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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 10, 2009

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PRESS RELEASE

FOOD ASSISTANCE TO VAKHSH RESIDENTS

Khatlon Region, Tajikistan, March 5, 2009. Ambassador Tracey Ann Jacobson and Vakhsh District Deputy Chairman Nizoramoh Zaripova distributed food to families in the village of H. Gulomov in the Vakhsh District. Ambassador Jacobson visited the district to demonstrate solidarity with families trying to cope with ongoing food shortages in the district that started with the severe cold of 2008. Of the 173 families living in this village or mahalla, 105 of them received flour, lentils, and vegetable oil to get them through the spring and early summer period until their own harvested crops are available.

Khatlon, Tajikistan's poorest region, during the past two years has been hit a series of economic and social shocks that greatly increased both chronic and acute food insecurity. The low agricultural yields and lack of other economic opportunities lead to extreme poverty among much of the population. Following years of poor harvests, farmers' indebtedness to lenders, and crop and seed damage caused by severe winter cold, staple food prices increased by 80-130%. Tajikistan is highly dependent on food imports due to limited arable land, uncertain tenure rights, and low productivity. Yields are diminished by long-term neglect of the arable land and poorly maintained irrigation infrastructure.

Using resources from the United States Agency for International Development, Save the Children has launched its Emergency Food Security Project (EFSP) to swiftly and effectively respond to the food security crisis, to ease effects on the poorest, most vulnerable children and their families. This project began in October 2008 with cash safety net transfers to 2,063 beneficiaries and distribution of wheat seeds to 12,900 beneficiaries, and will continue through April 2009.

During the current project phase, Save the Children, along with its partner Mercy Corps, are distributing basic food commodities procured from neighboring countries. As many as 11,545 vulnerable households, of which 8,045 are in Khatlon region, will receive a nutritionally-balanced ration of wheat flour, lentils, and vegetable oil in order to get them through the lean winter and spring periods. Each household targeted will receive 200 kilos of flour, 50 kilos of lentils, and 16 kilos of oil during the project period. This assistance will help the poorest families meet approximately 70% of their minimum nutritional requirements, throughout the four months prior to their wheat harvest. Specific districts targeted by the project in Khatlon include Muminobod, Kulob, Vose, Khuroson, and Vakhsh.

Beneficiaries include those families with children under two years old, households with orphaned children, households with disabled children or parents, women-headed households, elderly people living by them, and poor families that do not receive remittances from relatives working abroad. In each case, the community members themselves, who are most aware of

the situation on the ground, meet and identify their most vulnerable neighbors through a fully transparent, participatory process.

Save the Children program is among many assistance projects implemented in Tajikistan by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on behalf of the American people. Since 1993 the American people through USAID have provided about \$300 million in assistance programs that support economic growth, democratic institutions, health care, and education systems of Tajikistan.

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