

**DEVASTATED BY DROUGHT, VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES
IN AFRICA'S HORN NOW BRACE FOR EL NIÑO FLOODS**

(Nairobi/New York 16 October 2009) – Vulnerable communities in the Horn of Africa, in the midst of one of the worst droughts in a decade, are bracing for yet another potential huge challenge in coming months: floods triggered by the climatic phenomenon *El Niño* and associated mudslides, crop destruction, water-borne diseases and disrupted road networks. Countries most at risk of flash floods are Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda, but Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia could also be affected.

“More than 23 million people in pastoral, agricultural and sub-urban communities--as well internally displaced people and refugees in the region--are reeling from the impact of water and food shortages, pasture scarcity, conflict and insecurity. We continue to need massive help to deal with this. An additional shock in this intersection of human vulnerabilities would be devastating,” said United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes. UNICEF estimates that in 2009, 500,000 children under five years of age will suffer life-threatening severe acute malnutrition in Africa’s Horn.

United Nations and non-governmental humanitarian organizations are working in support of governments across the region on an urgent footing to develop or fine tune contingency plans in anticipation of the impact of *El Niño* on vulnerable communities already stretched to the breaking point.

“I am encouraged by the sense of urgency shown by humanitarian organizations, governments and communities in their efforts to prepare. While we cannot prevent these climatic shocks, we certainly can mitigate their disastrous effects through forward planning and the right funding from the donor community,” said John Holmes.

In Kenya, some 750,000 persons could be affected by floods and mudslides. Of these, 150,000 are refugees who could be forced to relocate to higher ground. In Somalia, some 450,000 persons in the Juba and Shabelle river basins could be affected. Uganda has elaborated flood contingency and evacuation plans, and UNICEF is preparing to give immediate support to 25,000 persons. In Tanzania, an estimated 50,000 persons could be directly affected if flood patterns mirror those of 2006-2007. Potentially flood affected people in Djibouti might be exposed to new water-borne diseases or experience a deterioration of the ongoing cholera outbreak. Although the humanitarian community is undertaking flood contingency planning, funding and humanitarian access remain the most significant constraints.

The big problem of the Horn for now remains the drought. In some drought-affected areas, enhanced *El Niño* rains will be welcomed as pasture will regenerate and water reserves will be replenished. However, even with this help, it is not expected that the widespread food insecurity in the region will show signs of improving until the harvesting season in early 2010.

The report *Horn of Africa Alert – October 2009* is available online: <http://ochaonline.un.org/rocea>

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