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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 #2, Fiscal Year (FY) 2005

September 30, 2005

Note: The last situation report was dated July 6, 2005.

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 2.3 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) continue to target 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.....\$2,000,000
Total FY 2005 U.S. Government (USG) Humanitarian Assistance to Eritrea..... \$58,665,200

CURRENT SITUATION

Closure of USAID Mission. On July 26, 2005, the GSE requested that USAID terminate its development programs in Eritrea. While USAID has not received a formal explanation from the GSE, USAID is in the process of closing its Mission in Eritrea. USAID will continue to work with the GSE in an effort to ensure the continued delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Eritrean people.

Current rains and food security outlook. According to USAID’s Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET) July 2005 report, a good start to the main season rains in all *kremti*-rain dependent areas has allowed agricultural activities to begin in *kremti*-benefiting areas of Gash Barka, Anseba, Debub, Makaan, and Northern Red Sea zones. Although rainfall in June was below average in Debub Zone, cumulative rainfall was adequate for field preparation, planting, and growth of long-cycle crops. In Gash Barka Zone, unusually heavy rains in May and above average precipitation in June and early July improved pasture and water conditions, which had seriously deteriorated during the long dry spell from September 2004 to May 2005. Pastoralist terms of trade were slowly improving due to rising animal prices although recovery of pastoralist livelihoods will require continued good pasture conditions. The early start of the *kremti* rain in southwestern Gash Barka also enhanced field preparation and timely planting operations, especially of sorghum—the most important staple and food crop in Eritrea, with

Gash Barka accounting for nearly 66 percent of sorghum production in the country. In addition, FEWS NET field reports indicate that farmers have already planted sesame in most parts of Guluj sub-Zone, which is the primary sesame growing area of Eritrea.

According to FEWS NET, cereal prices also remain high in all major markets compared to the five-year average, but if rains continue through September, a good *kremti* harvest could reduce prices. Between January and June 2005, approximately 1.35 million Eritreans received food assistance, with the current food stocks expected to meet beneficiary needs through the end of October.

Ongoing obstacles to food security. From July 23 to August 1, a USAID/OFDA regional advisor traveled to Eritrea, including field visits to Debub and Northern Red Sea zones, to meet with representatives of the USAID Mission, U.N. agencies, non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, and GSE officials to assess the current humanitarian situation and monitor current emergency programs. Assessments indicated that the increase of food prices over the past several months, combined with the depletion of farmers’ food reserves from last year have contributed to ongoing food insecurity. While the *azmera* rains were adequate in the central and southern highlands, and the *kremti* rains appeared to be performing well, Eritrea will require several years of good rains for agricultural and economic recovery. The eastern lowlands population is particularly vulnerable due to poor

bahri coastal rains from October 2004 to February 2005, which caused pastoralists to migrate to already overstressed highland areas in search of pasture and water.

Although planting of short-cycle crops had already occurred and long-cycle crops were expected to be harvested in September and October, shortages of seed and farm inputs, limited availability of farm labor, as well as high fuel prices impeding tractor rental were expected to have a negative impact on the upcoming harvest. In addition, reports of heavy torrential rains in parts of the central highlands had resulted in localized flooding and damage to micro-dams, which were also expected to have an adverse effect on crop production in some highland sub-zones.

Chronic water and sanitation needs. According to USAID/OFDA field assessments, Eritrea continues to face chronic water shortages with approximately 22 percent of the rural population able to access protected water systems, even under the best conditions. During the July assessment, water levels in wells and boreholes were at record lows, with many water sources completely depleted. All seasonal and permanent rivers had dried up and the water table in the lowlands had dropped by at least seven meters due to inadequate water flow from the highlands. According to implementing partners and community leaders interviewed, water shortages were the main humanitarian concern, with many communities resorting to trucking water and rationing. Although the onset of the long rains will improve conditions, experts within the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the NGO community emphasized that Eritrea required multiple seasons of consistent rainfall to raise the water table to pre-drought levels and replenish depleted or dried up aquifers.

The USAID/OFDA assessment highlighted sanitation coverage at 4 percent among the rural population, with the lack of sanitation facilities having the greatest impact on the health of children. UNICEF reported that diarrhea accounted for 22 percent of all hospital admissions and was the third most common cause of childhood deaths. Other causes of morbidity related to poor hygiene and sanitation were intestinal parasites.

