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U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (DCHA)
OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (OFDA)

Eritrea – Complex Food Security Crisis

Situation Report #1, Fiscal Year (FY) 2005

July 6, 2005

Note: The last situation report was dated September 2, 2004.

BACKGROUND

Recurring droughts over the past five years have resulted in acute water shortages, limited crop production, livestock losses and worsening food security in Eritrea. In 2004, widespread failure of the short February to April *azmera* rains and a late start and erratic distribution of the long June to September *kremti* rains led to reduced agricultural productivity across Debub and Gash Barka zones, former bread-basket areas of Eritrea. Even in good harvest years, Eritrea produces only 50 to 60 percent of the country’s total food needs, with commercial imports and food assistance normally filling the gap. Drought conditions and the residual effects of the border conflict with Ethiopia have led to significant socio-economic problems throughout the country with an estimated 2.2 million people requiring humanitarian assistance in 2005—an increase from the 1.9 million beneficiaries targeted in 2004, and representing more than 60 percent of Eritrea’s population, according to the revised U.N. Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal (CAP). U.N. agencies and the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) are targeting humanitarian assistance toward drought-affected communities, demobilized soldiers, HIV-infected individuals, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and returned refugees.

NUMBERS AT A GLANCE		SOURCE
Total Affected Population in 2005	2.3 million	U.N. CAP- Revised (June 22, 2005)
Total Food Aid Requirements in 2005	352,900 metric tons (MT)	U.N. CAP- Revised (June 22, 2005)

Total FY 2005 USAID/OFDA Assistance to Eritrea.....\$1,671,848
Total FY 2005 U.S. Government (USG) Humanitarian Assistance to Eritrea..... \$67,901,948

CURRENT SITUATION

Food security outlook. According to the U.N. CAP Mid-Year Review issued on June 22, the food security situation in Eritrea deteriorated in the last half of 2004—a trend that continued into early 2005. On January 18, 2005, the U.N.’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Program (WFP) issued a joint report estimating 2004 cereal production levels at 85,000 MT—only 24 percent of the annual cereal requirement of 347,000 MT and nearly 47 percent below the 12-year average for Eritrea. Further exacerbating the situation, FAO/WFP reported that since 2003, prices of major grains and food have increased significantly in Eritrea. Between March and September 2004, inflation was up to 78 percent for all foods, 112 percent for cereals, and 178 percent for pulses.

USAID’s Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET) reported in May that the *azmera* rains were average to above average in Debub and Makaan zones, facilitating long-cycle crop development and regenerating pasture and water sources, which improved the food security outlook for agro-pastoral and pastoral communities in the central and southern highlands; however, recovery will depend on the performance of the *kremti* rains, along with the availability of agricultural inputs and timely planting. Food security prospects for pastoralists in the eastern lowlands are less encouraging due to failure of the October-February *bahri* coastal rains in late 2004 and early 2005, and pastoralists are expected to migrate to the highlands in search of better pasture.

Between January and March 2005, FEWS NET reported between 1.2 and 1.4 million food aid beneficiaries throughout the country, and monthly food aid distribution in the range of 16,000-20,000 MT, representing 80 percent of the estimated need. At the end of April, the GSE’s Eritrea Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (ERREC) estimated 64,134 MT of food in stock, which is expected to last through July 2005, at the current rate of distribution.

Precarious health and nutrition status. According to U.N. agencies, the “hunger season”, traditionally from May to September, began earlier this year, due to reduced food availability resulting from low harvests and a reduction of food aid rations. The U.N. CAP Mid-Year Review reported significant increases in the admissions of severely malnourished children into therapeutic feeding programs and heightened under-five morbidity and mortality from diarrhea as compared to the same period in previous years. As a result, the current rate of 14 percent global acute malnutrition in children under five years of age, according to recent nutritional surveys, is likely to increase further in the coming months. Moreover, the National Nutrition Surveillance Surveys (NNSS) indicate that malnutrition affects 30 to 60 percent of women between 18 and 60 years of age, with pregnant and lactating women even more vulnerable due to their extra caloric requirement.

In addition, coping mechanisms such as consumption and sale of livestock, day labor, cross border movements, and use of wild and famine foods have been exhausted. FEWS NET field assessments indicate that households in the southern districts of Debub and Gash Barka zones have reduced the number of meals, while livestock was generally unavailable for food and income. Many household heads predict a worse situation than in the past five years of poor rains, primarily because so few household assets remain. The number of female-headed households is more than 50 percent in some areas, creating an enormous burden on already vulnerable populations.

Chronic water shortages. Eritrea continues to face a severe and growing shortage of water for drinking and livestock countrywide. Rationing is in effect in many towns; hundreds of neighborhoods, villages, and remote communities depend on distant and unclean water sources or water trucks; and animals are forced to migrate farther to reach sources. In February 2005, a USAID/OFDA team traveled to Northern Red Sea, Anseba, Makaan, and Debub zones to assess humanitarian conditions and monitor the progress of USAID/OFDA-funded programs. During site visits, community members and local officials consistently identified access to water as the most critical concern across the country. In all areas visited, the USAID/OFDA team observed brown soil, patchy areas with yellowed grass, and desert conditions in coastal areas.

