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## News release

### NO EXCUSE FOR HUNGER IN THE HORN OF AFRICA: RED CROSS RED CRESCENT

Nairobi, 18 November 2008

Millions of people in the Horn of Africa are facing a terrible food shortage situation. Parents are forced to endure the pain of having to send children to bed on an empty stomach or worse, to see them slowly lose their health and eventually die. Herds of livestock have been partially or entirely decimated. Families split and able members migrate to urban centres in a desperate, and often useless, search for income.

This is the reality encountered during the past three weeks by a Red Cross Red Crescent team in the region to assess the potential for scaling up the IFRC's response to the needs of 17 million persons who are suffering from hunger. The team is composed of experts in food security, health, water and sanitation, relief, nutrition, livelihood, recovery and communication. They visited Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Sudan where the IFRC already assists nearly 200,000 people severely affected by drought and severe food shortages.

In addition, thousands of Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers respond to the needs of some 1.2 million people across Eastern Africa affected by diseases such as cholera, acute watery diarrhoea and hepatitis E, as well as floods, cyclones and population movements.

“The current financial crisis should not be used as an excuse to let millions suffer of hunger in the Horn of Africa. This is the second consecutive year during which international aid to Africa has fallen, while the international community had committed to double aid to the continent by 2010<sup>(\*)</sup>”, said Dr. Asha Mohammed, IFRC’s Head of Eastern Africa Zone office.

According to Dr. Mohammed “this is not a time to cut humanitarian aid support, but a time to demonstrate our solidarity”. Pragmatically speaking, investing in disaster response and prevention as well as development, will yield significant returns not only in saving lives but also in terms of health and production costs.

She called on partners and donors to join the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Eastern Africa to scale up efforts.

“This is a call that goes beyond the Red Cross Red Crescent boundaries. As we are mobilizing volunteers to ensure that at least an additional one million people in the Horn of Africa receive the basic food rations that will carry them through this crisis - at least until the next harvest by mid next year - we are asking Governments, the corporate sector and the public to join this humanitarian effort to close this unacceptable food gap.” she added.

In Djibouti, the team witnessed the impact of four consecutive seasons of failed rains on pastoralist communities. People are now left to survive under incredibly harsh conditions without any significant source of livelihood. In recent weeks many of them have migrated to Djibouti city in the hope of finding some income through unskilled daily labour or worse, through begging.

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Their plight is further exacerbated by the high prices of staple foods; a consequence of local and global inflation and in some cases speculation. Pastoralists and the urban poor are facing a humanitarian crisis that demands our urgent attention.

In Ethiopia, 6.4 million people are in need of emergency food distributions in addition to the other 5.7 million who are receiving food under the Government's Productive Safety Network Program. The United Nations and the Ethiopian Government are facing a gap of 270,000 metric tonnes for 2008 while the shortfall for the first quarter of 2009 stands at 371.416 metric tonnes of food, equivalent to 313.6 million USD.

In Kenya, the Red Cross has already started food distributions to 87,000 vulnerable people in Baringo and West Pokot regions.

Initial recommendations of the IFRC's Horn of Africa Assessment Team include complementary activities to prevent outbreaks of acute watery diarrhoea and other diseases that might else further erode the health of already highly vulnerable people. Water is vitally important for survival in an environment that is almost hostile to the survival, not only of human beings but also of their animals. First priorities will be to limit the massive mortality of livestock through the repair and improvement of water sources for animal consumption and through support, where appropriate, to the production of fodder.

“But the necessary response does not end there. Pastoralist drop outs and urban poor need more than food. They need a future which can only be ensured if they are allowed access to modest but stable sources of income.” said Roger Bracke, the Leader of the Assessment Team.

An IFRC initiative was launched in April 2008, to reduce food insecurity for 2.3 million people and promote local agriculture in 15 countries in Africa through sustainable farming practices, microfinance projects, and small-scale irrigation techniques. These long term projects will make communities more resilient and better equipped to cope with high prices and help avoid future food shortages, such as the ones currently experienced in the Horn of Africa.

Meanwhile the IFRC, unveiled today its 2009 Work Plan for the Eastern Africa zone. It seeks a total of 27 million Swiss francs (or 22,6 million USD, 18 million Euros) to enable Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in 14 countries to strengthen their ability to conduct risk reduction, health and care as well as capacity building activities. These countries are Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

**For further information, or to set up interviews, please contact:**

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(\*) Dr. Asha Mohammed refers to the findings of the UN 2008 Millennium Developments Goals report.  
<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/The%20Millennium%20Development%20Goals%20Report%202008.pdf>

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