

## MEDIA RELEASE

**Hostilities against Aid Work in Jowhar Put Lives of Somali Children and Women at Risk**

NAIROBI, 17 June 2009: UNICEF is gravely disturbed by the new wave of aggression and hostilities against humanitarian aid work in Somalia which is putting lives of Somali children and women at great risk and further compounding their extreme and already protracted suffering by hampering their access to crucial life-saving services, stated Hannan Sulieman, Acting UNICEF Representative to Somalia.

The take-over of UNICEF's compound by militiamen following the fall of Jowhar town in Central Somalia under the control of Al Shabaab members on 17 May and the subsequent looting and destruction of life-saving humanitarian supplies and equipments have enormously affected UNICEF's ability to deliver services to the most vulnerable children and women. To this date, the UNICEF compound remains occupied by militiamen and inaccessible to UNICEF staff.

"While local authorities and UNICEF maintain cooperative relationships in many areas of Somalia, we are witnessing and experiencing an unprecedented level of aggression against humanitarian work in Jowhar, a situation that should cause a great deal of concern not only to the aid community but primarily to Somali communities," said Sulieman. "Perpetrators of these unacceptable and irresponsible actions must understand that their actions have serious consequences on their own children and women, their own communities and people".

This severe constraint on UNICEF's work comes at a critical time when Somali people are most in need of humanitarian assistance. Since the beginning of last month, 122,000 people have been displaced by the fierce fighting in Mogadishu, the largest caseload of new displacement in just over one month. Displaced people are lacking even the most basic services including shelter, food, water and protection. Their dire situation is further exacerbated by the lack of humanitarian agencies' presence. While UNICEF continues to work in Somalia, its presence in Central South regions has been jeopardized by the ongoing occupation of its premises by militias, and the disruption of its supply chain through Jowhar.

"Our aid delivery network consists of over 100 non-governmental and community-based organizations which we built and cultivated over the years to provide emergency health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education and protection services," said Sulieman. "However, this network is at risk of collapsing due to our inability to provide timely assistance to our partners, mainly Somali, to assist children and women through critical programmes."

With the cold-chain (vaccine storage) equipment in Jowhar- the biggest in Central South Zone- currently non-functioning, thousand of doses of life-saving vaccines for both children and women have been destroyed. Highly valuable nutritional supplies meant to be distributed to 40,000 of the most vulnerable children under three years old to prevent malnutrition were looted by militiamen. Jowhar is the biggest operational hub for UNICEF's support to about 200 feeding centres for the treatment of severely malnourished children- a life threatening condition- and 80 supplementary feeding programmes for the treatment of moderately malnourished children. Delays in the delivery of nutritional and medical supplies and undermining of quality of services put lives and well-being of vulnerable children at risk.

"We strongly urge that humanitarian work not be impeded in anyway and demand the immediate return of our facilities in Jowhar town as well as the release of looted equipments and supplies." added Sulieman.

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