

4 March 2003

Dear Resident Coordinators and Country Team Members,

Following the recent UN mission to Southern Africa on Food Insecurity and the HIV/AIDS crisis, co-led by Jim Morris, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa, and Stephen Lewis, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, we are writing to inform you about the next steps to be taken by the United Nations and to solicit both your assistance and your leadership.

As you are aware, the mission of Jim Morris and Stephen Lewis, also included senior representatives from WFP, UNICEF, UNDP, FAO, UNAIDS, OCHA and SADC. The mission report was presented on 18 February 2003 to the Senior Management Group, chaired by the Secretary-General.

Apart from highlighting and confirming the threat posed by food insecurity in the region, the key message was that the drought will end but the crisis may not. The distinguishing factor this time being that HIV/AIDS remains the underlying determinant to the perpetuation of the crisis in Southern Africa and that, combined with cyclical food shortages and chronic poverty, the epidemic becomes even more deadly. Furthermore, maintaining sound nutrition and food security for people living with HIV/AIDS, their families, and those orphaned by the disease is critical for affected communities to remain productive and for medical interventions to succeed. This pattern is in danger of repeating itself in the Horn of Africa. The situation calls for the immediate adoption of new and accelerated approaches seen through the lens of the multisectoral consequences of HIV/AIDS.

The mission of Jim Morris and Stephen Lewis identified concrete short and medium-term actions for the United Nations system. The members of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) will be coordinating the preparation of a draft United Nations strategy, building on the mission proposals. The first outline of this strategy will be shared with you so that its preparation can benefit from the experience of the Country Team and the Resident Coordinator.

The Secretary-General also asked Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, to set up a task force to look into the effects of HIV/AIDS on women. Ms. Bellamy, as Chair of the Task Force, will revert to you shortly about this.

In addition, the Secretary-General has indicated that he will be sending a letter to the Heads of State in the most affected countries to express his deep concern over the deteriorating situation and give his personal commitment to mobilize the whole United Nations family.

It is in this context that the Secretary-General asked the UNDG heads of agencies to request you, the Country Teams and the United Nations Resident Coordinators together, to see this rapid succession of events as the beginning of a new, long-overdue chapter in our – the UN's – work in Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa, the start of a reinvigorated campaign to confront the spiraling crisis affecting the subcontinent.

Resident Coordinators and Country Team Members  
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The mission made clear that the current situation calls for much more than we were aware of or anticipated when you and your teams developed your country support frameworks, articulated in your various UNDAF documents, the ongoing subregional Consolidated Appeal and specific agency interventions. Now more than ever in the history of humanitarian and development action, the United Nations is challenged to immediately review ongoing efforts to reduce poverty and food insecurity in the context of the HIV/AIDS crisis and to accordingly reorganize our efforts for maximum impact and effectiveness.

We would therefore request the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations system to initiate an immediate assessment with the United Nations Country Team, and to revisit our current efforts with a view to reorienting them for maximum relevance and effectiveness in addressing the combined HIV/AIDS and food security crisis.

In this regard, we would be most grateful receiving, through the Resident Coordinator and not later than 14 March 2003, a short note on how the Country Team intends to proceed.

Please convey our regards to all members of the United Nations Country Team. We need the leadership of the UN Country Team more than ever before.

Yours sincerely,

*Mark Malloch Brown* *Carol Bellamy* *Thoraya A. Obaid* *James Morris*

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