

United Nations Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ramesh at Rajasingham, remarks at ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment event on Transition from Relief to Development: Preventing the looming risk of multiple famines and addressing food insecurity and taking action to save lives and reduce people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities through closer humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding collaboration

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Thank you to the Vice Presidents of ECOSOC. It is an honour to be here to discuss this crucial issue. It is also shocking and sad time to be discussing this.

As experts correctly predicted at last year's ECOSOC HAS, the number of food-insecure people has soared over the past 12 months. A staggering 142 million people in 40 countries are now in acute hunger levels – or in other words, in IPC 3 or above.

Of these people, more than 40 million are at risk of dying of hunger, with one third of them in six countries: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, southern Madagascar, north-east Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen as Ambassador Baeriswyl earlier mentioned.

We face in Ethiopia the risk of a famine the likes of which we have not seen since 2011, ten years ago, in Somalia where hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people died.

This is the worst hunger crisis the world has seen in decades.

Allowing famine to happen in the twenty-first century is indeed a stain on humanity's conscience. As the humanitarian community has said many times, famines are man-made. As Oxfam put it: people are not starving, they are being starved. Famine is a choice. And it's up to us all to make sure we make the right choice to prevent it.

A toxic combination of factors causes hunger and famine. They include economic fragility, weather shocks and the climate crisis. But by far the strongest drivers today are conflict and the violations of international humanitarian law that often follow.

International humanitarian law acts as a vital line of defense against hunger and famine. We are gravely concerned about reports from Ethiopia on violations of international humanitarian law and the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare.

In Nigeria last year, an attack on a rice farm on the outskirts of Maiduguri killed at least 110 farmers. Meanwhile, security risks and related movement restrictions have disrupted the production and supply of food, resulting in a sharp increase in prices.

In March this year, the Secretary-General established a High-Level Task Force on Preventing Famine through coordinated advocacy and resource mobilization, to scale up operations and meet urgent needs.

The task force meets at Principals level and requires that FAO, WFP and myself work closely together and with all of our partners.

As well as advocating for swift, flexible resources, the task force focuses on improving access to people in need and coordinated information and data sharing.

The task force has called for US\$2 billion in flexible funding to scale up food and cash assistance, health and nutrition, agricultural and veterinary support for farmers and herders, and water, sanitation and protection in six countries: (the ones I mentioned earlier). In the immediate term, these funds will target 522,000 people already living in famine conditions in these countries.

Some funding has been reported over the past two months. This includes commitments from the G7 to provide \$7 billion in humanitarian assistance and resilience support to at-risk populations in 42 countries. But we need these commitments to turn into concrete action now.

On the advocacy side, the task force has raised the alarm in Security Council briefings, bilateral meetings and media engagements. At the same time, we are advocating at all levels and with all parties to allow and facilitate safe, rapid and unimpeded access to and for all people in need.

While emergency assistance is needed to save lives in the short term, collaboration with development partners can boost resilience to future food crises, and mitigate risk.

Good initiatives are under way in many countries experiencing acute food insecurity, building on lessons that we have learned from previous efforts to prevent famine or food insecurity.

In Chad, for instance, humanitarian, development and peacebuilding organizations operating in the Lake Chad region are jointly responding to the needs of displaced communities and their hosts to enable them to manage joint natural resources, such as fishing areas. This approach can strengthen social cohesion and prevent future intercommunal conflict.

In Somalia, humanitarian organizations continue to respond to rising severe food insecurity, while longer-term development efforts are being expanded to support households in food stress to prevent them from sliding into acute food insecurity.

Here, I will lay out three approaches that need to be adopted now to prevent hunger and famine taking hold.

First, funding is urgently needed.

Member States need to increase their contributions to Humanitarian Response Plans so that UN agencies and partners can scale up before famines spread.

Insufficient funds force humanitarians to divert resources from other critical humanitarian programmes, which threatens lives.

Wherever possible, funding must be flexible and multi-year so that the most informed and strategic funding decisions can be taken by our colleagues on the ground.

Second, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2417 and the rules of international humanitarian law which underpin it, parties to conflict must not attack objects indispensable to civilians' survival such as crops and livestock, and must respect all civilian objects necessary for food production and distribution.

They must also facilitate humanitarian access for civilians in need. We cannot lift people out of famine conditions if we cannot safely reach them or they cannot reach basic services.

Governments must also do more to ensure respect IHL, investigate allegations of serious violations and hold perpetrators to account.

Third, as we approach the Food Systems Summit later this year, we must continue to improve collaboration across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors to protect vulnerable people from shocks, and build their resilience so they do not fall into acute food insecurity.

It begins with a common analysis by humanitarian and development actors. The most vulnerable humanitarian populations are often 'those left furthest behind' in the SDG equation. We must find the most effective response to lift them out of these categories.

By working collaboratively across these sectors, we can develop a common understanding of the underlying drivers of food insecurity and establish collective outcomes to reduce it.

And development funding is critical to this. Chronic humanitarian needs cannot be solved by humanitarian assistance alone.

So, we have the solutions to save lives in the immediate term and protect people from falling into acute hunger in the future.

It is now indeed time to apply those solutions.