



Hunger threatens lives of refugees

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By Guardian Reporter

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) warned yesterday that its operations, which involve caring for 2.2 million refugees globally, are critically under-funded and now hundreds of thousands of people have to endure food-related hardships.

The UN body has now been forced to reduce food rations for refugees in Africa. The most affected are Burundian and the Democratic Republic of Congo refugees residing in Tanzania, a WFP statement released yesterday, said.

A nutritional survey done in Tanzania at the end of last year found that 37 per cent of the children under five years of age were chronically malnourished, and 23.4 per cent were underweight among the 400,000 refugees in the country after WFP was forced to reduce rations from the standard 1,857 kcal per person to 1,629 in September 2004.

The UN body cautioned that with reduced food rations for refugees in Africa and without new contributions, the organisation would have to resort to more cuts.

The repatriation of refugees in some parts of the world is also critically undermined by the lack of financial support.

WFP now urgently needs 315 million US dollars to meet the needs of 2.2 million refugees living in camps. Seventy-five per cent of this sum is needed for Africa alone.

“Refugees are among WFP’s most vulnerable beneficiaries and have been hit hard by shortfalls,” WFP Deputy Executive Director John Powell was quoted in the statement as saying.

Powell is in Geneva to discuss funding with officials at the headquarters of the UN High Commission for Refugees. WFP assists refugees and returnees in collaboration with UNHCR through 25 operations worldwide.

“Many of the refugees rely almost entirely on food aid for their survival,” said Powell. “They are frequently confined to camps where arable land, if available, is scarce and employment opportunities are limited.”

This month, WFP began reducing rations to refugees in Sierra Leone after sensitisation campaigns in the camps to ensure that the cuts are implemented smoothly.

Food rations have also been cut for refugees in Guinea and Liberia, as only 40 per cent of WFP’s appeal for US\$ 93.5 million for refugees in West Africa has been funded so far.

To meet the basic needs of refugees in Sierra Leone and Guinea, WFP has had no choice but

to cut food-for work and food-for-training activities for the local populations. Even school feeding programmes for local and refugee populations have had to be cut.

* SOURCE: Guardian