

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing on “Horn of Africa: The Continuing Food,
Refugee, and Humanitarian Crisis”.

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Written Text of Briefing by Allan Jury, Director US Relations, World Food Program

Members of Congress, distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman, thank you for the opportunity to brief this commission today on the United Nations perspective on the humanitarian situation in the Horn of Africa. This situation is one of the most serious humanitarian situations in the world, affecting over ten million people in four main impacted countries – Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. The strong international response to this crisis over the past nine months has had a significant positive effect, saving lives and improving health and nutritional status. The international community nonetheless needs to remain vigilant in light of potential challenges in the months ahead that could slow or reverse the progress achieved to date.

CURRENT SITUATION IN THE HORN

All the countries in the Horn of Africa are facing the effects of a drought that produced its more severe impact in second half of 2011. The humanitarian impact of that drought have been exacerbated by conflict and governance challenges in Somalia that affect not only Somalia but the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia and Kenya, which host large Somali refugees populations that grew significantly in 2011. Long-awaited rains and a good harvest have brought relief to some drought-affected areas of the Horn of Africa but millions still need food assistance. Good rainfall in the short rainy season has improved water and pasture conditions and reduced trekking distances. The food security situation is expected to improve, as newly harvested crops reach local markets.

However, food access will remain difficult for millions of poor households due to low market prices of animals and high prices of local cereals. At the end of 2011, local maize prices were still significantly higher than the previous year's prices. In two regions the rains were below normal– northern Ethiopia and parts of northern Somalia (Puntland and Somaliland).

The World Food Program (WFP) is currently targeting over 10.9 million people affected by the crisis in the Horn of Africa region. Since the beginning of July 2011, WFP has reached over 9 million people in the Horn of Africa with direct food assistance. WFP is providing a critical lifeline to vulnerable Somalis in three countries. In Somalia, WFP has provided 1.3 million people with life-saving food assistance. In addition, WFP assists an increasing number of Somali people who fled to escape the famine and has extended its food assistance in Ethiopia to include newly arrived Sudanese refugees fleeing conflict in Blue Nile state. Food assistance and life-saving nutritional support are currently provided to 556,000 refugees in Kenya and 298,000 refugees in Ethiopia. WFP is also assisting almost 7 million drought affected people in Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti and Uganda. WFP food assistance is providing the nutritional support that communities need to rebuild their lives and build resilience against future droughts. WFP has increased a number of nutrition programmes using specialised products to both prevent and treat malnutrition, especially in children, pregnant women and nursing mothers. Longer-term programs supporting communities to build sustainable food security are a crucial part of WFP's work in Ethiopia and Kenya. Our MERET program, a joint effort with the government of Ethiopia, improves livelihoods by enabling chronically food-insecure communities to generate income through environmental rehabilitation activities.

SOMALIA

The situation in Somalia poses special challenges for the international community. Conflict and denial of access to civilian population in parts of Somalia makes it particularly difficult for international assistance efforts to reach all those who need food and nutritional assistance, particularly in Southern Somalia. Somalia is one of the most challenging and dangerous environments to work, largely due to insecurity, poor infrastructure and a widely scattered population.

WFP is focusing its efforts on distributing food to as many people as it can reach in areas of Somalia to which we have access. We have been reaching around 1.3 million people and will continue to assess and address the needs accordingly where we have access. Currently, WFP has access to: Puntland, Somaliland, the Central regions, Mogadishu and some border areas of the south.

We have also coordinated closely with other non-governmental (NGOs) and international organizations which have in the past been able to deliver food and nutritional assistance to areas where WFP has not had access. The combination of these coordinated food assistance efforts and a better harvest in the latter part of 2011 led the UN led Food Security and Nutrition Assessment Unit (FSNAU) and the US-supported Famine Early Warning System (FEWSNET) jointly to declare on February 3 that famine is no longer present in Somalia

Even though recent analysis by FSNAU and FEWS NET indicates that Somalia is no longer in famine, the study warns that 2.34 million people remain in crisis, unable to fully meet essential food and non-food needs. There are two factors that raise concerns that the improvements in the food security situation in Somalia could be jeopardized in the months ahead. First, there remains uncertainty about the spring rainfalls in the Horn generally and Somalia in particular. FEWS NET and FSNAU estimate that the April-June Somalia harvest will be average, although risk of a poor season remains, and populations in southern regions continue to be extremely vulnerable to both price and rainfall shocks following the effects of the recent famine. As a result, large numbers of people are likely to remain in crisis until the August 2012 seasonal harvest.

In addition, the number of people in crisis is likely to increase from May in Juba, Shabelle, and Bay regions, when the benefit of the current harvest will have diminished. According to the IGAD's Climate Prediction and Application Center's seasonal forecast for the Greater Horn of Africa there is an increased probability of below-average rainfall in northern Kenya, southern Ethiopia, and most of Somalia during the March to May 2012 season.

A second factor of concern is reduced humanitarian access to Southern Somalia. The pull-out of the ICRC from southern Somalia (12 Jan) and the expulsion of 16 humanitarian groups (28 Nov) by armed elements in control of much of the territory of Southern Somali will leave approximately 1.7 million people without access to food assistance. WFP is very concerned about the well-being of the people in areas beyond the reach of humanitarian aid.

