

Swazis face starvation

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Mbabane - A United Nations relief agency on Tuesday appealed for \$15,6-million (about R107-million) in humanitarian aid for more than 400 000 people facing starvation in Swaziland.

"The government of Swaziland is doing all it can, but needs our support. Hundreds of thousands of people face hunger, illness and severe hardship in the coming months and it is critical that we get life-saving activities up and running as quickly as possible," said UN emergency relief co-ordinator John Holmes.

The assistance would help address humanitarian concerns, such as food, agricultural inputs, health, water, sanitation, protection and early livelihood recovery in the country, hit by the worst drought in 15 years, a statement by the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs said.

About 400 000 Swazis - about a third of the population - will need about 40 000 tons of food between now and the next maize harvest in April 2008, according to a report on Monday by the Food and Agriculture Organisation and World Food Programme.

The Swazi government in July declared a national disaster after the recent maize harvest fell to only 26 000 metric tons from 67 000 last year making it the worst harvest yet, the statement added.

Compounding the crisis is a high prevalence rate of HIV and Aids in the kingdom, which has the highest adult HIV infection rate in the world, estimated at 42.6 percent, it said.

The government has pledged \$23,6-million (about R161-million) to respond to the most urgent needs for food and water, but has asked the international humanitarian community to support its efforts, the statement said. - Sapa-AFP