*"All the fields have dried up. There is no chance to find water. The community is also dependent on the animals. They don't have any other option... the life of the community is in danger."*

Niman Arab, IRC Emergency Rapid Response Manager in Ethiopia

**CONTEXT**

**IRC teams on the ground are already seeing deaths from starvation and anticipating a crisis worse than the 2011 famine in Somalia that killed 260,000 people**. We expect an official famine declaration in early September, but by then, it will already be too late to save hundreds of thousands of lives.  In Somalia today, the number of people going hungry is **twice as high** as when the UN declared famine in 2011.

**This is the longest, most severe drought in the region in decades**. There have been a record four consecutive failed rainy seasons, surpassing the three seen during the deadly 2011 famine. The next rainy season this autumn is also predicted to fail, which would be unprecedented and could lead to a near-total collapse in all food production across drought-affected areas.

**The fallout from conflict in Ukraine acted as an accelerator in a region that was already extremely vulnerable**. Ukraine and Russia historically provided 90% of wheat imported to East Africa. Combined with the rise in fuel costs that are a key factor in the increase in food prices, East Africa has seen a larger rise in levels of hunger following the war in Ukraine than any other region.

**Food insecurity is rapidly growing and has surpassed previous droughts**. 20 million people in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya are set to be food insecure by September - a doubling compared to just last year. Over three million of these people are already experiencing the most extreme levels of hunger, increasing their risk of death. Today, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia make up 2% of the world’s population, but are home to 70% of the world’s most extremely food insecure.

**This will be a child starvation crisis.** During the 2011 famine in Somalia, half of all deaths were children under five - infants and toddlers who bore the brunt of global inaction. Today, 2 million children in the region are experiencing the most extreme form of malnutrition, which increases their risk of death tenfold, while a further 5.1 million are acutely malnourished. In Somalia, **380,000 children are currently at risk of death from starvation.**

**Ultimately, this was predictable and preventable.** There is nothing natural about famines in the twenty-first century. While a complex set of factors drive food insecurity, the slide into mass death is man-made, driven by international inaction.

**Severe underfunding**
Despite the scale of the crisis the region’s humanitarian appeals remain staggeringly underfunded. Even by July, six months into the year, these appeals were just 22% funded. Once fulfilled, major commitments from the US in July would bring humanitarian responses to 40% funded. Without significant additional contributions from other donors, humanitarians will face challenges in scaling up their activities to match the level of need.

**CHALLENGES**

**Lack of global leadership and urgency**
There is still a window of opportunity to scale aid efforts to reduce the levels of death and suffering. Yet the international system is sitting in neutral at precisely the moment it needs to be accelerating. There is no time to wait for data collection to confirm what the IRC is already seeing on the ground: a country hurtling at breakneck speed towards a catastrophic famine. During the 2011 famine, half of deaths occurred before a famine was declared. During the peak, 30,000 people were dying each month. A total of 260,000 people died.

**Limited public awareness**
Despite the scale of the crisis, it has received relatively low levels of media attention – a major barrier to high level public engagement, fundraising and taking action.

 **WHAT CAN THE UK GOVERNMENT DO?**

The UK Government was a key actor in averting famine in East Africa 2016-17 through its generous donations and leadership in corralling other donors to step up. We urge the UK Government to show that same level of leadership now and urgently take the following steps:

1. **Increase funding for the East Africa response and ensure money moves quickly to operational agencies, including via direct funding to NGOs by:**
	* Providing top ups to existing implementing partners.
	* Frontloading funding through existing multi-year funding mechanisms, recognising that rains this autumn are predicted to fail and the crisis will extend well into 2023.
2. **Drive forward efforts to strengthen global coordination by:**
	* Helping set up an international emergency action coordination group for the crisis. This would bring together other Member States, (including governments of affected countries) and the humanitarian community - represented by the IASC Emergency Directors group, Regional / Humanitarian Coordinators, and local civil society. This group would be able to advise on best response and ensure that any action is coordinated.

**WHAT CAN PARLIAMENTARIANS DO?**

1. **Write to the new Foreign Secretary and ask them to make this issue one of their first priorities;**
2. **Raise the crisis in Parliament to ensure it stays high on the parliamentary agenda;**
3. **Help increase public awareness by taking part in media opportunities wherever possible.**

IRC UK can support on all of the above, so please do not hesitate to get in touch and discuss how you can help.

**IRC in East Africa**

The IRC is a global humanitarian organisation with programmes in over 40 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, and the U.S. Our mission is to help people whose lives and livelihood are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and gain control of their future.

The IRC has operated in East Africa since 1981 with offices in Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia. The IRC delivers programming and services across East Africa including cash relief, education, health and those that focus on women’s protection and empowerment.

For more information, contact Lydia Rollinson, Parliamentary and Advocacy Officer, IRC-UK: Lydia.rollinson@rescue.org