

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 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 justatium*: ‘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.

Bird flu vaccines set to undergo clinical trials

Four kinds of vaccine for the H7N9 strain of bird flu virus have been approved for clinical trials by China's top drug regulator, according to the Beijing Food and Drug Administration.



The China Food and Drug Administration. [File photo/Xinhua]

The administration will continue to provide assistance and guidance for clinical trials of the vaccines so they can enter the market as soon as possible, it said in a statement last week.

Beijing Tiantan Biological Products Co, a State-owned enterprise in Beijing, which developed the vaccines, announced on Wednesday that the China Food and Drug Administration had approved clinical trials. The company added that it must conduct other procedures after the completion of clinical trials before the vaccines can be sold on the market, including applying for registration of the drugs and acquiring certificates for their manufacture from the CFDA.

There are currently no vaccines for the H7N9 strain of bird flu which is most active in winter and spring available on the market in China or overseas, although several other domestic companies have also acquired approval from CFDA for clinical trials for similar products, Beijing Tiantan said.

Two human cases of H7N9 have been reported in Beijing this year, with both patients suspected of having been exposed to live poultry markets. Both are in critical condition, the Beijing Center for Disease Control and Prevention said last week.

A 41-year-old woman infected with the H7N9 strain of bird flu in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, died on Sunday, the regional Health and Family Planning Commission said.

The central government has intensified measures to control the spread of H7N9, including shutting down live poultry markets, according to the National Health and Family Planning Commission. The commission called on the public to

take precautionary measures such as avoiding contact with live poultry and cooking chicken meat thoroughly.

Human cases of H7N9 have been reported in 16 provinces in China since October, including in Yunnan, Fujian, Hubei and Hunan provinces, with most of them involving exposure to live poultry markets, according to the commission.

In January alone, 192 human cases of H7N9 were reported on the Chinese mainland, including 79 deaths, making it the worst period since the virus first appeared in China in 2013, the commission said.

There is no evidence to support sustained human-to-human transmission of the virus, which was first reported in the spring of 2013, according to the World Health Organization.

The Beijing Center for Disease Control and Prevention said last week that more sporadic cases are expected in the city.

Sporadic cases of the bird flu may last until late April, said Ni Daxin, deputy director of emergency response at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Plan to lower age to 14 on detention gets mixed review



[Shanghai Daily]

A new draft law that would change the minimum age for administrative detention from 16 to 14 has been met with both concerns of over correction and voices of support, albeit cautious.

In China, administrative detention is a punishment for violations that threaten public security but do not constitute a criminal charge. Sentences usually do not exceed 20 days. People awaiting trial are sometimes held in administrative detention.

Currently, minors are exempt from administrative detention. However, the draft public security administration law released last Friday proposed administrative detention should be applicable for individuals “at least 14 and under 18.”

The draft law comes in response to rising concerns about young offenders, especially those involved with bullying or violence at school.

Moreover, a survey by China Youth and Children Research Center in 2015 showed that juvenile offenders are getting younger.

Many people, however, are wary about the new draft law.

“I don’t agree with it,” said Ge Haiyan, a mother in Beijing. “Children of that age are not mature enough to understand the consequences of their actions, and they are often rebellious at puberty. If we are too strict, our

methods could have a negative effect.”

Wang Tingting, another Beijing parent, said there should be a more holistic approach to punishment, as juvenile offences were influenced by home and school life. “Teachers and parents should step up,” she said.

Song Ruiyong, an education official in Beijing, said he was more concerned about the negative effects administrative detention had on young offenders.

“There is a risk that they will interact with more seasoned criminals while in detention, and they could have a negative influence on them,” Song said. “Being locked-up is an irreversible experience, especially for children.”

He said youth education services would be better suited for young offenders.

Bian Feng, a judge in Shenyang City, said that the incarceration of minors was ignoring the fundamental problem. “I think community or social services could be a better option.”

Some people welcomed the proposed law, but not without conditions.

Wu Changhai, a law professor at China University of Political Science and Law, argued that the minimum age should only be applied in certain situations. “The rule should only be executed if the misconduct has had a huge social impact or if the suspect is a repeat offender,” Wu said.

Deng Xiquan, deputy director of CYCRC, also supports the new rules. “There are no existing actions in the current law for young offenders aged 14 to 16, and this has been exploited by some criminals who use kids of that age to circumvent the criminal law process,” Deng said. “The new rule, in a way, protects minors.”

Deng’s support comes with a condition. “All young offenders should be kept at a specialized complex, away from bad influences,” he said.

Wang Na, a lawyer in Beijing, supported the lowering of the minimum age, especially for those suspected of severe crimes.

“Teenagers these days mature earlier,” Wang said. “I have encountered cases of 14-year-olds suspected of molesting girls.”

She said the number of reported school bullying cases had increased, so the new law could work as a deterrent.