



United Nations Officials Warn That Half of Afghanistan's Population Faces Severe Food Insecurity in the Lead-Up to the Winter Months

The United Nations has warned that Afghanistan is on the brink of a grim humanitarian disaster as the winter months approach. Since the country's former government – which received widespread aid from the international community – fell and the Taliban took control, much needed assistance to Afghanistan's civilian population has gone. Now, with an expectedly harsh winter on the horizon, 22 million Afghans are at risk of acute hunger. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) is currently operating in Afghanistan and attempting to dwindle the number of people at risk, however, it is feared that the situation will likely worsen considerably during the upcoming harsher weather months in the absence of a major funding influx. With many nations having halted their aid to Afghanistan due to the Taliban's takeover, one of the negative repercussions of this is that unfortunately the decision to do so has hurt the country's most vulnerable citizens. While this has understandably been done because of concern regarding the aid falling directly into the Taliban's hands and not ending up going to those who desperately need it, analysts contend that there must be a level of accountability for those that are at risk of severe starvation and food insecurity. These Afghan civilians should not unjustly bear the consequences of the Taliban takeover, and it is imperative that the global community works to alleviate the circumstances before a devastating crisis unfolds.

The Executive Director of the WFP, David Beasley, directly relayed the credible threat of a looming humanitarian disaster, commenting that "It is as bad as you possibly can imagine, and in fact, we are now looking at the worst humanitarian crisis on Earth." Observers are particularly alarmed at this sentiment, given the major contemporary crises also taking place in countries such as Yemen and Ethiopia, among others. For aid workers, the warning signs are evident. Personal accounts have detailed the long lines forming outside of WFP centers throughout Afghanistan, demonstrating just how many people are grappling with the issue of food insecurity. Adding to the concern is the fact that the country often suffers from extremely brutal winters, with some experts predicting one this year that may even be worse than usual and that is expected to significantly harm food sources across the nation.

Disturbing reports of Afghan families selling their children to the Taliban have also emerged in the aftermath of the group's takeover. In many of these cases, the families believe that they will not be able to feed their kids through the end of the winter and are facing the harsh realization that the Taliban may instead be best fit to provide basic essential means of survival. WFP Executive Director Beasley fears that this phenomenon will continue to get worse as the winter nears, with children especially at risk of malnutrition and starvation.

To try and address the potential crisis, the WFP has called for the unfreezing of millions of dollars in assets that were suspended upon the Taliban's recent takeover back in August. While the G20 has made some progress in allocating funds to combat food insecurity, it is clear that more longstanding plans are needed than mere single-hand donations. The WFP has stated that it requires about \$220 million per month to feed the 22 million Afghans at risk. This amount, for temporary aid purposes, is a highly achievable number if countries around the world step up to avert the potential humanitarian catastrophe.