

## **Somalia's Ocean Stars and Heegan Football Club kick off 'Stamp out cholera!' campaign in Mogadishu**

16 December, 2011 | Mogadishu/Nairobi – Somali soccer players kicked off today the 'Stamp out cholera' campaign. A friendly soccer match between the Somali national team, also known as the Ocean stars, and Heegan FC will take place this afternoon at the University Football stadium in Mogadishu.

The '*Stamp out cholera!*' campaign aims at raising awareness on cholera and acute watery diarrhea among the Somali population. "As the Somali National soccer team, we are very honored to support this campaign. Cholera is a killer disease but can easily be prevented and save many lives," says Ahmed Abdalla Moallim, captain of the Ocean Stars (Somali National team). "During our match, various cholera prevention messages such as hand washing and water chlorination will be announced to make sure that every Somali citizen understands what cholera is and how it can be prevented," he added.

The cause of cholera is that sewage water gets mixed into drinking water, making it unsafe to drink. Cholera is an easily transmittable disease that causes severe diarrhoea, leading to rapid dehydration. If left untreated, it can kill in a matter of hours. The contagious disease continues to be one of the major health concerns in the country. Since January this year, about 60 000 cases of acute watery diarrhoea and cholera have been reported in South Central Somalia. About 75 percent of all cases are children under the age of five. Boys and girls under the age of five and women are among the most vulnerable hit by the disease.

"Cholera can be prevented by increasing awareness on hygienic living conditions among people, by educating them on hygiene and telling them to wash their hands with soap before eating and after visiting the toilets. This can bring down the number of diarrhea cases by at least 50%", says the Minister of Health and Human Services, Abdiaziz Sh. Yussuf. "Cholera is spreading fast nowadays in Somalia, because people have been displaced without access to safe water and sanitation. Therefore, chlorinating the water with tablets is very efficient and makes the water safe to drink," he continued.

The most important treatment for cholera is rehydration, which consists of prompt replacement of the water and salts lost. Early use of Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS) can save the lives of nearly all cholera patients. People living in high-risk areas can protect themselves by following a few simple rules of good hygiene and safe food preparation. These include washing of hands with soap, especially before food preparation and eating, thorough cooking of food, boiling or using purification techniques to make drinking water safer, and use of sanitary facilities.

The ultimate aim of this public-awareness campaign is to ensure that households have at least one person who knows how to prevent cholera and what to do in case symptoms occur, and where to refer severe cases. Other efforts will also include community meetings and distribution of information in health centres, schools and markets – as well door-to-door visits and children's activities in local communities.

**For more information:** [www.stampoutcholera.org](http://www.stampoutcholera.org)

**Note to Editors:**

Cholera is an acute diarrheal infection caused by ingestion of food or water contaminated with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. Every year, there are an estimated 3–5 million cholera cases worldwide and 100 000–120 000 deaths due to cholera. The short incubation period of two hours to five days, enhances the potentially explosive pattern of outbreaks.

Cholera is an extremely virulent disease. It affects both children and adults and can kill within hours. About 75% of people infected with *V. cholerae* do not develop any symptoms, although the bacteria are present in their faeces for 7–14 days after infection and are shed back into the environment, potentially infecting other people. Among people who develop symptoms, 80% have mild or moderate symptoms, while around 20% develop acute watery diarrhoea with severe dehydration. This can lead to death if untreated. People with low immunity – such as malnourished children, elderly, or people living with HIV – are at a greater risk of death if infected.

Cholera transmission is closely linked to inadequate environmental management. Typical at-risk areas include camps for internally displaced people or refugees, where minimum requirements of clean water and sanitation are not met, as well as, peri-urban slums, where basic infrastructure is not available. Cholera is an easily treatable disease. Up to 80% of people can be treated successfully through prompt administration of oral rehydration salt.