

**Office of the Deputy Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Southern Sudan****FOOD AID REQUIREMENTS IN WAR-TORN SOUTHERN SUDAN DROP BY 19% IN 2007**

(Juba: 12 April 2007): While meningitis and acute watery diarrhoea (AWD) have killed over 700 people in Southern Sudan since the beginning of the year, the food security situation is slowly improving. In 2007, food aid requirements will be 19% lower than in 2006, according to an annual assessment completed this year by United Nations agencies and their partners.

“The global picture shows an increase in Southern Sudan’s food production, from 805,000 metric tonnes in 2005 to 838,000 metric tonnes in 2006, marking a 4% improvement. For a territory that just came out of two decades of war, this is not bad”, said World Food Programme (WFP) Coordinator Justin Bagirishya, in the Southern Sudanese capital Juba.

The improvement, said the official, is in good part due to the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Returnees engage in farming in their areas of origin, thanks to seeds and agricultural tools provided by humanitarian organizations. This supports not only their well-being, but also the local livelihoods, thereby promoting early recovery. “In addition, the improvement in the road network allows for much better transport and trade, which has led to the opening of new markets”, said Eliane Duthoit, Head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Juba.

With more people resettling and engaging into production, more and more communities are becoming self-sufficient, and food distribution has to be reduced. “Food aid planned for 2007 will be 108,000 metric tonnes, down by 19% compared to 133,000 metric tonnes in 2006”, said Mr. Bagirishya. “But the real change is not so much about tonnage, but rather about how food is used”, he added. In 2007, for the first time since the end of the war, WFP will cease air drops, whereby food aid was dropped by air to highly vulnerable communities that were hard to reach. During the war, air drops accounted for 80% of food aid.

No food will be provided for free in 2007, except to children under five, the elderly, those affected by HIV/AIDS, and other chronically food insecure groups who are unable to work, as well as returnees during the first three months after their arrival.

One of WFP’s main programmes in 2007 will be ‘food for education’. Food is provided to schoolchildren in school canteens, with the double aim of supporting their nutrition, and encouraging school attendance. “We reached 130,000 children last year. This year we are planning to reach at least 450,000”, said Mr. Bagirishya. In addition, through programmes named ‘food for work’ and ‘food for recovery’, WFP will provide food to over 720,000 people in Southern Sudan in exchange for community-based work, such as building schools and roads, and constructing latrines. This has so far seen 1,800 kms of roads completed in Southern Sudan, over a target of 3,000 kms to be achieved by the end of 2007, which will connect Southern Sudan to the north, as well as to Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda.

“These developments show that we are slowly but gradually moving from humanitarian action to recovery, and to development”, said Ms. Duthoit.

“In our planning however, there is always a contingency stock. If peace and stability were to be disrupted, obviously our needs would be much higher than planned”, Mr. Bagirishya added. Following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005, the people of Southern Sudan are experiencing peace for the first time in over two decades. Although stability remains precarious in some areas, the Government with the support of the international community has made significant steps to alleviate human suffering, while proceeding towards development.

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