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## CRITICAL ECONOMIC SITUATION IN AFRICA

### Report of the Secretary-General

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 40/40 of 2 December 1985 on the critical economic situation in Africa, the General Assembly decided "to convene a special session of the General Assembly at the ministerial level to consider in depth the critical economic situation in Africa, to be held in New York from 27 to 31 May 1986".
2. The special session, which was held on the scheduled dates, adopted by consensus on 1 June 1986 a United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 (resolution 13/2, annex). Reports to the General Assembly on the implementation of the Programme will be made in 1987 and 1988, as provided for in resolution 13/2.
3. The present report has been prepared in response to paragraph 9 of resolution 40/40, in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General "to continue to monitor the emergency situation, to assess the needs and responses, to maintain the system's capacity to respond to the continuing emergency in the affected countries, and to report to the General Assembly at its forty-first session". The report, therefore, deals exclusively with the emergency situation.

## II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4. The last major drought that had been developing over a number of years in several regions of Africa culminated, in 1984, in an extraordinary emergency of catastrophic proportions. In December 1984, when the harvest failed - in some countries for a third consecutive year - livestock perished in vast numbers, water supplies fell to unprecedentedly low levels, and the spectre of severe famine, disease and death spread over some 20 African countries. Particularly hard hit were people already living at subsistence levels; more than 35 million were affected, and of these almost 10 million abandoned their homes and their lands in search of food and water.
5. This tragic sequence of events and the tremendous human suffering that resulted from it did not occur overnight, nor did it result from drought alone. A number of persistent, negative economic forces had been affecting the development potential of many of the African countries concerned for more than a decade, contributing to conditions of increasing poverty and stark underdevelopment. These included, inter alia, a prolonged and general recession in the industrialized countries, which resulted in stagnation of aid flows to African countries; a continuously growing burden of foreign debt-servicing; lower returns from the export of agricultural and other basic commodities whose world market prices kept on falling, while the cost of imported fuel and manufactured goods kept on rising. Ecological deterioration and growing demographic pressures further contributed to this process of socio-economic decline.
6. While the above developments were paving the way for the 1984 crisis, several Governments were continuing to draw the attention of the world community to the growing threat. Following the Sahelian drought of the late 1960s and early 1970s,

a number of African nations and the United Nations had frequently warned the international community of recurring spells of drought, increased desertification pressures and the growing threat of famine conditions developing across many parts of the African continent. The rapidly worsening situation in Ethiopia was underlined several times in 1983 and 1984 by United Nations organizations and non-governmental organizations alike. The international response to these early warnings, however, remained tentative.

7. At the end of 1984, therefore, the Secretary-General decided to set up, on a temporary basis, the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa, to ensure that the United Nations would respond to the emergency needs of the affected countries in a timely and optimally effective manner. He designated Mr. Bradford Morse to serve as Director of the Office. The paragraphs below review briefly the manner in which the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa operated throughout 1985-1986 and the main outcome of relief operations during that same period.

### III. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OFFICE FOR EMERGENCY OPERATIONS IN AFRICA

8. The central functions of the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa throughout 1985-1986 1/ were to promote co-ordination and co-operation in the response of the United Nations system to the African emergency crisis; to facilitate the gathering and diffusion of up-to-date, coherent and comprehensive information on the scope and evolution of the emergency; to promote and support resource mobilization efforts on behalf of the affected countries; and to help expedite the delivery of emergency supplies by the entire international donor community, including non-governmental organizations, to the Governments of affected African countries. Through its regular contacts with the media, the Office also helped to keep the world's attention focused on the African emergency.

#### A. Co-ordination

9. Organizationally, the key to the effectiveness of the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa in performing its co-ordination functions were the collaborative arrangements worked out between the principal United Nations organizations and agencies concerned with the African emergency, inter alia, through the African Emergency Task Force. The African Emergency Task Force comprised representatives from the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Office for Special Political Questions, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The African Emergency Task Force was administratively independent of the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa, but related closely to it, and provided an ongoing and direct channel of communication between Office and the participating organizations and agencies.

10. Similar co-operative arrangements were organized, at field level, in most of the affected African countries. Under the chairmanship of the resident co-ordinators and, in the case of Ethiopia and the Sudan, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, field-based emergency operations groups made up of representatives of the above-mentioned United Nations organizations and agencies met regularly, in close consultation with the host Governments, to assess emergency requirements and priorities and to discuss these assessments and other emergency-related problems with local representatives of bilateral programmes, non-governmental organizations and other concerned parties. These groups rapidly became and remained the mainsprings of the Office's operations throughout 1985 and into 1986.

