

World Food Programme to close office in southern Africa after Trump aid cuts

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UN food agency received half its budget from US last year and is accelerating merger plan as a result of funding cuts



The World Food Programme in Uganda. The organisation is planning to consolidate its southern and east Africa operations. Photograph: Joerg Boethling/Alamy

The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) is closing its southern Africa office in the wake of the Trump administration's aid cuts.

In a statement, a spokesperson said the office in Johannesburg would close and the WFP would consolidate its southern and east Africa operations into one regional office in Nairobi, Kenya.

The spokesperson said the UN food agency had launched a long-term plan to streamline its structure in 2023, but as "the donor funding outlook becomes more constrained, we have been compelled to accelerate these efforts".

The spokesperson said food programmes would continue:

"Our commitment to serving vulnerable communities is as strong as ever, and WFP remains committed to ensuring our operations are as effective and efficient as possible in meeting the needs of those facing hunger."

The WFP did not say how much funding it had lost from USAid, but it received \$4.4bn (£3.5bn) in assistance from the US last year, about half its total annual budget and more than four times the amount given by the second biggest donor, Germany.

The Trump administration said last week it was terminating 90% of USAid's foreign aid contracts because they did not advance America's national interests, stopping \$60bn in spending on humanitarian projects across the world.

Southern Africa was hit by its worst drought in decades last year, destroying crops and putting 27 million people in danger of hunger, according to the WFP. It made a call for \$147m in donations to help some of those in need even before Donald Trump started cutting US foreign aid.

The WFP provides food assistance to more than 150 million people in 120 countries, it says. It won the Nobel peace prize in 2020 and its six leaders since 1992 have been Americans, including current executive director Cindy McCain, the widow of the former US senator John McCain.

Few UN agencies have been specific about the impact of the US aid cuts.

The UN's International Organization for Migration reportedly has cut 3,000 jobs linked to resettlement in the US, and family planning agency UNFPA has estimated that a number of its operations will be affected.

Many UN aid agencies have said they are still assessing the impact and remain unclear about whether some programmes or projects will benefit from waivers that could allow US donations to continue to flow.

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