

**Minister Brophy's Opening Address to the
Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence on his visit to the Horn of Africa and the
situation in the region**

29 November 2022

Chair, members of the Committee

Thank you for your invitation here today to discuss the crisis in the Horn of Africa. This is a situation that deserves all of our attention.

During my recent visit to Kenya and South Sudan, I witnessed in very stark terms the devastation being wrought on vulnerable communities across the region by a set of interlocking crises: drought and climate change, global and regional conflict and unsustainable food systems.

Communities stricken by drought in Turkana, in Kenya told me they were fearful that, once again, the rains would fail. It is now November, and sadly their fears have been confirmed.

The overall scale of the crisis in the region is staggering.

There are currently more than 36 million people affected by the five season drought in the Horn of Africa, focused particularly in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya. Over 21 million face acute levels of food insecurity and malnutrition. Current estimates predict that this figure will rise to as high as 26 million by February next year.

In addition to the drought, some regions have experienced wide-scale flooding year after year.

When I visited Bentiu in South Sudan in September I heard from communities already grappling with decades of conflict, now forced to flee from repeated floods: as I travelled in from Juba I could see fragile dams holding back large expanses of water threatening to engulf their makeshift camps.

Humanitarian agencies stressed the need to ensure South Sudan does not become a forgotten crisis, against a worrying backdrop of donor fatigue and competing needs, both within the region and globally.

The primary driver of these environmental crises is undeniably climate change. Average annual temperatures in the region are increasing at almost double the global rate with changing weather patterns and environmental degradation having a huge impact – shaping conflict cycles, impacting food production and threatening livelihoods and ways of life. These climate-induced shocks are closely intertwined with already unsustainable food systems which have continued to deteriorate as the crisis shows no signs of ending.

New and ongoing conflicts, political tensions and the global impact of the war in Ukraine, have also exacerbated the situation.

In Sudan, where a military coup last year halted the democratic transition that was underway, about 14 million people are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity, classified in Crisis (IPC Phase 3), or worse.

While the food crisis is being felt across the region, the drought in the heart of the Horn is having perhaps the most acute effects. With famine-like conditions already being experienced by communities, there is just a narrow window of opportunity to prevent famine in parts of Somalia, South Sudan and Ethiopia. Humanitarian Agencies and partners have appealed for \$3.4 billion to provide assistance to respond to the drought – however, this appeal is only 50 percent funded, severely limiting humanitarian agencies' capacities to respond and save lives.

It is vital that the international community responds urgently to prevent large scale starvation and death.

Ireland is playing its part. Following my visit, the Government announced that it would provide an additional €30 million in immediate humanitarian assistance to respond to the urgency of the crisis across the region. This package is on top of €3.2m in additional humanitarian aid disbursed in October, including €1.5m to Irish NGOs active on the ground and €500,000 for UNICEF's work with

malnourished children in Kenya. This will bring Ireland's support to the Horn of Africa in 2022 to over €100 million.

Working through trusted partners on the ground, including UN agencies and Irish NGOs, Ireland's funding will support the most vulnerable communities across the most severely affected countries in the region. These partners have been chosen based on proven geographic, sectoral, and thematic expertise and capacity to deliver an effective and timely response to the needs of those worst-affected by the crisis.

The focus will be on life-saving health, nutrition, water and sanitation and cash responses and will align with Ireland's commitment to reach the furthest behind first. We will place a strong emphasis on supporting local humanitarian efforts. Special attention is being paid to the plight of women and girls who have been disproportionately affected by the drought and to ensure their needs are met.

This additional funding from Ireland complements support already provided through other channels including through multilateral agencies and pooled funds such as the UN OCHA Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) which has been central to the response in the Horn of Africa and has already provided €143 million in 2022. Ireland is among the top 10 donors to the CERF and provides €11.5m annually.

As part of the package we will support critical coordination and needs analyses, in order to enhance the quality of the collective response.

While our immediate priority is to save lives, this funding will also begin to lay the groundwork for longer-term resilience and development.

In Somalia, for example, a €1 million contribution from Ireland to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Crisis Response Initiative is boosting agricultural productive capacity, food supply chains, and irrigation and domestic water supply.

In September 2022, at a High Level Event during the UN General Assembly, Ireland pledged to spend €50 million on addressing Child Wasting over the next three years (2023-2025). With 1.5 million children – nearly half of the under-five population – suffering from malnutrition in Somalia alone, the Horn of Africa will be a key focus of this response.

Meanwhile, our ongoing development funding in the region, from work on food systems, to climate mitigation, and peace building, is being complemented by robust political interventions to protect civilians and resolve conflict.

We recognize that humanitarian funding alone will not be sufficient to address the complex challenges facing the Horn of Africa, and our

development programme will look to target the underlying causes and drivers of conflict, instability and food insecurity in the region. We will prioritise actions targeting gender equality, strengthened governance and climate action, as well as maintain a focus on food insecurity and malnutrition.

Our funding complements Ireland's political engagement on the UN Security Council over the past two years, where we have taken a leadership role on peace and security in the Horn, including as Chair of the Somalia Sanctions Committee. We have also been to the fore on the Council's engagement on Ethiopia where two years of conflict in the north of the country has had a devastating impact on civilians. In that regard, I strongly welcome the peace agreement reached between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray authorities. Implementation of all aspects will be key, and securing full humanitarian access to those in need is essential.

Further, as informal focal point on hunger and conflict and through our work on climate and security at the Council, Ireland has galvanised international attention on addressing the underlying causes of food insecurity including conflict, climate change and unsustainable food systems.

In all our actions at the Council, we have consistently maintained a principled position in line with our priorities of empathy, partnership

and independence, and with a focus on addressing the human consequences of conflict and insecurity.

As you will be aware, in Budget 2023 over €1.2 billion has been allocated for international development. This is an increase of 17% on 2022 figures and represents an unprecedented investment in Ireland's overseas development programme.

Of this, €75 million will be used to address the humanitarian and other needs in Ukraine and in countries affected by the impact of Russia's invasion, including in the Horn of Africa. An additional €25 million will be provided as part of the Government's commitment to more than double our climate finance to €225 million per year by 2025. The vast majority of this will be channelled towards adaptation activities for vulnerable countries, including in the Horn. I should note too the role played by Ireland at COP27, where nationally, and as EU Lead on Loss and Damage, we were central to reaching agreement on a critical new fund to provide finance for the most vulnerable countries suffering loss and damage caused by climate change.

Ireland also continues to work through the EU to address the crisis in the Horn of Africa. On 20 June, the Foreign Affairs Council endorsed the Team Europe pledge of over €600 million for the Horn of Africa. An additional package of emergency aid for the region was recently

announced by the EU as part of a new €210 million effort to address food insecurity in 15 countries.

Let me conclude by reiterating that Ireland will remain steadfast in our commitment to tackling the immediate and substantial needs in the Horn of Africa, while also continuing to advocate for sustainable solutions that address the underlying drivers of this crisis. This is in line with our values. It is also in keeping with our interests as global citizens.

Thank you.