

700 dead as malaria 'epidemic' hits Burundi

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About 700 people have died from malaria in Burundi so far this year, the health minister said, with the authorities having registered 1.8 million infections in a rising epidemic.

"Burundi faces a malaria epidemic," Josiane Nijimbere said Monday, commenting on a World Health Organization (WHO) report.

From January 1 to March 10 this year, 1.8 million infections were registered in Burundi, according to the WHO.

According to Nijimbere, the latest figures constitute a 17 percent increase from the same period last year.

"Some 700 deaths" have been registered since January, the minister added.

In 2016, an estimated 8.2 million people were infected and 3,000 people died in mountainous Burundi, which is home to around 11 million people.

UN officials and medical sources say Burundi's stock of anti-malaria medication is nearly empty.

Nijimbere put the cost of fighting malaria at \$31 million (29 million euros), as she appealed for donations to help fight the disease.

She attributed the rise in infections to climate change, increased

marshland for rice-growing and the population's misuse of mosquito nets.

Burundi has been plunged into chaos since President Pierre Nkurunziza's controversial decision in April 2015 to run for a third term.

Hundreds of [people](#) have been killed and hundreds of thousands of others have fled the country.

The crisis also led to a 54 percent cut to the government's health budget in 2016 from the previous year.

"This [malaria](#) crisis is even more dramatic because it is striking an impoverished, hungry population that has no resources and for whom even the slightest shock can have life-or-death consequences," a diplomat told AFP on condition of anonymity.

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