Cairo, 27 February 2017 – The World Health Organization (WHO) is scaling up its response in Somalia to provide critical health services for 1.5 million people currently affected by severe drought conditions and a worsening food crisis. However, the Organization urgently requires US$ 10 million as part of the United Nations appeal for the first 6 months of 2017.

The humanitarian situation in Somalia continues to deteriorate, and there is a high risk that the country will face its third famine in 25 years. More than 6.2 million people – half of the total population – are in urgent need of humanitarian aid, including almost 3 million facing a food security crisis. Nearly 5.5 million people are at risk of contracting waterborne diseases, more than half of whom are women and children under 5 years of age.

Acute drought in many parts of Somalia has reduced the availability of clean water sources, and the food crisis has given way to malnutrition. More than 363 000 acutely malnourished children and 70 000 severely malnourished children are in need of urgent and life-saving support. According to United Nations estimates, if the current situation food and security continues, these numbers are estimated to double in 2017.

Drought conditions have increased the spread of epidemic-prone diseases such as acute watery diarrhoea, cholera and measles. In the first 7 weeks of 2017, over 6000 cases and 65 deaths by acute watery diarrhoea/ cholera have been reported, and a total of 2578 cases of suspected measles were reported as of September 2016.

“Somalia is now at a critical point as a result of this drought and environmental hazards and lack of basic services,” said WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Mahmoud Fikri. “Less than half of the population in Somalia has access to basic health services. WHO is providing all possible support to address the ongoing challenges and reduce the dire consequences of drought and pre-famine. WHO Regional Office rapid response teams have been deployed to reinforce support in the areas of emergency response, disease outbreaks, health systems and nutrition.”

WHO’s Regional Office has delivered medicines and medical supplies to health facilities in drought-affected areas. A total of 265 sentinel sites are providing enhanced surveillance for

epidemic-prone diseases such as cholera and measles. Cholera treatment centres have been established in 40 districts to manage cases of severe acute watery diarrhoea/ cholera.

The United Nations has launched an appeal for US$ 825 million for the first half of 2017 for the pre-famine response, of which US$ 85 million is required by the health sector, including US$ 10 million required by WHO.