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By Jill Moss



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This is the VOA Special English Development Report.

The number of people receiving food assistance in Asia rose to a new record high during the first half of this year. The United Nations World Food Program says this is because of an increase in natural disasters throughout the area. They include floods in Bangladesh, Cambodia and Laos, and an earthquake in India.

Catherine Bertini is the executive director of the World Food Program. She estimates the program has helped almost thirty-five million hungry people in Asia so far this year. This is a sixteen-percent increase, up from almost thirty-million people during the same period last year.

The World Food Program has emergency and development operations in twelve countries throughout Asia. The largest is in North Korea, where more than eight-million people are receiving aid. This is almost one-third of North Korea's population. Most of the victims are farmers and their families. They have suffered through several years of floods, food shortages, and severe dry conditions.


Mizz Bertini says Indonesia has also received more food aid this year. During the early Nineteen-Nineties, Indonesia exported food to other countries. However, millions of people were affected by the Asian financial crisis in Nineteen-Ninety-Seven. The crisis created hunger problems for people living in cities throughout Indonesia.


The increase in people receiving food aid in Asia is also linked to an expansion in the U-N school feeding program. Under the program, poor children are given a healthy meal at school. The World Food Program is also supporting a new plan to fight H-I-V and AIDS. World Health Organization estimates say the disease is spreading faster in Asia than anywhere else in the world. Currently, India has the highest number of victims -- more than three-and-one-half million.

Mizz Bertini says that Asia has more hungry people than any other part of the world. However, not all developing countries in Asia are in trouble. For example, as of last year Vietnam no longer needed help from the World Food Program. Also, China is making progress. Mizz Bertini says the number of poor people in China has dropped. So the number of hungry people also has decreased. Mizz Bertini says the World Food Program

could begin closing down its assistance program in China within five years.

This VOA Special English Development Report was written by Jill Moss.

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