



RESOURCE SECURITY WATCH

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
Changes to the Global Strategic Environment

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July 2, 2019 **Rebecca Yim**

Related Categories: Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Resource Security; Africa; North Korea

NORTH KOREA'S DEFORESTATION PROBLEM

North Korea has long struggled with food scarcity, even suffering through a protracted famine in the 1990s. But the Hermit Kingdom's food woes are today growing even more dire as a result of sharp increases in deforestation. Forests play an integral role in keeping nutrient-rich topsoil in place, allowing for sustainable agriculture. However, this topsoil is increasingly being washed away as the DPRK suffers through extreme weather phenomena such as floods, droughts, and storms. This, in turn, has created significant losses in the amount of food that can be produced – a depletion the DPRK can ill afford amid ongoing international sanctions.

The prognosis is potentially dire. The regime of Kim Jong Un has managed to survive so far under existing sanctions. However, less arable land means less produce as a whole for North Korea's population, and less food for its already malnourished citizens. This heightens the possibility of domestic unrest amid mounting shortages. And even if sanctions are eventually lifted as a result of international diplomacy, the problem is likely to persist. The current trend is leading the North to become increasingly reliant on foreign food products, and less and less invested in domestic agriculture – a problem that will remain even if the country is diplomatically rehabilitated. (*Scientific American*, April 19, 2019)

A GLOBAL MEASLES OUTBREAK

The head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Ghebreyesus, has warned that the world is in the middle of a global measles crisis. The first three months of 2019 saw a nearly 300 percent increase in the number of recorded measles cases, as compared to the same period in 2018. This increase could be fatal for children who haven't been vaccinated, due to their underdeveloped immune systems.

Measles can generally be found under two different conditions: low income countries and countries stricken by war. In both scenarios, vaccinations for the disease tend to be inaccessible, unaffordable, or unavailable. But of late a third set of conditions has arisen, as populations in wealthy nations have exhibited a rise in skepticism toward vaccinations.

The danger is amplified by the communicability of the disease. Measles can survive for hours in the open air, and a vulnerable person need only to breathe the same air as an infected person to contract the disease. This transferability creates a hazard for any traveler, and could lead to contagion in major urban centers or, potentially, a global pandemic if there is an outbreak at an international airport. (*New York Times*, April 9, 2019; *UN News*, April 15, 2019)

NAMIBIA'S FAR-REACHING DROUGHT

Namibian President Hage G. Geingob has declared a national emergency as a result of the long-running drought affecting his country. Due to poor rainfall earlier this year, the African nation has been hit with severe water shortages, leading to more than 500,000 people now without access to enough food. This has caused many citizens to turn to the government for food and water, and for the Namibian government to in turn plead with the international community for aid. The drought is also ravaging Namibian agriculture. Half of the country's economy is made up by agriculture, with a large portion of it in livestock, and the water shortage has caused more than 60,000 domestic animals to die. If the drought continues, the country will see severe food shortages as well, and potentially cause a migration crisis as families, unable to support themselves, will flee to the national capital, Windhoek, or to surrounding countries like Botswana or South Africa. (*Africa News*, May 6, 2019; *BBC*, May 7, 2019; *Namibian Farmer*, May 21, 2019)