11. A further important element in establishing the collaborative character of the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa was the periodic meetings of executive heads of the organizations represented in the African Emergency Task Force, as well as the establishment, in New York, of a small Office secretariat, composed of seasoned, field-tested representatives of WFP, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF and the United Nations itself, which provided the operational back-up for the Director and Executive Co-ordinator of the Office in the handling of its responsibilities.

12. The Office for Emergency Operations in Africa also instituted and maintained close co-operation with Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental and private sector organizations. This function was discharged by the Office, with donor Governments, by means of periodic meetings: (a) with the permanent missions in New York, (b) at Geneva, through the Humanitarian Liaison Working Group, and (c) by direct communication with individual Governments and bilateral aid organizations. Similarly, co-ordination with non-governmental organizations based in North America and Europe was achieved through: (a) periodic meetings and (b) consultative arrangements. Through the creation, within the Office, of a small private sector/non-governmental organization support programme unit, it became possible to facilitate the role of private sector organizations, including non-governmental organizations significantly, in collectively assessing and responding to emergency needs.

#### B. Information

13. A key function carried out by the Office was the provision of information on emergency needs and donor responses to them, through the publication of regular status reports. Building on the experience of the Nairobi office of the Secretary-General's Special Representative on the Economic and Social Crisis in Africa, the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa issued monthly status reports on emergency requirements and donor responses to those needs, which provided basic information for all those involved and concerned with the provision of emergency relief.

14. As an authoritative source of such information, the Office's monthly status reports were used by many donors to help them decide on their allocation of resources in responding to the emergency. It also provided substantial support for

the resource mobilization efforts of the affected African countries by providing up-to-date information on needs and delivery of relief assistance that was credible with the media and the public in donor countries. The usefulness and credibility of the information provided by the Office depended primarily on three elements: its reliability, its timeliness and its presentation in a form useful for decision-making:

(a) The factor of reliability was achieved mainly through the fact that the basic information used came directly from the field. A central responsibility of the United Nations resident co-ordinator in each of the affected countries, and, in the case of Ethiopia and the Sudan, of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, was to provide the Office, on a monthly basis, with detailed, standardized information on emergency needs, donor responses, deliveries and other relevant data concerning the evolution of the emergency in their respective countries of assignment. In so doing, they consulted closely with the Government of the country, with the members of the emergency operations groups and other representatives of concerned United Nations agencies and with key representatives of governmental and non-governmental donors active in the country. Before this basic information was issued, it was promptly reviewed and rechecked with the concerned organizations by the Office secretariat in New York;

(b) As to timeliness, the ability of the Office to provide reliably updated information on a regular basis was one of the keys to its usefulness;

(c) With regard to form, the Office's status reports provided, throughout the crisis, comprehensive information on all aspects of the emergency, which was not available elsewhere in such a comprehensive format.

### C. Resource mobilization

15. Helping the affected African countries to mobilize resources to meet their emergency needs constituted one of the Office's most important functions. This was performed primarily by providing leadership and focus through updated needs assessments and constant contact with the African Governments concerned and key donor organizations, to the multiplicity of efforts undertaken in the international community to mobilize resources to meet Africa's priority emergency requirements. A key element in the Office's approach in this respect, and one which greatly facilitated the acceptance of its leadership by both African Governments and the donor community, was its early decision to provide broad support for mobilizing resources to meet Africa's emergency needs from all possible sources, regardless of what organization was to be responsible subsequently for implementing the related emergency programmes and activities.

16. The Office's resource mobilization functions were carried out in a number of ways, both from Headquarters and at field level. Virtually all of them were directed to supporting the regular resource mobilization efforts of the Governments of the affected countries as well as the special appeals launched by them and/or on their behalf by the United Nations and their other aid partners. As a result, the appeals launched by a number of resident co-ordinators and by the Special

Representatives of the Secretary-General in Ethiopia or the Sudan, and the several appeals launched by particular United Nations organizations or agencies such as FAO, UNDRO, UNHCR and UNICEF were part of a coherent approach, and their components included within the scope of the Office's monthly needs assessments.

17. The resource mobilization process, however, was not a success in every respect. Donors proved to be far more responsive to needs for food aid and for logistic requirements that could be provided out of existing stocks than to the funding of critical needs for medical and health supplies, drinking water and sanitation facilities, cash for internal transport requirements and essential agricultural and pastoral inputs. As a result of the continuing deficiencies in the response to these vital needs, widespread suffering and debilitation has continued to prevail in many areas, and large sections of the population in the countries still affected, especially children, remain highly vulnerable.

