

## Children 'are dying' now in DRC's Kasai from malnutrition, warns UNICEF

400,000 children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) "are at risk of death" in the Kasais region from food shortages caused by conflict and displacement, according to a senior UN official who has just returned from the area, expressing shock at what he had witnessed.

The [UN Children's Fund \(UNICEF\)](#) issued the warning on Friday, as it scales up its response to those in need.

Before violence flared in mid-2016 between government forces and tribal militia across the vast region, the people of the Kasais had little experience of conflict, according to UNICEF Spokesperson Christophe Boulhierac.

What I saw really shocked me at a personal level...The situation there is absolutely scary, in the sense that people had to flee in the bush (with) family, children – *Christophe Boulhierac*

He has just returned from DRC, where he said he was personally affected by the desperate situation he encountered.

"What I saw really shocked me at a personal level...The situation there is absolutely scary, in the sense that people had to flee in the bush (with) family, children", he said.

"They had to stay a few months because of the violence. They had no proper food, they had no proper water to drink. And now that the violence has decreased they come back."

Clearly moved, the UNICEF official who has worked in the field in Asia, African and the Caribbean, said: "Often we say that children are at risk of dying; no, that's not what we are saying in Kasai. We say that children *are* dying; I saw that."

Some 3.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in the Kasais, including 2.3 million children. At least half of all children under-5 years of age in the region – that's 770,000 – are suffering from acute malnutrition, including 400,000 who are severely malnourished, according to a [UNICEF report](#) published this week.

UNICEF says that many families driven from their homes have been unable to plant and harvest their crops for three successive seasons. It also warns that thousands of children have been recruited into armed groups and militias and that hundreds of schools and health centres have been looted, burned or destroyed.

To support its programmes for the children of Kasai in 2018, UNICEF has appealed for \$ 88 million, which to date is only 25 per cent funded.