

World Food Program says \$6.8 billion needed in six months to avert famine amid COVID-19

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The UN's World Food Program says seven million people worldwide have already died from hunger this year. (Photo: Internet)

Rome, October 14 (RHC)-- The United Nations World Food Program (WFP) will need to raise \$6.8 billion over the next six months to avert famine amid the COVID-19 crisis, the agency said. The WFP, which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last week for its efforts to prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war and conflict, said it had so far raised \$1.6 billion.

"We've got a lot more money to raise to make certain we avert famine," David Beasley, executive director of the WFP, said at a conference on Tuesday organised by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Beasley noted that seven million people had died from hunger this year as the COVID-19 pandemic – which could double hunger worldwide – claimed a further one million lives. “If we don’t sort out COVID, [the] hunger death rate could be three, four, five times that,” said Beasley.

The pandemic has forced governments around the world to impose nationwide lockdowns that have in turn affected numerous economies, some already suffering from poverty and years of conflict and instability.

The Rome-based WFP says it helps some 97 million people in about 88 countries each year, and that one in nine people worldwide still do not have enough to eat.

After declining for several decades, world hunger has been on the rise again since 2016, driven by conflict and climate change. “If you think about the wealth on Earth today we shouldn’t see one single child [go] hungry or die from starvation,” said Beasley.

The agency, the world’s largest humanitarian organisation, is funded entirely by donations. It provides school meals to 17.3 million children globally and delivered 4.2 million tonnes of food to regions or countries in need in 2019.

The WFP has dispatched medical cargoes to more than 120 countries during the pandemic, and provided passenger services to ferry humanitarian workers where commercial flights were unavailable.

The new coronavirus has so far killed more than one million people, and has infected at least 37.8 million people since it first emerged in China late last year.

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