

Rwanda needs urgent food aid to avoid imminent famine: FAO

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NAIROBI, March 16 (AFP) - The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) warned Wednesday that food supply was critical in all parts of Rwanda and urged donors to address the total food aid needs to avoid further human suffering.

In a statement faxed to AFP here the FAO said that in northern Rwanda, food shortages were due to reduced foodcrop production after drought and massive population displacements during the civil war.

The southern region, which is characterised by the most fragile agricultural soils, was hardest-hit by the drought and the population is currently struggling to cope with food shortages of unprecedented proportions, the statement said.

"Deaths from starvation-related causes continued to be reported from this traditionally food-deficit region and the situation is further aggravated by the presence of a large num-

ber of refugees from Burundi," the statement added.

An FAO/World Food Programme Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission, which visited Rwanda February 5-15, estimated the 1994 first season foodcrop output at 1.3 million tonnes, 33 percent below last year's first season production.

The mission had also estimated foodcrop output for the February-June 1994 second season at 1.8 million tonnes, 22 percent less than the corresponding harvest for the previous season - putting the overall foodcrop production in 1994 provisionally at 3.1 million tonnes or 27 percent down over last year.

The mission had also estimated the national cereal import requirement in 1994 at 115,000 tonnes, comprising 95,000 tonnes of coarse grains, 13,000 tonnes of wheat and 7,000 tonnes of rice and the bean import requirement at 190,000 tonnes.

But as the country's capacity for commercial imports is seriously limited due to lack of foreign exchange, the bulk of the food import requirement for 1994 will have to be covered by food aid, FAO pointed out.

The immediate March-July 1994 emergency food aid requirements of the victims of drought, displaced persons in camps in northern Rwanda

and the 262,000 Burundian refugees in the south are estimated at 67,000.

But taking into account in-country available stocks and food aid already in the pipeline, Rwanda still needs a balance of 13,750 tonnes to cover immediate emergency requirements, the statement concluded.

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