

ETHIOPIA

'Situation to get worse before it gets better'

By Mark Zimmermann
NC News Service

International relief efforts for famine-ravaged Ethiopia escalated in late October and early November, but officials cautioned that much more aid was needed for Ethiopia, where 6 million people face starvation.

"The situation is going to get worse before it gets better," said Kenneth Hackett, senior director for Africa of the New York-based Catholic Relief Services. "Although we hope to move an incredible amount of food, we're only scratching the surface. We need more money to transport food from the ports to the people."

CRS announced Nov. 2 that it and three other groups -- the Lutheran World Federation, the Lutheran-affiliated Ethiopian Evangelical Church and the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat -- agreed to expand and coordinate their efforts to regions in Ethiopia hardest hit by the famine.

CRS said it is distributing about 90 percent of the American food aid reaching Ethiopia.

In addition to the private relief agencies, several nations have stepped up their aid to Ethiopia, and many individuals have responded with donations.

The picture of human suffering in Ethiopia painted by Hackett and other relief personnel is a grim one.

Hackett said that he had found a "horrifying" situation during a recent visit to Ethiopia. On previous trips to Africa he had seen starvation, but he said "in Ethiopia this time we saw death." He had earlier reported that in two small towns he visited, there were 106 deaths in a single day.

"The number of people arriving at feeding centers after walking for several days far exceeds the available supplies of food," said Beth Griffin, CRS press spokeswoman.

She said that famine was particularly desperate in Ethiopia because the drought has ruined at least four planting seasons in a row for the predominantly agricultural nation. And relief efforts have been hampered by

transportation difficulties caused by the country's civil wars, she said.

Lawrence Pezzullo, CRS director, said that the coalition of church agencies were appealing for 200,000 tons of food for distribution over the next 12 months. That amount would, according to The New York Times, roughly quadruple the tonnage of food the groups are currently distributing.

Pezzullo said that by expanding their efforts and by concentrating on separate regions the agencies hoped to reach 1.5 million Ethiopians.

The U.S. Agency for International Development announced Nov. 2 that the U.S. government planned to provide 50,000 tons of emergency food aid directly to the Ethiopian government for distribution within the country.

Earlier, the United States had agreed to provide private relief organizations with 80,000 tons of food to distribute throughout Ethiopia. Total U.S. famine aid to Ethiopia is estimated at about \$60 million.

U.S. citizens also have responded generously to Ethiopian relief efforts.

Ms. Griffin said that CRS received \$800,000 in donations between Oct. 29 and Nov. 2. She said that most of the contributions came from individuals or families and from both Catholics and non-Catholics. Contributions have ranged from \$1 to \$100,000, she said.

One family of four living on a fixed income decided to donate the money they would have spent on Christmas gifts, and another family sent CRS the money they normally spent on snacks, Ms. Griffin said. A Philadelphia television station aired an interview with a CRS staff member from Ethiopia and received \$4,680 in donations, she added.

"People really care," Ms. Griffin said.

In an Oct. 29 statement, Chicago Cardinal Joseph Bernardin praised the generous response by people in the United States toward the crisis.

"The media bring word that 110 people are dying each



day in Ethiopia, but they also report that relief agencies here are being flooded with phone calls and pledged contributions," the cardinal said. "The tragedy is terrible; the compassionate response, beautiful to behold."

Ms. Griffin said that the U.S. bishops have set aside money to pay for the administration of CRS's emergency Ethiopian relief funds, and as a result, 100 percent of donations will go toward funding transportation and distribution of the food aid given by the United States and other governments.

Even as the outlook for aid to Ethiopian famine victims brightens, the specter of devastating famines in the 23 other sub-Saharan African nations affected by a recent prolonged drought looms overhead.

"Ethiopia is definitely the worst situation now," said Hackett, "but there could be other Ethiopias."

Donations may be sent to Catholic Relief Services Ethiopian Aid, Missions Office, 123 East Ave., Rochester, N.Y., 14604.

From King Solomon To Haile Selassie

Ethiopia is an ancient African nation facing a contemporary African problem -- famine.

Its history has been recorded for 2,000 years, and its line of emperors claimed to be descendants of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Its last emperor, Haile Selassie, was deposed in 1974 and replaced by a junta that made Ethiopia a socialist state.

Today nearly one fifth of Ethiopia's 33 million people face starvation because of a disastrous drought, now in its third year, throughout Africa's Sub-Sahara region. The country was also hit by a major drought in 1973 which caused the deaths of 100,000 Ethiopians.

The country, three times the size of California, is in east-central Africa and is bordered by Sudan and Somalia. Much of Ethiopia is high, temperate plateau. The regions below 1,600 feet are arid and hot.

Christianity was introduced to the country in the 4th century by Egyptian and Syrian missionaries. Today, nearly 40 percent of Ethiopians are Coptic Christians. Catholics make up less than 1 percent of the population.

Along with most developing countries, Ethiopia is primarily an agricultural nation. And like 23 other African nations, it is reeling from the effects of a recent series of devastating droughts.

The severity of the famine conditions faced by those countries has been compounded in recent years by the droughts and by development problems, said Father Rollins Lambert, African affairs adviser to the U.S. Catholic Conference's Office of International Justice and Peace.

Father Lambert said those development problems have included deforestation, overgrazing and the continuance of the practice from African colonial times of primarily growing exportable cash crops like coffee.

Ethiopia has been particularly hard-hit by drought, and its problems have been intensified due to transportation difficulties resulting from its civil wars.

