

Donors pledge \$1.7 billion in humanitarian aid to conflict-hit Sahel



United Nations, October 23 (RHC)-- International donors have pledged \$1.7 billion in humanitarian aid for countries in the conflict-hit Sahel region, surpassing by \$300 million the fundraising target of a virtual conference, according to the United Nations.

The announcement came as UN agencies reported that needs in the border region between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have reached record levels due to changing climates, rising insecurity and most recently the coronavirus pandemic. "The central Sahel region is at a breaking point," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said at the meeting hosted by the UN, Denmark, Germany and the European Union.

In a statement, the World Food Program (WFP), which was recently awarded the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize, said violence and insecurity have already pushed some 7.4 million people across the three countries into acute hunger.

The UN food relief agency said thousands in the volatile region will be “pushed into further destitution”, unless access is urgently granted to humanitarian organisations.

Meanwhile, the number of internally displaced people has jumped to a staggering 1.6 million, up from 70,000 two years ago. That figure included more than 288,000 people in Mali, some 265,000 in Niger and one million in Burkina Faso, which is now home to the world’s fastest-growing displacement crisis.

“When we can’t get to vulnerable communities, we’re seeing tragic spikes in food insecurity,” said Chris Nikoi, WFP regional director for West Africa.

He explained that “dreadful violence and conflict” in parts of northern Burkina Faso have left more than 10,000 people there “one step short of famine”.

Armed groups affiliated to al-Qaeda and ISIL (ISIS), once confined to lawless areas of northern Mali, have in recent years spread across the arid scrublands of the Sahel, into Burkina Faso and Niger, stoking ethnic tensions while jockeying for power and attacking security forces, which have also faced accusations of grave abuses.

The deteriorating security situation has created an enormous humanitarian crisis, destroying fragile agricultural economies and hobbling aid efforts.

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