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AFRICA/NIGER - Drought and famine: the catastrophic situation in the country

Tera (Agenzia Fides) - The severe drought that has struck Niger for months has destroyed crops and amplified the serious problems of food supply that the country has been suffering from for years. The Spanish Catholic organization Manos Unidas, through the missionary Rafael Marco, busy in Tera, a city 157 kilometers from the border with Burkina Faso, in a statement sent to Fides, confirms the seriousness of the situation. "The harvest lost - said Fr. Marco- the state of emergency of 2009-2010 continues. The situation is very serious". The Spanish missionary states that between 60 and 90 percent of the crops have been lost and, for the first time, the government has recognized the state of emergency and asked for help. Rafael Marco belongs to the Society of African Missions, which has been present in Tera for about two years, lives and works with the most vulnerable population: "We take care of education and nutrition of a group of about 30 children, and recently the group is rising. "The concern is very evident. Niger, has also been severely affected by the conflict in Libya, since the Nigerians were used as mercenaries. "Approximately 250 000 people returned from Libya, and consequently many families were left without any income", explains the missionary. The war has also affected the livestock sector, a major economy of the country. The cattle trade has dropped by almost 30% increasing the vulnerability of people who depended on this activity. The international community is, however, in time to avoid that even Niger joins the list of African countries affected by famine. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 03/11/2011)

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