unsafe or unfit for their dwellings. Approximately 200,000 children have now been forced to delay their educational programmes by almost two months as their schools lack adequate heat and electrical supply.

Already high inflation rates were further compounded by an 80% increase in gas and electricity prices for the population. This has resulted in a precarious decline in purchasing power of the most vulnerable and has contributed to a precarious food security situation for some households. Many farmers have been forced to slaughter their livestock as they become unable to afford fodder and veterinary supplies. One in five households in Kyrgyzstan, or 1 million people, is food insecure and at high nutritional and health risk.

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With extremely limited funds the United Nations and its partners have begun a food distribution programme and are providing assistance to a number of social institutions and vulnerable individuals. WFP is initiating distribution of food to 40,000 households in the poorest districts of the country. This is only 35% of the total target as identified in the Flash Appeal. FAO will provide 7,500 vulnerable households with forage seeds, fodder and veterinary medicine, or only 30% of the total target beneficiaries. UNICEF will support six shelters with total of 420 street children and two institutions for 365 severely disabled children. This amounts to 35% of the children to be supported in two UNICEF Flash Appeal projects. In addition, UNHCR will provide emergency food aid for all 1000 refugee and asylum seeking families registered in the country. However, the vast majority of needs outlined in the Appeal remain unmet.

While the focus should remain on most critical needs of vulnerable groups and institutions, the United Nations and its partners are working with local and international partners to ensure that all urgent humanitarian interventions, early recovery and medium term development programmes are synchronized to augment Kyrgyzstan's resilience to future shocks. Regrettably, with almost 90% of the appeal's budget unfunded this strategy is under serious threat, at the risk of continued suffering of the vulnerable and avoidable loss of human and economic capital.

"We are moving quickly to implement the projects of the Flash Appeal with the resources we have mobilized either internally from the UN system or from contributions of external donors. We are committed to mobilize the funds still needed, as we strongly believe that unless we address these humanitarian needs in a timely manner, we risk further deterioration of the situation into next year. The areas of concern include chronic food insecurity, population health, and depletion of productive assets. Integrated in the Appeal is transition towards the medium term needs to maximize the ability of the most vulnerable groups in the country to initiate their comeback. I would like to thank those donors that have already contributed and encourage a number of others that are in the process of reviewing their input to make a rapid decision in order to ensure our timely response," says Neal Walker, UN Resident Coordinator in Kyrgyzstan.

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