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United Nations, November 20 (RHC)-- War-torn Yemen is in imminent danger of the worst famine the world has seen in decades, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned. “In the absence of immediate action, millions of lives may be lost,” Guterres said on Friday of the country that has endured a five-year war between Iranian-backed Houthi rebels and government forces.

Guterres' warning comes as the United States threatens to blacklist the Houthi group as part of its "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran. Aid workers have raised fears such a move would prevent life-saving aid from reaching the country and make things even worse in Yemen.

In his statement, Guterres made only an indirect reference to this possibility. "I urge all those with influence to act urgently on these issues to stave off catastrophe, and I also request that everyone avoids taking any action that could make the already dire situation even worse," he said.

Guterres said the reasons for the heightened threat of famine include a sharp drop in funding for the UN-coordinated relief programme, the instability of the Yemeni currency and the warring parties imposing "impediments" for relief organisations.

A Saudi Arabia-led military coalition intervened in Yemen in 2015, backing government forces fighting the Houthi group. The coalition is assisted by Western powers including the United States.

The Houthi rebels control the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, and much of the north after a grinding war that has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

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