



## UN crisis relief fund looks to multi-year commitments for sustainability



The 2007 Bangladesh cyclone is just one of the crises for which the CERF has provided funding [File Photo]

15 December 2009 – Several major donors have made multi-year commitments to provide significant funding to the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (**CERF**), which aims to save scores of thousands of lives by providing virtually immediate financing in sudden-onset crises, like earthquakes or hurricanes, or for ongoing but neglected emergencies.

“This gives us an element of sustainability,” UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (**OCHA**) spokesman John Nyaga told the UN News Centre of the pledges to CERF, which has an annual target of raising \$450 million, with an additional \$50-million loan facility to allow rapid access to funds ahead of the transfer of donor pledges.

Canada has an ongoing, five-year agreement through 2012, while the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have renewed multi-year funding arrangements, OCHA reported today. Australia has also announced a four-year commitment, starting with a 2010 pledge of \$11.1 million, with annual increases of \$1.8 million through 2013.

China, India and Saudi Arabia have already made multi-year funding commitments and have announced that it would look into a similar arrangement starting in 2010.

Set up in 2006 to jump-start relief operations by providing funds within days and saving thousands of lives that would otherwise be lost to delay under the then under-funded \$50-million mechanism, CERF allocated two thirds of its financing to sudden-onset emergencies and a third to neglected crises.

UN officials have noted that under the previous system it took four months between the lifting of access restrictions in Sudan’s strife-torn Darfur region and the commitment of funds to the relief appeal. In that time, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) climbed to 1.6 million and mortality rates rose above emergency levels.

In the case of locust swarms infesting the African Sahel area in 2004, a \$9 million appeal by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (**FAO**) in February to spray larvae and prevent their spread was inadequately funded. That summer, the locusts multiplied throughout eight countries and FAO had to revise its appeal upwards to \$100 million. Now requests can be approved by the CERF Secretariat as quickly as within 24 hours or less of reception.

At its annual pledging session at UN Headquarters in New York last week, CERF raised a record \$424 million in pledges for 2010, compared with some \$400 million for 2009. The top 10 donors since the Fund's inception in 2006 came through with pledges of more than \$373 million for 2010 – or 88 per cent of the total.

Overall, CERF's top contributors – United Kingdom, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Canada, Spain, Ireland, Germany, Denmark, Australia – have pledged or contributed some \$1.7 billion of the nearly \$2 billion raised by CERF, roughly 85 percent of the total, since 2006.

“The overwhelming generosity of our major donors was clear, despite the hard times of the current economic climate,” Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes **said**. “Yet the fact remains that we require increased support from a broader range of donors so that the Fund can be sustained in coming years.”

The United States rejoined the contributor list with a \$10 million pledge last week, and five new Member States were added to the roster of CERF supporters, bringing to 115 the number of Member States and observers, nearly two thirds of the 192-member General Assembly.

With a \$2 million pledge, Russia made the list of CERF supporters for the first time. Several countries, including Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa, increased their pledges over the previous year.

“We are hopeful that emerging donors will come forward with larger, more regular contributions to the Fund,” Mr. Holmes said.

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