

# Estimate for world hunger tops one billion people for first time

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WASHINGTON D.C — UN officials say more people than ever before are going hungry. And they blame it on the global economic crisis.

UN Food and Agriculture Director-General Jacques Diouf says it is with "deep regret" that he announces the new estimate for hungry people in the world.

"The number of those suffering from chronic hunger in the world has topped one billion in 2009. One billion and 20 million to be more precise," he says.

Diouf says a "dangerous mix" of the global economic slowdown and very high food prices pushed another 100 million people into the hungry category over the past year.

"Neither drought, nor floods or disastrous harvests can be held to blame this time. Worsening hunger in the last three years largely stems from economic shocks," he says.

This includes the global credit crunch, falling trade and investment flows, declining remittances and budgetary pressures on development aid.

## Poor hit hard

"The financial and economic crisis is having a particularly profound impact on poor and rural households, specifically, the rural landless, the urban poor and the female-headed households," he says.

The latest figures show the number of hungry people in the Asia-Pacific region is up 10.5 percent. In sub-Saharan Africa, there's an 11.8 percent increase. The Near East and North Africa are up 13.5 percent. Latin America and the Caribbean show a 12.8 percent increase. Even developed countries are not immune, showing a nearly 15 and a half percent hike in the number of hungry people.

The FAO leader says the world's food system is "fragile and vulnerable."

"The situation goes beyond traditional humanitarian dimensions. It calls for a new world food order," he says.

World Food Program Executive Director Josette Sheeran warns, "Unless world leaders respond by ensuring all people access to adequate and affordable nutrition, we are in danger of losing a generation to malnutrition and despair."

## Hungry world is a dangerous world

Sheeran says hunger can help destabilize countries. Last year, high prices triggered food riots in 30 countries.

"Without food, people have only three options: they riot, they migrate or they die. None of these are acceptable options," she says.

She says having enough food to eat is "one of the most critical peace and security issues of our time."

"A hungry world is a dangerous world. This is an issue that rightly belongs at the top of the global agenda from the G8 to the G20, to the G77, to the (UN) General Assembly and here, of course, at FAO and our Rome-based agencies," she says.

But Sheeran says the good news is the world has the know-how to solve the problem. China, for example, once a major recipient of WFP aid, now helps supply the agency with food.

Mathew Wyatt of the International Fund for Agricultural Development says one of the best solutions is investing in smallholder farming.

"About two billion people in the world, that's about a third of humanity, depend on their smallholder farms for their livelihoods and for their food. With the right support, these farmers can double or triple their very meager yields and they can then feed themselves and their families," he says.

## Investment brings triple payoff

"First of all, it boosts production. There is more food available. Secondly, because it's production by some of the poorest people in the world, it directly reduces poverty.... And thirdly... agriculture and smallholder agriculture can be an engine of broader economic growth," he says.

The UN agency officials call on donor nations to continue their aid to hungry people. But they also say it is a time to lay the groundwork to solve the hunger problem once and for all.

<http://www.newjerseynewsroom.com/international/estimate-for-world-hunger-tops-one-billion-people-for-first-time>