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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 its resolution 32/55 of 8 December 1977, requested the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations organizations and specialized agencies to continue and intensify their assistance to Ethiopia; appealed to Governments of Member States and to intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and all voluntary agencies to continue and increase their assistance to the people of Ethiopia for relief, rehabilitation and recovery of the drought-stricken areas; called upon all concerned to ensure that the international assistance provided be used for the sole purpose of relief and rehabilitation; 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-third session and to the Economic and Social Council at its first regular session, 1978, on the implementation of that and other relevant resolutions of the Assembly and the Council.
2. At the first regular session of the Economic and Social Council, 1978, 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, particularly of transport, would be insufficient to deal with a deteriorating situation (E/1978/56). In his introductory statement to the Council at its 10th meeting on 2 May 1978, the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator reviewed the situation, stressing once again the fact that unless discharge rates at the ports could be improved and unless, simultaneously, more transport became available, the distribution of food to all those in need would not be practicable.
3. In the latter half of 1977 a proposal to set up a separate truck float solely for carrying relief goods and fertilizer was developed by staff members of the

* A/33/150.

World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). A member of the Co-ordinator's staff and an expert provided by the Government of Switzerland were associated with the planning in its later stages. After extensive discussions with the relevant Ethiopian authorities and respective agencies' headquarters, a joint project of the United Nations Development Programme and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) entitled "Logistic and Technical Support for Food Aid Transport" was established.

4. The project called for a fleet of 125 20- to 30-ton trucks and 25 5- to 10-ton trucks, which would give a total port off-take capacity of about 100,000 tons of food aid annually. A mechanical workshop to be equipped by UNDP under the supervision of an ILO expert was included in the scheme. The ILO is also providing an expert for driver and mechanic training. In his statement to the Second Committee of the General Assembly on 10 November 1977 the Co-ordinator urged Member States to give the project their financial support, and on 5 December 1977 an appeal was made direct to a number of traditional donor countries for assistance. The first contributions came from the Swedish International Development Agency of \$3.4 million; from USAID, \$2 million; and from OXFAM and Save the Children Fund (British voluntary agencies) a total of approximately \$50,000. Pledges were made subsequently by the European Economic Community (EEC) for 50 vehicles, by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for 20, and by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for 15. Taken together these donations will enable a fleet of 178 trucks to be put on the road. Priorities for the use of the vehicles were stated by UNICEF and UNHCR, and no difficulty is foreseen in respecting the donors' wishes.

5. The Office of Special Relief Operations (OSRO) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) organized a multi-donor mission to Ethiopia, from 10 to 25 June 1978. A representative from the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator joined the mission, which consisted of members from the FAO, the World Food Programme, the European Economic Community, and the Governments of Switzerland and the United States of America. The mission examined the availability and prospects of local crop production; the position of stocks of basic foodstuffs and the requirements of cereals and protective food for 1978/79; the logistic problems related to the distribution of food aid and fertilizers in the light of existing means of port facilities, storage and transport, and the estimated short-term requirements.

6. The Government of Ethiopia facilitated the work of the mission, in particular by providing transport to visit the affected provinces. In the course of their trip, members of the mission visited a number of distribution centres and resettlement camps and held discussions with local officials.

7. Journeys by members of the mission to the southern parts of Ethiopia showed that the shortage of food had been made more severe by the recent conflict in the three regions of Bale, Hararghe and Sidamo. A large number of people abandoned their homes after the destruction of their crops and livestock. About 200,000 people are now in resettlement camps and are receiving food and medical aid, implements, clothing, etc. Although not all of the northern regions of the country could be visited, the mission received reports from the authorities and concluded that, in

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general, the present situation in the northern regions of Wollo and Tigre was no less grave than it had been between 1972 and 1974. It was reported that in Tigre disturbed conditions in some areas are affecting agricultural production. Furthermore, Tigre suffers from drought conditions similar to those of the neighbouring Wollo region. There are approximately 650,000 people affected in these two provinces, but the total number of people requiring assistance in Ethiopia could well be as high as 2 million. About 1.5 million people are already receiving food aid throughout the country.

