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News Release:

Ireland's Minister visits key UN humanitarian response base funded by Ireland's Rapid Response Initiative in Accra, Ghana

The Irish Minister of State for Overseas Development, Mr Peter Power T.D., today visited the UN Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD) in Accra, Ghana. The Accra Depot, which is the UN's main supply base for the West Africa region, is currently undergoing a major expansion project and a new and larger facility is under construction. This is a key part of Ireland's Rapid Response Initiative.

"I am delighted to visit the Humanitarian Response Depot in Accra today and to be welcomed here by Ms Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the World Food Programme", said Minister Power.

"The Depot plays an important role in Irish Aid's Rapid Response Initiative. This enhanced facility is about responding quickly to emergencies and saving lives. I am delighted to see that our substantial funding is being effectively spent. It is timely that we are visiting just as the Depot is responding to a serious flood emergency in Togo.

By pre-positioning essential supplies here in Accra, Irish Aid, WFP and the wider humanitarian community are in a far better position to respond faster and more effectively than ever to humanitarian emergencies in the West Africa region, which is unfortunately so prone to climate-related crises", added the Minister.

"Ireland is a major leader in the fight against hunger", said Sheeran. "I thank them for their life-saving contribution to the humanitarian response depot."

In addition to Irish Aid's financial support for a new and larger Depot, a member of Ireland's Rapid Response Corps - Mr Des Page, an engineer from Naas in Co. Kildare - has been deployed to project manage the expansion.

"I can also confirm that, once the new facility is up and running, it is the Government's intention to pre-position more of our essential humanitarian supplies here. The Depot will then take on an even greater significance in our overall stockpiling strategy", said Minister Power.

Note to Editors:

UNHRD Accra – the UN's main humanitarian supply base for the West Africa region - forms part of a new network of rapid response hubs managed by the World Food Programme. The other hubs are in Brindisi (Italy), Dubai, Panama City and Subang (Malaysia).

Under the October 2006 Letter of Agreement framing the stockpiling arrangement between Irish Aid and the WFP, Irish Aid has committed to making an annual contribution of up to €400,000 towards the operating costs of the UNHRD Accra. The €600,000 provided for the construction of the new facility in Accra is in addition to this annual contribution.

In response to the flooding in Togo, Irish Aid has deployed supplies from the depot in Brindisi, including tents and water storage tanks.

Ireland will spend over €120 million in responding to emergencies and recovery operations globally in 2008.

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