Beth Griffin, press coordinator for Catholic Relief Services, which distributes about 90 percent of the U.S. food aid reaching Ethiopia, said that the drought has ruined at least four planting seasons in a row.

Tamene Eshete, second secretary at the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington, said the extended dry spell has been particularly devastating for Ethiopia because of its agrarian makeup. Ethiopia's chief crops are coffee, barley, wheat, corn and sugar cane.

Because of the drought, food reserves have been depleted, as have many wells which normally supplied water for drinking and irrigation, Ms. Griffin said. In 1983 CRS reported that the lack of rain was preventing many farmers from planting seeds. Instead they were eating the seeds to keep from starving, CRS said.

Relief efforts in Ethiopia have been hindered by transportation difficulties intensified by rough terrain, a shortage of vehicles and roads not built for heavy travel.

In addition, aid has been slowed by the several armed conflicts within the country, such as the civil war in the Eritrean region of northern Ethiopia and a rebellion among ethnic Somalis in the Ogaden region in eastern Ethiopia.

Ms. Griffin said in some areas the government must militarily secure sections of roadways before a convoy of trucks can carry aid from Ethiopian ports to stricken regions. -- Mark Zimmermann, NC News Service



President Reagan

By Liz S. Armstrong
Washington (NC) -- The tragic plight of starving Ethiopians, subject of a massive fight by Catholic Relief Services to save lives, became more than a question of international charity when a leading member of Congress and the Reagan administration traded comments on the extent of the U.S. role in saving Ethiopian lives.

Even Mother Teresa of Calcutta got indirectly involved when the news broke that she had reportedly prodded the United States to take action and that President Reagan had promised her America would help.

According to government information, the United States allocated approximately \$45 million for Ethiopian aid in October, more than double what was provided in fiscal 1984.

In addition, the Reagan administration announced Nov. 1 that, pending discussions with the Ethiopian government, the Agency for International Development would charter two cargo transports to fly food supplies to Ethiopia and provide 60 days of service in the hunger relief efforts, at a cost of \$2.4 million. AID Administrator M. Peter McPherson said Oct. 25 that another \$25,000 had been provided for fuel for relief planes.

The Reagan administration announced Nov. 1 that the United States was extending \$45 million in aid to three other drought-affected

Did Mother Teresa Prod U.S. on Aid?



Mother Teresa

nations as well: Kenya, Mozambique and Mali.

Speaker of the House Thomas P. ("Tip") O'Neill, D-Mass., Oct. 30 accused the administration of doing too little for hungry Africans and of earlier having been willing to let Africans starve in order to give Latin Americans guns to kill each other.

The White House said that Americans are providing millions of dollars in relief and that the Ethiopian government has not been entirely cooperative in overcoming hunger.

O'Neill, a Catholic, referred to fights during the 98th Congress to tie African food relief programs to legislation providing funds for the "contra" rebels fighting the Nicaraguan government. "Even when the situation in Africa had become terrible, the administration held food

aid legislative hostage to its murderous and illegal covert war in Nicaragua," he said.

Eventually, Congress approved a bill containing the African aid but not money for the contras.

White House deputy press secretary Larry Speakes said Oct. 30 that Ethiopia's pro-Soviet government could demonstrate a "more cooperative" attitude in solving its people's problems and dedicate more of its own resources to that goal. However, Speakes added, "we do sense some greater interest from them."

Dawit Walde Giorgis, who heads the Ethiopian relief and rehabilitation commission, held talks with U.S. officials in Washington Nov. 1.

Some reports emanating from Ethiopia suggested that tons of supplies destined for

the hungry were backed up in warehouses and on ships and were starting to spoil.

Speakes also said that Reagan had "taken a personal interest" in the famine problem and had even discussed it on Oct. 26 by telephone with Mother Teresa, who reportedly had asked the United States to help. Later, "The president asked (AID) Administrator McPherson to call Mother Teresa and offer additional assistance, which he did," Speakes added.

CRS had indicated the government's help is welcome.

Fact Sheet — Millions Face Starvation

• An estimated 6 million to 10 million people are facing starvation -- 2.5 million in immediate danger of death. Half are children.

• The famine is the result of a 10-year drought throughout the sub-Saharan Sahel, with East African nations hardest hit.

• In July 1984, the Ethiopian government reported a total depletion of grain stockpiles. By August, reports of death from starvation in 12 of the nation's 14 regions were daily occurrences.

• International relief agencies, particularly Catholic Relief Services, which distributes 90 percent of the American food in Ethiopia, have been increasingly active for the past 16 months and have stepped up

food transport efforts since August.

• The bulk of American food to Ethiopians is provided through the U.S. government's Food for Peace program, with significant tonnages and funds from the Canadian International Development Agency and the Mennonite community in the U.S.

• An additional \$4 million has been provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Relief to move the food.

• More than 200,000 tons of food will be requested from various donor nations to be transported by air, truck and train from ports to inland feeding stations, hopefully to reach 1.5 million people.

• To date, 32,000 tons of food requested by Catholic Relief Services from the U.S. government have been approved and preliminary conversations have taken place toward obtaining an additional 50,000 tons.

• Shipments of foodstuffs such as sorghum grits, bulgur wheat, cooking oil and corn soya milk.

• Catholic Relief Services is the official overseas relief and development agency of American Catholics. Need is the essential criterion in all Catholic Relief Services activities and assistance is given without regard to race, creed or nationality.

• Rochester diocesan may contribute to Catholic Relief Services-Ethiopia, care of Diocesan Missions Office, 123 East Ave., Rochester, N.Y. 14604.