“Crisis Is Getting Worse and is Rapidly Descending into a Catastrophe,” says Concern’s Tom Arnold

Agency CEO says situation first-hand is “truly shocking” and “heartbreaking” as UN declaration of famine in parts of Somalia shows severity of East Africa drought crisis.

Tom Arnold, CEO Ireland’s largest aid agency Concern Worldwide, who is in the Horn of Africa this week with a consortium of aid agencies and former-President Mary Robinson, has called what he has seen first-hand in the region “truly shocking”.

The UN has declared that regions of southern Somalia are officially suffering from famine. Over 10 million people are affected across large areas of Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia in what is the worst drought to hit the region in 60 years.

Concern has been working in East Africa for over 25 years, and is one of the few international agencies currently working in Somalia.

“What we have seen this week is truly shocking,” said Mr Arnold. “The people we have met, and the stories we have heard – families who have been separated, children and elderly people dying from hunger and disease, people walking for days and weeks to find help – are heartbreaking.

“The most disturbing realisation I have is that this crisis is only getting worse and is rapidly descending into a catastrophe,” he added.

Already this has been described as the worst food crisis in the world today, and given the severity and the scale, it is the most severe food security crisis in Africa since the 1991/92 Somalia famine.

The next harvest is not due until October and the predictions are that not be enough to lift this crisis. “From what I’ve seen in the last few days, the situation is on the brink of a catastrophe. The number of people dying is starting to rise sharply.”

Concern began warning about the current crisis late last year and hey agency and its local partners have been responding to the needs of this drought emergency since its onset in late 2010. It is now reaching over 400,000 people with clean water, food and nutritional care.

Concern’s emergency public appeal details are:

Concern appeal phone lines: 1850 410 510
Concern appeal web page: www.concern.net/drought

Contact: