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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) – SOMALIA
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Main Developments

Relative calm reigned in Mogadishu for five days following meetings late last week between Hawiye elders and Ethiopian troops which resulted in a truce. The truce came as the worst week of violence since ICU forces were ousted from the capital culminated in the shooting down of a AU-contracted cargo plane during take-off from Mogadishu on 23 March; all 11 Belarusian crew members aboard were killed. However, on 29 March, the truce was broken, reportedly when Ethiopian troops began an offensive to crush suspected anti-government forces. Major clashes – involving tanks, heavy artillery and Ethiopian air strikes – erupted in the south of the city. Heavy fighting continued today and an Ethiopian helicopter was shot down. At least 30 people are believed dead in the violence of the last two days and dozens more wounded. According to hospital officials in Mogadishu, most casualties are civilians caught in the crossfire between Ethiopian tanks and insurgents firing rocket-propelled grenades. UNHCR has stated that some of the dead are IDPs whose settlements were hit by rounds of mortar.

UNHCR has reported that on 22 March, at least 29 people died and 71 others went missing after smugglers forced some 450 Somalis and Ethiopians into the sea during the journey from the northern Somali coast to Yemen. This incident follows another tragic episode in February when at least 107 bodies were found along a stretch of Yemen's coastline after the smugglers' boat capsized. Since January 2006, an estimated 30,000 Somalis and Ethiopians have been smuggled to Yemen. Over 500 people died during that period and at least 300 remain missing.

The most recent FEWS NET/Somalia Food Security Alert Update has highlighted an increased likelihood of near normal rainfall over much of Somalia during the coming *Gu* season (April-June). Given that most of Somalia received above normal *Deyr* rains (October-December 2006), near normal *Gu* rains should further improve crop production and rangeland conditions and enhance post-drought recovery. However, there is a high probability that some of the upper catchments of the Juba and Shabelle River valleys in the Ethiopian highlands will receive above normal *Gu* rains, meaning that another season of flooding downstream in riverine areas of southern Somalia may be imminent. While it is too early to determine the potential magnitude of *Gu* floods, renewed flooding will definitely exacerbate the current humanitarian emergency, especially in the Shabelle and Juba valley riverine areas, which are still recovering from *Deyr* floods of late 2006.

Displacement

UNHCR is estimating that displacement from Mogadishu during February and March due to insecurity and fighting has now reached 58,000. During March, an estimated 18,000 people fled the fighting; of these, over 12,000 have moved since 21 March, when violence in the capital intensified. The vast majority of March movements (12,000) have been to Lower Shabelle, mostly Merka and Qoryooley. Nearly 1,000 have gone to Baidoa, and hundreds more are dispersed between Kismayo, Hargeisa, Beletweyne and Balad. Meanwhile, an estimated 2,500 people arrived in Galkayo (north and south) during the month of March. Most of the displaced coming from Mogadishu are women and children with relatives or clan links in the town. The influx is stretching already scarce resources. New arrivals are reporting that it is difficult for men to make the journey as it requires crossing clan lines, which would put them at risk of revenge killings. The new IDPs are also reporting that they are suffering harassment at checkpoints along the way, where their household goods are often looted. There have also been reports of rapes during the journey.

Access and Response

Between 1 January 2007 to 17 March, a total of 7976 cases of Acute Watery Diarrhea (AWD) have been confirmed, with 341 deaths in eight regions of South/Central Somalia: Hiran, Middle and Lower Shabelle, Banadir, Gedo, Bay, Galgudud and Lower Juba. Monitoring and response by health partners has continued in the affected regions. According to ICRC, the Somali Red Crescent Society – with ICRC support – opened five Oral Rehydration Treatment Centres in Mogadishu on 29 March. There are already four Cholera Treatment Centres (CTCs) operated by other health partners in Mogadishu hospitals and treating more severe cases of AWD. However, restricted movement within Mogadishu and lack of access to the city from outside is hindering response in and around the city.

On 28 March, a multi-agency fact-finding mission (involving UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, WHO, OCHA and UNFPA, as well as four TFG representatives) travelled to five IDP settlements between Mogadishu and Afgoye where new IDPs from Mogadishu have settled. The mission estimated that there were 8,000-9,000 families in the five settlements (though this number may have risen since due to fresh movement following the fighting of the last two days). Their immediate needs are water, shelter and health care. Numerous cases of diarrhea were reported, as well as some measles cases. The price of water in the sites is said to have risen seven-fold, and nearly all the functioning wells have reportedly developed technical problems, suggesting that major water and sanitation problems could be imminent. So far, response to new IDPs in this area has been impossible due to lack of access – both because of prevailing insecurity and the fact that airports which would allow access to IDP populations remain off-limits.

In anticipation of the upcoming *Gu* rains and potential flooding, the Flood Working Group has been reactivated in Nairobi. Roles and responsibilities have been defined for agencies that will take the lead on flood response in the various areas of South/Central. UN agencies and local and international NGOs have mapped river embankment breakages as an early warning tool. HRF funds have been made available for river embankment repair projects and community-based early warning mechanisms.

Reports detailing response activities by cluster (Who does What Where) are available on the OCHA website at <http://ochaonline2.un.org/Default.aspx?tabid=5066>

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