

UN says 'the world can no longer ignore starvation,' millions could die

By Frenalyn Untalan

March 07 2017 1:57 PM

Officials from United Nations (UN) and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) have issued a warning against famine, saying millions of people are at risk of dying. The organisations say the world can no longer afford to ignore starvation as severe case takes hold in four countries.

UN and UNICEF call for an immediate action to be taken to save the lives of millions of people, including 1.4 million children, from dying due to lack of food and nutrition. Based on a data from UNICEF, children from Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen who suffer from severe malnutrition could die this year.

The aforementioned crisis is said to be the first new famine in six years. "Our worst fears have been realised," Serge Tissot, head of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation in South Sudan warned.

Jeremy Hopkins, head of the UN children's agency in South Sudan, said people should have access to food urgently. "If food aid does not reach them "many of them will die," he said. The official notes that over 250,000 children are already severely malnourished and at risk of death in the country.

UNICEF director Anthony Lake believes it is not yet too late. "We can still save many lives," he said. UN Security Council ambassadors are travelling to northern Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger in April to raise concerns related to the humanitarian crisis prompted by the conflict with Boko Haram militants.

Yemen has been suffering for two years, with 462,000 children with acute malnutrition. Meanwhile, two regions of Nigeria in Western Africa have 450,000 cases of severely malnourishment. According to Fews Net, the famine early warning system, there are remote areas in Nigeria's Borno state that have been hit by famine since late last year. The case is expected to continue as agencies are not able to reach its residents.

UNICEF reportedly said the crisis is expected to continue, with fears that aid agencies may be too late. News.com.au (with AP and staff writers) notes that the four countries affected have different issues on why their people suffer.

A UN official believes that the blame should be put to the politicians for famine in South Sudan. Joyce Luma, head of the World Food Program in South Sudan, said the crisis is man-made.

“There is only so much that humanitarian assistance can achieve in the absence of meaningful peace and security,” she said.