

‘WORLD SLEEPWALKING INTO DISASTER OF COVID-19’ – CONCERN

Humanitarian aid agency Concern Worldwide is calling for a greater global response to both the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 in the developing world, amid fears that the pandemic will leave over one billion people without sufficient food.

“The world is currently sleepwalking into disaster. It must wake up to the unprecedented challenge we are facing in the developing world,” according to Anne O’Mahony, Concern’s Director of International Programmes. “Extraordinary measures will have to be put in place to avoid hunger growing to levels we have never seen before,” she added.

World hunger levels have been rising since 2015 with over 820 million people going hungry on a daily basis and around 168 million people already requiring humanitarian assistance. There is now a high risk that the broader disruptive effect of COVID-19 will drive levels of global food insecurity to over a billion people.

Concern teams in 23 countries continue to escalate their efforts to support communities and are working closely with governments to maintain consistent messaging on COVID-19 and what can be done to prevent it.

“Humanitarian agencies from around the world are prepared to stay where they are needed and deliver, but they need global commitment and leadership,” O’Mahony said, adding that lifesaving humanitarian activities such as the distribution of food and cash must be considered essential services.

CATASTROPHIC IMPACT OF COVID

Income losses for people in developing countries as a result of COVID-19 are expected to exceed €202 billion. The more severe lockdown approaches in many western countries are only possible if supported by social protection systems to protect families and individuals whose livelihoods have been disrupted.

With an estimated 55% of the global population having no access to social protection, the impact of COVID-19 on their livelihoods and access to food will be catastrophic, according to the aid agency.

In Ethiopia, where Concern has been working for 46 years, around 8.5 million people are in need of food. The country is simultaneously battling the worst desert locust infestation it has seen in decades.

This infestation has left more than one million people food insecure, according to the UN Food

and Agriculture Organisation. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 was already shaping up to be a challenging year in Ethiopia, noted Eileen Morrow, Concern’s Ethiopia Country Director.

“While I keep hearing ‘We are all in this together’, the COVID pandemic highlights the major inequality that exists between African countries and the rest of the world. African countries are last in line to get access to global supply chains for essential equipment, and yet their populations are among the most vulnerable,” Morrow noted.

“This is neither fair nor strategic in terms of containing the virus – it knows no borders. The time to act for Africa is really now,” she said.

Concern is reaching people across Ethiopia with key COVID-19 prevention messages, distributed over 64,000 bars of soap to quarantine facilities, health institutions and vulnerable populations and installed 31 new handwashing stations.

