

Millions threatened by E. Africa drought - U.S.

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WASHINGTON, April 7 (Reuter) - More than 20 million people are at risk of malnutrition or starvation in East Africa as a threatened drought adds to conflict-related refugee problems, U.S. aid officials said.

They said a coordinated international effort was needed to prevent widespread famine affecting the so-called Greater Horn region with a food shortfall of up to 757,000 tonnes.

"We need to step in again as we did so successfully in 1992 and through a joint international coordinated response try to prevent famine from occurring on a massive scale due to drought," Agency for International Development official Lois Richards told reporters.

According to U.S. and United Nations figures, drought-related food shortages were being experienced by nearly 11 million people in in Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda.

War-torn Somalia, where the United States ended a peacekeeping mission last month, and Burundi were also facing food shortfalls.

The region has more than 2.7 million refugees and 7.2 million people displaced in their own countries.

Richards said the United States last week asked other governments to respond now to the looming crisis.

She said the World Food Programme had recently asked for a United Nations international donors meeting for East Africa and U.S. aid officials had urged it be called as soon as possible.

She said Washington had reinforced the request with approaches to individual donor countries to "start responding now."

In the current fiscal year the United States had provided 214*million in food aid to the Greater Horn, out of 319 million allocated to Africa*, and additional aid was being sent to the World Food Programme for drought and civil disaster relief, Richards said.

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