

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE : 6 March 2006**

## **CHILDREN MOST AT RISK IN KENYAN DROUGHT EMERGENCY**

The drought ravaged regions of Kenya are experiencing a grim state of affairs indeed with almost 20 per cent of children suffering malnutrition and 500,000 children needing assistance. Donations to assist children in the drought affected regions can be made through Save the Children on ph 0800 167 168.

Seventy per cent of the population in the worst affected district, Kajiado, are dependent upon food aid. That amounts to 530,000 people who urgently need more food aid and want help to find long-term solutions to this crisis. There are a total of 3.5 million Kenyans suffering from food shortages and 4.5 million experiencing water shortages in the 25 drought-affected districts.

"Children are the most vulnerable in this crisis - 500,000 children in 25 drought hit districts need assistance. Save the Children is organising programmes focussed upon the specific needs of children under five years of age, primary school children and pregnant and lactating mothers in the worst affected districts of Kajiado and Isiolo. Special attention is also being paid to children and mothers suffering from HIV/AIDS," Acting Executive Director, Liz Gibbs said today.

"Kenya urgently needs more support. Save the Children estimates that this crisis will need our attention for approximately a year in order to deal with the medium term effects of crop failure, stock death and water shortages. The food shortage has meant food prices have skyrocketed in rural marketplaces. The water shortage is affecting approximately 4.5 million people.

"There is a significant need to get water to schools, for borehole maintenance, and water-related supplies in Isiolo and Kajiado. Water storage tanks are needed at 915 schools and 798 schools need water delivered to sustain 200,000 children in school.

"Reports from the northeastern districts tell of an upsurge in diseases affecting children, including malaria, marasmus, kwashiorkor, anaemia and diarrhoea. Acute child malnutrition rates are approximately 30 per cent, well above the World Health Organisation emergency threshold of 15 per cent. These are grim statistics that need to be addressed by NGOs and Government agencies alike," Liz Gibbs said.

This week the agency will be assessing the deteriorating food situation on the border of Somalia and Kenya as efforts to provide emergency food, water and health services are stepped up. Save the Children is working with children and families impacted by a devastating drought affecting large portions of Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia. Experts say as many as 10 million people in the three countries, including 3 million children, are facing severe food and water shortages.

### **For more information contact:**

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## **Notes to Editor**

- ?? We have a Save the Children spokesperson on the ground in Kenya – information on request.
- ?? Nairobi time is 10 hours behind NZ time.

## **Background**

As a result of the drought:

- ?? An estimated 4.5 million people in Kenya, and 5.5 million people in Ethiopia and Somalia, are facing severe food and/or water shortages, including 3 million children across the three countries.
- ?? Local farmers report that this will prove to be the worst drought on record.
- ?? Existing governmental food aid interventions are not providing food that can be digested by children under five.
- ?? Thousands of livestock have already died due to lack of pasture and water, leaving families with no food or income source.
- ?? In some districts up to 30 per cent of all children are showing signs of advanced malnutrition and do not have the strength to walk great distances with their families to find pasture or food aid.
- ?? The need for water is outstripping efforts by the government to provide water supplies and repair water boreholes.