

UN reports more than 200,000 face starvation as drought suffocates Somalia

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UN reports more than 200,000 face starvation in Somalia as rains fail

United Nations, June 7 (RHC)-- Nearly a quarter of a million people are facing starvation in Somalia as drought worsens and global food prices hover near record highs, United Nations agencies have said.

The agencies said on Monday that a fourth consecutive rainy season had failed in the Horn of Africa country, and meteorologists are warning of another below-average rainy season later this year as the world's climate becomes more erratic.

This is causing the worst drought in 40 years in Somalia and a major hunger crisis. At the same time, world food prices are close to record highs as the Russia-Ukraine war roils markets for staple grains and edible oils.

Around 213,000 Somalis are at risk of starvation, a near threefold increase from levels expected in April, according to a statement from the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The agencies said some 7.1 million Somalis or nearly half the population face acute levels of food insecurity, meaning they will be barely able to get the minimum calories they need and might have to sell assets to survive.

"We must act immediately to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe," said El-Khidir Daloum, the WFP's country director in Somalia. "The lives of the most vulnerable are already at risk from malnutrition and hunger; we cannot wait for a declaration of famine to act. It's a race against time to prevent famine."

Around three million livestock have died in Somalia due to the drought that has lasted since mid-2021, a terrible toll in a largely pastoral country where families rely on their herds for meat, milk and trade, the agencies said.

At particular risk of famine is southern Somalia, where the presence of fighters from the al-Shabab armed group makes humanitarian access a challenge.

The UN's 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan is only 18 percent funded to date, and Somalia is competing with other global emergency hot spots for funding as food insecurity spreads around the world, the agencies added.

"We're calling on the international community to act fast while we still have some hope of preventing ... widespread famine in Somalia," the FAO's representative in Somalia Etienne Peterschmitt said.

In 2011, famine conditions killed an estimated quarter of a million people in Somalia. Half of those who died were children under the age of six.

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