

UN reports more than 700 children have died in Somalia nutrition centers

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Fardowsa Adan Mohamed, just seven months old, being examined in a UNICEF-funded clinic to find the extent of malnutrition due to the severe drought in the region. (Al Jazeera)

Geneva, September 8 (RHC)-- Hundreds of children have already died in nutrition centers across Somalia, the United Nations children's agency (UNICEF) announced, one day after it warned that parts of

Somalia will be hit by famine in the coming months.

The Horn of Africa region is on track for a fifth-consecutive failed rainy season. In 2011, a famine in Somalia claimed more than a quarter of a million lives, most of them children. “Some 730 children have been reported to have died in food and nutrition centres across the country between January and July this year but the numbers could be more as many deaths go unreported,” UNICEF Somalia representative Wafaa Saeed told a Geneva press briefing.

The centers are for children with severe acute malnutrition as well as other complications such as measles, cholera or malaria and are considered just a snapshot of the situation across the country. “We don’t know the full picture. I have met many, many families whose children have died along the way (to centres)” said Victor Chinyama, the UNICEF spokesman in Mogadishu.

UNICEF said that disease outbreaks were increasing among children, with some 13,000 suspected measles cases reported in recent months of which 78 percent were children under five years of age. Funding for Somalia has increased in recent weeks and the United Nations’ \$1.46bn appeal is now 67-percent funded. But aid officials warned that it had come very late and that more was needed.

“We are going to be witnessing the death of children on an unimaginable scale if we don’t act fast,” said Audrey Crawford, Somalia’s country director at the Danish Refugee Council.

For his part, the UN's humanitarian chief, Martin Griffiths, spoke to reporters in the Somali capital Mogadishu after touring camps for internally displaced people and visiting hospitals treating malnourished children. Griffiths said afterward that hundreds of thousands of people are at imminent risk of death.

Martin Griffiths told reporters: “I have been shocked to my core these past few days by the level of pain and suffering we see so many Somalis enduring. Famine is at the door, and today we are receiving a final warning.”

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