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# One billion people hungry

## World hunger, rising faster than population, hits grim milestone.

By Alessandra Rizzo

Associated Press

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ROME The global financial meltdown has pushed the ranks of the world's hungry to a record 1 billion, a dire figure that poses a threat to peace and security, U.N. food officials said Friday.

Because of war, drought, political instability, high food prices and poverty, hunger now affects one in six people, by the U.N. estimate.

The financial meltdown has compounded the crisis in what the head of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization called a “devastating combination for the world's most vulnerable.”

Compared with last year, 100 million more people are hungry, meaning they consume fewer than 1,800 calories a day, the agency said.

“No part of the world is immune,” FAO's Director-General Jacques Diouf said. “All world regions have been affected by the rise of food insecurity.”

The crisis is a humanitarian issue, but it is also a political one.

Officials presenting the new estimates in Rome sought to stress the link between hunger and instability, noting that soaring prices for staples, such as rice, triggered riots in the developing world last year.

Josette Sheeran of the World Food Program, another U.N. food agency based in Rome, said hungry people rioted in at least 30 countries last year. Most notably, soaring food prices led to deadly riots in Haiti and the overthrow of the prime minister.

“A hungry world is a dangerous world,” Sheeran said. “Without food, people have only three options: They riot, they emigrate or they die. None of these are acceptable options.”

Even though prices have retreated from their mid-2008 highs, they are still “stubbornly high” in some domestic markets, according to FAO. On average, food prices were 24 percent higher in real terms at the end of 2008 compared with 2006, it said.

“Malnutrition kills through the fact that it weakens the immune system of a child,” said Andrei Engstrand-Neacsu, a Nairobi, Kenya-based spokesman for the International Federation of Red

Cross and Red Crescent Societies in East Africa. Some 22 million of the 1 billion hungry people counted by the United Nations are in the drought-stricken Horn of Africa, he said.

Engstrand-Neacsu said he had just returned from a corner of southern Ethiopia on the Kenyan border where the food situation is dire, and had been speaking to a family who lost a child to malaria in February. The parents said they were told he couldn't be saved because he was malnourished.

The number of hungry people is estimated to have reached 1.02 billion – up 11 percent from last year's 915 million, the FAO said. The agency said it based its estimate on analysis by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The FAO said the hunger rate is rising, too – that is, the number of hungry people is growing faster than the world population. Officials did not provide a rate but said the trend began two years ago.

Almost all the world's undernourished live in developing countries. But all regions of the world have registered two-digit increases in hunger from last year.

FAO said the calorie limit it employs to declare a person hungry is on average 1,800, though it changes slightly from country to country.



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