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Ivory Coast / Liberia: Hundreds of thousands will be at risk for months without urgent humanitarian international effort, warn aid agencies

14 April 2011 – The situation in Ivory Coast and Liberia has descended into a huge humanitarian disaster which requires urgent international funding, a coalition of 13 aid agencies has warned today.

Despite recent political developments, the humanitarian emergency remains and the needs of people affected by extreme fighting continue to escalate. The crisis is far from over in Ivory Coast, agencies say, and will require international attention for months to come. **Funding is desperately needed to provide life-saving aid and to rebuild shattered communities, but the humanitarian aid pledged so far has fallen dangerously short.**

The conflict in Ivory Coast has already displaced more than one million people from their homes and forced around 135,000 refugees to flee to Liberia¹. People made homeless by violence are now in desperate need of food, water, shelter, sanitation and protection. The majority of the displaced are children, many of whom are at risk from disease and hunger.

Guy Cave, Save the Children's Country Director for Ivory Coast said: "According to our staff on the ground, displaced children and their families are living in terrible conditions in Duekoué. There are no proper toilets and a huge lack of water, so people can't keep clean. There is massive overcrowding and people have nowhere to sleep. The risk of disease spreading is acute. This is a catastrophic situation and children need urgent help."

Displaced people and refugees are mostly living with relatives or in strangers' homes, causing a major stress on local food supplies. In Liberia, aid agencies are reporting a near- exhaustion of food stocks, families reducing their food consumption to one meal per day, and major increases in the price of rice and cassava in local markets. Scattered in remote and dense forest border areas between Ivory Coast and Liberia, a huge number of refugees remain incredibly vulnerable and out of reach of life-saving relief.

Tariq Riebl, Oxfam's Humanitarian Manager in Liberia said: "Many refugees we are working with are too afraid to return home any time soon. The crisis has also severely affected the incomes of families. This is a humanitarian crisis that is likely to continue for months to come. We need to urgently expand our response to meet the escalating needs in Ivory Coast and Liberia but without the funds tens of thousands of people will go without help."

The coalition is calling for funding to increase rapidly to meet the growing humanitarian needs on the ground both in Ivory Coast and Liberia, which will continue for months to come. So far funding has been inadequate. The \$146.5 million UN humanitarian appeal for Liberia has received just 29% of the funds requested², while a new

¹ OCHA website, <http://ochaonline.un.org/UrgencesEmergencies/ElectionsCocirtedIvoire/tabid/7330/language/fr-FR/Default.aspx>

² OCHA Financial Tracking Service website, http://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=searchProject-Reporting_display&CQ=cq040211162132ELGUpqFHSv&orderby=ChannelOrganizationName&showDetails=

\$160 million appeal for Ivory Coast has received only 18%³. Unless funding is dramatically scaled up, the needs of tens of thousands of people will remain unmet⁴.

Vincent Taillandier, Desk Officer for Action Contre la Faim (ACF) just back from Ivory Coast said: "In addition to a huge displacement of the population, there is a major problem with a lack of critical supplies. Health centers, for example, are without any drugs or therapeutic food to treat malnutrition. Medical staff are in place, but are no longer receiving their wages and feel powerless without the medical equipment they need to treat their patients. It is essential to get health centers the provisions they need."

The coalition also urges donors to ensure aid is delivered to those most in need. Concrete and coordinated measures must be taken to preserve neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action, and further aid pledges must be delivered according to proper needs assessments on the ground.

"On the Ivory Coast-Liberia border, people seeking refuge are saying they are exhausted and in desperate need of assistance. Most vulnerable are isolated women, children, the elderly and disabled persons who require specific support, such as psychosocial and medical services. The international community must ensure that humanitarian aid is impartial and reaches all who need it regardless of location or political affiliation," said Laurent Davy, Programme Manager for Ivory Coast and Liberia at Handicap International.

The coalition calls upon the humanitarian donor community to:

- Urgently increase their funding to enable aid agencies to meet the needs of displaced people in Ivory Coast and refugees in Liberia, as well as affected neighboring countries;
- Ensure funding allocations are made transparently and equitably to ensure that needs are met across the country.

