

UN High-Level Round Table on the Horn of Africa drought – Minister for Africa speech

Thank you, Chairs. We are very grateful to you for leading this Round Table, and to UN OCHA for convening it.

Honourable Prime Minister Roble, ministers for Ethiopia and Kenya, colleagues, ladies, and gentlemen,

The Horn of Africa is in the grip of a worsening drought. Tens of millions of people are in jeopardy, facing an uncertain future. Lives and livelihoods across Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia have been disrupted – and many will not recover.

To save lives, to stop communities from collapsing, we must act is now.

Today I want to focus on Somalia, given the particular urgency of the situation there.

When famine last occurred, in 2011, over a quarter of a million people needlessly lost their lives. I remember so clearly that the world pledged ‘never again’, and we stood behind that commitment in 2016 / 17. Then, we acted quickly. We scaled up our resources and headed off the large scale loss of life.

But today, famine is stalking Somalia once again: without immediate help, 81,000 people are at risk of dying [clarification: are already in its grip]; and, without immediate help, 350,000 children are at risk of dying.

The rest of the county is teetering on the edge. Nearly half the population needs humanitarian assistance. Water is scarce, cattle are dying, prices are skyrocketing, disease is spreading, and hundreds of thousands are on the move in search of food and water. Villages and schools, as we’ve heard, already stand empty.

Yesterday I took a virtual tour of Baidoa, to see things for myself. I wanted to talk to people about what’s happening and to see some of the brilliant work being done by our partner, the Norwegian Refugee Council.

What I learned was deeply harrowing. I heard the voices of the mothers who can do nothing more to save their children. Without more of our help, their future is truly bleak.

So can I applaud the leadership of the UN and EU for convening this meeting; and the UN for taking the bold and correct decision to move from drought response to famine prevention in Somalia.

Today there must also be leadership from the international community. Even as

we grapple with the tragic events in Ukraine, and the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, we need to dig deeper, in response to the crisis unfolding across the Horn of Africa.

If the current rainy season is poor – it'll be the fourth in a row – what is already happening in Somalia could be multiplied many times and repeated elsewhere. A regional crisis of this magnitude needs a coordinated and ambitious regional response. We are already seeing cross-border movements as communities search for pasture, search for water, and search for humanitarian services.

The UK will continue to play its part.

I visited to East Africa in January, and the trajectory of the crisis and the severity of suffering was already clear to me then. That's why we responded swiftly, providing £24m in emergency assistance for early actions across Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya (as well as funds for South Sudan for flooding).

With Somalia again gripped by famine, I am announcing today that we will provide a further £25m for life-saving food, water, and emergency health support to those most in need. I am also very pleased to announce a new partnership with Qatar, which will see them invest \$1.5m with us towards resilience and the emergency response.

I know that, in this room today, we have the knowledge, and the tools, to stop widespread famine in Somalia, and to tackle drought in the Horn, and to help communities build their resilience for the future.

We did it before when early action and our collective generosity averted famine in 2016 / 17. We can do it again.

By working together, our knowledge and tools can stem those tears in Baidoa, and make good on our promise to the region: never again.