

As new drought hits Ethiopia, UN urges support for Government's 'remarkable' efforts

29 January 2017 – Commending the Ethiopian Government and humanitarian partners on the response to last year's El Niño drought that left 10.2 million people needing food assistance, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and UN aid chief Stephen O'Brien today said the international community must show "total solidarity" with country as it faces a new drought.

"This High-Level event must express our total solidarity with the Ethiopian people and the Ethiopian Government. And let's be clear: that solidarity is not a matter of generosity. It is a matter of justice and of self-interest," the Secretary-General told those gathered for the event, held earlier today in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, on the margins of the 28th Summit of the African Union.

It is a matter of justice in relation to the enormous generosity of the Ethiopian people themselves, he said, recalling that during his 10 years as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, he had witnessed the way Ethiopia became not only the largest African refugee-hosting country but the country with the most determined policy of keeping all its borders open, even in the most difficult security situations; "an example that, I would say, needs to be thought about in a world where unfortunately, so many borders are being closed."

Moreover, he said, the current crisis has not caught the Government and the people of Ethiopia unprepared, even if the magnitude of the crisis clearly is above the capacity of the Horn of Africa country to resolve. "Ethiopia has persistently applied a policy of building resilience in relation to the natural disasters that unfortunately with climate change have come to be more and more frequent and intense," explained Mr. Guterres.

Showing solidarity with Ethiopia is a matter of self-interest "because the link between humanitarian and development with peace and security is growing everywhere, and to invest in building resilience of populations and to invest in the best humanitarian needs in situations of stress like the one we are facing is also to contribute to strengthen peace and security," said Mr. Guterres, noting that a number of countries around Ethiopia are in the midst of deep crises "Somalia, South Sudan and Eritrea.

In Ethiopia and beyond, development and peace and security must be tackled jointly UN chief

Describing Ethiopia as a "pillar of stability" in the region, he said the international community cannot allow the effect of drought to be a promoter of additional instability, social unrest, or conflict as this would

have dreadful consequences not only in relation to the conflicts in the area but in connection to displacements of populations, in a world that is so little inclined to receive more migrants, and to global terrorism that is now a threat everywhere.

With all this in mind, he urged the participants to transform this session of solidarity in a commitment to work together not only to address the pressing humanitarian needs of Ethiopia but to join efforts in addressing the huge challenges from a development perspective, a sustainable development perspective and from a peace and security perspective the world faces today.

Just back from a three-day visit to Ethiopia to see first-hand the impact of failed rains in the southern parts of the country, Mr. O'Brien, who is the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that in Warder zone in Ethiopia's Somali Region, he had witnessed the immense impact the drought is having on people's lives and livelihoods.

Below average rains in south and southeastern parts of the country caused by the negative Indian Ocean Dipole have led to a new lowland drought. Among the most affected areas are parts of Somali and Afar regions and a number of lowland areas of Oromia and SNNP regions. The new drought has led to severe shortages of water and pasture in the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities. Deteriorating livestock body condition and loss of livestock are also being reported as well as high levels of acute and moderate malnutrition.

We have no time to lose UN Emergency Relief Coordinator

We need to act now before it is too late, said Mr. O'Brien, calling on the international partners to join the Ethiopian Government in funding the 2017 Humanitarian Requirements Document, which seeks \$948 million to assist 5.6 million people, whose lives, livelihoods and well-being depend on support from relief partners.

As effective as the humanitarian response to the 2016 El Niño drought has been, Ethiopian farmers and herders in affected areas are still living on the brink, unable to build back their livestock herds, or reinvigorate their small farms, and struggling to sustain themselves and their families, said Mr. O'Brien.

We have no time to lose. Livestock are already dying; pastoralists and farmers are already fleeing their homes in search of water and pasture; children more often girls are dropping out of school to support with household chores, and hunger and malnutrition levels will rise soon if assistance does not arrive on time, particularly among women who are more likely to suffer from health problems and malnutrition during droughts, he stressed.