

HAITI

U.N LAUNCHES LARGEST EVER APPEAL FOR NATURAL DISASTER

New York, Feb 19 2010 - The United Nations and its aid partners Thursday issued a call for nearly \$1.5 billion to assist 3 million Haitians — one third of the Caribbean nation's population — following last month's colossal earthquake, making it the largest-ever humanitarian appeal launched in the wake of a natural disaster.

Some 1.2 million people need emergency shelter and urgent sanitation and hygiene help, while at least 2 million need food aid in the aftermath of the 7.0-magnitude earthquake which struck Haiti, already the Western Hemisphere's poorest country before the tragedy, on 12 January.

The \$1.44 billion appeal was launched Thursday in New York by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who was joined by John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Bill Clinton, former United States president and UN Envoy for Haiti; and Ambassador Leo Mérorès of Haiti.

Today's revised appeal will fold in the \$577 million flash appeal issued just days after the earthquake, which was originally intended to cover a six-month period. It is being expanded to meet needs for one year as the hurricane and rainy seasons approach, and its size reflects the scale of the catastrophe and takes into consideration the need for stepped-up early recovery efforts.

The original appeal is more than 100 per cent funded, leaving unmet requirements for the revised appeal at \$768 million.

It aims to support, among other sectors, agriculture, education, emergency shelter, telecommunications, health and nutrition. One third of the funds are earmarked for food aid.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the emergency phase of relief operations will last for many months to come. While strides have been made in reaching those in need with food, health care and others, needs remain great.

Previously, the largest appeal issued after a natural disaster was in

2005 following the Indian Ocean tsunami, when the UN and its partners sought

\$1.41 billion.

In a related development, the world body's top military official in Haiti, Major General Floriano Peixoto Vieira Neto, told reporters that despite losing 24 members of the UN Stabilization Force in the country (MINUSTAH), "the military component was not affected by the earthquake," playing a crucial role in the hours immediately after the disaster.

"The military component has taken part in all moments and events of the Haitian life, providing not only security, but special assistance [for] whatever necessary, in difficult moments such as these that we are living right now," said Maj.-Gen. Peixoto, who has 8,500 forces from 18 nations under his command.

He said that he has been focusing his attentions on two fronts: the provision of security and humanitarian aid.