#### D. Problem solving

18. Assisting in the timely delivery of emergency assistance and helping to solve related transport and logistical problems were among the Office's principal preoccupations. WFP assumed primary responsibility in this area. In each of the affected African countries, the task of receiving relief supplies and ensuring their distribution to the people in need within the country imposed severe, and in some instances, virtually unbearable strains on both their administrative and physical infrastructures. Thus one of the most important tasks of the United Nations organizations and agencies in the field, especially of WFP and UNICEF, was to provide assistance and support to the Governments in undertaking these tasks. This involved supplementing and building up the existing capabilities of some Governments with respect to planning, programming and implementation. Practically, it involved the establishment of transport fleets, through WFP, in Chad, Ethiopia and the Sudan; special measures to increase port capacities, also principally through WFP, at key ports of delivery such as Douala, Assab and Port Sudan; the building up of national capacity and effectiveness of transport from ports of entry to inland distribution points, as for example the "land bridge" from Douala to Chad and the mounting of a massive transport operation to supplement inadequate rail transport to western Sudan. It also involved the mounting of airlift operations to areas inaccessible by other means, inter alia, in Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique and the Sudan.

#### E. Public information

19. Finally, the maintenance of public awareness regarding the continuing gravity of the African emergency was another key function of the Office. Any analysis of the African emergency and the unprecedented international response to it has to acknowledge the central role that the media played in creating widespread public awareness that triggered response by individuals, public and private organizations and donor Governments to Africa's emergency needs. The Office played an important role in contributing regularly to the flow of information that sustained public concern and support through the period during which the emergency situation was most acute.

#### IV. INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

##### A. Past action

20. During 1985, estimated emergency needs stemming from the drought-related famine emergency in 20 affected countries amounted to some \$3.38 billion, and some 85 per cent of these needs was provided by the end of that year. The unmet needs, totalling some \$500 million, primarily in the non-food sector, were reassessed and, wherever relevant, carried forward into 1986. 2/

21. During the emergency, the foremost priority was to ensure that the food needs of the famine-stricken populations were met in a timely manner. The international community not only helped organize the overseas delivery of some 6 million metric tonnes of food aid during 1985 but also actively participated in the overland transport and distribution of this food to and within affected areas. The United States of America, the European Community, WFP and Canada accounted for more than 65 per cent of food aid allocations. Support came from many countries, including low-income countries of the third world.

22. While food aid was generously provided, essential non-food requirements, which were critical to save lives and alleviate the suffering of millions, were also being met in 1985 by the community of donors, in the following manner:

##### (a) Logistics

The need for trucks, air-lift operations and logistics management was critical to the delivery of emergency supplies. Total emergency needs during 1985 amounted to \$270 million and donors provided 73 per cent of these needs;

##### (b) Health

The urgent need for drugs, medicines and vaccines, for hospital and medical supplies and special logistical support was particularly critical in 1985 since the affected population was highly vulnerable to diseases and other health ailments. During 1985, the emergency needs in this sector amounted to \$125 million, of which some 89 per cent was provided;

##### (c) Water supply and sanitation

The provision for water supply and sanitation to the large number of people in relief centres as well as to a large proportion of the rural population, especially in areas of severe drought conditions, was of particular concern during 1985. Of the \$114 million of assessed emergency needs, some 65 per cent was provided by the end of 1985;

##### (d) Relief and survival requirements

During 1985, some \$81 million was required to provide blankets, clothing, shelter and other relief items for almost 10 million destitute and displaced people. Of these needs for essential relief and survival items, some 79 per cent was met;

(e) Priority agricultural and pastoral inputs

Although rains had failed for a number of years, there was hope that 1985 might be different. Preparations had to be made to pre-position agricultural inputs so that when the rains came, farmers would be in a position to plant and reap a long-awaited harvest. Of the \$292 million required for the provision of seeds, fertilizers, agricultural tools and irrigation equipment, only some 43 per cent was provided during 1985. As a result of insufficient supplies of seeds, fertilizer, pesticides and tools in a number of countries where rains were abundant, affected farmers were not able to increase their production optimally;

(f) Refugees and returnees

The severe emergency conditions in Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan gave rise to a population of more than a million refugees and returnees in these countries during 1985. UNHCR mounted a special emergency appeal for \$108 million to provide essential assistance to these populations. By the end of 1985, donors had covered about 90 per cent of these needs.

23. Looking back at 1985, the African people and the international community can recall with pride that a major tragedy was averted, hundreds of thousands of lives were saved and the suffering of millions more relieved by a generally timely and effective response. At the peak of the emergency in 1985, there were 3 to 5 million people in camps. Today there are virtually none, yet we must remember that in those camps, at one stage, hundreds of people were dying daily. The affected African people everywhere have responded with great vitality and in a spirited, determined way to the challenge for survival that many had to face directly. The strength, versatility and courage they demonstrated in coping with the massive and crippling problems that confronted them is the most important, positive lesson of the emergency, as it underlines the tremendous human potential for growth and development that exists on the African continent.

