

UN : WF Programme

NEWS

# UN food scheme confident of securing African aid

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Johannesburg - The UN World Food Programme is confident of securing more than a million tons of aid for southern Africa despite donors' political concerns over the region, the programme said yesterday.

The scheme, which estimated that 12.8 million people in six southern African countries were threatened by food shortages, said the numbers could rise if the winter crop failed, commercial imports fell short and foreign donor response was slow or insufficient.

Aid organisations and donors agreed at two days of urgent talks in Johannesburg last week that the scheme would begin supplying food as soon as July. Other agencies would start their aid as soon as they were able to do so.

Donors were concerned that

man-made factors, such as the seizure of white-owned farms in Zimbabwe and Malawi's sale of its strategic maize reserve in 2000/2001, had compounded food crises caused by natural damage to harvests.

Judith Lewis, the food programme's regional director for east and southern Africa, said: "It was very clear from last week's talks that in addition to food assistance there must be a concerted effort from member countries to hold high-level policy talks on issues that are hampering agriculture and food supply.

"Nobody was hinting that they would hold back emergency assistance, but the donors would like governments in the region to look at their responsibilities and ensure they have policies in place to prevent this from happening again."

Two successive years of poor



The UN's Judith Lewis

harvests caused by drought, floods and frost, coupled with economic and political crises, have cut food supplies and sent prices of staple maize soaring.

Under the plan agreed to last week, the scheme will begin

stockpiling two-month supplies of food in affected countries during July, using mainly road transport from harbours in South Africa, Mozambique and Tanzania.

"Donors are not at a place where they are saying they will absolutely deny food aid," Lewis said. However, she said the response had been mixed so far.

Donors have contributed less than half the \$135.3 million requested for bridging operations until the food operation starts in July. In terms of food deliveries, the scheme had only 120 000 tons of the 255 538 tons it asked for.

Executive director James Morris said last week the food agency aimed to mobilise over 1 million tons of aid to the region.

The plan is to use Johannesburg as a base to distribute food to the most affected countries - Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozam-

bique, Lesotho and Swaziland.

At the UN World Food Summit, which started in Rome yesterday, only a few top leaders turned up to hear how the world would combat global hunger.

However, dozens of leaders from the developing world attended the four-day meeting.

UN secretary-general Kofi Annan told delegates at the summit that according to some estimates, 24 000 people died from hunger every day even though there was enough food for everyone, if it was distributed properly.

The World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation estimate that Zimbabwe needs 705 000 tons of food aid for about 6 million people up to March next year, out of an estimated 12.8 million people in the region who will need 1.2 million tons over the same period. - Reuters