

United Nations Nations Unies

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

CHOLERA CASES IN ZIMBABWE SURPASS 60,000, UN HUMANITARIAN FUND GIVES \$7 MILLION TO COMBAT THE DISEASE

(New York, 30 January 2009): The number of cholera cases in Zimbabwe has surpassed the World Health Organization's (WHO) worst-case scenario figure of 60,000, an indication that the epidemic is still far from under control despite concerted efforts by local health authorities, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations. The disease has claimed the lives of 3,095 people as of 28 January.

In an effort to bolster the fight against the spread of the disease, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, John Holmes, has allocated some \$7.8 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to help the Zimbabwean authorities and United Nations agencies to implement a number of urgently-needed life-saving programmes.

"In addition to the CERF, we need donors to step up more on an urgent basis to help the growing number of people in need in Zimbabwe," said Mr. Holmes "This CERF allocation will enable agencies to buy some of the most essential drugs and materials required, but it is far from enough," he warned. UN agencies and their humanitarian partners have requested a total of \$567 million to support those in need in Zimbabwe in 2009. Only 12 percent of the appeal is funded so far.

Efforts to respond to the epidemic, which has spread to all 10 of Zimbabwe's provinces, have been undermined by the lack of safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation, the declining health care infrastructure, lack of resources, and high attrition of health personnel due to low salaries.

The World Health Organisation (WHO), in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare and the World Food Programme (WFP), will use some \$2 million of the CERF allocation to deploy 12 more staff to each of Zimbabwe's provinces, and to bolster disease monitoring, including repairing and installing better communications equipment. WFP will use some \$400,000 to provide logistical support for the anti-cholera effort.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) will purchase essential medicines and water and sanitation supplies worth \$2 million. An innovative part of the UNICEF's anti-cholera activities is a \$3 million project to create an incentive package for health workers to return to their posts.

Concern is mounting that, with more rainfall forecast in the coming weeks, floods could complicate efforts to control the disease because more water sources could be contaminated.

The cholera epidemic is ravaging the country at a time of wider humanitarian crisis. Zimbabwe has entered its peak hunger period (January to March) with almost seven million people, more than half the country's population, relying on food aid. Record hyperinflation and a collapsing banking system pose major challenges to the country.

CERF was established in 2006 to help agencies respond rapidly to new or deteriorating humanitarian situations. Since its establishment, more than 100 Member States and private sector donors have contributed 1.5 billion dollars to CERF, which is administered by OCHA.

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