South Sudan

I would also like to call attention to the situation in South Sudan, a country that is not always considered part of the Horn of Africa but suffers from some of the same factors that have produced widespread food insecurity in the rest of the Horn. More than six months after the birth of South Sudan—the world's newest independent country—a series of emergencies are unfolding that require urgent humanitarian response.

The recent Crop Food Security Assessment (CFSAM), released by the Food Security and Livelihood Cluster in South Sudan, projects a cereal deficit of 470,000 mt, half of the national cereal requirement and 60% more than last year's deficit. Delayed and erratic rains, as well as political instability and conflict, were cited as the major factors leading to the current cereal deficit. It is estimated that as many as 4.7 million people could suffer from food insecurity in 2012, with an estimated 1 million people severely food-insecure.

Potential macroeconomic shocks resulting from the continuing political stalemate between the Republic of South Sudan and Sudan may further contribute to the deteriorating economic conditions in the country. The Republic of South Sudan, which previously derived 98 per cent of its budgetary revenue from oil exports, lost this source of foreign exchange following shutdown of oil production earlier this year. The expected pressure on the South Sudanese pound and related price inflation for essential commodities is expected to have additional impacts on the food security status of the population.

In addition to these structural socio-economic concerns, South Sudan currently hosts more than 100,000 refugees, with more expected to arrive from the Republic of Sudan as the humanitarian situation in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile continues to deteriorate. During the past 15 months, more than 360,000 people have returned from the Republic of Sudan. Furthermore, an additional 120,000 people have been registered in Sudan to date who have indicated that they do not possess the financial means to return to South Sudan. It is expected that hundreds of thousands more will return if the moratorium period for residency of South Sudanese is not extended beyond April 2012. Inter-communal violence has also been on the rise, with the looming threat of renewed conflict in flash point areas, such as northern parts of Jonglei state.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude my remarks by summarizing what I see as the three main positive achievements of the international assistance effort to the Horn of Africa and the three greatest challenges the international community faces in the region in the months ahead.

POSITIVE ACHIEVEMENTS

The first of these positive achievements is that **famine is no longer present** in the Horn of Africa. It is significant that international assistance and an improved harvest led the international community to declare that famine conditions that first appeared in Somalia in July 2011 were, by February 3, 2012, no longer present in that country. But perhaps even more significant is that famine conditions never appeared elsewhere in the Horn, despite drought conditions in much of Ethiopia and Kenya at least as severe as in Somalia. Long-term programs to mitigate the impact of drought and increase resiliency such as Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) and WFP's MERET program reduced the number of people needing emergency food assistance in Ethiopia. The willingness of the Governments of Kenya and Ethiopia to permit humanitarian access to drought affected populations allowed international food assistance to be scaled up rapidly, preventing serious food insecurity from reaching famine levels in these countries.

Secondly, the UN and NGO community has come together to address collectively the enormous challenges in responding to the humanitarian and food crisis in the Horn. The joint food assessments by the FSNAU and FEWSNET in the Horn of Africa represent one of the best examples of coordinated food security analysis in addressing a major food emergency. The Somalia Food Cluster led by WFP that brought together all the NGOs and international organizations working in Somalia enhanced coordination and information sharing in order to maximize opportunities to deliver vital assistance to Southern Somalia within an environment where international humanitarian access was extremely limited. Close cooperation between the Office of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Program (WFP), and other NGOs and international organizations assisting refugees proved essential in meeting the challenges posed by a rapid increase in Somali refugee populations in Ethiopia and Kenya.

Thirdly, the international community, led by the United States, has responded generously by contributing significant resources to the humanitarian assistance community's needs in the Horn of Africa. WFP has received US\$754 million in contributions from more than 40 donors since famine was declared in Somalia in July 2011, although it still requires an additional US\$97 million to July 2012 to ensure the critical supply of food to millions of people who continue to suffer from drought and famine in the Horn of Africa.

CONTINUING CHALLENGES

The most critical challenge in the Horn is that millions of people remain in need of international humanitarian assistance at least through the middle of the year and food security outcomes will depend heavily on the performance of the March to May 2012 rains. These rains are the major rainfall period for pastoral and agricultural areas of northern Kenya, southern Ethiopia, and most of Somalia, accounting for 50 to 60 percent of annual rainfall. It also contributes about 20 to 30 percent of total annual rainfall in the southern parts of South Sudan.

The second major challenge is the limited international humanitarian access to Southern Somali. Currently, there is virtually no humanitarian access to 1.7 million food insecure people in Southern Somalia, many of whom are likely to need international assistance during the upcoming lean season between harvests.

The third major challenge is to make sure the international community supports programs for resiliency and recovery in the Horn as robustly as it has supported emergency relief programs over the past nine months. As the situation in Ethiopia shows, long-term investment in agriculture, community development, disaster preparedness/mitigation, and resiliency to shocks can reduce the need for emergency assistance when drought hits the region. The next crisis in the Horn of Africa can have a less severe impact if the international community stays engaged in the region and supports the long-term investments needed to reduce chronic hunger and increase capacity to cope with future shocks.