

2023 to Go Down as ‘One of the Most Difficult’ Years for Children Worldwide: UNICEF

By [Anadolu Agency](#)

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As dozens of conflicts have ruthlessly robbed tens of thousands of children of their future, 2023 will be remembered as “one of the most difficult” years to be a child in, according to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

Another factor that made the year “one of the most difficult” was insufficient funds for humanitarian actors, harming children in need of life-saving assistance, especially in ongoing conflict zones, as “you cannot do more with less,” said the UNICEF deputy executive director.

“I think 2023 has been one of the most difficult years for children worldwide. And I think the things that have struck me the most is, firstly, the horrendous, unprecedented violence that we’ve seen in Gaza,” Ted Chaiban told *Anadolu* in an interview.

In Gaza, the proportion of children killed as a percentage of the total death toll is “over 40%,” Chaiban said, adding that this is “twice what we’ve seen in over 40 conflicts where we have this aggregated data.

“It’s something that’s unprecedented we’ve seen, an indiscriminate level of violence in Gaza,” he said. “And that’s just absolutely horrendous.”

Israel has pounded the Gaza Strip since a cross-border attack by the Palestinian group Hamas on Oct. 7, killing at least 20,424 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injuring 54,036 others, according to health authorities in the enclave.

This has caused an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe and immense damage to infrastructure, according to Palestinian and international sources.

Crises Before Gaza Are ‘Stain on Our Consciousness’

This is a world where conflict is profoundly affecting children, where climate is causing increased displacement, and where the humanitarian system is going to need to continue to be there to respond, Chaiban stressed.

He added that the magnitude of the ongoing hostilities in Gaza is overshadowing the other ongoing hostilities which needed to be remembered.

“It’s hard to think that the crises that were even before Gaza, you know, were a stain on our consciousness, and that’s what’s happened in Sudan,” he said, noting that he worked in the country 20 years ago when the Darfur crisis was at its height and what is occurring right now is a repeat of history.

“We’re seeing children and their families that are being pulled out of their villages, forced to go across the border in Chad, in what is community-based targeted violence, essentially,” he said.

Noting that this is not only happening throughout Darfur but the violence has spread to Kordofan and Khartoum, Chaiban said:

“The whole country is being dislocated. We’ve got the largest child displacement in the world occurring as we speak in Sudan.”

Then the world has an “almost forgotten” crisis in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where there is sexual and physical violence against children in a conflict that, frankly, has been going on since the 1990s, he said.

“How can something like that be forgotten?” he questioned.

2023 Appeal for Children ‘Roughly 50% Funded’

Although “every dollar counts,” Chaiban said, UNICEF’s 2023 appeal for children was “roughly 50% funded, leading to a reduction in 2024’s appeal by 16%.”

“Every one of those dollars made a difference,” he said. “And we’re going to do everything possible to raise the resources so that we can respond to children.”

In 2023, UNICEF appealed for \$10.3 billion in emergency funding to reach more than 110 million children – including 54 million girls and 10 million children with disabilities – with humanitarian assistance across 155 countries and territories.

The appeal was focused on major crises including in Haiti, the Sahel, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Horn of Africa, Pakistan, Ukraine, Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Myanmar.

With the decreased appeal, Chaiban said UNICEF aims to be “more efficient” in the way it works with some of its sister agencies like the World Food Programme (WFP) next year.

“We focus together on the treatment of severe acute malnutrition and we’ve come up with a simplified protocol which focuses only on those that are most at risk,” he said,

adding they will target their supplies to those that are most in need.

“So through those kinds of steps, we hope to be able to reach those that are most at risk,” he said but argued that “you cannot do more with less.”

“We continue to appeal to the world’s donors and not to turn their attention away from children.”

“We’re in a world where the generosity of governments, individuals or foundations makes a difference,” he said. “It gives hope in the midst of tragic events. So let’s keep giving hope.”

Getting Into 2024 with ‘Very Difficult Situations’

Stressing that another distressing year is approaching as not the only world is entering the year but also many ongoing conflicts, Chaiban expressed hope in the work that UNICEF does.

“I think it’s very clear that we’re going into 2024 with very difficult situations in Gaza, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Sahel,” he said.

“We need to make sure we don’t forget crises like the displacement that came out of Syria, the Rohingya in Bangladesh and the situation in Haiti, where we’ve got gang violence that has been an upheaval in society.”

“But I also want to speak about situations of hope,” he said, drawing attention to Somalia, where a famine was averted in 2022 because of the concerted work of humanitarian agencies.

Then there is “the situation in the Horn of Africa, where over the years, systems have been set up. You know, the health system has been decentralized, (and) the food safety net put in place in places like Ethiopia, so that when the shock does happen, the population can withstand that shock,” he added.

He noted that UNICEF’s work has a positive impact in the targeted countries.

“We also have hope in the work that we do and know that it makes a difference — not just with lifesaving activities, but for example, with the work that we do in education.”

What to Expect from UNICEF in 2024

In its 2024 appeal, UNICEF launched a \$9.3 billion emergency funding appeal to reach at least 93.7 million children in 155 countries.

The top five appeals by funding requirements for 2024 are for Afghanistan with \$1.44 billion, Syrian refugees and other vulnerable populations with \$860 million, Sudan with \$840 million, the Democratic Republic of Congo with \$804 million and Ukraine and the refugee response with \$580 million.

Its plans include reaching 17.3 million children for vaccination against measles and 7.6 million children for treating their severe acute malnutrition.

Also among UNICEF's goals are making formal or non-formal education accessible for 19.3 million children and making community-based mental health and psychosocial support accessible to 26.7 children.

According to the new appeal, the critically underfunded emergencies include Sudan, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Haiti, Ethiopia, Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Bangladesh.

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Featured image: Wounded Palestinian children, are taken to hospital after Israeli attacks in Khan Yunis, Gaza on December 23, 2023 [Belal Khaled/Anadolu Agency]

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