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Bangladesh: UN launches international appeal for flood relief and recovery

Dhaka – Warning that millions of people in Bangladesh are now facing grave food insecurity and health risks after one of the worst floods ever seen here, the United Nations today launched an appeal to international donors for USD 210 million to help the very poor survive the next six months.

“The hardest time starts now,” UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh Jorgen Lissner warned during the launch of the international Appeal in the Bangladeshi capital earlier today. He said that most people in Bangladesh are adept at surviving the sudden onslaught of floodwater. “The Government has well-tested emergency response systems in place,” he added.

During the weeks and months after a disaster, however, the nation struggles to secure people’s access to clean water, food, shelter and income. As the waters recede, diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera and typhoid are spreading rapidly as flooding has mixed with sewerage, and millions of drinking water sources are now contaminated or damaged. Food insecurity is also looming as much of the next rice crop was washed away, and the current planting season, normally in mid-August, is under threat. “In the past, more people have died after rather than during the peaks of the floods,” Lissner said.

This year the floods in Bangladesh left much of the country submerged for more than a month. “The very poor are at particular risk now because their food stocks are exhausted, assets lost or sold to survive, and money is needed to rebuild farms, villages and

জিপিও বক্স ২২৪, ঢাকা ১০০০, বাংলাদেশ, টেলিফোন: (৮৮০-২) ৮১১৮৬০০-৬, ফ্যাক্স: (৮৮০-২) ৮১১৮৭১১, ই-মেইল: rc.bd@undp.org
GPO Box 224, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh • Tel: (880-2) 8118600-6, Fax: (880-2) 8113196, E-mail: rc.bd@undp.org, Internet: www.un-bd.org

businesses,” Lissner said. “This is an especially difficult time for the very poor, many of whom struggled on the edge of extreme poverty before this disaster,” he emphasized.

Thousands of kilometres of road, plus bridges, culverts, schools and other public buildings are damaged or destroyed. The Government estimates that the nationwide losses from this flood would reach USD 7 billion.

Through the Appeal, the UN hopes to raise enough funds to help the very poor in those areas where the worst flooding occurred to get safe drinking water, food, shelter, and regain income opportunities over the next six months.

Under the UN plan, seeds, fish fingerlings and agricultural implements will be provided to poor farmers. While others, like weavers and small shop owners, will be given support to regain their business capital.

Meanwhile, labour intensive infrastructure rebuilding projects are planned in conjunction with the Government to provide immediate income opportunities for millions, and to help rebuild some of the damaged transport and communications systems. Approximately 3 million houses are damaged or destroyed.

“The people of Bangladesh are extraordinarily self-reliant and resilient and are striving to achieve what they can within their own means, but their means are often slender,” Lissner said.

“Many of the very poor have sold their possessions to buy food and medicines. Donors can assist these people to restart their lives by ensuring that they are provided with clean water, basic sanitation, food and supplementary nutrition where necessary, and are able to return to a semblance of economic normality,” Lissner said.

He urged the international community to show its solidarity with the people of Bangladesh in this time of crisis by supporting their swift recovery.

Press enquires can be directed to: Lisa Hiller, Communication Officer, ph: 811 8600, mobile:011 812 042, email: lisa.hiller@undp.org.

জিপিও বক্স ২২৪, ঢাকা ১০০০, বাংলাদেশ, টেলিফোন: (৮৮০-২) ৮১১৮৬০০-৬, ফ্যাক্স: (৮৮০-২) ৮১১৮৭১১, ই-মেইল: rc.bd@undp.org
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