Locust swarms move to Horn of Africa. In a June 20 update on the locust situation in Africa, FAO called for intensified survey operations in Sudan and Eritrea after several swarms moved across the area in mid-June. On June 12-16, swarms originating from the Southern Circuit in Guinea moved across West Africa, reaching Sudan's West Darfur where they quickly matured. Some swarms laid eggs in West and North Darfur, while others moved eastwards across the Nile River to Gedaref in eastern Sudan. According to FAO, some swarms may have already reached the western lowlands of Eritrea and northwest Ethiopia.

Border stalemate continues. Although the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea ended in 2000, ongoing disagreement over the demarcation of the boundary has fueled tensions between the two countries. In February 2005, Ethiopia declined an invitation from the boundary commission to discuss the ruling, and in March, representatives from both the U.N. Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) and the GSE cautioned that the border stalemate could lead to another outbreak of hostilities.

On May 19, tensions eased somewhat when UNMEE announced that Ethiopia and Eritrea had agreed to a plan of action to prevent attacks along the border. According to the agreement, military representatives from both sides have agreed to increase vigilance along the border and to work together under UNMEE coordination to locally

resolve minor incidents, investigate all attacks, and prevent loss of life.

USG pledges additional aid to Africa. On June 7, following a meeting between U.S. President Bush and U.K. Prime Minister Blair, the USG announced an additional \$674 million in assistance to address urgent humanitarian needs in Africa. The additional resources will be focused in particular toward the Horn of Africa and the estimated 14 million people who are at risk in Eritrea and Ethiopia. On June 22, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Johanns announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is releasing up to 500,000 MT of wheat from the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust as part of President Bush's Hunger Initiative to address the emergency food situation in Africa. The USG expects to provide 200,000 MT of the pledged amount to Eritrea.

GSE prioritizes IDP returns. Of the more than 1 million people displaced during the 1998-2000 border conflict with Ethiopia, approximately 59,000 IDPs remain displaced in the country, according to ERREC, which has prioritized helping IDPs return to their homes and livelihoods. Barring any new displacement from conflict, ERREC is confident most IDPs will be home by the end of 2005.

U.N. adopts \$186 million budget for UNMEE. On June 22, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a \$3.2 billion budget for 2005-2006 peacekeeping operations for 14 ongoing missions, including nearly \$186 million for UNMEE. The U.N. emphasized the need for budgetary discipline, improved management and adequate controls over budget implementation in the face of the current unprecedented surge in peacekeeping operations.

USG HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

On October 20, 2004, U.S. Ambassador Scott H. DeLisi redeclared a disaster in response to the continuing food security crisis in Eritrea. In FY 2005 to date, USAID/OFDA has focused resources to support water and sanitation activities in Eritrea with \$1 million in support to the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF). USAID/OFDA also provided more than \$670,000 to Catholic Relief Services (CRS) for emergency agriculture initiatives. In addition, USAID/OFDA regional and Washington-based staff traveled to affected areas of Northern Red Sea, Anseba, Makaan, and Debub zones in February 2005 to monitor programs, assess humanitarian conditions, and identify emerging humanitarian concerns in areas requiring additional support.

Emergency food assistance. In FY 2005 to date, USAID's Office of Food for Peace (USAID/FFP) has pledged 142,705 MT of P.L. 480 Title II emergency food assistance valued at more than \$64.3 million through implementing partners CRS, Mercy Corps, and WFP. The commodities provided by USAID/FFP include a combination of cereals, pulses, and vegetable oil, and corn soya blend (CSB) for therapeutic and supplementary feeding. USAID/FFP emergency food assistance is

provided to vulnerable populations through direct distribution, food for work programs, emergency school feeding, maternal and child health programs, and therapeutic and supplementary feeding programs.

Refugee assistance. To date in FY 2005, the Department of State's Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (State/PRM) has provided \$1.9 million to the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) for protection and assistance of Sudanese and Somali refugees in Eritrea and for returned Eritrean refugees. In addition, State/PRM's overall contribution to UNHCR supported the Eritrea country program.

U.S. GOVERNMENT HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO ERITREA

<i>Implementing Partner</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Amount</i>
USAID/OFDA ASSISTANCE¹			
CRS	Agriculture	Debul, Gash Barka	\$670,835
UNICEF	Water and Sanitation	Anseba, Debub, Gash Barka, Makaal	\$1,000,000
USAID/REDSO	Administrative	Various	\$1,013
TOTAL USAID/OFDA			\$1,671,848
USAID/FFP ASSISTANCE			
CRS	49,545 MT of P.L. 480 Title II Emergency Food Assistance	Countrywide	\$23,937,000
Mercy Corps	29,320 MT of P.L. 480 Title II Emergency Food Assistance	Countrywide	\$14,382,700
WFP	63,840 MT of P.L. 480 Title II Emergency Food Assistance	Countrywide	\$26,010,400
TOTAL USAID/FFP			\$64,330,100
STATE/PRM ASSISTANCE			
UNHCR	Refugee Protection and Assistance	Countrywide	\$1,900,000
TOTAL STATE/PRM			\$1,900,000
TOTAL USAID HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO ERITREA IN FY 2005			\$66,001,948
TOTAL USG HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO ERITREA IN FY 2005			\$67,901,948

¹ USAID/OFDA funding represents committed and/or obligated amount as of July 6, 2005.



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