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United Nations, December 4 (RHC)-- The United Nations has warned that malnutrition in conflict-hit Yemen has reached record levels, saying almost half of the population is experiencing high levels of food insecurity, as time is running out to prevent mass starvation.

The World Food Program (WFP) warned on Thursday that the number of people facing the second highest level of food insecurity in Yemen is set to increase from 3.6 million people to 5 million in the first half of 2021.

"Pockets of famine-like conditions have already returned for the first time in two years," WFP said in a statement, adding, "The number of people experiencing this degree of catastrophic food insecurity could nearly triple from 16,500 currently to 47,000 people between January and June 2021."

According to the UN's Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis, around 45% of Yemen's population is facing high levels of acute food insecurity. It noted that within this number, 33% of the Yemeni population are in crisis, while 12% are in emergency.

Moreover, 16,500 people are in a catastrophic and famine-like situation, and the figure is the worst level of the IPC classifications.

The IPC analysis further highlighted that the outlook for next year is worse as 54% of Yemenis – equal to 16.2 million people – are likely to experience high levels of acute food insecurity between January and June next year.

“Keeping people alive by maintaining the flow of food is imperative, but this cycle cannot continue forever,” UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Director General Qu Dongyu said. He added: “Yemen needs a cessation of conflict, which is the primary driver of food insecurity in the country.”

Separately, Mohamed Abdi, Yemen's country director for the NGO Norwegian Refugee Council, said: “We need to act immediately. Waiting for a famine declaration to act will condemn hundreds of thousands of people to death.”

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched the war on Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the government of former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi back to power and crushing the popular Ansarullah movement.

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