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OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DISASTER RELIEF CO-ORDINATOR

Assistance to the drought-stricken areas of Ethiopia

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The General Assembly, in resolution 31/172 of 21 December 1976, urged the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the other United Nations organizations and specialized agencies to continue and intensify their assistance to Ethiopia in its relief and rehabilitation efforts in their respective areas of competence; appealed to all Member States and voluntary agencies and intergovernmental organizations to continue and increase their assistance to Ethiopia; and invited the Secretary-General, the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator and the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme to report to the General Assembly at its thirty-second session and to the Economic and Social Council at its sixty-second session on the implementation of that and other relevant resolutions regarding assistance to the drought-stricken areas of Ethiopia.

2. At the sixty-second session of the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General reported on the assistance to the drought-stricken areas of Ethiopia and drew the Council's attention to the fears of the Ethiopian authorities that their resources of food and of transport would be insufficient to deal with a deteriorating situation (E/5919). In his introductory statement to the Council at its 2054th meeting on 5 May 1977, the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator reviewed the situation under three headings in the light of the then most recent information: (a) the newly drought-affected areas of Wollo and Tigre; (b) the food requirements for 1977 from outside; and (c) the logistic difficulties in the import of these requirements.

3. Although crop losses had occurred in parts of Wollo and Tigre provinces, the

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Co-ordinator expressed the general opinion of government officials and others working in those areas that the situation was not comparable to the 1973/74 drought crisis. The development of serious food shortages in certain regions, however, was not excluded, depending on the outcome of the short Belg rains. In this connexion, the Co-ordinator stressed the importance of the ongoing food-for-work projects by the World Food Programme (WFP) and government agencies for soil conservation and re-afforestation. The country's grain import requirements for 1977 were estimated at 200,000 tons. Commercial imports of 100,000 tons had been arranged and 53,000 tons had been committed as food aid. Donors were asked to consider the shortfall of approximately 50,000 tons. Regarding the logistic requirements for these imports, the statement mentioned the insufficient transport fleet as the main factor limiting the off-take capacity of the two ports, Assab and Djibouti. To increase this capacity, the Government had requested 150 trucks and the Co-ordinator had drawn this request to the attention of the donor community. He expressed the hope that there would be a positive response. In conclusion, the statement emphasized the need for continued development activities to combat the causes of the drought.

4. The Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 2047 (LXII) of 5 May 1977, in which the Council requested the Co-ordinator, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and other United Nations organizations and specialized agencies to continue to intensify their assistance to Ethiopia; appealed to Governments of Member States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to continue and increase their assistance to Ethiopia for relief, rehabilitation and recovery of the drought-stricken areas; and decided to keep the matter under review.

5. Until the main harvest in December, the availability of food supplies continues to give cause for concern. Especially is this so in Wollo, Tigre, Wollega and the main urban areas, where prices for all cereals, except wheat, have increased over 50 per cent in the last 12 months. Prospects for the main harvest are, however, encouraging, particularly for maize in the Rift Valley. Good rains have been reported from most regions, but the ultimate outcome cannot be predicted with any certainty.

6. Although the total grain imports during 1977 now total 76,250 tons at commercial or concessional rates and 38,000 tons of relief assistance and World Food Programme project imports, 42,000 tons of this total lies in the port of Assab. The off-take from Assab is about 7,000 tons each month: 2,000 tons can be moved from Massawa each month but none at all from Djibouti since the cutting of the rail link at the end of May. Therefore, although the Government plans to import a further 90,000 tons this year and although 20,000 tons more are expected for projects of the World Food Programme, the match of total imports to total requirements will be of little effect unless the means of distribution of the food are greatly increased.

7. The vehicle situation is critical. To replace the capacity of the Djibouti railway alone, 360 trucks would be needed. The total new truck requirement, including ordinary annual replacement, has been estimated by the United Nations Development Programme at 1,500 units. Against this, the Government is purchasing

only 200 at present and had made a strong appeal through the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator for 150 trucks from the international community. So far, 10 trucks have been donated, by the United Kingdom, and means whereby more contributions could be encouraged have been proposed recently by the UNDP Resident Representative. The representatives of United Nations organizations and of the donor community all agreed that further grain imports, commercial and food aid would be impracticable unless the transport situation could be improved.

8. Food-aid programmes will continue to be required during 1978, but they will have to be backed by transport which, for the moment at least, cannot be provided from within the country. It should be noted, too, that food aid in quantities beyond the estimated harvest/requirement shortfall will also be needed to succour refugees and war victims. It is encouraging that the need for soil conservation and re-afforestation has now been accepted by the farmers' associations, but a grain supply is vital to safeguard the continuity of food-for-work projects to make these ecological improvements and hence combat the causes of drought. The difficulties faced by the Government will require the co-operation of the international donor community with the agencies of the United Nations system and of both with the Government if they are to be overcome.
