



The Irish Association
of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations

OPENING STATEMENT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

25 October 2022

Jane Ann McKenna, CEO, Dóchas

Chairman Flanagan, Deputies and Senators, thank you for the invitation to meet with you today to continue our engagement with you on the global food crisis and in particular on the dire situation facing millions in the Horn of Africa. By now you have already heard the calls to action to avert catastrophe. It is not an exaggeration to say that the catastrophe has already arrived and a rapid escalation of humanitarian aid into areas facing famine is needed. While I am reading this statement, 12 more people will have died in East Africa due to lack of food and related complications.

Since May of this year, estimates of the number of people across the world who will experience crisis levels of hunger in 2022 has risen from **181 million people (in 41 countries) toⁱ 345 millionⁱⁱ**. The G7 says 323 million people are on the brink of starvationⁱⁱⁱ. The **Global Hunger Index** released last week confirmed that hunger levels are reaching catastrophic proportions, with 44 countries suffering with serious or alarming levels of hunger^{iv}. There is no doubt that the numbers will increase, given the millions displaced and lives upended in another recent climate crisis, Pakistan. That we are experiencing an unprecedented global emergency is undisputed.

I am joined today in person by Réiseal Ní Chéilleachair, Head of International Advocacy with Concern Worldwide and Colm Byrne, Gender and Humanitarian Advocacy Advisor with Trócaire. I am very pleased to also be joined by Paul Healy, Trócaire Country Director for Somalia, speaking to us from the region.

Before I hand over to my colleagues I would like to give you a short update of what has changed since we last met with you in June.

- Back then we said that one person was dying from hunger every 48 seconds in the Horn of Africa, now it is estimated that one person is dying every 36 seconds.
- Back then we knew there was a possibility the next rainy season due to start this month would fail. Now we know for sure that this has happened, leaving communities facing into a 5th consecutive season of failed rains. A historic situation by any accounts.
- Back then we warned that despite our help hundreds of thousands of children would die for lack of food and adequate nutrition. Now we are seeing children dying daily, many of whom have arrived too weak and too ill to health centers after long arduous journeys with their families.

That anyone, anywhere is dying of hunger in 2022 is unacceptable. That any child would spend its first years knowing nothing but hunger should shock us all into action.

In recent months, both the Irish people and the Irish Government have acted. Minister Brophy's recent visit to Kenya and Ireland's announcement to allocate an additional €30m to the situation in the Horn of Africa for 2022 is to be particularly welcomed, as is the announcement of increased funding for ODA in Budget 2023. On that, I would like in particular to thank the committee for your support and engagement with us and with the government. As with all funding, we ask that the release of such funding expedited, or more lives will unnecessarily be lost.

It is vital that Ireland continues to show solidarity with those who are living through the worst drought in 40 years.

COP 27, which takes place in two weeks time, presents an opportunity to accelerate our global ambition to tackle the climate emergency and to place climate justice and human rights at the heart of climate action. Climate security is now a critical issue, one that requires new thinking and new solutions.

No country in the G20 is decarbonizing quickly enough to maintain a safe climate and that is putting more lives and livelihoods at risk, in particular in countries such as Somalia that have done little to contribute to the problem.

A critical issue for the communities we work with is that of Loss and Damage. Countries in the Global South are experiencing massive losses and damages from climate change impacts and have the least financial and technical resources to cope. This is diverting much needed public finance for sustainable development into dealing with crises and is pushing countries further into debt. It is a matter of climate justice that richer countries including Ireland contribute to and support the development of this third pillar of finance under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

We are asking all of you here today, and all Oireachtas members to support our call to action of Ireland.

- To release flexible multi-year funding to meet the current humanitarian needs and that those funds reach as many NGOs and local organisations as possible who are the frontline responders
- To continue to grow Ireland's ODA budget in line with our commitment to spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA by 2030
- To advocate at the UNSC and in relevant international forums for accountability for those who seek to use starvation as a weapon of war
- To support the scale up of investment in social protection programmes and sustainable livelihoods to protect and strengthen hard won development gains.
- To support the establishment of a Loss and Damage Finance Facility at COP27 and to follow the lead of other countries such as Denmark, and commit initial Loss and Damage finance, as a sign of leadership on the issue.

We need political action and leadership to prevent this catastrophe getting worse. Each day of delay exacerbates human suffering, increases the scale of the crisis and raises the cost of the response.

I will now hand over to Paul Healy who will speak to you about the reality on the ground in Somalia, after which I and my colleagues would welcome your input and to answer any questions you may have.

ⁱ <https://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC%202022%20Final%20Report.pdf>

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- ii <https://www.wfp.org/stories/wfp-urges-g7-act-now-or-record-hunger-will-continue-rise-and-millions-more-will-face>
- iii <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/g7-failure-tackle-hunger-crisis-will-leave-millions-starve>
- iv <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/>