

UN conference pledges fall short of \$7 billion goal for Horn of Africa

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Somalis who fled drought-stricken areas carry their belongings as they arrive at a makeshift camp for the displaced on the outskirts of Mogadishu, Somalia [Farah Abdi Warsameh/AP Photo]

United Nations, May 26 (RHC)-- A United Nations-backed conference raised \$2.4 billion on Wednesday to prevent famine in the Horn of Africa, which is reeling from its worst drought in decades as global temperatures rise.

The money will provide life-saving assistance for nearly 32 million people across Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, the world body's humanitarian agency OCHA said in a statement. "Famine has been averted, thanks in part to the tremendous efforts of local communities, humanitarian organizations and authorities, as well as the support of donors," OCHA said.

But the sum is considerably less than the \$7bn the United Nations says is needed to provide help to people affected by drought and conflict in the region. "The emergency is far from over, and additional resources are urgently required to prevent a return to the worst-case scenario," OCHA added.

Since late 2020, countries in the Horn of Africa – Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan — have been suffering the region's worst drought in 40 years.

Five failed rainy seasons have left millions of people in need, decimated crops and killed millions of livestock. More than 23.5 million people are enduring high levels of acute food insecurity in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, according to OCHA.

In Somalia alone, where armed groups are spearheading conflict, 3.8 million people have been displaced from their homes by conflict, drought or floods and double that number are struggling to find food, according to figures from the UN and the Norwegian Refugee Council. More than half a million children are severely malnourished, the two organizations added.

Deaths from hunger are on the rise in Africa because of droughts worsened by climate change and conflict, UN officials and scientists say. The devastating drought in the Horn of Africa could not have occurred without the effects of greenhouse gas emissions, the World Weather Attribution group, an international team of climate scientists, said in a report released in April.

But aid organisations like the Norwegian Refugee Council have also said a focus on the Ukraine crisis has drastically reduced the funding available for work in the Horn of Africa. "The war in Ukraine has demonstrated the immense gap between what is possible when the international community rallies behind a crisis, and the daily reality for millions of people suffering in silence within these crises on the African continent that the world has chosen to ignore," the aid group's chief Jan Egeland said last June.

Earlier this week, a group of NGOs, including Islamic Relief Worldwide and Save the Children, called on donors to fully fund the humanitarian response required for "one of the biggest climate injustices of our time". Citing UN numbers, the organisations pointed out that despite funding mobilised aid to the region last year, an estimated 43,000 people died from the drought in Somalia alone in 2022.

At the opening of the donors' conference organised in conjunction with Italy, Qatar, the United Kingdom and the horn of Africa states, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed for "an immediate and major injection of funding" to stop people from dying. "We must act now to prevent crisis from turning into catastrophe," he added, recalling that last year donor countries delivered vital help to 20 million people in the region and helped avert a famine.

Guterres said people in the region, which he described as "the epicentre of one of the world's worst climate emergencies", were "paying an unconscionable price for a climate crisis they did nothing to cause."



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