

Food aid staving off famine in Somalia: UN

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The United Nations said Friday that international food assistance to Somalia was the only reason why famine was being kept at bay in the troubled country.

The UN's World Food Programme said the situation was dire and the nation was now in a desperate race against time to avert famine, having suffered four consecutive failed rainy seasons since the end of 2020 and

with a fifth now happening.

But WFP warned that if the world waited for famine to be formally declared before taking action, it would already be too late.

"Somalia is absolutely not out of danger yet. We remain extremely concerned about the dire situation across the country and we're in a desperate race against time," WFP's Somalia deputy country director Laura Turner told reporters in Geneva, speaking from Mogadishu.

"If the situation continues to worsen... then famine is projected before the end of this year."

Turner said that conditions were indeed expected to deteriorate as the rains have failed to materialise in the current season.

Meanwhile the situation could also worsen if the progressive scale-up of assistance is not maintained.

Famine is likely to strike in the Baidoa and Burhakaba districts of the Bay region, in inland southern Somalia.

Turner said famine had not yet been declared because three indicators had not been reached.

"One is extreme lack of food, the second is [acute malnutrition](#) and the third is mortality," she explained.

"The malnutrition rates are truly horrifying... the mortality rates are only increasing. It's actually only the provision of food assistance that is keeping famine at bay."

Food costs are rising because Somalia is heavily dependent on Ukraine

and Russia for its wheat imports.

"Food assistance alone will not prevent large-scale loss of life," Turner said, as disease, poor hygiene and dehydration would prove fatal.

Somalia is WFP's biggest operation, with the agency having distributed food and cash to nearly 4.2 million people—double the numbers it reached earlier this year.

Turner said WFP required \$300 million to sustain its operations for the next six months, when the next potential rains might come.

Cost of inaction

Somalia has been wracked by decades of civil war, [political violence](#) and an Islamist insurgency.

Millions of people are at risk of starvation across the wider Horn of Africa, which is in the grip of the worst drought in four decades after the four failed rainy seasons wiped out livestock and crops.

Mamunur Rahman Malik, the World Health Organization's representative in Somalia, also speaking from Mogadishu, said people in Somalia were facing hunger on a scale not seen since the 2011 famine.

"The risk of starving to death is being compounded by unprecedented drought, continued fighting, and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a fragile health system," he said.

Malik said that 1.8 million children—half the country's total—were facing acute severe malnutrition, while one in 10 were visiting health centres with largely preventable diseases such as measles and cholera.

One in seven children were missing out on vaccines as their families move in search of food, he added.

"We should not have to wait for a famine declaration to prevent people from dying," said Malik.

"The cost of our inaction will mean that children, women and other vulnerable people will pay with their lives while we hopelessly, helplessly witness the tragedy unfolding."

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