

CAMBODIA

Will Things Get Worse?

By Beth Spring
Religion Today

Renewed concern over prospects for famine in Cambodia is prompting calls for more aid, much of which comes from the religious community.

Pleas from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization for people "not to lose interest" were recently made since "there is a tremendous need to mount a food aid program for 1980," an FAO spokesman said.

While problems of hunger and health care have grown steadily worse since the economic disruptions of the Pol Pot regime began five years ago, the immediate concern arises from a con-

fluence of factors which point toward both a six-month food shortfall beginning this spring and the possibility of even wider spread famine in 1981.

The single hope for averting hunger is foreign food shipments of some 200,000 tons, the U.N. estimates. Underlying the immediate needs to feed the hungry is a more far-reaching problem: The threat of very low crop yields because of the Pol Pot regime's destruction of the nation's irrigation systems.

A spokesman for World Vision International, a major Christian relief agency, said ordinarily a new crop of rice would be planted about now, with the resulting harvest next fall. But the U.N. reports much of the seed intended for

planting has been eaten already, in place of food grains.

The New York Times said recently that a confidential U.N. report estimates Cambodia is now producing only one-fifth the food it grew in peacetime. Even if enough seed could be planted, the lack of an adequate irrigation system would practically ensure crop failure.

So far, starvation within the country has been staved off primarily through the "tons of rice we and others have brought in," the World Vision spokesman said.

He explained that two popular myths about the condition of the Cambodian people need debunking. First,

that the country's inhabitants are all as malnourished and weakened as the refugees streaming across the border into Thailand, and second, that the Heng Samrin government is preventing relief agencies from transporting food into the country's interior.

The real problem is that "there are no bridges, no roads, no trucks, no physical way to get the food through."

The plight has sparked an international effort to replenish the basic components of Cambodia's agrarian society. The Soviet Union recently sent a dozen trucks. A British non-profit agency, Oxfam, is sending a "steady stream of barges" — three each month — a

spokesman said. Besides additional rice and vegetable seeds, Oxfam barges carry new irrigation pumps, fishing nets, sewing machines and materials for small manufacturing.

Oxfam is supported by numerous religious bodies, including Catholics, Mennonites and the National Association of Evangelicals World Relief Corporation.

An Oxfam spokesman agreed with the U.N. that "things are going to get worse." A problem that she pointed out is that people are simply too weak to work in the fields.

Oxfam is supported almost entirely by private contributions, although it receives

small amounts of money from the British government. The organization's spokesman said, "It is essential that people continue to be concerned."

World Vision has pledged \$17 million to relief efforts in Cambodia, including a hospital fully equipped by donations from American Hospital Supply Corp.

Other groups such as Catholic Relief Services are pitching in as well. Deliveries to Cambodia by many groups have been coordinated for the past two years by the World Food Program of the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization. Another agency, UNICEF, is working with Britain's Oxfam on railroad repair and maintenance.

Arlo Guthrie, Bat McGrath Do Their Bit for Refugees

By John Dash

Shortly after midnight Palm Sunday, Arlo Guthrie, folk-rock hero since the late 1960s, had departed in search of the perfect pizza, affable but pale and evidently very tired following a two-hour stint of music making for the relief of the refugees from the war in Cambodia.

Even earlier that evening, Guthrie's concert partner, Bat McGrath, had departed to be with his wife, then in labor with their first child.

ME Weekend

John and Pat Malach of Newark have arranged a National Marriage Encounter Weekend for April 11-13 at Divine Word Seminary, Conesus. Details may be obtained through 716-334-9658 or, after 5 p.m., through 315-946-4951.

All in all, it was a Palm Sunday to remember: a three-hour concert which packed the auditorium of the Nazareth Arts Center to standing room only — a concert for which the performers weren't paid, a concert to benefit the local Cambodian Relief Fund, the diocesan effort to raise funds for Catholic Relief Services' work for the Southeast Asian refugees.

As McGrath explained following his set, "I just saw this as a chance to do something for what I believe in."

The entire event was masterminded by Jerome and Marsha Vaiana, the Rochester couple who have worked in the Thailand camp at Sa Kaew for Cambodians, and Father Joseph Reinhart,

the chief of the Diocesan Missions Office.

Several weeks ago Vaiana contacted McGrath with the idea of a benefit concert. McGrath readily agreed. At the same time, a phone call to Guthrie's home, followed up by a personal visit, brought the Washington, Mass., resident to Rochester.

Guthrie also had his backup group, Shenandoah, accompany him on the bill.

Both McGrath and Guthrie performed material familiar from their albums and singles; McGrath his deeply personal and gutsy lyrics, Guthrie his socially critical and often funny work intermixed with a number of Gospel favorites.

Surprising to at least one listener, Guthrie closed his

concert segment with the unabashedly romantic melody of Elvis Presley, "I Can't Help Falling in Love with You."

The crowd leapt to its feet in thunderous applause.

Later in the wee hours of the morning, Father Reinhart mused, "Now I think we know how to do everything." Never in his priestly training had he thought one day he would stage a rock concert.

Persons wishing to contribute to the relief of the Cambodian people are asked to send donations to:

Cambodian Relief
123 East Ave.
Rochester, N.Y. 14604



Photo by John Dash

Arlo Guthrie relaxes after the Cambodian Relief Fund benefit concert.

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