

'Time lost means lives lost,' warns UN aid chief, releasing funds to tackle drought in Ethiopia

21 February 2017 – The top United Nations humanitarian official today released \$18.5 million from the organization's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to enable critical aid for more than 785,000 people suffering from hunger, malnutrition and severe water shortages in Ethiopia's Somali region – the worst drought-stricken part of the country.

"I was recently in Ethiopia's Somali region, where I saw the devastating impact this drought is having on people's lives, livestock and livelihoods," said UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien.

"Time lost means lives lost so I am releasing CERF funding to provide urgent aid to people in need – now – when they need it most."

According to CERF, the latest allocation will immediately provide affected people with access to water and health, nutritional and agricultural services. The funds will also help pastoral communities, who are most in need, and thousands of whom have been forced to move in search of water and pasture.

This latest drought struck Ethiopia before it could recover from the effects of a devastating El Niño-induced drought in 2015 and 2016 which left millions in urgent need of aid.

However, the grant covers only a small portion of what is required in 2017 to address rising challenges. Furthermore, according to current estimates more than 5.6 million people in the country are in desperate need of basic necessities.

"Humanitarians will use these funds to save lives, but it is a bridge that must be matched and surpassed urgently. Millions of people's lives, livelihoods and wellbeing depend on continued donor support," noted Mr. O'Brien.

The drought is also one of the worst to hit the Horn of Africa in decades. According to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the region received only a quarter of the expected rainfall between October and December last year, leaving over 17 million people in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda in crisis and emergency food insecurity levels.

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CERF also highlighted that as the scale and intensity of emergencies around the world continue to increase, the Fund needs to be strengthened so that aid

can reach people, whenever and wherever crises hit.

To this end, In December last year, UN General Assembly endorsed a recommendation by then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's to double CERF's annual target to \$1 billion by 2018.

Famine declared in region of South Sudan – UN

20 February 2017 – Famine has been formally declared in parts of South Sudan, the United Nations said today, warning that war and a collapsing economy have left some 100,000 people facing starvation there and a further 1 million people are classified as being on the brink of famine.

“Famine has become a tragic reality in parts of South Sudan and our worst fears have been realised,” said Serge Tissot, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Representative in South Sudan, in a news release issued jointly with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

“Many families have exhausted every means they have to survive,” he stated, explaining that these people are predominantly farmers who have lost their livestock, even their farming tools.

Famine is currently affecting parts of Unity State in the northern-central part of the country. A formal famine declaration means people have already started dying of hunger.

Famine has become a tragic reality in parts of South Sudan

The situation is the worst hunger catastrophe since fighting erupted more than three years ago between rival forces – the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) loyal to President Salva Kiir and the SPLA in Opposition backing First Vice-President Riek Machar.

The three UN agencies warned that urgent action is needed to prevent more people from dying of hunger.

According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) update released today by the government, the three agencies and other humanitarian partners, 4.9 million people – more than 40 percent of South Sudan’s population – are in need of urgent food, agriculture and nutrition assistance.

The total number of food insecure people is expected to rise to 5.5 million

at the height of the lean season in July if nothing is done to curb the severity and spread of the food crisis.

More than one million children are currently estimated to be acutely malnourished across South Sudan; over a quarter of a million children are already severely malnourished. If we do not reach these children with urgent aid many of them will die," said Jeremy Hopkins, UNICEF Representative a.i in South Sudan.

"We have also warned that there is only so much that humanitarian assistance can achieve in the absence of meaningful peace and security, both for relief workers and the crisis-affected people they serve," said WFP Country Director Joyce Luma.

Critical food aid shortages hit Africa's refugees hard, UN warns

20 February 2017 – Across Africa, some two million refugees are facing critical shortages in food assistance, the United Nations warned today.

Refugee operations in 10 African countries have experienced cuts affecting the quantity and quality of food assistance for approximately two million refugees, according to a joint press release from the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"Millions of refugees depend on WFP food and our work to treat and prevent malnutrition to stay alive. But in Africa they are in danger of being overshadowed by large humanitarian crises elsewhere," WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin said in the release.

Food rations have been dramatically cut – in some cases by up to 50 per cent – in large operations including Cameroon, Chad, Kenya, Mauritania, South Sudan and Uganda.

Refugees in Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Burundi and Ethiopia have had specific commodities cut including micronutrient fortified blended foods, needed to ensure an adequate quality diet.

RELATED: Famine hits parts of South Sudan, UN warns

"We can't imagine how difficult life is for thousands of refugee families with no food, and often denied the possibility to work or provide for themselves in other ways," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. "Refugees are extraordinarily resilient, but cuts in food assistance – sometimes as high as 50 per cent – are having a devastating impact on the health and nutrition of thousands of

families.”

