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Office of the United Nations Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia

Press Release

Tsunami compounds an already serious humanitarian situation in Somalia, says UN

Nairobi (29 December 2004) – On 26 December 2004, the tsunami that hit many parts of Southeast Asia also struck Puntland in the Horn of Africa. Coastal communities between the island of Hafun in the Bari region and the village of Garacad in Mudug, a 650-kilometre stretch of coastline, were particularly affected (see attached map).

Latest figures report that at least 114 people have died, over 100 fishing boats are missing and many more people remain unaccounted for. Villages in the area have been either fully or partially submerged and livestock and livelihoods lost in an area predominantly reliant on fishing and pastoralism.

As interagency assessment missions carry on in the areas, WFP have relocated staff from Bossaso to Hafun and are preparing to distribute 31MT of food to assist at least 2,000 people, while UNICEF has mobilised emergency relief supplies from Bossaso. WHO is transferring 3 emergency kits to the area – each can cater to a population of 10,000 people for three months. An interagency aerial assessment of the affected coastline will take place tomorrow (Thursday 30 December 2004). The UN will make an appeal for assistance depending on the outcome of the assessments.

“Our efforts to even gauge the full extent of the damage are being hampered by the poor transport and communication networks, which also affect the delivery of emergency relief as we piece together a complete picture of the situation, “ says acting Humanitarian Coordinator Elballa Hagona. “What is clear is that the tsunami is a further assault on communities that have already been rendered vulnerable and destitute by the severe drought and subsequent floods that occurred during this year.”

The four-year drought was declared an emergency in August 2004 and has affected more than 600,000 people, decimated herds of livestock and led to loss of livelihood assets. More recently, flash floods and extreme weather conditions further compounded an already serious humanitarian situation.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is leading the interagency task force responding to the tsunami that includes UN agencies, donors and international NGOs.

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