

Food Security

Overview: The Famine in Somalia

From Education for Justice

I am following with deep concern the news from the region of the Horn of Africa and, particular, Somalia, stricken by a very severe drought followed in certain areas by torrential rain, which are causing a humanitarian catastrophe. Countless people are fleeing from that terrible famine in search of food and help. I hope that international mobilization will be stepped up so as to send aid without delay to these brothers and sisters of ours already harshly tried, including a great many children. May these suffering peoples not lack our solidarity and the material support of all people of good will.- Pope Benedict XXVI, July 2011

About 13.2 million people across Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya in what is called the Horn of Africa are in dire need of food, clean water and basic sanitation, while about 4 million people are at risk of starvation in southern Somalia, the worst hit area. This famine is being described as the worst famine in the region in thirty years, according to the United Nations. Tens of thousands have died since 2010 as the famine has spread and the Somalian insurgent group Al Shabaab has prevented food supplies and other foreign aid from being brought into southern Somalia. Over the summer, more areas in this southern region have been opened for food delivery, although many problems remain.

Drought in the Horn of Africa

Drought is a predictable event in the Horn of Africa's semi-arid and arid climate: in the last thirty years, droughts have occurred there in 1983-85, 1991-92, and 1998-99. However, in the last decades, climate change, with more severe droughts and more extreme flooding, and changes in animal grazing and agricultural practices have exacerbated the impact of these droughts. Additionally, recent political unrest has caused problems with food aid delivery and development help to many of the people most affected.

Colonial Domination

Somalia and the Horn of Africa, like the rest of the continent, was colonized by Europeans, and this tragedy had impacts that have lasted long after the colonial powers left. Colonial powers drew boundaries on maps to define new nations, paying little attention to tribal groups and cultures and to related territorial issues. Often Colonial rulers played tribes against each other, setting up conflicts that still cause violence (the 1994 genocide in Rwanda is one example, and problems in Sudan, Uganda and the Congo are more recent examples).

Despite years of resistance from indigenous groups, the British took over the Horn of Africa in 1920. Then Italy began efforts to take over the Horn, succeeding by 1936. During World War II, the British regained control; the UN helped bring independence to the region in the following decades.

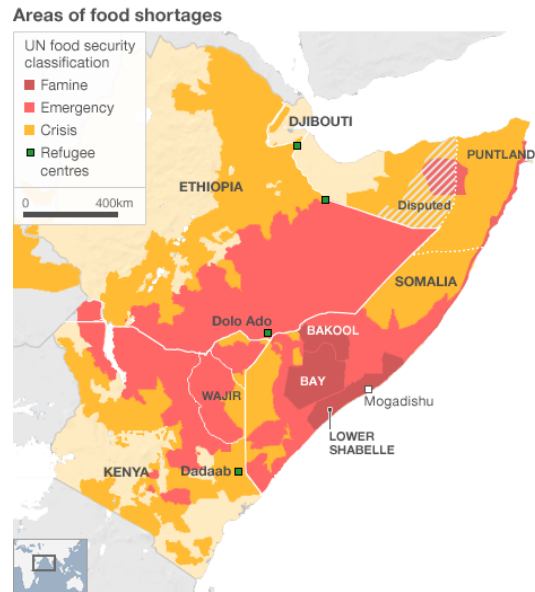
Independence- And Growing Conflict

By the 1960s, the newly independent Horn of Africa nations were in conflict over borders decided by colonial partition. With the advent of the Cold War, both U.S. and Russia began competition for strategic alliances with African nations, further complicating country conflicts in areas such as the Horn, while pouring in military aid and weapons that fuel those conflicts.

Within Somalia, tensions among different regions, parties and Christians and Muslims began to flare up after independence in 1960. A military coup in 1969 brought in harsh “reform” measures; this Russian-backed military government lasted until 1991, when civil war broke out. A “Transitional Federal Government (TFG)” was created in 2004, but has had very little success in effective government and in stabilizing the country, and has become irrelevant in many ways, including famine response. Much of Southern Somalia has been taken over by Al Shabaab militia, branded as a terrorist group with ties to global terrorist networks.

Food Aid Suspended for Last Two Years

During the last two years, while food insecurity was a growing problem in areas of Somalia, humanitarian organizations have stopped delivering food aid for several reasons, which has contributed to the number of famine victims. Humanitarian aid worker casualties increased drastically in Somalia by 2008 because food was being seized by violent militant groups, and aid



organizations could no longer risk the lives of their employees. Additionally, the U.S. government suspended food aid on counter-terrorism grounds, as much of the food was seized by Al Shabaab. Al Shabaab in turn banned all aid agencies from coming to the aid of hungry people in the areas it controlled.

Current Aid Situation

At the beginning of August, 2011, U.S. policy shifted to allow aid agencies to bring in food where possible. Recently, Al Shabaab has pulled out of the Somalia capital of Mogadishu- the famine issue has fragmented the group from within and lessen support from local communities. Some factions of Al Shabaab have asked aid groups to return to their local areas because of overwhelming famine problems.

While Kenya and Ethiopia have their own growing numbers of hungry people, large number of refugees from southern Somalia have been fleeing for months to these neighboring states, where crowded, unsanitary conditions in camps, together with severe malnutrition, continue to contribute to a large number of deaths.

The U.S. Bishops' international aid agency, Catholic Relief Service (CRS) is on the ground in Kenya and Ethiopia to help famine victims. CRS is working there with other

humanitarian aid agencies, including Catholic aid organizations from Europe. Some aid is now beginning to reach locations in Somalia.

To Donate to CRS

Checks can be made out to Archdiocese of Chicago/CRS and sent to Catholic Relief Services, 3525 S. Lake Park Avenue, Chicago, IL 60653-1402. Write "East Africa Emergency Fund" in the memo line.