

People at risk of starvation as South Sudan enters its sixth year of independence

9 July marks the sixth anniversary of South Sudan's independence, but the promise of the world's youngest country is marred by hunger and conflict, as millions of people still face starvation.

After more than three years of conflict and insecurity, communities are now stretched to breaking point. The economy has collapsed, malnutrition has soared and hunger continues grip the lives of many.

Thanks to aid efforts, famine – which was declared in two counties of Unity State by the UN in February – has been pushed back, but CAFOD and Trócaire's Acting Country Representative, Mugove Chakurira said:

“The overall number of people at risk of starvation has increased. There is no room for complacency: the food crisis continues to spread across the country and six million people, half the population of South Sudan, are still facing severe hunger and need immediate help.

“CAFOD and Trócaire are distributing emergency food in Yirol, in the Central Lakes region. This aid is keeping people alive; preventing the situation from getting even worse.”

Working with its Caritas aid agency, Caritas Rumbek, CAFOD and Trócaire are reaching 25,200 people with emergency food – beans, sorghum, salt, and cooking oil, in four areas (Payams) – Adior, Pagarau, Malek and Lekakudu.

As people continue to flee the fighting, a cholera outbreak has spread. UN Humanitarian Coordination Office(OCHA) estimates that 11,214 cholera cases have been reported and at least 190 deaths have been recorded across 24 counties over the last year. There is grave concern regarding the further spread of the disease as the rainy season arrives, and CAFOD and Trócaire are already working to halt its spread, with WASH support – clean water, sanitation and hygiene promotion is being rolled out. This involves latrine construction, fixing

boreholes and training local mechanics to keep them operational, and the distribution of hygiene kits – containing essential items such as soap.

“With the rains also come higher risks of cholera and other water borne disease epidemics, said Mugove Chakurira. He continued, “We are also supporting the training of 50 hygiene promotion volunteers from the Yirol community, to raise awareness of cholera and share prevention knowledge of how to stay healthy in this challenging environment.”

The nation which achieved independence six years ago, in July 2011, has been riven since December 2013 by fighting between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and followers of the former Vice President, Dr Riek Machar. The conflict has escalated, as other local militias join the fighting. The UN estimates that tens of thousands of people have been killed in the conflict; and to date, 1.97 million people have been displaced inside the country and 1.9 million are refugees in neighbouring countries.

The story of Mary who fled with her seven children and husband to Billing Payam from Panjar in Unity state last year, is all too familiar.

“The war reached our village and we could not farm. We fled to Billing with only the clothes on our backs as we had to save our lives from certain death.” Mary said.

Mary is one of the thousands of displaced people that has received food aid, keeping her and her children alive.

“With this food I can get some peace and rest that my family has something to eat.”

This conflict has prevented many farmers from planting and harvesting crops. Hyperinflation, which has hit nearly 800 percent, and has put the price of food beyond the reach of ordinary people.

Mugove Chakurira said: “Our local Caritas aid workers bravely continue to provide humanitarian assistance under challenging conditions, in remote parts of the country. We will keep supporting them to help communities on the brink of catastrophe.

“However, the aid effort must be accompanied by a concerted effort by all the

parties to end the conflict and take the necessary steps needed towards peace and reconciliation.”

Source: <http://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/people-risk-starvation-south-sudan-enters-its-sixth-year-independence>

[Disclaimer]