

World must 'act fast,' scale up life-saving assistance in drought-hit Somalia – UN

6 March 2017 – As a severe drought deepens in Somalia, the risk of famine is looming in the long-troubled country, with about half the population in need of some form of assistance, according to an assessment by United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners.

The situation has become “significantly worse in the last six months,” explained Joseph Contreras, the spokesperson for the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM).

“Currently, approximately 6.2 million Somalis are in need of humanitarian assistance, of that number, three million are in need of urgent life saving measures. This is a significant step up from the 1.1 million Somalis that were in such circumstances, such need for life saving measures in September,” he said.

In addition, the UN reports that nearly 950,000 children under the age of five will be acutely malnourished this year, with 185,000 of that number at risk of death without immediate medical treatment.

Citing ‘worrying similarities’ to the 2011 famine in Somalia, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) this past Friday launched a \$24.6 million appeal for the more than one million Somalis most affected by the drought.

“We named this (2017) drought ‘Odi Kawayn,’ which is Somali for ‘something bigger than the elders,’” drought victim Halima told the agency, explaining that none of the elders has ever seen a drought as severe as this one.

A massive increase in aid is urgently needed to avert a famine. IOM reports that wages are collapsing, local food prices are rising, animal deaths are increasing, and malnutrition rates are starting to rise. Moreover, water prices are spiralling and Somalis are moving in growing numbers in search of food and water. Without assistance, many people face malnutrition, significantly increased risk of disease, loss of livelihoods and even death.



Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien (right), is joined by Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Peter de Clercq (left), and head of the UN Mission in Somalia Michael Keating on arrival in Mogadishu, Somalia, where five and a half million people need urgent assistance over the next six months. Photo: OCHA

Meanwhile today, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O’Brien,

visited the Zone K Internal Displacement Camp (IDP) Settlement located in the Hodan district of the Somali capital, Mogadishu.

“We understand their hunger, their thirst and their need to look after their children,” said Mr. O’Brien, noting that by seeing it for himself, “we can make this story known to a much bigger world and try to help.”

“You need to know that you touch our hearts,” he said to the drought victims.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which Mr. O’Brien heads up, Zone K first became an IDP settlement in 2011, when a large number of drought affected people from Lower Shabelle, Bay and Bakool regions settled.

It became one of the biggest IDP settlements in Mogadishu but, according to OCHA, the exact number of the people in Zone K is currently unknown.

“Whenever you have enormous pressure on people’s ability to survive or to be protected in conflict, you will get internal displacements, and here we have a severe trend of internal displacement,” explained Mr. O’Brien, noting the need to act “fast, now and together” in order to fund the programmes that would help support people in their hour of need.

Humanitarians in Somalia are seeking an overall \$825 million to reach the most vulnerable with life-saving assistance until June 2017.

In a press release, the Humanitarian Coordinator in the country, Peter de Clercq, stated that the “drought situation is deteriorating rapidly.” At this “critical phase,” he highlighted the need to “act fast and efficiently to avoid the worst.”

Mr. Contreras told *UN News* that whereas in 2011, the drought – and the resulting famine – was concentrated in South Central Somalia, this year, it is affecting more parts of the country, including the north-eastern and the Somaliland regions, with a higher total number of people at risk.

However, he mentioned that the donor community is responding “more energetically” and humanitarian partners have a larger presence around the country to respond to these emergency needs.

Mr. Contreras also noted that Somalia has a new Government, and that the country’s new President, Mohamed Abdullahi ‘Farmajo’, is “completely committed to a robust and effective response to this crisis.”

This amendment presents a monumental

[opportunity to increase voter participation – Cat Smith](#)

Cat

Smith MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for Voter Engagement and Youth Affairs, commenting on

Labour's victory in the House of Lords today, following Baroness Royall's amendment to the Higher Education and Research Bill, said:

"I am delighted that our colleagues in the Lords have defeated the Tories over their attempts to restrict student voter registration. Students are one of the most under-registered groups on the electoral roll and this amendment presents a monumental opportunity to increase voter participation whilst enabling councils to make significant savings on the canvassing process, saving our local authorities valuable time and resources.

"We now must ensure that the Tories accept this amendment when its moves to the Commons."

