



Office for the Coordination of humanitarian affairs

Press release

Partners join the Human Race for climate action in West and Central Africa where climate emergencies devastate people's lives

Dakar, 19 August 2021- The climate emergency is wreaking havoc across the world at a scale that people and humanitarian organizations on the front lines struggle to manage. Droughts, heatwaves, raging wildfires, and horrific floods are shattering the lives of millions of people. In West and Central Africa, climate change is impacting people's lives and well-being with slow-onset effects, such as rising temperatures and droughts, and sudden-onset events such as destructive floods, both of which are threatening lives, driving people from their homes, disrupting food production and eroding livelihoods.

And this is just a glimpse of what lies ahead if we fail to act on climate change. Time is running out. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, is urging the world to show solidarity: "The climate emergency is a race we are losing, but it is a race we can win ... let's lace up our running shoes and win the climate race for us all." To get the world racing against the climate crisis clock, OCHA and humanitarian partners have launched #TheHumanRace – a global challenge for climate action in solidarity with people who need it the most – to put the needs of climate-vulnerable people front and centre at the UN climate summit (COP26) in November 2021. The Human Race culminates on the week of World Humanitarian Day on 19 August. In the race against the climate crisis, no one should be left behind, including those already facing humanitarian crises.

"The Sahel is a hotspot of climate change. Temperatures are increasing 1.5 times faster than in the rest of the world," said Julie Belanger, Head of the UNOCHA Regional Office for West and Central Africa. "Sudden-onset disasters such as floods almost doubled between 2015 and 2020. As a result, around 80 per cent of the region's farmlands are affected by degradation, drastically reducing food sources," she added.

Across West and Central Africa, people are struggling to have adequate and sufficient food. Over 31 million people across the region do not know where their next meal will come from. "Climate is a driver of hunger," said Chris Nikoi, Regional Director for Western Africa of the World Food Programme (WFP). "It adds to a complex combination of challenges including chronic poverty, deteriorating security, and the socio-economic fallout due to COVID-19. WFP is committed to saving lives in climate emergencies, helping communities get back on their feet and also building resilience so they are able to better withstand future shocks."



Climate hazards especially affect women and girls, who often bear a disproportionate burden to provide for their families whether by going without meals to feed others or trekking increasingly longer distances to find potable water and suitable food. In the Lake Chad Basin, as drought makes water ever-scarcer, women and girls are forced to walk long distances to obtain drinkable water, increasing their exposure to sexual harassment and assault far from home.

Climate effects also strongly impact humanitarian access. Difficult climate conditions can delay the delivery of life-saving assistance and put humanitarian workers at great risk. As the climate becomes more volatile, rains heavier, and floods more frequent, a timely humanitarian response becomes increasingly challenging. Additionally, the security situation is worsening and attacks on aid workers are increasing with many having been abducted and killed.

"We are currently obliged to double our ingenuity to access communities and bring them timely humanitarian assistance wherever they are", says the Regional Representative of Action Contre la Faim, Mamadou Diop. "The cumulative factors of insecurity, national measures in security-challenged countries restricting access to some areas, and the impact of climate change complicate our work," he added.

World Humanitarian Day honors humanitarian workers killed and injured in the course of their work, as well as all aid and health workers who continue, despite the odds, to provide life-saving support and protection to people most in need. This year, run, ride, swim or do any activity of your choice to send a message of solidarity and demand climate action for the people of the Sahel. Log 100 minutes of total activity in [Strava](#) application between August 16 - 31 and/or simply sign up to our [Call To Action](#) to join #TheHumanRace.

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