

PERSISTENT NEEDS IN SAHEL, CONFLICT DRIVING MASSIVE DISPLACEMENT

Dakar, 6 March 2019 - Top United Nations and Non-Governmental aid officials today sounded the alarm over rising conflict and insecurity that have accelerated forced displacement across the Sahel, where millions of people are still reeling from the effects of last year's food and nutrition crisis.

Around 4.2 million people are displaced in the Sahel – a million more than in 2018 – due to escalating armed violence in parts of Mali, across the Lake Chad Basin and the Liptako-Gourma region (the border regions of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger). The number of internally displaced people in Mali has tripled to around 120,000. The Lake Chad Basin region is witnessing its highest levels of forced displacement with 2.7 million people uprooted from their homes, while in Burkina Faso, more than 100,000 people have been displaced, over half of them since the start of 2019.

“We are witnessing an unprecedented humanitarian emergency in Burkina Faso where an upsurge in armed attacks has caused massive internal displacement. Thousands of families, young children, men and women are surviving in utterly difficult conditions, some in overcrowded tents, and without enough food, water or medical attention,” said Ursula Mueller, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, who has just concluded a three-day visit to Burkina Faso. “It is critical that we step up the ongoing emergency assistance in Burkina Faso and increase efforts in the Sahel in general where growing insecurity directly generates a rapid deterioration in the humanitarian situation.”

Protracted armed violence in parts of the Sahel compounds the impact of emergencies such as food insecurity, malnutrition and epidemics, and undermines efforts to uplift communities from chronic vulnerability. Farming, trade and other livelihood and economic activities are often severely impaired in conflict-affected regions.

Following the impact of a severe drought that decimated pasture, livestock and crops in 2018, the situation of millions of affected families is still fragile. Experts project that 9.5 million people will be critically food insecure in the 2019 lean season, between June and August, including 4.4 million in the Lake Chad Basin.

“Food insecurity and malnutrition, fuelled by poverty, climate shocks and conflict continue stalking the Sahel region,” said Abdou Dieng, Regional Director for the UN World Food Programme in West and Central Africa. “Substantive investments are needed to prevent widespread suffering this coming lean season and beyond to help communities and countries become more resilient. Emergency relief must be part of broader strategies encompassing economic investments, development and security initiatives.”

Worsening insecurity is both driving needs and straining humanitarian access in conflict-hit regions, depriving vulnerable people of critical assistance and heightening protection risks.

“It is reprehensible that the neutrality of innocent civilians and aid workers in conflict settings is no longer respected and insecurity poses an interference towards access to aid and services such as protection, health, nutrition and education,” said David Wright, Save the Children Regional Director for West and Central Africa. “Civilians, including the displaced and children, are bearing the worst effects of violence. States must be supported with the needed resources to safeguard civilians and ensure the access of continuous basic services, particularly to the most vulnerable, women and children.”

This year, the humanitarian community is requesting US\$2.4 billion to assist some 15.3 million people in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria.

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