

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien**

Opening remarks at high-level event on the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia

Addis Ababa, 29 January 2017

As delivered

It is an honour to be here and I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the Government of Ethiopia for hosting us today and for the strong impact of the remarks from both Deputy Prime Minister Mekonnen and United Nations Secretary-General Guterres.

Let me first acknowledge the Ethiopian Government and humanitarian partners' remarkable response to the El Niño drought over the past year. On recently reviewing lessons from the drought response, the humanitarian community concluded that the Government and partners unequivocally helped save countless people's lives and averted a major humanitarian catastrophe in Ethiopia, all while also supporting one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Last year's humanitarian appeal for Ethiopia was one of the best-funded globally. And including the Government of Ethiopia's own very significant contributions to the response, the appeal was nearly 90 per cent funded.

We should recognize the critical role of the Ethiopia Humanitarian Fund in that response, by channeling US\$74 million to life-saving and resilience projects last year, most of the money going to NGOs; and also to the Central Emergency Response Fund which made Ethiopia the highest recipient of its El Niño allocations, while also boosting support to refugees from South Sudan living in Ethiopia.

We all know that it takes years to recover assets following a devastating drought and that is why it is all the more demoralizing to see that a new drought has now hit Ethiopia. This drought is wreaking havoc on people's lives, this time in the lowland areas in the south and east of Ethiopia, as well as affecting millions of people in parts of Somalia and Kenya.

As we speak, 5.6 million Ethiopians face hunger unless they access food assistance, 300,000 children are at risk of malnutrition and over 9 million people cannot access safe drinking water, while 2.4 million farmers and herders cannot sustainably practice their livelihoods.

I spent all day yesterday in the Warder zone, hundreds of miles east from Addis, in Ethiopia's Somali Region, where I saw the immense impact this new drought is having on people's lives, livestock and livelihoods. I also witnessed the hard work of the Ethiopian Government and its UN and NGO partners to ensure that water-trucking, animal health and emergency nutrition support are provided to all those in need.

Near Warder's Dollo Zone in the Somali Region, I saw children who were perilously close to slipping into the red danger zone of severe acute malnutrition. I spoke with internally displaced people in Garlogubey, the largest IDP site in the area, and heard Saho's story – a mother of seven children, with her two youngest, a boy, Ibrahim (4) and a girl, Ikram (2), both at the mobile clinic to be assessed on why he'd lost appetite yet was emaciated. The most striking thing yesterday was of course first the sheer massing of people around water points and food distribution centres, mainly women and their children, but also the number of animals dead across the parched sandy ground, where dry bareleaved trees and other poisonous bushes grow. There was a crucial interdependence of people and stock; cows, sheep, camels, goats, where hardly a cow or a sheep is left to see, even the camels are looking thin.

The Government and humanitarian partners are addressing this drought with focus and determination, but given its devastating and rapidly escalating scale, we need to urgently ramp up our response to reduce suffering and protect Ethiopia's hard-won development gains.

We need to act now before it is too late. This is why I am calling on international partners to join the Ethiopian Government in funding the 2017 Humanitarian Requirements Document which seeks US\$948 million to assist 5.6 million people whose lives, livelihoods and well-being depend on our support. On behalf of the Secretary-General, I am urgently examining a CERF allocation to get relief moving and spur others to step up and join our collective efforts.

We have no time to lose. Livestock are already dying; pastoralists and farmers are already fleeing their homes in search of water and pasture; children – more often girls – are dropping out of school to support with household survival; and hunger and malnutrition levels will rise soon to even worse levels if assistance does not arrive on time, particularly among women who are more likely to suffer from health problems and malnutrition during droughts.

The bulk of this humanitarian support will flow through the Government's health infrastructure and food security systems, set up to protect people's lives and livelihoods in the face of shock. Reinforcing these national systems has been key to helping Ethiopia achieve the 2015 Millennium Development Goals and will continue to be central as Ethiopia pursues the 2030 Agenda.

The approach that partners and the Government in Ethiopia are taking strongly aligns with the goals of the Agenda for Humanity that emerged from last year's World Humanitarian Summit, which Ethiopia actively participated in. At the Summit leaders committed to build the resilience of the world's most vulnerable people by reinforcing national systems and by embracing a new way of working. Through this new way of working, humanitarian and development partners commit to work hand in hand towards collective outcomes to reduce need, recognizing that only by working together will we live up to our promise to leave no one behind.

These are just some of the many bold commitments made by the Government of Ethiopia to deliver on the Agenda for Humanity. Others include improving the use of social protection schemes, including its Productive Safety Net Programme; reinforcing its peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts; and continuing to protect displaced communities by ratifying the African

Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons, as well as continuing to implement its obligations under the 1951 and 1969 Refugee Conventions. We welcome these commitments and encourage you to report on their progress on the Platform for Action, Commitments and Transformation.

We have to act now, and this is our chance. Thank you.
