

**Your Excellency the Prime Minister,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would, on behalf of the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission, like to welcome you all to our gathering today and thank you for your attendance. This gathering has for many years been an annual event through which we have been presenting and discussing impending serious food shortages in the country and the measures which need to be taken to avert famine threats. Today's gathering could perhaps be viewed by some as more of the same. The magnitude of the famine threat we are facing, however, accords it a special significance.

**Your Excellencies,
Dear Partners,**

As you may recall, last year this time, we were in the midst of a favorable Meher harvest and a brighter food prospect for 2002. When the appeal was made, the level of optimism which prevailed by then was so much that many were questioning the validity of maintaining the annual appeal system. Many, quite rightly, were encouraged to look at a different approach of mobilizing food resources mainly to address the chronic needs. The realities on the ground and the level of vulnerability in the country are such that a year later we are unfortunately coming to you with an appeal for a massive food assistance to address the needs of millions of both chronically and acutely food insecure Ethiopians.

Unlike the situation last year, the 2002 agricultural seasons -both Belg and Meher-have been the poorest in many years with adverse consequences on crop and animal production, severe constraints on the availability of drinking water, and causing death of many livestock. Millions of households have failed to obtain a meaningful crop production forcing them to seek relief assistance as of now, at the time of what should have been the peak of the harvest period. Rising levels of malnutrition among children are prevalent in many areas. Unusual migrations of people have also been observed in some areas.

**Your Excellences
Dear Friends and Partners,
Ladies and Gentlemen**

We have just concluded our annual joint food and non-food assessments which were undertaken with the full participation of donors, UN agencies and NGOs. The assessments have revealed that:-

- About 11.3 million people would require food assistance amounting to nearly 1.5 million Mt and additional 2.9 million would be on the margin and may also need assistance in the later months of the year. Furthermore, there are also areas with different agricultural season whose food situation is yet to be assessed. These assessments could also reveal additional needs. Almost all of the victims are dependent on a single harvest, and their recovery before next year's harvest in November/ December is unlikely. You may already have been informed that the FAO/WFP crop and food assessment mission has confirmed the enormity of the production shortfall we have experienced. It has come up with an initial estimate that indicates a production shortfall of about 25% of that of last year, a year which left about 6 million people seeking food assistance through 2002.
- The magnitude of the crop failure and the destitution it has entailed has been so much that seed assistance worth USD 15.2 million would be needed very soon to allow the destitute farmers plant again in April.

- There has been acute shortage of drinking water in many areas since July and is getting worse. Reduction of surface water availability due to the failure of the two consecutive rainy seasons is already becoming visible even in mid and some highland areas. To avert a disaster, an assistance amounting to USD 12.7 million is needed urgently so that a minimum amount of water could be availed to the neediest.
- The livestock in the pastoral areas of Afar and the northern part of Somali are in greater danger of death. Such a threat will have a far reaching consequence on the livelihood of the affected beneficiaries. To prevent such a disaster, we have come up with a proposal to save the most essential animals with the provision of fodder, veterinary drug, and water. This is estimated to cost USD 15.6 million.
- There is also an increasing risk of drought and famine related epidemic outbreak in many areas, and prevention measures have to be in place as soon as possible. Special intervention will also be required to prevent acute malnutrition as well as to improve sanitation conditions. All of these are estimated to cost USD 21.1 million.

The document we have circulated will provide you with the details of all our needs and priorities.

**Your Excellencies,
Honorable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Through the points I have enumerated, I hope I have reinforced your earlier conviction that the emergency situation is real and very serious. The problem has become a major challenge to the Government and people of Ethiopia. We also like to believe that it is a challenge to all humanitarian agencies in all spheres of life- donors, NGOs, and the UN system - which have a mandate and commitment to make a difference to the predicament of people in similar situations.

The challenge ahead is not only to make pledges and commitments but also to deliver them as quickly as possible. On the food side, we are entering 2003 with little carry over stock and pledges, and yet, 7.4 million people will need assistance in January, 8.2 million in February, and nearly 10 million in March. The relief food requirement for the 1st three months alone is 420,197 Mt. This situation makes it imperative that relief deliveries are large, fast, and uninterrupted. A related and crucial factor here is also that our Emergency Reserve may not be able to cope with such massive draw- down of food, and this is certain to require advance delivery of pledges rather than fully relying on borrowing from the Reserve. The Government is seriously concerned that failure to quickly deliver and sustain it would cause the death and displacement of victims we have so far successfully prevented. Already, close to 5 million people are getting relief assistance in December.

We are therefore appealing to all of you today to extend your usual generous and unflinching commitment so that together we can avert the disaster which is threatening the lives and livelihoods of millions of Ethiopians.

**Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen**

While the consequences of the drought have been unparalleled, I find it appropriate to acknowledge at this juncture that the sympathy and support we have so far received from our donors, as well as the commitment and joint efforts by our partners in the UN system and the NGO community have been encouraging. I would like to express our sincere thanks for your continued concern and support.

I also find it appropriate to mention here that the Government has been making concerted efforts to avert the looming disaster: through the timely warning of the famine threat as of last July, the

purchase and delivery of food and seed to the most needy, the allocation of budget to address the acute water shortages faced in a number of areas as well as the human and animal disease threats and outbreaks in many of the regions, and the mobilization of federal man power resources to assist regional efforts.

As you may have noticed from the local media, Ethiopians in the Diaspora are also trying to support the famine prevention efforts. To this effect, a National Committee has been set up to coordinate effective local resource mobilization.

All the efforts so far made by the Government and the international humanitarian community have paid us back satisfactorily. We jointly have prevented death and displacement of people, and have supported the farmers whose 1st crops failed to try again. It is, therefore, with satisfaction that we reflect at the effective life saving measures we have taken in the last six months. This has been a source of encouragement that the challenge ahead would also be met with greater concern and commitment.

I would like to conclude my statement by assuring you of the Government's effort and commitment to avert the famine threat. It is no secret to you that the Government's financial capacity to effectively respond to the current emergency without jeopardizing the most essential social and economic services it is rendering is limited. As we are in the middle of the budget year, this itself is also an additional constraint. Nevertheless, the Government has during the current fiscal year allocated a budget and delivered 45, 000 MT of emergency food. It has also allocated 150 million Birr for the implementation of the food security program through which water harvesting, soil and water conservation, rural road construction and similar other schemes are under implementation. These activities, as you would agree with me, are key instruments to address the chronic food problems in the country.

An important factor in the effectiveness of our operation next year is also the logistical capability we will put in place. In this regard, measures are already being taken to come up with a workable arrangement, and the details will be brought to your attention and concurrence soon.

Thank You