



**Helen Keller International**

352 Park Avenue South, 12th Floor  
New York, NY 10010  
212.532.0544  
212.532.6014 fax  
[www.hki.org](http://www.hki.org)

**CONTACT:**

Jennifer Klopp, Vice President of Development and Communications  
Helen Keller International  
212-532-0544 x808  
[jklopp@hki.org](mailto:jklopp@hki.org)

**HKI RESPONDS TO SEVERE FOOD CRISIS IN NIGER;  
FUNDING IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT EFFORTS**

*June 28, 2010, Niamey, Niger* – [Niger](#) is in the middle of a severe nutrition and food crisis following insufficient and irregular rains in 2009 that caused poor food harvests and water shortages. Over 7 million people have been left vulnerable, with children under five and pregnant and nursing women the most at risk. As one of the poorest countries in Africa, Niger already has one of the highest child death rates in the world. This latest food crisis will put even more children in danger. An estimated 455,000 children are now suffering from acute malnutrition, and the situation is considered critical in the regions of Zinder and Diffa, and serious in Dosso.

“Mothers are being forced to make the difficult decision between cultivating their fields to ensure the next harvest is a good one, and seeking care for their malnourished children,” says Helen Keller International’s country director in Niger, Marily Knieriemen. “In order to save these children’s lives, we are working with partners to provide community-based rehabilitation services within the affected communities.”

Helen Keller International is responding to this grave situation by supporting screening efforts to identify malnourished children and pregnant/nursing women and providing much-needed [treatment](#) to those who are malnourished. Working in the Diffa, Dosso and Zinder regions, HKI closely collaborates with Niger’s Ministry of Health, and other partners, such as UNICEF and the World Food Programme, to ensure services reach those most in need.

Using an armband to measure upper-arm circumference, volunteers screen children to determine their level of malnutrition. Those who are severely malnourished with complications are admitted to a district hospital, but all others can receive outpatient treatment from health workers.

Moderately malnourished children are given vitamin A, iron, folic acid, de-worming medication and (if appropriate for age) a measles vaccine. They also receive rations of fortified Corn Soy Blend combined with oil and sugar that will feed them for 1-2 weeks. Severely malnourished children without complications are given these same medications and are treated for infections and malaria. They also receive a 1-week supply of Plumpy’Nut – a nutrient-rich paste specifically designed to treat severe malnutrition.

Both groups are asked to return on a regular basis so that their progress can be monitored and new supplies provided. By reducing the number of cases that are required to be treated at in-patient



**Helen Keller International**

352 Park Avenue South, 12th Floor  
New York, NY 10010  
212.532.0544  
212.532.6014 fax  
[www.hki.org](http://www.hki.org)

facilities, the likeliness of infection is reduced, families are able to stay together, and the financial and social burden to families is reduced.

Since it is clear that the food crisis will continue to get worse, Helen Keller International is seeking \$175,000 in additional funds to expand services to thirty more clinics in the hard-hit Zinder region to reach more children in need. To make a donation now, please click [here](#).

# # # #

*Founded in 1915, Helen Keller International's (HKI) mission is to save the sight and lives of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. HKI combats the causes and consequences of blindness and malnutrition by establishing programs based on evidence and research in vision, health and nutrition. The organization is known for sustainability, reliability, efficiency, and the highest level of technical expertise in preventing blindness and reducing malnutrition. HKI is headquartered in New York City, and has programs in 21 countries in Africa and Asia as well as in the United States, addressing malnutrition (including vitamin A deficiency), cataract, trachoma, onchocerciasis (river blindness) and refractive error. HKI receives support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and other national and local governments as well as from private and corporate foundations and individuals.*