The coalition calls upon the UN and the international humanitarian system to:

- Ensure military and humanitarian response are distinguished to preserve neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action;
- Take adequate measures to ensure humanitarian access to all affected populations, regardless of ethnicity, religion or perceived political alignment.

- END -

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NOTE TO THE EDITORS

- **Signatory organizations**

- Action contre la Faim (ACF)
- Care France
- Handicap International
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI)
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
- Oxfam
- Plan International
- Première Urgence - Aide Médicale Internationale (PU-AMI)
- Save the children
- Secours catholique - Caritas France
- Solidarités International
- Trocaire

³ OCHA Financial Tracking Service website, http://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=searchProject-Reporting_display&CQ=cq040211162249tRkNUs2pQK&orderby=ChannelOrganizationName&showDetails=

⁴ While announcements from April 12 of €400 million in aid from France and €180 million from the European Commission are very welcome, it is not yet clear how much of this funding will go towards tackling urgent humanitarian needs through the UN appeal.

- **Possible interviewees**

Spokespersons from signatory organizations are available for interviews in English and French. Contacts with spokespersons on the field in Ivory Coast and Liberia can also be facilitated.

- **Testimonies from the field**

Collette Gowlai Danzahoun, 50, from Bloléquin. She got separated from her husband and two grown up daughters in the conflict. She arrived in Janzon on April 2, 2011.

“Bloléquin fell to the rebels a few weeks ago. I was with the young children so it was hard for us, we didn’t come here directly; we had to move slowly. The fighting started at 3am and the sound of the guns made us run away. We had to stop a lot of times... the children were weak and needed feeding. I had to carry one of the children on my back; another one on my shoulders. We had to stop on the way many times. My problem now is caring for these young children. They have no food, no clothes.”⁵

Koulah Olivier Kouidé, 38, his wife, Aimée Gayé, 34, and their 6 children, 3 month old Urish, 2 year old Enoch, 5 year old Prisca, 7 year old Godeleh, 8 year old Evarice and 18 year old Fabrice, arrived in Bawaydee on April 3, 2011. They are sharing a room with 22 people. Koulah and his family travelled from Oulai Taïbli village by foot.

“Rebels entered our village at around 10 in the morning. When they attacked we ran into the bush to hide. I got separated from family, from my brothers, on the way. We spent 3 days walking through the bush and on the fourth day we arrived in Liberia. We had nothing with us. We arrived empty handed.”

“Despite all the difficulties we have reached Liberia but the families helping us cannot afford to feed us. There is no shelter, no clothing, no food no water, and we are still mourning the deaths of two children. Now I don't know what to do. We are asking the international community to help us in any way they can.”⁶

Isaac Bloé Quiah, 53, is the town chief of Bawaydee, which is situated close to the border and has seen its population more than double in recent weeks as residents have taken in refugees fleeing the conflict in Ivory Coast.

“The new arrivals have been welcomed but it is putting a strain on the community. We need more water pumps and at least 25 toilets. We have 3 water pumps but only one is working. Food is also running out because the refugees are staying with families and eating food with them. There is a food shortage. Before, people had cassava, rice and so on, but stocks are almost finished.

“We are hosting many refugees. Seven are staying in my personal house. We are the same blood, the same people. If they had to flee danger, we are willing to help them. We are all African and we live next to each other.”⁷

Alimed arrived at the church of Guiglo with his entire family after walking 120 km across the bush from Toulépleu, where violent fighting had occurred. Thousands of refugees have gathered around the church with only the few belongings they could take with them.

“I’ve lost everything: my farm, my house, my goods, my tools, everything - and my wife is pregnant. We only had time to take a little food and money with us. But within two to three days, we’ll have used it all.” Alimed knows he will have to stay here for a while, sleeping outside even though the rainy season is coming. But along with many other displaced persons he is still very scared and doesn’t want to go back home yet.

“We’ll probably stay here for at least one or two months to be sure the situation has calmed down. Fortunately, your presence here tells us that we have not been forgotten.”⁸

⁵ Oxfam

⁶ Oxfam

⁷ Oxfam

⁸ Action contre la faim