

Gathering Storm of Famine Looms Over Many Nations | Opinion

In South Sudan the hunger crisis is at its worst since the country gained independence back in 2011. Since funding for humanitarian aid in South Sudan is so low, the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) recently announced it had to suspend food aid for almost 2 million within the country. Two million may seem like just a number to us, but behind each one of those 2 million is a story of desperation, of a person not knowing how they can find food each day.

An internal conflict in South Sudan has forced some from their homes and livelihoods, leading to hunger. In other parts of the country, it is drought or flooding that has limited food production. All of these tragedies are now being compounded by high food prices. The result is severe hunger for over 60 percent of South Sudan's population. For infants the absence of food can lead to deadly malnutrition quickly, unless help arrives in time. But right now aid is being scaled back because of lack of funding.

This is how the storm of famine is taking shape in South Sudan and many other countries. Food needs are increasing and high food prices reduces humanitarian aid. The international community must rally and build up funding for global food aid. If we fail, many lives could be lost and chaos will ensue in countries where millions are hungry.

Already we are seeing people die of starvation. In east Africa someone dies of starvation every 48 seconds according to a new report from Save the Children and Oxfam. South Sudan is also now in danger as WFP has run out of funds to assist.

"We are extremely concerned about the impact of the funding cuts on children, women and men who will not have enough to eat during the lean season. These families have completely exhausted their coping strategies. They need immediate humanitarian assistance to put food on the table in the short-term and to rebuild their livelihoods and resilience to cope with future shocks," said Adeyinka Badejo, of the WFP in South Sudan.

A new U.N. report warned that there are 20 areas of the world where hunger is

expected to worsen this summer. These include war-torn Yemen, South Sudan, Nigeria, and Ethiopia and Somalia, which are in danger of mass starvation. Afghanistan has nearly 20 million people living in severe hunger from conflict, drought and flooding. Now Afghanistan has been leveled by a devastating earthquake, which will worsen the already dire humanitarian crisis.

Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sahel, Haiti, and Sudan are also “of very high concern” as hunger escalates. Madagascar, Lebanon, West African countries including Benin have been added to the hunger crisis list as well.

Ukraine is the most recent addition to nations facing hunger. The war has taken a country that was once the world’s breadbasket to now a place where millions need food aid.

The U.N. report called for urgent action “to save lives and livelihoods, and prevent famine.” It’s vital Congress increase global food aid, to prevent starvation and global chaos.

“We’re facing a perfect storm that is not just going to hurt the poorest of the poor – it’s also going to overwhelm millions of families who until now have just about kept their heads above water,” said WFP executive director David Beasley. There are around 325 million people worldwide who are headed toward starvation, said Beasley.

Feeding the hungry is also vital to preventing riots and a descent into conflict over scarce resources.

War and drought have led to severe hunger everywhere. With food prices so high, it’s even harder for relief agencies like WFP to feed all those in need, leading to food aid programs in Somalia or the Sahel countries being scaled back or cut because of lack of funding.

In Sri Lanka the government has been forced to cut a million children from its free school meals program because of high food prices. The U.N. World Food Program and Save the Children are trying to help by feeding as many children as possible in Sri Lanka but more funding is needed there for school meals. Julian Chellapah, Save the Children’s national director in Sri Lanka, warned, “If we don’t keep the school meal programme going, we could soon see a situation where we aren’t just talking about hungry children but dangerously ill and

malnourished children, which could have severe consequences on school attendance.”

In Rhode Island, the non-profit Edesia produces the life-saving food Plumpy’Nut which treats malnourished children in poor countries. But the high food prices are making it hard for Edesia to produce this food while it’s needed more than ever. Edesia is among many organizations calling for increases to global food aid so all the hungry can be fed.

There needs to be an increase in global food aid or many in need will be at risk of deadly malnutrition. Imagine a family displaced by war seeing their monthly rations cut in half because funding ran out. This is exactly what happened in Yemen.

Each of us can make a difference now in preventing a summer of starvation for millions across the globe. It takes that kind of team effort to stop a hunger crisis of this magnitude. You can contact your elected officials, urging them to increase global food aid. The resources dedicated to hunger relief must increase in time of vast need.

By hosting fundraiser or rallies for global hunger relief, you can set a great example. You can educate others about world hunger. This will encourage donations as well as other hunger relief events.

Every time you take action against hunger, you show the world that you care about the hungry. If enough people care, we can save millions of people from starvation this summer and help build peace.

William Lambers is an author who partnered with the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) on the book Ending World Hunger. His writings have been published by The Washington Post, History News Network, Cleveland’s The Plain Dealer and many other news outlets. Lambers recently volunteered to write the Hunger Heroes section of WFP’s online learning game Freerice.

The views expressed in this article are the writer’s own.

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