**East Africa Regional Food Security Crisis**

**Background**

Sadly hunger on a massive scale is looming across East Africa and beyond.

Drought and conflict have left 16 million people on the brink of starvation and in urgent need of food, water and medical treatment. Drought has caused crops to fail and cattle to die in parts of Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya - leaving millions facing starvation and desperately seeking a safe source of water. Brutal war in South Sudan has driven more than three million people from their homes and left millions more in need of emergency food. People are already dying in South Sudan and Somalia.

In Kenya, the government has declared a national emergency and Ethiopia is battling a new wave of drought following the strongest El Nino on record.

Women, children and older people are suffering the most; more than 800,000 children under five are severely malnourished. Without immediate treatment, they are at risk of starving to death.

For the first time since 2011, famine has been declared in the worst affected areas.

In Ethiopia this year, an estimated 300,000 children will become severely acutely malnourished and 9.2 million people are expected not have a regular supply of safe drinking water. 5.6 million people urgently need food.

In Kenya, the arid and semi-arid lands and coastal areas are worst affected. 2.7 million people are considered severely at risk. Malnutrition rates have reached a critical level.

In Somalia, the UN has been warning of a famine. The number of people in need of emergency food aid has doubled in the last six months to 6.2 million. Over 360,000 acutely malnourished children are in urgent need of support.

In South Sudan, ongoing conflict means that 7.5 million people are now in need of humanitarian assistance. Half the country's population are expected to be affected by extreme hunger by July - and famine has already been declared in parts of the country.

In March the UN relaunched its emergency appeals for famine and the catastrophic effects of conflict in two additional contexts to the above namely Yemen and eastern Nigeria.

Without immediate action, this crisis will get worse. **We need to act now to save lives.**

**World Jewish Relief's response**

History has of course told us that it is prudent to act before these slow onset crises get worse even if the imagery of large numbers of dying kids hasn’t yet reached our screens.
World Jewish Relief launched its own appeal last week and is in discussions with partners in northern Kenya and northern Uganda to respond to the food security crisis and South Sudanese refugee crisis respectively. We have seen a good response from the UK Jewish community to our appeal which will probably resonate even more strongly over Pesach.

We know that the Jewish world is nervous about responding to the conflict arenas in Yemen, Somalia and eastern Nigeria, and hence we have focused our attention on Kenya and South Sudan where, by targeting women and kids with food assistance (cash or vouchers) and water provision we can make a specific difference to communities that are right on the brink of catastrophe.

The impact and success of Emergency Appeals is of course dependent on a level of sustained press and public interest in the story. The nature of this complex slow onset food security crisis inevitably makes it a much harder “appeal” to our support base and I am aware that it is not headline news in the US at present.

I would like to bring this emergency, which is poised on an unprecedented scale, to the Executive Committee of the Coalition to consider potentially creating a Jewish Coalition for East Africa Food Crisis.