

Drought in Horn of Africa worse than during 2011 famine

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Internally displaced Somali woman Habiba Bile and her children stand near the carcasses of their dead livestock following severe drought [File: Feisal Omar/Reuters]

Mogadishu, February 23 (RHC)-- Drought trends in the Horn of Africa are now worse than they were during the 2011 famine in which hundreds of thousands of people died. The IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Center said on Wednesday that below-normal rainfall is expected during the rainy season over the next three months.

“In parts of Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda that have been most affected by the recent drought, this could be the 6th failed consecutive rainfall season,” it said. Drier than normal conditions have also increased in parts of Burundi, eastern Tanzania, Rwanda and western South Sudan, the center added.

While famine thresholds have not been reached, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that 8.3 million people – more than half Somalia’s population – will need humanitarian assistance this year. Workneh Gebeyehu, the head of IGAD, urged governments and partners to act “before it’s too late.”

The drought, the longest on record in Somalia, has lasted almost three years and tens of thousands of people have died. Last month, the UN resident coordinator for Somalia warned excess deaths in the country will “almost certainly” surpass those of the famine declared in the country in 2011, when more than 260,000 people died of starvation.

About 1.3 million people, 80 percent women and children, have been internally displaced in Somalia by the drought sweeping the Horn of Africa. After five consecutive poor rainy seasons, the ongoing drought has already become the longest and most severe in Somalia’s recent history.

Close to 23 million people are thought to be highly food insecure in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya, according to a food security working group chaired by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

Already 11 million livestock that are essential to many families’ health and wealth have died, Wednesday’s statement said. Many people affected across the region are pastoralists or farmers who have watched crops wither and water sources run dry.

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