

African leaders say their people don't have enough food to survive

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Malabo, May 28 (RHC)-- African leaders gathered for a summit Friday in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, to address growing humanitarian needs on the continent, which is also facing increased violent activity, climate change challenges and a run of military coups.

Leaders called for increased mobilization to resolve a humanitarian crisis that has left millions displaced and more than 280 million suffering from malnourishment.

For people in Djibo, a town in northern Burkina Faso near the border with Mali, any help cannot come soon enough. The city in the Sahel region – the large expanse below the Sahara Desert – has been besieged since February by fighters who prevent people and goods from moving in or out and cut water supplies. Few truckers want to run the gauntlet of armed groups. Residents are suffering with no food or water, animals are dying and the price of grain has spiked.

“The goods are not arriving anymore here. Animal and agricultural production is not possible because the people cannot go back to their villages,” UN resident and humanitarian coordinator Barbara Manzi told The Associated Press from Djibo this week. “Unless (a solution) is found, it’s going to be really a tragedy for the entire group of people that are here.”

Djibo has been at the epicentre of the violence linked to al-Qaeda and the ISIL (ISIS) group that has killed thousands and displaced nearly two million people. While Djibo — and Soum province where the town is located — experienced periods of calm, such as during a makeshift ceasefire between fighters and the government surrounding the 2020 presidential election, the truce did not last.

Since November, insecurity in the region has increased. Armed groups have destroyed water infrastructure in the town and lined much of Djibo’s perimeter with explosives, blockading the city, say locals.

The town’s population has swollen from 60,000 to 300,000 during the last few years as people flee the countryside to escape the violence.

Blockading cities is a tactic used by armed groups to assert dominance and could also be an attempt to get Burkina Faso’s new military government, which seized power in January, to backtrack on promises to eliminate the fighters, said Laith Alkhouri, CEO of Intelonyx Intelligence Advisory, a group that provides intelligence analysis.

“Militants resort to blockading when they see an opportunity to gain incentives in negotiating with the government and simultaneously send a message to their base that they are in control. It’s a bargaining card and a winning one,” he said.

A UN team flew in briefly to assess the situation. The AP wire service was the first foreign media to visit the town in more than a year. “Today, there is nothing to buy here. Even if you have cash, there is nothing to buy. We came here with four donkeys and goats and some of them died because of hunger. We were forced to sell the rest of the animals and unfortunately, prices of animals have decreased,” said cattle owner Mamoudou Oumarou.

The 53-year-old father of 13 fled his village in February and said the blockade in Djibo has prevented people from coming to the market to buy and sell cattle, decreasing demand and lowering prices for the animals by half.

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