The number of refugees in Africa nearly doubled from 2.6 million in 2011 to nearly five million in 2016, the release said. While donor funding for refugee assistance increased during this period, it did not keep pace with rapidly rising needs. As a result, the humanitarian response is significantly underfunded.

Amid global paradox, solutions that unify economic and social progress needed – UN labour chief

20 February 2017 – Highlighting that many around the world are left out from being able to benefit from global prosperity dividends and that even flourishing societies are seeing inequalities widen, the head of the United Nations labour agency today called for solutions that can bring economic growth combined with social progress.

In his message on World Day of Social Justice, UN International Labour Organization chief Guy Ryder also underlined that the feeling of absence of social justice: children without secure futures, parents without decent jobs and a general feeling of abandonment, have grave consequences not only for communities and societies, but for economies as well.

“We need solutions that lead away from conflict and towards recovery, to economic growth with social progress, solutions that build institutions girded by labour standards that guarantee rights at work,” said Mr. Ryder.

“In an interconnected world this is a global agenda and a global responsibility,” he added.

Marked this year with the theme ‘Preventing conflict and sustaining peace through decent work’ the Day calls upon the international community work towards eradicating poverty, promoting full employment and decent work, gender equity, and access to social well-being and justice for all.

Mr. Ryder also stressed that lack of decent jobs and the fear that aspirations for a better life will remain unfulfilled multiplies people’s worries, leaving young people without a “stake in society.”

Urging for the formulation of policies that can deliver the decent work opportunities given their importance for the stability and success of societies, he added: “[The words] *Si vis pacem, cole justitium*: ‘If you seek peace, cultivate justice’ [...] are as compelling today as they were when

written nearly one hundred years ago when the world was emerging from the ravages of war.”

RELATED: Responses to global ills must integrate peace and sustainable development, UN Member States told

In 2007, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 20 February as World Day of Social Justice, inviting Member States to promote national activities in accordance with the objectives and goals of the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

Also today, UN independent human rights experts underlined everyone's right to a standard of living that ensures adequate health and well-being for themselves and their families, including access to food, clothing, housing, health care and social services.

“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which sets out these rights, also makes clear that all people are entitled to a social and international order in which their rights and freedoms can be fully realized,” said Alfred de Zayas, UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; and Idriss Jazairy, UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights.

They also underlined that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include commitments to eradicate poverty, provide clean, affordable energy, promote peaceful and inclusive societies, and implement nationally appropriate social protection systems for all, including social protection floors.

'Historic' day as last FARC-EP members gather to turn in arms – UN mission in Colombia

20 February 2017 – About 300 members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) today arrived in central Colombia's Agua Bonita zone, bringing the number to close to 6,900, to lay down their arms under United Nations verification, and to begin a transition to social, economic and political life, the UN Mission in the country said today.

“In the past 19 days they rode cars, buses, boats or walked some 8,700 kilometres [...] across the country, accompanied by over 860 [members] of the tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVM),” read a news release from the UN Mission in Colombia.

The Mission's Chief Observer and MVM coordinator, Major General Javier Pérez Aquino, called the day **historic**.

The UN Mission in Colombia and the MVM consider that the FARC-EP's decision to move into the zones in spite of the limited logistics in the majority of them very positive, he said.

This decision considerably reduces the possibility of armed contact [...] and we also hope that their presence will accelerate the construction works in these camps, creating the appropriate conditions to continue with the process that will lead to their reinsertion into the social, economic and political life, he added.

The Chief Observer also noted that despite limited logistics, the deadline for the completion of the laying down of arms 180 days after the Final Agreement, which came into force on 1 December stands.

Working hand-in-hand so that 'our children and grandchildren live in a conflict-free country'

In Colombia's capital, Bogotá, as well as at eight regional and 26 local sites, FARC-EP and Government members, along with 350 UN observers, are working together to verify the parties' commitments towards the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities.

We work together to implement the Final Agreement and I feel hopeful that this process will lead to a country with more social justice, said 45-year-old Esperanza Fajardo, who joined FARC-EP in the 1990's, now working with Government and UN Mission counterparts.

Mayor Alejandro Cruz, from the Government, echoed: I feel very committed to this process because I want our children and grandchildren to live in a conflict-free country.

Mr. Cruz was twice injured in combat with the FARC-EP and bears a large scar on his chest while Ms. Fajardo joined the rebel group to escape the killings of left-wing *Unión Patriótica* political affiliates.

In early October 2016, Colombian voters narrowly rejected the historic peace accord between the Government and the FARC-EP. That deal led to a cessation of hostilities and agreements on key issues such as political participation, land rights, illicit drugs and victims' rights and transitional justice. The two sides signed a new agreement in late November.