In response to the urgent health and humanitarian situation in Somalia, the World Health Organization (WHO) continues its rescue operations in coordination with development partners to address the rising needs in famine-hit areas.

In this respect, important preventive and curative requirements are being provided including essential medicines and vaccines based on the epidemiological surveillance process conducted by WHO experts. The indicators of the current situation show a huge increase in diarrhoeal and respiratory infection cases, which are considered to be the leading causes of child mortality in developing countries including Somalia. Moreover, the degradation of basic services and essential medical supplies can result in increases in communicable disease and in deaths among children under five years of age.

The results of epidemiological investigations show a cholera outbreak in Mogadishu (Banadir region) in addition to confirmed cases of measles and dengue fever. Dengue fever is also confirmed in Galbeed region of Somaliland.

During the past eight weeks, acute watery diarrhoeal cases and deaths have been reported from Banadir Hospital in Mogadishu, showing a significant increase in disease trend in comparison with data from the same period last year. Children under the age of two years bear the greatest burden of acute water diarrhoea, accounting for 49% of all reported cases and 47% of all reported deaths.

In light of this catastrophic situation, with the people of Somalia trapped between the famine raging in central and southern parts of the country and the ongoing civil war, immediate response by the international community is vital. To address the urgent and emerging needs for medical assistance for the Somali people, Saudi Arabia supported the handover of two inter-agency health kits through WHO. Other medical supplies are expected to complement the needs. Each of the two health kits contains medicines and equipment that provide ambulatory services and treatment for 10 000 people for 3 months, including clinical guidelines and diagnostic and treatment manuals prepared by WHO that are regularly updated in response to similar situations.

Prior to his upcoming field visit to Somalia, Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, said: "We appreciate the response of Saudi Arabia, as well as all

donor contributions that have already provided assistance to the relief work in Somalia. However, the daily bloodshed requires an expanded response, and provision of health and nutritional interventions without delay. Every day that passes without the right interventions results in the loss of more lives."

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