



UNOG Bi-weekly press Briefing: Famine Hotspots Alert- FAO - WFP

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Shotlist

1. Exterior wide shot, Palais des Nations flag alley, nations' flags flying, a cloudy day.
2. Medium-wide shot, TV camera operator with podium and speakers to rear in a near-empty Room XIV in line with COVID-19 distancing measures, Palais des Nations.
3. **SOUNDBITE (English) — Claudia Ah Poe, Senior food security adviser, World Food Programme (WFP): “Twenty countries have been identified and are referred to as hotspots that we are particularly concerned about. These countries already had significant acute food insecurity levels in 2020 – in early 2020 – and are now facing a risk of a further rapid deterioration over the next months.”**
4. Medium shot, UN technical staff member sitting with laptop and monitoring online participants, wears headphones, Room XIV, Palais des Nations.
5. **SOUNDBITE (English) — Claudia Ah Poe, senior food security adviser, World Food Programme (WFP): “Among the 20 hotspots that I just mentioned, there are four where we are concerned that they may be facing an elevated risk of famine if the situation would further deteriorate over the coming months and these are Burkina Faso - in the Sahel Region - north-eastern Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen.”**
6. Medium shot, camera operator filming, Room XIV, Palais des Nations.
7. **SOUNDBITE (English) — Tomson Phiri, spokesperson, WFP (World Food Programme): “Burkina Faso, we know that there’s an insurgency in the northern part of the country, the same with north-eastern Nigeria, the same with South Sudan, it’s a conflict that is, for decades, people have lost assets, people have lost their capability to cope with any shocks. We had one of**

the unprecedented floods this year; I mean, flood water were submerging whole towns, people are struggling, the harvest that was just about to come in, in South Sudan.”

8. Medium shot, UN staff member following the briefing on his laptop, Room XIV, Palais des Nations.
9. **SOUNDBITE (English) — Claudia Ah Poe, senior food security adviser, World Food Programme (WFP): “And in those 27 countries, the number of people that are already facing acute food insecurity are more than 100 million already. Analysis obviously is continuously ongoing so we expect this number to increase much more. And earlier on this year, we, WFP, we actually had estimated in the countries where we are operating – which is around 80 countries – an additional 121 million people would be at risk of falling into food insecurity.”**
10. Medium-wide shot, podium with speakers, side shot, Room XIV, Palais des Nations.
11. Medium shot, UN OCHA spokesperson sitting and using listening device, Room XIV, Palais des Nations.
12. Medium shot, UN staff member sitting and checking his phone, Room XIV, Palais des Nations.

Story

Aid agencies call for urgent action to prevent hunger crisis in famine hotspots

People in four “famine hotspots” in Burkina Faso, northeastern Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen need help urgently to avoid sliding into famine, UN humanitarians said on Friday.

Blaming long-running conflict and a lack of humanitarian access to communities in need, climate extremes and the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) warned that 16 additional countries also face a “major (food) emergency – or series of emergencies” in the next three to six months.

At-risk nations include Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo – where 22 million people are acutely food insecure - the highest number ever registered for a single country - Haiti and Venezuela.

“Twenty countries have been identified and are referred to as hotspots that we are particularly concerned about,” said Claudia Ah Poe, senior food security adviser at WFP. “These countries already had significant acute food insecurity levels in 2020...and are now facing a risk of a further rapid deterioration over the next months.”

Among the 20 hotspots, Ah Poe added that “there are four where we are concerned that they may be facing an elevated risk of famine if the situation would further deteriorate over the coming months and these are Burkina Faso - in the Sahel Region - north-eastern Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen”.

Some communities in these four countries “are already experiencing a critical hunger situation”, the UN agencies said in a joint statement, that underscored the risk of famine if there is “any further deterioration” in coming weeks and months.

Underscoring the level of need in the three African countries found to be among the four nations most at risk of famine, WFP spokesperson Tomson Phiri explained that in “Burkina Faso, we know that there’s an insurgency in the northern part of the country, the same with north-eastern Nigeria, the same with South Sudan; it’s a conflict that is, for decades, people have lost assets, people have lost their capability to cope with any shocks. We had ...unprecedented floods this year; I mean, floodwaters were submerging whole towns, people are struggling, the harvest that was just about to come in, in South Sudan.”

Further data from March to September has also shown that while in many countries COVID-19-related restrictions were progressively lifted, allowing economic activity to resume, 27 countries affected by food crises last year now

have up to 104.6 million people facing a food crisis.

In 2019, the number of people facing similar levels of food insecurity in these 27 countries was 97.6 million, according to WFP.

“In those 27 countries, the number of people that are already facing acute food insecurity are (sic) more than 100 million already. Analysis obviously is continuously ongoing so we expect this number to increase much more,” said WFP’s Claudia Ah Poe. “And earlier on this year, we... had estimated in the countries where we are operating – which is around 80 countries – an additional 121 million people would be at risk of falling into food insecurity.”

Speaking via video link from Rome, FAO senior food crises analyst Luca Russo recalled that the main objective of the alert was to avert a humanitarian catastrophe by identifying the many factors that contribute to famine, and which specific actions would help vulnerable communities most.

In 2011, famine was declared in southern Somalia in July, but most people had already died by May, he said.

“The moment you declare a famine it is already too late to act, in the sense that we saw this in the past, with Somalia when the famine was declared, already 260,000 people had died...so we want to raise an early warning before the famine occurs.”

Echoing that message, FAO’s Director of Emergencies and Resilience, Dominique Burgeon called for urgent action from the international community.

“We are deeply concerned about the combined impact of several crises which are eroding people’s ability to produce and access food, leaving them more and more at risk of the most extreme hunger,” he said. “We need access to these populations to ensure they have food and the means to produce food and improve their livelihoods to prevent a worst-case scenario.”

In a statement, WFP Director of Emergencies Margot van der Velden, cautioned that the world is at a “catastrophic turning point”, with the risk of famine in four different parts of the world at the same time. “When we declare a famine, it means many lives have already been lost. If we wait to find that out for sure, people are already dead,” she said.

Famine is defined as the most severe type of hunger, according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) measure, which humanitarians use to gauge food security levels on a scale of one to five.

A declaration of famine – IPC 5 - only refers to areas where “at least one in five households has or is most likely to have an extreme deprivation of food”, as per the IPC definition, and where “significant mortality, directly attributable to outright starvation or to the interaction of malnutrition and disease, is occurring or will be occurring”.