

Despite dwindling funds, charity struggles to feed famine and drought-stricken victims

Food For The Poor Inc., an international Christian charity based in Deerfield Beach, Fla., is in a unique — and frustrating — position. The organization has enough food to make a significant difference to drought-stricken and other hungry people, but is struggling to distribute it in the wake of the Sept. 11 tragedy.

The charity received a free donation of almost 60 million pounds of surplus food from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). It includes approximately \$25 million in corn, soy oil, wheat, bulgur, flour, soybeans, corn-soy milk, rice and powdered milk.

The donated food is earmarked for the hungry in Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador in Central America, as well as in Jamaica and Guyana in the Caribbean and South America. It is enough to feed 500,000 people for one year.

The charity had counted on its American donors to help with the massive distribution undertaking. Donations for the effort were streaming in — that is, before Sept. 11. Now, says Food For The Poor president Robin Mahfood, the charity is in "a very distressing situation."

"Understandably, right now Americans want to reach out and support all the wonderful and very worthy causes that have arisen here



In Matagalpa, Nicaragua, hungry refugees line up for food aid from Food For The Poor. Drought and famine in Central America have forced thousands to flee their homes and live by the roadsides, where they can beg for money and food to survive.

at home," he said. "As a result, our donations have slowed dramatically since Sept. 11."

Mahfood said he is worried about what will happen to the poor if Food For The Poor's flow of support continues to be interrupted.

"We don't know yet just how severely they will be affected," he said. "I can tell you, however, that 60,000 children a day depend on Food For The Poor just to have something to eat. If we do not feed them, they simply do not eat."

"These hungry little ones make up just a fraction of the poor population we serve," Mahfood continued. "I am very concerned about what will happen to them now that there is this Central America drought."

Mahfood said he hopes to encourage donors to give gifts of \$100. Each gift of this amount will distribute 2,000 pounds — 1 ton — of USDA-donated food to the locations where it is most needed.

This especially includes remote, difficult-to-reach locations like Esquintla, Guatemala. In this little mountain village, Food For The Poor staff found a little girl, 4-year-old Christina, lying malnourished and motionless, hours away from

death. On the way to the village, they had passed a funeral procession for a little girl who had died of starvation.

Food For The Poor staffers, who fortunately were accompanied by a doctor that day, rushed Christina to the nearest clinic in nearby La Union. Despite having no electricity (the only available light came from a video camera) and inadequate medical supplies, the doctor worked frantically to save her. Tragically, it was too late, and little Christina died.

Mahfood becomes visibly saddened when he recalls this story. "When I think of the fact that this little girl died needlessly of hunger, the only comfort I can find is that she is with God now," he said. "She is not suffering."

"We cannot save Christina," he continued. "But we can — we must — save others. We must get the food we have to where they are. We desperately need help to do so."

"Your Tragedy Is Ours"

Third World pastors, flocks pray for America

Eager to give something back to a country that has given them so much, the poor in 26 nations Food For The Poor serves, led by their pastors, have united in prayer for America as we struggle with the one of the biggest tragedies in our history.

"When El Salvador suffered two earthquakes in first two months of 2001, we received an outpouring of spiritual and material help from the United States," wrote the Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador, Fernando Sáenz Lacalle, to Food For The Poor. "In this time of sorrow, you can be assured of our thoughts and prayers. Your tragedy is ours."

The Archbishop is one of many pastors to offer his flock's spiritual support. Writes the Most Rev. S.E. Carter, Archbishop Emeritus of Kingston, Jamaica: "We are one with our friends in the United States in their hour of sorrow, and support them with our prayers. How true it is that through pain and suffering we become united as the Body of Christ."

Food For The Poor President Robin Mahfood expresses his gratitude for the outpouring of support.

"The poor, who understand what it is like to live day to day in a state of uncertainty and fear, have only their prayers to offer us," he said. "What a wonderful gift — prayer is the most powerful aid we have now. I thank God for every uplifted voice."



How You Can Help

If you would like to help us help the poor, please contact: Food For the Poor Inc., Dept. 30107, 550 SW 12th Avenue, Deerfield Beach, FL 33442. You can also log onto www.foodforthe poor.org.