

Worsening world hunger affects 821 million, says UN

United Nations, United States

More than 821 million people suffered from hunger worldwide last year, the United Nations reported Monday -- the third year in a row that the number has risen.

After decades of decline, malnutrition began to increase in 2015, mainly because of climate change and war. Reversing the trend is one of the 2030 targets of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals which aim to improve the planet and its people.

But getting to a world where no one is suffering from hunger by then remains an "immense challenge," the report said, noting the number of people without enough to eat had risen from 811 million in 2017.

"We will not achieve zero hunger by 2030," said David Beasley, head of the World Food Programme, one of the UN agencies contributing to the report.

"That's a bad trend. Without food security we will never have peace and stability," said Beasley, deploring that the media carry more talk about Brexit and Donald Trump than children dying of hunger.

He warned that extremist groups were using hunger and

control over food supplies as a weapon to divide communities or recruit new members.

"The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World" report was produced by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other United Nations agencies including the World Health Organization.

"To safeguard food security and nutrition, it is critical to already have in place economic and social policies to counteract the effects of adverse economic cycles when they arrive, while avoiding cuts in essential services, such as healthcare and education, at all costs," it said.

A "structural transformation" was needed to include the poorest people in the world, the authors said.

This would require "integrating food security and nutrition concerns into poverty reduction efforts" while tackling gender inequality and the exclusion of certain social groups, they said.

Malnutrition widespread in Africa

Malnutrition remains widespread in Africa, where around 20 percent of the population is affected, and in Asia where more than 12 percent of people expe-

rience it. In Latin America and the Caribbean, fewer than seven percent of people are affected.

Adding those hit by food insecurity gives a total of more than two billion people, eight percent of whom are in North America and Europe, who don't regularly have access to enough nutritious, safe food, the report said.

The FAO said current efforts were insufficient to meet the goal of halving the number of children whose growth is stunted by malnutrition by 2030.

Robin Willoughby, the head of food and climate policy at Oxfam GB, said women were hit hardest by the rise in hunger.

"A toxic brew of climate shocks, inequality and conflict is unravelling years of progress," he said.

"If we are to meet the target of ending hunger by 2030, governments must urgently cut greenhouse emissions, provide more support for small-scale agriculture and increase efforts to end violent conflicts."

The French non-governmental group CCFD-Terre Solidaire said that in Africa and Latin America, food insecurity was affecting emerging economies as well, and not just those considered to be the least advanced.



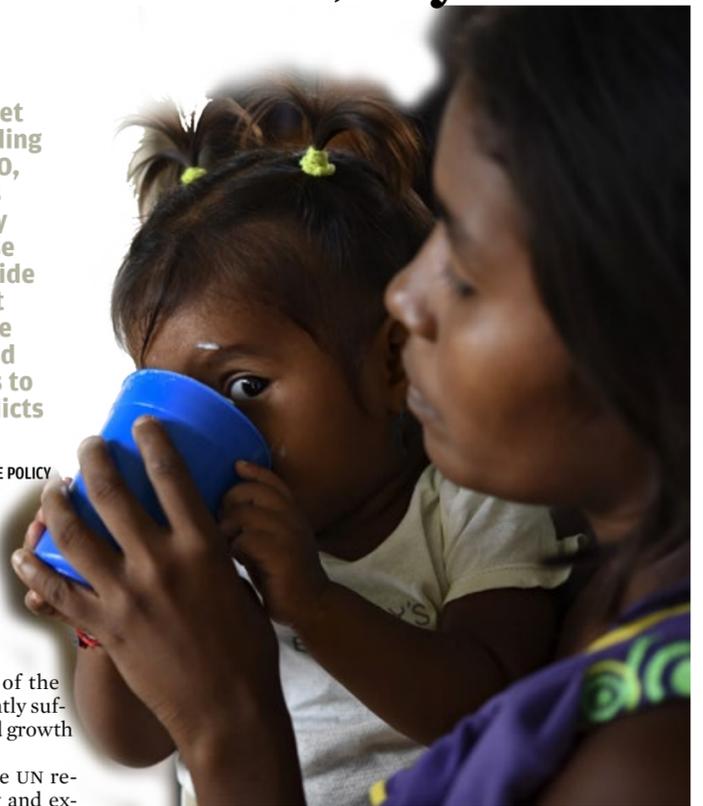
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ROBIN WILLOUGHBY

THE HEAD OF FOOD AND CLIMATE POLICY AT OXFAM GB

Around 149 million of the world's children currently suffer from hunger-related growth delays.

