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Caritas seeks aid for West African food crises

Brian Roewe | Mar. 23, 2012 Eco Catholic

Caritas International has launched campaigns the past two days to help alleviate the food crises in the African nations of Niger and Burkina Faso.

People of both countries in West Africa?s Sahel region face rising food costs amid growing shortages.

?Niger and the Sahel face an alarming food emergency that is getting worse day-by-day,? said Raymond Yoro, the executive secretary of Caritas Niger, in a press release.

Caritas says that the food shortage affects a third of the Nigerien population. The shortage dates back to 2010, when 7.8 million people ? or three-fifths of the population ? faced moderate to severe food insecurity, following a 2009 drought that depleted food stocks. With food already limited today, an increasing number of Malian refugees have further strained supplies.

Famines are nothing new in Niger. In 2010, the New York Times detailed the long struggle [1], dating back to 1974, the country has had battling food shortages amidst increasing birthrates and a basic agricultural system.

The Caritas campaign launched today seeks to raise $5 million to help 400,000 people in Niger, while the Caritas Burkina Faso appeal has targeted $2.3 million in order to provide food and other aid for more than 45,000 people in 7,000 homes.

In Burkina Faso, the price of corn has increased by a third since 2010, while grain production has dropped 16 percent. Those most at risk of malnutrition are the 21,000 children under age five Caritas currently seeks to serve through their nutrition recovery centers.

While the situation requires immediate action, part of Caritas? plan includes a long-term vision, whereby helping households grow their own food and restock reserves to better prepare for future shortages and bad harvests.

?We must act now to avoid tragedy in the months to come,? said Fr. Isidore Ouedraogo, the Caritas Burkina Faso executive secretary, in a separate release.

?Today, we are witnessing thousands of people who eat only one meal a day. By intervening now, Caritas will help them survive the lean season when the lack of food is most acute,? he said.

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Links:
[1] http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/04/world/africa/04niger.html