Locust update. According to the September 1 U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Desert Locust Bulletin, most of the current desert locust activity in the region is concentrated along the Chad/Sudan border and along the Red Sea coastal plains in northeast Eritrea. Unusually heavy breeding occurred in the area due to good rainfall in the past few months. Ground control operations are in progress and teams have treated more than 11,000 hectares (ha) of hopper bands and adults in Eritrea during the first half of August. FAO forecasts that a few small swarms are likely to form on the Northern Red Sea coastal plains during September and October as the remaining hoppers fledge and become adults. Most of the adults are likely to stay in place,

and eventually lay eggs in areas where ecological conditions are favorable.

Horn of Africa polio campaign. In August 2005, the U.N. World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed a case of polio in Gogne village in Gash Barka Zone, near the Sudanese border, marking the first reported case of polio in Eritrea since 1997. In response, the GSE's Ministry of Health (MOH), in collaboration with WHO and UNICEF, is planning to conduct two rounds of immunization campaigns from October 7 to 10 and November 12 to 15. Furthermore, on September 13, WHO, Rotary International, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and UNICEF launched the Global Polio Eradication Initiative—an ambitious series of polio immunization campaigns to prevent the re-emergence of the disease in the Horn of Africa. The new plan arrives as a polio case is confirmed in Mogadishu, Somalia, which had been polio-free since 2002. The initiative will include large-scale immunization campaigns coordinated across Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, and parts of Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, between September and November, targeting more than 34 million children.

NGO Proclamation. On June 1, the GSE issued Proclamation 145/2005 outlining the administration of NGOs in Eritrea. The major issues impacting local and international NGOs include registration and the issuance of work permits for international staff, authorization on importation of goods, taxes on all imported goods, and restriction of NGO overhead costs to 10 percent of the budget. NGOs are also limited to relief and rehabilitation activities rather than development assistance and local NGOs must have at their disposal in Eritrea \$1 million or its equivalent in convertible currency, while international NGOs must have \$2 million liquidity in-country.

U.N. extends peace-keeping mission. On September 13, the U.N. Security Council extended the mandate of the U.N. Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) until March 2006, and approved a reconfiguration of its military component, including an increase in the number of military observers. UNMEE has an estimated 3,000 peacekeepers patrolling the border in the Temporary Security Zone.

Visit of U.N. Special Envoy. From August 22 to 25, Martti Ahtisaari, the Special Envoy of the U.N. Secretary General for the Humanitarian Crisis in the Horn of Africa, visited Eritrea, marking his fifth trip to the region since his appointment in June 2003. With the goal of raising international awareness regarding the impact of war and recurring drought and food insecurity, as well as mobilizing donor support for long-term recovery programs and persistent humanitarian needs, the Special Envoy met with senior GSE officials and representatives of U.N. agencies and NGOs and held discussions focused on plans for the return and resettlement of IDPs and the reintegration of approximately 120,000 returnees from Sudan. The Special Envoy urged Eritrea and Ethiopia to

resolve the ongoing border dispute due to its continued negative impact on humanitarian activities and development.

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.

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, USAID/OFDA focused resources to support critically needed water and sanitation activities in Eritrea, providing more than \$1.3 million to the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF). Catholic Relief Services (CRS) also received more than \$670,000 for emergency food security and 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 and July 2005 to monitor programs, assess conditions, and identify emerging humanitarian concerns in areas requiring additional support.

Emergency food assistance. In FY 2005, USAID's Office of Food for Peace (USAID/FFP) pledged 129,350 MT of P.L. 480 Title II emergency food assistance valued at more than \$54.7 million through implementing partners CRS, Mercy Corps, and the World Food Programme (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. In FY 2005, the Department of State's Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (State/PRM) 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	Food Security/Agriculture	Debul, Makaal	\$670,835
UNICEF	Water and Sanitation	Countrywide	\$1,328,152
USAID/REDSO	Administrative	Various	\$1,013
TOTAL USAID/OFDA			\$2,000,000
USAID/FFP ASSISTANCE			
CRS	43,700 MT of P.L. 480 Title II Emergency Food Assistance	Countrywide	\$17,497,500
Mercy Corps	21,810 MT of P.L. 480 Title II Emergency Food Assistance	Countrywide	\$11,256,800
WFP	63,840 MT of P.L. 480 Title II Emergency Food Assistance	Countrywide	\$26,010,900
TOTAL USAID/FFP			\$54,765,200
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			\$56,765,200
TOTAL USG HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO ERITREA IN FY 2005			\$58,665,200

¹USAID/OFDA funding represents total amount obligated for FY 2005.



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