

Massive food aid needed for starving Burundi refugees: MSF

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NAIROBI, Dec 2 (AFP) - An international relief agency has warned that unless 700,000 Burundian refugees in Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire receive massive food aid immediately, "people will begin dying of starvation in the next few days".

In a statement released here on Thursday, the international medical aid agency, Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF - Doctors Without Borders) warned that, short of enough to eat, some refugee families were sneaking back into Burundi at night to look for food in villages they had abandoned.

Warning that the situation was serious, MSF appealed for immediate financial backing from the outside world to get a food distribution system for the Burundi refugees running.

The statement charged that the U.N. High Commission for Refugees

(UNHCR) and the U.N. World Food Programme (WFP) had failed to ensure that the refugees received adequate food rations on a regular basis.

The UNHCR launched an international appeal for 17 million U.S. dollars to help feed the Burundian refugees who fled tribal massacres in their country after the October 21 failed coup in which president Melchior Ndadaye and several of his key aides were killed.

To date, however, only 4.9 million dollars have been committed, MSF said.

"Food distribution is so ineffective that some refugees have told MSF aid worker that members of their families were crossing back into Burundi at night to look for food in villages they left behind, but many do not return", MSF said.