At the same time, the UN report notes that obesity and excess weight are both on the rise in all regions, with school-age children and adults particularly affected.



Yukpa indigenous children, some of them suffering from malnutrition, are fed with supplements provided by CARITAS organization, at Los Angeles del Tukuko mission, near Machiques, Zulia state, Venezuela

UK raises alarm after mother held by Iran taken to mental ward

● **Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's case has roiled Britain's relations with the Islamic republic since her 2016 arrest**

● **The Free Nazanin campaign said she was being held by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**

● **The 40-year-old ended a 15-day hunger strike at the end of June**

● **Zaghari-Ratcliffe is a project manager with the Thomson Reuters Foundation**

London, United Kingdom

London demanded the immediate release Wednesday of a jailed British-Iranian aid worker whose husband said she has been transferred to the mental ward of a public hospital in Tehran.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's case has roiled Britain's relations with the Islamic republic since her 2016 arrest and conviction on sedition charges over which she has held a series of hunger strikes.

"We are extremely concerned about Nazanin's welfare and call for her immediate release," Prime Minister Theresa May's spokesman said.

"We urge Iran to allow family members to visit her and check on her care."

UK Foreign Office minister Andrew Murrison said Zaghari-Ratcliffe's husband had told him that she was moved to the ward on Monday.

"It would be indeed cruel to deny this lady, in a psychiatric ward of a public hospital, access to her family. That must happen immediately," Murrison told parliament.

Zaghari-Ratcliffe has described her detention conditions to her family over the phone as "completely contrary to international norms," he added.

Suicide risk

The Free Nazanin campaign said she was being held by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) -- a vast and powerful branch of the Iranian military -- at Imam Khomeini hospital.

A psychiatrist has recommended that she be "instantly hospitalised due to her sharp deterioration since her previous meeting, and the risk of her taking matters into her own hands", the campaign group said, in an apparent reference to the possibility of Zaghari-Ratcliffe taking her own life.

The 40-year-old ended a 15-

day hunger strike at the end of June.

She was arrested in April 2016 while she was waiting for her flight out of Tehran after taking her then 22-month-old daughter Gabriella to visit her family.

"I was healthy and happy when I came to Iran to see my parents," Zaghari-Ratcliffe has been quoted as saying by her family.

"Three-and-a-bit years later and I am admitted to a mental health clinic. Look at me now. I ended up in an asylum. It should be an embarrassment."

Zaghari-Ratcliffe is a project manager with the Thomson Reuters Foundation -- the global media group's philanthropic arm -- but was in Tehran on a private visit to her family.

She was sentenced to five years in jail for allegedly trying to topple the Iranian government.

'Compassionate' release

Zaghari-Ratcliffe's case has added to long-standing tensions between Tehran and London -- a traditional ally and big arms supplier to Iran's arch-enemy Saudi Arabia.

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has previously raised the possibility of Zaghari-Ratcliffe being swapped for Iranian nationals held in the United States and Australia.

He told the BBC in an interview aired Wednesday that he also supported the idea of Zaghari-Ratcliffe being released on humanitarian grounds.

"That's not a decision for me to take, but that is an ideal situation for which I have tried and I will continue to try," Zarif said when asked about the possibility of her being "released soon on compassionate grounds".

Western analysts view Zarif as

a liberal with limited sway over the much more powerful IRGC and the clerics who surround Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"I am not happy to see a single individual in prison and I'll do my best to address that to the maximum of my capacity and my capability," Zarif said.

"But as foreign minister, I am responsible for the conduct of foreign affairs of the country. And she is an Iranian citizen."

Tehran's international isolation has been compounded by its decision to ramp up uranium enrichment in reprisal for Washington's decision last year to pull out of a landmark Iranian nuclear pact.

France and Britain are both signatories to the 2015 nuclear agreement.

The oil-rich Gulf nation confirmed Tuesday it had also arrested French-Iranian academic Fariba Adelkhah, 60.



Richard Ratcliffe, the husband of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, outside the Iranian embassy in London last month. (Courtesy of the Guardian)



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ANDREW MURRISON
UK FOREIGN OFFICE MINISTER