24. Among other more remarkable examples of international co-operation that appeared within the context of the African emergency during the last two years one can briefly mention the following:

(a) The dramatic air-drop operations mounted in a number of countries. With the help of aircraft coming from Belgium, the German Democratic Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Poland, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as well as other donors, relief supplies were delivered to hard-hit remote areas unreachable by road;

(b) The extensive and critical operations of the United Nations overland logistical supply lines and trucking fleets that were established and funded through contributions from many donors and made a difference between life and death in many remote areas;

(c) The medical assistance of many nations who provided emergency health support and played a major role in treating and controlling outbreaks of devastating diseases;



(d) The critical role that non-governmental organizations, both national and international, played in taking care of drought victims and assuring the distribution of humanitarian relief assistance and the provision of medical care to the severely affected people in camps and in rural areas.

#### B. The current situation

25. Today, the situation has very much improved when compared to what it was one year ago. The number of countries facing an emergency has decreased significantly, but substantial relief assistance is still required. Several countries continue to face severe emergency conditions, even though the drought-related famine has virtually come to an end as a result of two consecutive years of reasonably good rains. Other countries that are well along the way to recovery also face considerable non-food emergency related needs, which, if not met promptly, will leave them vulnerable to any calamities such as drought in the future. Thus, for instance, some 14 million people are still in need of relief food and non-food aid. Over 3 million people are still displaced and need special help so that they can resume productive lives. There are also tens of thousands of orphans or children who have been separated from their families as a result of last year's tragedy; these children, without a family to tend to their needs, will need many years of dedicated assistance to give them hope and a productive future.

26. According to the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa, overall requirements for 1986 for countries facing severe or residual emergency conditions are as follows. The emergency food-aid requirements total some 2.1 million metric tonnes and donor commitments to date cover most of these needs. With regard to non-food needs of some \$544 million for 1986, donors have thus far pledged \$244 million. It is crucial that the remaining \$300 million for non-food emergency-related needs be provided to ensure an early transition to recovery and development. Requirements may be categorized as follows:

##### (a) Logistics

Of the 1986 logistical requirements of some \$121 million, at present, the unmet needs total \$66 million. There continues to be a shortage of long-haul and light trucks, specialized vehicles for field-based primary health care programmes, trucks, port handling equipment, spare parts and costs for maintenance support programmes. These logistics requirements are particularly critical, as they are directly linked to the capacity of Governments to move the food aid that has already been committed;

##### (b) Health

For 1986, the emergency-related health needs were estimated at \$64 million and at present the unmet needs amount to some \$25 million. Major efforts are required to control and treat communicable diseases. In the rural areas, the most pressing priorities include:

- (i) Emergency maternal and child health services;
- (ii) Vaccinations campaigns;

- (iii) Control and treatment of communicable diseases;
- (iv) Nutritional monitoring;
- (v) Strengthening of health relief preparedness and management capacity;
- (c) Water supply and sanitation

The 1986 emergency-related needs for water supply and sanitation totalled \$164 million, and at present the unmet needs amount to \$38 million. A residual effect of the prolonged drought has been a substantial drop in ground-water levels. River flows also continue to be significantly reduced. In traditional grazing areas, many watering holes and ponds have reduced water supplies. There is a continuing need to develop new and rehabilitate existing water systems. Particularly in parts of southern Africa, which continue to be affected by drought, the availability of potable water for people and reliable water sources for livestock remain an unfilled priority;

(d) Relief and survival items

The number of displaced and destitute persons declined considerably in 1986. The total needs for relief and survival items amount to \$52 million, and of these, \$31 million remains unmet. Many of last year's drought victims and displaced populations are still in need of essential relief and survival items such as blankets, clothing, soap and shelter;

(e) Agricultural inputs

The 1986 agricultural inputs needs amount to \$197 million and at present \$124 million remains unmet. The continuing recovery of the agricultural sector is dependent on the provision of agricultural inputs - seeds, tools, fertilizers and pesticides. Special efforts will have to be made to provide and distribute these before the start of the next planting season;

(f) Refugees and returnees

Of the UNHCR 1986 emergency appeal of \$78 million, donors have thus far provided assistance to cover 80 per cent of these needs. The remaining \$15 million are primarily required for non-food emergency-related assistance.

