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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

RECURRENT DISASTERS BUFFET SOUTHERN AFRICA

(Johannesburg, 4 April 2007): Cyclones and flooding continue to batter numerous countries in southern Africa, threatening the lives of over a million vulnerable people. Although regional capacity for disaster and emergency preparedness and response has increased in recent years, the early arrival of the rainy season with unusually heavy rains and an unprecedented series of cyclones and tropical storms have stretched local authorities and humanitarian partners to the limit. Communities in Angola, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia and Zambia are struggling to recover from several months of relentless rainfall as they rebuild their homes and livelihoods.

Madagascar has been pummeled by six cyclones and tropical storms since last December and close to 450,000 people have been affected. By early March, Cyclones Bondo, Clovis, Gamede and Favio had already brought widespread flooding, displacement, and crop damage. These problems were multiplied in many areas when Cyclone Indlala cut a path of devastation across the northeastern part of the country in mid-March. Cyclone Jaya again threatened the northeastern part of the country in early April with high winds, heavy rains and flooding. In the country's arid southern region, the 2006-2007 rainy season compounded problems caused by drought and persistent food insecurity and malnutrition. Humanitarian partners and local authorities quickly mobilised to jointly assess needs and deliver urgent assistance to the most affected populations. However, cumulatively these natural disasters have exhausted in-country resources. In mid-March, a Flash Appeal for US\$ 9.6 million was launched to request international assistance. Although the international community has responded generously, 55 percent of the Appeal remains unfunded. The consequences of Cyclone Jaya are currently being assessed and partners anticipate that the further recent destruction will increase humanitarian needs. Without additional assistance to save lives and bolster early recovery efforts, the Malagasy people will continue to struggle to obtain shelter, food, potable water, and health care.

Mozambique has also suffered from floods and cyclones this year. In February, floods in the Zambezi River Basin and the impact of Cyclone Favio in Inhambane and Sofala Provinces brought about widespread displacement and destruction. Heavy rains in early February in Mozambique, as well as in the neighbouring countries of Zambia and Malawi, which also feed the Zambezi River and its tributaries, caused flooding which affected an estimated 285,000 people. Several weeks later, Cyclone Favio affected an estimated 150,000 people. Essential infrastructures, including health centres and educational facilities, were severely damaged and thousands of hectares of crops were destroyed. While the Government of Mozambique prioritised the allocation of funds for disaster response to the floods and cyclone

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emergencies, national resources were not sufficient to meet the humanitarian needs of the affected populations and a Flash Appeal for US\$37.6 million was launched. Recent reports indicate that 140,000 displaced persons are still in accommodation centres and an additional 55,500 are moving to resettlement sites. More than 163,000 people will require food assistance until the end of April, and an additional 263,000 targeted beneficiaries will require limited assistance until the second season harvest in May-July. Although partners continue working with local authorities to provide food, shelter, agricultural inputs, basic healthcare, and other necessities, sustained support is necessary to ensure that affected Mozambicans are able to recover from the disastrous February cyclones and flooding.

In Zambia, excessive rainfall since December caused widespread flooding, displacing people and destroying crops, houses and public infrastructure. The situation became critical in mid-February, when the Zambezi, Kafue and Luangwa Rivers started bursting their banks. Although water levels in many areas are receding, the floods were more widespread than usual and affected people that do not have traditional coping mechanisms, especially in North-Western Province. Some areas in the Zambezi District and elsewhere remained inaccessible for long periods, making it difficult to effectively coordinate response efforts and provide assistance. An estimated 295,000 people were directly affected by the floods and will require assistance in the rehabilitation of their houses, latrines, water wells, schools, clinics, roads and other infrastructure over the next year. Partners issued a Flash Appeal in March for US\$ 8.8 million for immediate priority interventions. As of early April, less than five percent of requirements had been funded. While the Flash Appeal addressed immediate emergency needs, there is a need to bridge the immediate emergency relief response identified in this document with recovery, reconstruction and longer-term reduction of risks and vulnerability.

Angola and Namibia have also experienced unexpected heavy rainfall this season. In the Caprivi Strip rains and flooding led to displacement, evacuation and urgent needs among the affected population. Although the Zambezi River levels have fallen, large areas of land remain flooded. Approximately 15,000 persons in Namibia are still displaced, while floods in Angola have displaced some 30,000 people according to official figures. The contamination of water sources, increases in water-borne diseases and malaria pose additional threats to vulnerable populations. The cholera outbreak in Angola that began in January last year and has flared up again during the rainy season this year, and is again affecting thousands of people each month. With the risk of further heavy rains and flooding in Namibia and Zambia during April, partners are concerned about ongoing capacity to respond.

This turbulent rainy season in southern Africa has once again highlighted the region's vulnerability to natural disasters and food insecurity. According to the Head of OCHA's Regional Office for Southern Africa, Kelly David, "it seems we either have too much or too little rain. The humanitarian implications of this situation are alarming. The recent disasters have dealt a heavy blow to our region, particularly to two of the poorest countries in the world—Mozambique and Madagascar. Building the capacity to respond quickly to rapid onset emergencies goes hand in hand with other sustained efforts by national governments and humanitarian partners to improve the lives of millions."

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