

UNHCR and WFP announce new life-saving food aid for refugees and asylum seekers in Somalia

Mogadishu, 20 August 2020 -The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in Somalia signed a three-month agreement last month to provide lifesaving food assistance to some 30,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Somalia, mainly women and children. Distribution of the more than 1,500 metric tons of food has already begun in Mogadishu, Galkayo and Bossaso, and is expected to commence in Somaliland on 23 August.

Somalia's refugees and asylum seekers are comprised mainly of Ethiopians and Yemenis who fled conflict and persecution in their own countries, most of them settling in Berbera, Bossaso, Galkayo, Hargeisa and the country's capital Mogadishu. A review by UNHCR indicates that the vast majority of refugees and asylum seekers calling the agency's hotlines during the COVID-19 period have lost their only source of livelihood and are unable to meet their basic needs since March. Prior to the loss of work, many refugees and asylum seekers in Somalia worked as casual labourers or small business owners.

"The outbreak of the coronavirus in Somalia has made life extremely difficult for the most vulnerable, including refugees and asylum seekers, with many at risk of going hungry," said UNHCR Representative Johann Siffointe. "We have seen that since the pandemic, foreigners are sometimes stigmatized and among the first to lose their daily wages, making this partnership with WFP so vital in cushioning the blow they are facing."

For its part, WFP will provide a three-month supply of food rations consisting of cereals, pulses and oil. UNHCR's community-based NGO partners and WFP will carry out distribution in localities where the refugees and asylum seekers have settled. Distribution will be carried out in a single series of days or weeks depending on the number of those receiving assistance in each location. Nearly two-thirds of the refugees and asylum seekers are in Somaliland, where the distribution is expected to take more time. In all distribution sites, COVID-19 prevention measures such as physical distancing, washing of hands and wearing of masks will be strictly enforced.

"We welcome this partnership with UNHCR which gives WFP an opportunity to save the lives of the most vulnerable, including refugees and asylum seekers. We do everything we can so that no one is left behind particularly in this difficult time," said WFP Somalia Deputy Country Director Emmanuel Bigenimana.

The cash assistance provided by UNHCR to vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers has not been enough to meet their basic needs in the context of the pandemic, underscoring the need for the one-time extraordinary food distribution. Somalia reported its first case of COVID-19 on 16 March. The Federal Government of Somalia immediately formed a National Task Force and set aside US\$ 5 million for its National Contingency Plan for Preparedness and Response to COVID-19. The Government also called on donors and UN agencies to support the response plan.

As part of its COVID-19 response, UNHCR and partners have rolled out a number of interventions including cash-based assistance, provision of medical equipment, personal protective equipment (PPE) and decongestion of shelters, as well as advocating for a moratorium on evictions during a time of enhanced vulnerability caused by the pandemic.

WFP continues to serve the most vulnerable and severely food-insecure in Somalia as it adapts its interventions to the challenges of COVID-19. It has introduced an online shopping app which enables those receiving WFP cash assistance to buy food from retailers in their neighborhood and have the food delivered to their homes. It also introduced mobile money transfers in order to minimize the risk of exposure to corona virus among those receiving the assistance.

The COVID-19 pandemic comes against a backdrop of lasting and severe flooding and a locust invasion in Somalia that has aggravated the already complex and protracted humanitarian situation in the country.

For more information please contact:

UNHCR

Mahsa Izadpanah izadpana@unhcr.org; + 252613643710

Njoki Mwangi mwangin@unhcr.org; +254720134103

WFP

Amor Almagro amor.almagro@wfp.org; +254734554040