



Catholic Courier

DIocese of Rochester, New York ■ VOL. 105 NO. 21 ■ THURSDAY, MARCH 3, 1994 ■ 75¢ ■ 16 PAGES



In Battambang, Cambodia, women prepare vegetables to sell at market. Catholic Relief Services, an overseas relief and development agency, reopened its offices in Cambodia in 1991 after a 16-year absence. CRS has implemented a \$1.13 million reconstruction program in Cambodia.



In Bolivia, CRS has trained farmers and city dwellers. Here two Bolivian women haul dirt from a construction project.

Catholic Relief Services bring hope to world's poor

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Pat Johns vividly recalls the lengths to which Catholic Relief Services had to go to protect its workers and relief supplies in Somalia.

"It was truly bizarre," he said. "I did not like driving around the country in a Land Rover with a submachine gun mounted on top!"

Nonetheless, CRS' coordinator for Africa saw the armed vehicle as one more deal he had to strike with the devil in order to carry out the church's mission to Somalia's starving masses.

Until United Nation's forces — particularly U.S. troops — arrived in late 1992, he added, every relief agency had to hire its own small security force lest all its supplies be taken by marauding bands of armed Somalis.

"You could not rent a house without security," Johns emphasized.

Johns is one of thousands of CRS relief workers who have had to improvise their way through an often violent and brutal world that desperately needs aid in order to hope for a peaceful tomorrow.

Johns, who has worked with CRS since 1974, spoke to the *Catholic Courier* in a telephone interview from his office in Baltimore, Md., where CRS is headquartered.

One of the best known NGOs — non-governmental agencies — in the world, CRS funds programs in 78 countries on nearly every continent. In 48 of those countries, CRS has resident staff and, in 30 countries, assistance is given to local projects.

CRS' annual report states the agency aims to carry out Jesus Christ's mandate to help the suffering by fulfilling the following agency objectives:

- To respond to victims of natural and man-made disasters.
- To help the poor to alleviate their immediate needs.

• To support self-help programs that involve people and communities in their own development.

• To help those it serves to restore and preserve their dignity and to realize their potential.

• To collaborate with religious and non-sectarian persons and groups in programs and projects that create a more equitable society.

• To educate U.S. citizens to fulfill their moral responsibilities to alleviate human suffering, remove its causes and promote social justice.

Sixty-five percent of CRS aid monies came from the U.S. government in 1992, according to the agency's annual report; the remainder came from a variety of sources, including 19 percent from private donations. But Johns stressed that government money does not mean that CRS is a mouthpiece for U.S. foreign policy.

"We do not allow the U.S. government to determine where we go," he said. "When we say we distribute aid to anyone regardless of race, creed, ... we do just that."

In fact, CRS' annual report noted that everyone from Marxists to Muslims have benefited from CRS' humanitarian aid. By striving to avoid involvement in local political struggles, CRS can sometimes play a role in mediating conflicts, Johns asserted. The agency may co-sponsor a conference of foreign bishops next fall with some U.S. bishops. The conference would focus on the role the church can play in conflict mediation, he explained.

Indeed, CRS' annual report notes that

Continued on page 14



Ethiopian families receive U.S.-supplied relief food at a distribution center in Tigray.