[News story: Welsh Secretary welcomes stars to a special event to celebrate Welsh culture](#)

Leading figures from Welsh culture gathered at the Wales Office tonight (Monday) to celebrate Welsh achievements in creative life.

More than 50 guests from independent TV makers, broadcasters, theatre groups and sports were invited to Gwydyr House in Whitehall.

Hosted by Alun Cairns, the Secretary of State for Wales, the gathering was told that Welsh culture represents a fantastic shop window for the world.

Secretary of State for Wales, Alun Cairns, said:

I am delighted to welcome people from all walks of creative life to Gwydyr House to celebrate Welsh culture.

All the vibrant elements of Wales are in attendance from sport to tourism and from stage to screen. Together they all play a vital role in showcasing Welsh talent across the world.

Wales Week in London is a brilliant initiative to promote Wales internationally, I am committed to ensuring that Wales continues to punch well above its weight with people enjoying Welsh culture in all four corners of the world.

[Security Council wraps up Lake Chad Basin visit; stops in 'epicentre' of Boko Haram violence](#)

6 March 2017 – The crisis in Africa's Lake Chad Basin is of global concern and action is needed "right now," the United Nations Security Council today said, wrapping up its four-country tour with the promise of long-term support for the Governments and the people in their fight against Boko Haram.

"Neither the military fight against terrorism nor the immediate humanitarian response will solve these protracted crises," Ambassador Matthew Rycroft of the United Kingdom, who is leading the Council visit as President of the 15-nation body for the month of March, told journalists in Abuja.

He spoke alongside Edward Kallon, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, as well as Fodé Seck, Representative of Senegal to the United Nations, and Michele Sison, Deputy Representative of the United States to the United Nations.

"What is needed in the end is long-term development," Mr. Rycroft said, noting the need for jobs, education, human rights, services for displaced people and refugees, and solutions for coping with drought and other environmental challenges.

"Those are multifaceted, complex set of problems and require a holistic set of solutions, and we are here to support the Government of Nigeria in finding those solutions," he vowed.

Yesterday, the Council members met with internally displaced persons (IDPs) at the Teacher Village in Maiduguri, in hard-hit Borno state in the north-eastern part of the country. About half of the displaced persons living in the camp are children, with 379 of them infants.

The Council members joined a circle of survivors, many of whom were women whose husbands and children were killed by Boko Haram, and who are struggling

to feed themselves and the remnants of families that they have left.



Members of the UN Security Council mission on a visit to the Lake Chad Basin visited the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) and discussed challenges that the region is facing. Photo: Japan/UN Mission

“Their accounts of a life in crisis were beyond sobering,” Mr. Rycroft said.

The displaced camp is in Maiduguri, which is known as the epicentre of the years long Boko Haram crisis, according to Governor Kashim Shettima, who spoke with the Council members.

Some 14 million people are affected by Boko Haram, with 8.5 million people in urgent need of humanitarian aid.

While in Nigeria, the Council also met with women’s groups from across the country who called for a greater role in finding solutions to the Lake Chad Basin crisis.

“We can pass information faster than the men,” one woman told the Council.

The Council members also spoke with members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional group of 16 countries, with discussions focused on coordination of response and sharing of information.

The Council also met with Nigeria’s acting President, Yemi Osinbajo, and other senior political leaders.

After visiting Nigeria, and previously being in Cameroon, Chad and Niger, the Council emphasized that “barely enough is being done” to aid the crisis in the Lake Chad Basin.

“The scale we have seen is of a growing crisis. Famine is being averted at the moment because of the generosity of donors and the effectiveness of the national responses – but only just,” Mr. Rycroft said, adding: “We urge the international community as a whole to continue to step up before it is too late. And that means right now.”

Despite some cosmetic changes, this remains a retrograde step for the United States – Thornberry

Labour’s

Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Emily Thornberry

MP, responding

to the US administration's updated travel ban said:

"Despite

some cosmetic changes, this remains a retrograde step for the United States.

"By

abdicated its responsibilities under international law, the administration continues to send a terrible message to the rest of the world on the refugee crisis. While it remains to be seen whether or not this new executive order will stand up in court, nothing in today's announcement changes the fact that these measures are unnecessary, divisive and wrong."