

## UN appeals for US\$ 530 million for Southern Africa

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Geneva/Johannesburg: July 29, 2003: The United Nations today launched a *2003/04 Regional Consolidated Appeal (CAP) for southern Africa* to provide life-saving assistance for 6.5 million people severely weakened by consecutive failed harvests, extreme poverty and HIV/AIDS.

"Because of the quick response from the international community, the UN and its NGO partners saved millions of lives threatened by starvation in southern Africa over the past year. But the crisis is not over and I urge donors to remember hundreds of thousands of families - many of them in Zimbabwe - who are still in grave danger," said James Morris, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa.

The United Nations system, including FAO, OCHA, UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP, WFP and WHO, in collaboration with NGOs and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), are appealing for US\$530 million - US\$320 million for food and US\$210 million for other aid- to address the humanitarian needs of 6.5 million vulnerable people in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In addition to food aid, the 12-month appeal also seeks to fund water and sanitation, agriculture, education and health projects.

The 2002/03 CAP for southern Africa received 73 percent of the US\$656 million requested by the United Nations agencies and NGOs for their operations assisting millions of crisis-stricken people in the region. The majority of the donations made were for food aid, while non-food aid remained seriously under-funded.

Although humanitarian response and an improved harvest this year have brought some respite for much of the region, many parts of the six countries covered by the appeal remain extremely fragile. Acute needs, particularly in *Zimbabwe* and Mozambique, will be a primary focus of United Nations agencies.

Agencies will also assist those families which have not been able to recover from last year's emergency, despite improved rains, in countries such as Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland and Zambia.

Hundreds of thousands of people were forced to sell household items and livestock to survive last year's crisis and cannot afford to buy the food which is now available in markets. Seeds and fertilizer are still urgently needed to produce future harvests, as are medicines to fight life-threatening diseases.

In addition, the CAP will focus on the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. With the highest levels of HIV/AIDS prevalence in the world, southern Africa has been hit with a destructive force that is devastating people's lives and potentially fueling widespread social and economic breakdown.

Not only is HIV/AIDS killing millions of people prematurely, it is also wiping out the most productive members of society- farmers, teachers, health workers - leaving millions of orphans, widows, widowers and elderly. As a result, decades of development gains have been lost and efforts to reduce poverty and improve living standards have been severely undermined.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on children is especially damaging. The total number of AIDS orphans in the six countries is estimated to be over 2.3 million - and that number is rising fast. In the absence of care-taking adults, children are forced to fend for themselves and many drop out of school in order to care for younger siblings.

"Even if rains begin to improve, as they did in parts of the region during the last season, how will fields be planted if there are no farmers to till the soil?" said Morris. "The world cannot afford to avert

its gaze from southern Africa right now. If it does, we will see an accelerated and irreversible unraveling of societies across the region."

In addition to food aid, projects have been designed to strengthen longer-term development at the household level, as well as to strengthen vital social services. Addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic, particularly with women, in the prevention, care and treatment of disease, is central to these activities.

"As long as HIV/AIDS continues to be the single biggest destroyer of lives and livelihoods in this region, southern Africa will remain on the precipice of an unparalleled humanitarian tragedy," said Morris. "We absolutely cannot return to a 'business as usual' approach in southern Africa. It is simply not an option."

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