

## UN official appeals for resources to help millions facing hunger in Horn of Africa

A growing number of people in the Horn of Africa are in need of food assistance in the wake of a hard drought and ongoing conflict in Somalia.



The head of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) today voiced concern over the plight of nearly 10 million people facing severe food shortages as a result of a prolonged drought in the Horn of Africa, adding that resources for the relief effort in the region are dwindling at a time when assistance needs to be stepped up.

“The World Food Programme is aiming to feed more than 6 million of the most vulnerable, but resources are thin and at the very moment that we should be ramping up operations, we have been scaling back some programmes in Ethiopia and Somalia,” said Josette Sheeran, the WFP Executive Director.

She said delivery of emergency food assistance is a vital part of the Horn of Africa Action Plan the humanitarian community developed last year to strengthen the resilience of communities affected by the drought emergency and to protect assets such as farming tools and livestock.

“It is essential that we move quickly to break the destructive cycle of drought and hunger that forces farmers to sell their means of production as part of their survival strategy.”

Ms. Sheeran said conflict in Somalia also continues to force civilians from their homes, with an estimated 10,000 people arriving each week at crowded refugee camps in Kenya. The number of malnourished children receiving supplementary or therapeutic feeding in the camps has tripled this year, an indication of the seriousness of the problem and the need for swift international action.

“A slowly evolving regional hunger crisis may not have the immediate impact of a mega-emergency like the Haitian earthquake, or Pakistan floods, but the drought and rising malnutrition in the Horn affects more people and its effects are equally devastating,” said Ms. Sheeran.

Those in need of assistance include 3.2 million people in Ethiopia, 3.5 million in Kenya, 2.5 million in Somalia, an estimated 600,000 residents of north-eastern Uganda and some 120,000 people in Djibouti,

according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Mark Bowden, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia told a news briefing that the situation in that country was “rapidly deteriorating.”

“If we are not able to respond to it rapidly and effectively, there will be many more lives lost as a result of malnutrition,” he said.

Mr. Bowden said “the basic root cause” of the crisis is the price of food, which he said has risen by 270 per cent since last year.

Noting that an appeal for Somalia has been only 40 per cent funded, he said: “Currently our resources are woefully inadequate... We find ourselves in a position where we are able to do more, but don’t have the resources.”

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