

World Food Program warns Afghans are facing avalanche of hunger

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People wait in line during a World Food Programme food distribution event, in Kabul, Afghanistan, on November 6, 2021. (Photo by AFP)

United Nations, December 16 (RHC)-- The UN's food agency has warned that a failing economy could plunge Afghanistan into catastrophe next year. A spokesperson for the World Food Program (WFP) said during a briefing in the Swiss city of Geneva on Tuesday that Afghanistan's fragile economy was on the brink of collapse.

"The spiraling economic crisis, the conflict, and drought has meant the average family can now barely cope," Tomson Phiri said. "We have a huge amount to do to stop this crisis from becoming a catastrophe."

Phiri further said that the WFP was rapidly ramping up humanitarian operations in Afghanistan to assist the over 23 million people who will face severe hunger in the country in 2022. It has provided food assistance to 15 million Afghans so far in 2021, he said. "We cannot waste any moment," Phiri said. "Our country director describes the situation as quite dire. She says it's 'an avalanche of hunger and destitution.'"

According to recent surveys by the WFP, an estimated 98% of Afghans are not eating enough, with seven in 10 families resorting to borrowing food, which pushes them deeper into poverty. Separately, Nada al-Nashif, the UN's deputy high commissioner for human rights, said Afghan families faced "severe poverty and hunger," with many pushed into desperate measures, including child labor, early marriage, and "even the sale of children."

Afghanistan has been teetering on the brink of a major humanitarian catastrophe. In recent weeks, UN agencies have sounded the alarm bells, warning that millions of Afghans could run out of food before the onset of winter and around one million children are at risk of starvation.

The World Health Organization says one million children in Afghanistan are at risk of dying from acute malnutrition by the end of 2021. The unfolding crisis has also affected the already fragile banking system in the country, especially with billions of dollars in Afghan assets frozen by the US since the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August.

The Taliban, who had previously ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, took power again on August 15 as the U.S. was in the middle of a chaotic troop withdrawal. The group announced the formation of a caretaker government on September 7th. No country has yet recognized their rule. Since then, the Taliban have been struggling to contain a deepening economic crisis.

The UN says Afghanistan is facing "one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters."

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