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**MISSION TO LONDON, MALAWI AND MADAGASCAR
REMARKS TO THE PRESS, NEW YORK**

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As delivered

Thank you for joining me today.

I have just returned from visiting Madagascar and Malawi, where I saw first-hand the impact of the devastating and widespread drought on Southern Africa.

Before that, I took part in a key donor meeting on 14 July in London, on the effects of El Niño in Southern Africa. The impact of the current El Niño is felt globally, affecting over 60 million people. Southern Africa is of particular concern as the region is facing its worst drought in 35 years, with an estimated 40 million people facing food insecurity, including some 23 million in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. The high probability of La Niña phenomenon toward the end of this year is likely to exacerbate the humanitarian situation, as coping capacity in most of these countries have been eroded.

During the donor meeting, I urged international donors and other development partners to join us in raising the profile of the El Niño crisis facing the region, and the urgency of the response needed. This must include more investment in development and more joint humanitarian-development programming.

I was very encouraged by the commitment of donors at the London conference to assisting the people worst affected by this humanitarian crisis. Yesterday, the Southern African Development Community launched a regional appeal, covering 13 countries and seeking funding for 10 Member States that have asked for international support. To complement this appeal, the Regional Inter-Agency Standing Committee - UN and NGO partners - has prepared a regional plan of action, seeking \$1.2 billion to support 12.3 million people across 7 countries.

During my mission to Malawi and Madagascar, it was clear that El Niño-related conditions have compounded existing vulnerabilities, resulting in severe food shortages.

In Malawi, nearly 40 per cent of the population – about 6.5 million people – are projected to face a lack of food and inadequate cash to meet basic survival needs at the peak of the lean season in January. That means they will not be able to meet their annual food requirements.

I spoke to mothers and children affected by malnutrition about the support that they are receiving. I also met with communities receiving help to improve their agricultural production. Despite the challenges, I was glad to see that communities are participating in projects that will help them take their livelihoods into their own hands and build resilience to better mitigate the impact of any future crisis.

But this crisis is not only about food insecurity: humanitarian response also needs to also focus on health, water and sanitation, protection, education and other kinds of support.

In Madagascar, in the Grand Sud region at the southern tip of the island country, which is the size of France and the Benelux countries added together, the scale of the drought has devastated the coping capacities of communities barely surviving on subsistence farming. Hard-won development gains and even minimum coping mechanisms hang in the balance. Chronic poverty resulting from decades of marginalization and lack of development investments has meant that humanitarian assistance has had to fill the gap.

Water, which is hard to generate and harvest at the best of times in this arid region, is now critically short due to the drought. For example, driving to a project site along bumpy dirt roads, our convoy had to stop and wait for a farmer carting water home from a small muddy puddle in the middle of the road. The same puddle was also used by cattle and other livestock. Then we had to drive through the puddle to get to our project site. The farmer and his family then used the water for drinking without any further treatment. That was one of most jarring experiences.

A WFP school feeding programme that we visited with the Prime Minister is currently unable to reach half of the 300,000 children due to funding shortages.

At a primary health centre, we saw groups of young mothers whose severely acutely malnourished young children needed therapeutic feeding. They seemed totally lifeless and listless, and no amount of gentle talk could get them to engage or give a smile. The one doctor at the centre takes care of thousands of people around the area – this reveals the extreme shortage of trained workers in the health sector.

However, I was also able to see some positive outcomes from the efforts of UN agencies and our partners. For example, WHO is piloting a health surveillance application, using CERF funding as part of its support to the health centre. To encourage people to stop the custom of open defecation, UNICEF is helping communities to design and build community led total sanitation toilets, which use local materials and training. About 65,000 of these have so far been built in the region. Since September last year, CERF funds have helped to save lives, contributing nearly \$16 million to both Malawi and Madagascar.

I met with the political leadership in both countries and discussed ways of strengthening the response to the drought and the need to build the resilience of affected communities to mitigate the recurrent impact on lives and livelihoods.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts so far of the Governments of Malawi and Madagascar. With the increasing probability of La Niña occurring towards the end of the year we will need to work even harder in the months before the event to help mitigate its impact.

We rely on the generosity of donors and other partners to support the Governments and demonstrate their continued commitment to saving lives as well as restoring the livelihoods of those affected.

Thank you.