27. It must also be mentioned that several of the African countries that were so severely affected by the drought prior to the 1985 rains are now facing a new and potentially severe locust and grasshopper threat. Partly because of the long years of drought, followed by two years of essentially good rains, locust and grasshopper populations in western, eastern and southern Africa have increased rapidly and, in several areas, have generated high concentrations of insect populations that will swarm and reproduce further if they are not brought under control in the months following the current rainy season. FAO is responsible for co-ordinating the fight against this new menace. For this purpose, a special Emergency Control Locust Operation was established at Rome, which plays a central role in co-ordinating the

efforts of African and donor Governments in organizing and implementing locust control activities in the countries concerned. Clearly, the acridian threat needs to be watched carefully. FAO, in the latter part of 1986, will reassess its severity and, taking into consideration the impact of control measures implemented during the last three months, recommend appropriate measures to deal with it in 1987.

## V. LESSONS LEARNED

28. The creation of the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa was essentially a reaction to a crisis of unprecedented proportion. The reasons for the success of the Office have been spelled out in Chapter II of this report and need not be repeated here. However, as in the case of all emergencies of extraordinary magnitude, a number of steps could have been taken while the crisis was building up that would have lessened its impact to a considerable extent.

29. One of the chief lessons learned from the African emergency is that early warning systems must function effectively at least in the countries and regions facing latent threats of drought, desertification or other natural disasters, so that the Governments of these countries can, on a continuous basis, assess the evolution of trends and weigh the implications of field reports and other regular indicators. This, in turn, should give them sufficient lead time to prepare themselves, when necessary, in co-operation with their aid partners, to cope with emergency-related problems before these reach the scope and devastating impact characteristic of the last emergency.

30. Similarly, the United Nations organizations and agencies concerned who have added considerably, during the last two years, to their respective knowledge and capacities to assist, in co-operation with others, in the handling of large-scale emergency assistance programmes, should keep this knowledge alive within their own structures so that, if they are called upon to offer such assistance again, they would be in a position to do so even more effectively than they did in 1984.

31. One of the most important lessons learned during the African emergency was that it is impossible, to all intents and purposes, to respond effectively to emergency-related requirements without considering the very clear relationship that exists between emergency, recovery and rehabilitation activities. Except for the provision of the top priority humanitarian assistance required to save lives - a response that is by necessity immediate and of a very specific type - the provision of emergency assistance over a longer period of time has serious implications for the people and Governments who receive it. Care must be taken that this response does not create or encourage conditions of dependability and that it is used so that it helps attack some of the real causes of the crisis. Emergency assistance needs to be provided in ways that are directly supportive both of recovery and of long-term development. For example, emergency food aid should be applied in food-for-work programmes; assistance in the fields of transport, health, water supply and sanitation must be tailored so as to make a contribution towards meeting longer-term needs. Such strategies require the close collaboration of those responsible for emergency relief and recovery and those responsible for longer-term development measures.

32. While the drought itself posed a serious and immediate threat to Africa, it was recognized from the beginning that it was the impact of the drought on already weak economies that produced the severity of the crisis. It is probable that drought will be a recurrent feature in Africa and every effort should be made to enhance the preparedness to deal with such situations when they arise. However, this should be part of concerted action by the international community to support the efforts of African Governments to achieve economic recovery and development. The United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990, adopted by the thirteenth special session of the General Assembly, provides the framework for rehabilitation and medium- and long-term development.

## VI. FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS

33. In the light of the significant improvement in the drought-related emergency situation in Africa the Secretary-General announced on 1 May 1986 that the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa, which had been established on a temporary basis, would close as a separate office of the United Nations on 31 October 1986. Arrangements will be made to ensure that those countries still affected by drought will continue to receive the services formerly provided by the Office. Equally significant, the Secretary-General is committed, drawing on the experiences of the Office, to take the necessary measures to ensure the capacity of the United Nations to respond in an effective and timely manner to future emergencies. A special working group of senior United Nations officials, reporting to the Director-General for International and Economic Co-operation and working under the chairmanship of Mr. Maurice F. Strong, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, has submitted recommendations to this effect, which were under consideration at the time the present report was written. The Secretary-General will inform Member States in an appropriate manner on future decisions.

### Notes

1/ The principal functions performed by the Office throughout 1986 remained essentially the same as for 1985, as previously outlined in the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly (A/40/372/Add.1-E/1985/104/Add.1 and A/40/372/Add.2-E/1985/104/Add.2). The present report elaborates on the information included therein.

2/ Detailed information on needs, on a country basis, were provided in the Office's monthly reports, as well as in the documents presented to the Conference on the Emergency Situation in Africa, organized by the Secretary-General at Geneva in March 1985.

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