



AFRICA-Half a million children are at risk of starvation

Nairobi (Agenzia Fides) - At least 500 000 malnourished children at risk in areas of the Horn of Africa affected by drought. "This emergency will only worsen in the next six months", said UNICEF Executive Director at a recent conference in Nairobi after a visit in the North West region of Turkana and in Dadaab, home to thousands of displaced Somalis. Due to the lack of protein intake, severely malnourished children show symptoms such as swelling in the legs and face. Malnutrition is divided into acute or global acute malnutrition. When a GAM value exceeds 10% this means there is an emergency. In the Turkana region the global rate of acute malnutrition (GAM) is 37%. Because of the drought across the Horn of Africa at least 10.7 million people in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia are in urgent need of humanitarian aid. In Somalia, thousands of people are leaving the country, about 3,200 move to Kenya and Ethiopia every day. Humanitarian operators have welcomed a recent statement of the Somali Islamist opposition group, Al-Shabab, which allows access of humanitarian aid to central and southern regions. For the first time in more than two years, on 13 July, UNICEF brought emergency food and water supplies to Baidoa in southern Somalia via air transport. In Mogadishu, doctors together with the African Union peacekeeping Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) are busy in trying to contain a measles outbreak that has spread in a camp for displaced always because of the drought. Since the month of June around 9.300 people have arrived in the Somali capital, forced to abandon their homes in central and southern regions. The drought has seriously affected agricultural communities in the semi-arid areas of Ethiopia, Kenya and worst of all in Somalia. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 07/19/2011)