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WFP/Arete/Fredrik Lerneryd. WFP staff, Francis Mpoyi, measures baby's arm during a routine check-up in Kalemie, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Hunger & Starvation Threaten Quarter of a Billion People Worldwide

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By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS, 4 May 2023 (IDN) — A new report on world hunger by the *Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC)* is a setback to the UN's highly-publicized goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by 2030—an integral part of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Far from achieving progress in the fight against hunger, the latest numbers indicate a reversal in the battle front.

Released May 3, the “Global Report on Food Crises” (GRFC), warns the high levels of acute food insecurity require urgent food and livelihood assistance for the fourth consecutive year in 2022.

Over a quarter of a billion people were estimated to face acute hunger, with economic shocks and the Ukraine war contributing to the increase.

In 2022, around 258 million people across 58 countries and territories faced acute food insecurity at crisis or worse levels, up from 193 million people in 53 countries and territories in 2021.

Emily Farr, Global Food and Economic Security Lead at Oxfam said: “For global hunger to rise for a fifth consecutive year in a world of plenty is a stain on our collective humanity.”

She said decades of progress made to end poverty and hunger are now being fast reversed by conflict, economic shocks and climate change.

“Arms dealers, warlords, big polluters, and food monopolies are making the planet increasingly uninhabitable, driving more people from their homes and lands and wiping out the income of millions already struggling to put food on the table.

“In East Africa alone, one of the worst affected regions, climate-induced drought and ongoing conflict have left over 36 million people in extreme hunger—nearly the entire population of Canada—up from 24 million last year. Over 85,000 people are already facing starvation.”

Families are being forced to eat dry leaves, beg, or have their girls married at young ages to survive, she declared.

Danielle Nierenberg, President and co-founder of Food Tank, the think tank for food, told IDN the new report highlights a stark reality—that conflict, the climate crisis, and inequality and injustice are the root causes of hunger and poverty across the globe.

But “we”—policymakers, corporations, multi-lateral institutions, producers, and citizen eaters—can make the changes necessary to create food and economic systems where no one is left behind.

The next few months are critical as world leaders meet at Aim4C, Climate Week/UNGA, and, of course, COP28 —“the decisions we make now can ensure that those who are currently hungry not only have the means to survive, but to thrive”, she warned.

The 2023 report is described as the result of a collaborative effort among 16 partners to achieve a consensus-based assessment of acute food insecurity in GRFC countries.

The report aims to inform humanitarian and development action by providing independent and consensus-based evidence and analysis.

Launched in 2016 by the European Union, FAO and WFP, the GNAFC seeks to better link, integrate, and guide existing initiatives, partnerships, programmes and policy processes to sustainably address the root causes of crises.

The alliance now includes the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank.

In a [foreword to the report](#), UN Secretary-General António Guterres says more than a quarter of a billion people are now facing acute levels of hunger, and some are on the brink of starvation. That’s unconscionable.

This seventh edition of the GRFC “is a stinging indictment of humanity’s failure to make progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 2 to end hunger, and achieve food security and improved nutrition for all”.

In fact, we are moving in the wrong direction. Conflicts and mass displacement continue to drive global hunger. Rising poverty, deepening inequalities, rampant underdevelopment, the climate crisis and natural disasters also contribute to food insecurity, Guterres argues.

“As always, it is the most vulnerable who bear the brunt of this failure, facing soaring food prices that were aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic and, despite some declines, are still above 2019 levels due to the war in Ukraine.

All this, while humanitarian funding to fight hunger and malnutrition pales in comparison to what is needed,” he declared.

Asked about reports of food being looted across Sudan, UN Deputy Spokesperson Farhan Haq said May 3 that WFP has reported about 17,000 metric tonnes having been looted out of a stockpile of more than 80,000 metric tonnes of food that the agency had in Sudan in different parts of the country.

“So, the looting occurred in many different areas... but they are right now in the process of trying to evaluate the stocks that were lost”, he noted.

Guterres said the food crisis demands fundamental, systemic change. This report makes clear that progress is possible.

“We have the data and know-how to build a more resilient, inclusive, sustainable world where hunger has no home—including through stronger food systems, and massive investments in food security and improved nutrition for all people, no matter where they live”.

With collective action and a commitment to change, he argued, “we can ensure that every person, everywhere, has access to the most basic of human needs: food and nutrition.”

Elaborating further, Oxfam’s Farr said while the pandemic and the Ukraine war have made food and energy unaffordable for millions, 95 food and energy corporations made a whopping \$306 billion in windfall profits just last year.

“This is a rigged economic system that exploits and starves the poorest and rewards the richest”.

“We need an urgent and fundamental shift in our humanitarian system if we are to put the brakes on the speeding hunger crisis. Funds must be used to equip poor countries to prepare for and cope with reoccurring economic and climate shocks before they happen, and rich donors must immediately inject money to meet the UN appeal for response”.

“But just “band-aid” funding will only temporarily delay the problem. We must do more in resolving conflict, inequality, and climate change. Warring parties must lower their guns”.

Rich polluting nations must cut their emissions. Governments must tax the rich and polluters to free funds for social protection and climate mitigation, to help vulnerable people cope with shocks, she declared.

“This is a moment in history that will judge whether we will prioritize our collective humanity over greed of a powerful few.” [IDN-InDepthNews]

Photo: WFP/Arete/Fredrik Lerneryd. WFP staff, Francis Mpoyi, measures baby’s arm during a routine check-up in Kalemie, Democratic Republic of Congo.

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