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## PRESS RELEASE

### Meeting of the Food Crises Prevention Network in the Sahel and West Africa

**Serious food and nutrition crisis in the eastern Sahel region: Millions of people are in a situation of food insecurity in Niger and Chad. An emergency intervention is necessary.**

Members of the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA), who met in Paris on 8-9 April 2010, have unanimously confirmed that the Sahel region is facing a serious food and nutrition crisis. This analysis follows annual assessments of regional crop and food security, meetings of organizations responsible for food crisis management and prevention, as well as individual country appeals.

Declining cereal production (over 30% compared to last year in Niger and Chad); deteriorating terms of trade (livestock/grain, cash crops/cereals); and lack of animal feed has hit the Sahelian regions of Niger, Chad, north-east Mali and Burkina Faso. These difficulties have led to unusual migrations of people and livestock. The cereal trade market cannot alone address issues of access to food by vulnerable populations. High food prices in the region continue to compound the problems of pastoral and agro-pastoral populations' access to food supplies. Approximately 2.7 million people in Niger and 2 million people in Chad are in need of emergency assistance. In Niger, 5 million people are also suffering from moderate food insecurity.

The already alarming nutritional situation is deteriorating rapidly, especially for children under the age of 5 and for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Acute malnutrition rates are very high in most Sahel countries, while some areas of Niger and Chad have already exceeded emergency levels. This situation, characterized by high levels chronic malnutrition, will worsen along with the state of food insecurity. Unless the situation is addressed, more than 300 000 children under the age of five in Niger and an additional 100 000 children in Chad will suffer from severe acute malnutrition.

The RPCA recommends immediate and significant action and calls upon states, West African regional integration organisations (UEMOA, CILSS, and ECOWAS) and their partners to take the following emergency measures:

- Immediately provide vulnerable populations with the means necessary to buy grain on the open market. Where grain is available, the distribution of cash or vouchers to the most vulnerable must be prioritized. In other areas, activities such as “food for work” or free distribution must be implemented before the harvest;
- Accelerate the implementation of actions in favour of promoting livestock, capital and essential food sources for pastoral and agropastoral populations by facilitating access to animal feed through distribution, temporary suspension of import duties, provision of veterinary services, rehabilitation of both water supplies and diminished livestock;

- Facilitate regional purchasing of grain to reduce delays and shortages. Import vital cereals without delay when regional purchases are not sufficient;
- Coordinate activities in accordance with the *Food aid charter*, the *Paris declaration*, and the principles of good humanitarian donorship by implementing and strengthening national frameworks for coordination and planning. These interventions should be tailored to specific populations, regional contexts and periods of implementation;
- Strengthen and broaden the management of moderate and severe malnutrition, particularly in Niger and Chad, while taking into account the specific needs of young children and women who are pregnant or breast feeding through nutritional supplementation and access to health care;
- Improve monitoring of food and nutritional situations by using the Harmonized Framework to adapt emergency response as necessary, to anticipate the medium-term rehabilitation needs of populations at the national and regional level, as they resume their livelihoods; and
- The RPCA recommends that ECOWAS organises an emergency meeting in April with ministers of Commerce and Agriculture. This meeting would help to provide a regional response to efforts being made by West African states and their partners which include food loans based on national stocks. This cooperative activity would help to create a network of national food stock security management offices to help manage food crises in the future. The formal and informal restrictive measures taken by some states to ban food exports contributes to rising food prices and compounds the food crisis.