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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UNITED NATIONS AIDS MALDIVES AFTER FLOODING

(New York, 22 May 2007): The Government of the Maldives has appealed for international aid following a series of wave swells that affected at least 35 islands in 13 atolls in the country. It also made a formal appeal to the United Nations Secretary-General help in the immediate relief and early recovery efforts. The waves started around noon of 15 May 2007 and intermittently re-occurred for two days.

“Except for the tsunami in 2004, the Maldives has never before faced such widespread and simultaneous flooding of so many islands,” said John Holmes, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. “If required, the United Nations stands ready to help the country respond to this environmental emergency,” he added.

A rapid assessment team comprised of personnel from the government, the International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (IFRC), and the United Nations was deployed on 19 May 2007 to five islands of Gh. Dhaalu Atoll--including Fares-Maathoda, Fiyoare, Rathafandhoo, Nadella, and Madaveli.

While there have been no deaths, some 1,650 people were evacuated and 217 housing units damaged; a number of harbours and jetties were also damaged. Families lost household items due to the flooding, forcing them to relocate to other families within the island. Some home gardens were extensively damaged, and some roads were covered with garbage, with debris widespread. Waste dumping areas were flooded, while septic tanks have been damaged. The water table has been contaminated by salt water, and there is also a shortage of clean drinking water in some islands. However, health and educational facilities are functioning.

Although full results of the assessment are still awaited, the government has already provided emergency relief assistance, including food, water, and mattresses. A mobile water desalination plant has also been dispatched. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is providing 10 water tanks and 5 rain-water harvesting kits to Gaafu dhaalu Atoll, the most affected atoll. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has been coordinating with the Ministry of Health on possible assistance that may be required. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is liaising with national authorities in order to provide support in the areas of livelihoods recovery and coordination. IFRC is making provision for drinking water in Gaafu dhaalu atoll, including possible support for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

For further information, please call: Stephanie Bunker, OCHA-New York, +1 917 367 5126, mobile +1 917 892 1679; Kristen Knutson, OCHA-New York, +1 917 367 9262; Elisabeth Byrs, OCHA-Geneva, +41 22 917 2653, mobile, +41 79 473 4570. OCHA press releases are available at <http://ochaonline.un.org> or www.reliefweb.int.