8. An official communiqué issued by the Government of Ethiopia since the mission's report was made states that, taking into consideration the events in Eritrea and the Ogaden as well as the drought, the number of people affected is now over 3 million. Over 160,000 are affected in the Asmara area alone including the surrounding villages. Non-governmental organizations are airlifting food supplies to Asmara and have reported that of the 37,000 children being fed almost 5,000 are critically malnourished. The death rate among infants has increased.

9. For Ethiopia as a whole, the mission estimated that the production of cereals in 1977/78 would be 4,540,800 metric tons, and no higher figure could be expected in 1978/79. In 1976/77 production was 4,987,600 metric tons. For the year 1978/79, the mission felt that Ethiopia should have cereals available to the same extent as in 1976/77, taking into account national production, commercial imports and food aid received from abroad. Using this calculation, the quantity of cereal available in 1976/77 was 5,106,600 metric tons. To reach this figure, even after allowing for the expected production in 1978/79, the commercial imports planned by the Ethiopian Government, and the possible food aid likely to come from WFP and EEC, a further 250,800 metric tons would be needed.

10. Starting from a different point, if only the requirements of 2 million persons who are expected to receive food aid in 1978/79 are considered, the quantity required at the rate of 400 grams per day for a period of 250 days in a year would be 200,000 metric tons. The near coincidence of this amount (which has been requested by the Relief Commission) with that already computed shows that the Government's request to the international community is not extravagant.

11. The mission also called for extra transport, mobile vehicle repair workshops and new machinery to speed unloading of ships at Assab; machines to be used in the packaging of a local preventive food known as "faffa"; and for two light aircraft to be used in the anti-locust campaign. After the Director-General of FAO had studied and accepted the mission's recommendations, the requirements were made known to potential donors by the Co-ordinator and the Director-General of FAO in an appeal in July 1978.

12. The difficulties facing the authorities in Ethiopia have been increased by the appearance of locust swarms in the provinces of Wollo and south-eastern Tigre, as well as in north-western Hararghe. The extent of the breeding of locusts in some areas could not be verified because of military operations going on there. While the Desert Locust Control Organization for eastern Africa is organizing anti-locust operations to supplement the efforts of the Government in the region, a certain amount of damage from locust swarms seems to be inevitable. Moreover, there is a real danger that swarms will move into other parts of the country, as well as into neighbouring States, towards the end of 1978. Indeed, a recent report from the

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Desert Locust Control Organization indicated that swarms of locusts had invaded Eritrea, Hararghe, Gojjam, Tigre, Wollo, Gondar and Shewa, where ecological conditions for further breeding were very suitable. The swarms were reported to have caused substantial crop damage, increasing the danger of more acute food shortages.

13. In April 1978, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees launched an appeal for support of refugees and displaced persons in the Horn of Africa, who had been uprooted by the Ogaden conflict. In response to the requests made by the Ethiopian Government and in consultation with other United Nations agencies, UNHCR has established a humanitarian assistance programme for internally displaced persons in Ethiopia. This programme is estimated to cost \$US 5,075,000. It aims at benefiting some 30,000 families in their resettlement in the regions of origin, and it concentrates on sections where its impact can be immediate. The projects at present being carried out include assistance for transport of relief supplies, provision of supplementary food and of basic resettlement requirements, such as seeds, tools, domestic utensils and clothing. UNHCR assistance is further being granted for the reconstruction of communal facilities. The UNHCR Regional Liaison Office in Addis Ababa, which has been strengthened for the implementation of the special assistance programme, has planned the distribution of this assistance in stages, according to the rate of return of the afflicted population. According to the co-ordinating governmental agency, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, at least 70 per cent of these populations had resettled in their places of origin by the beginning of August 1978. New lands at the rate of 2-1/2 hectares per family are being allotted, but it is very unlikely that they will be immediately cultivable. Thus, not only has there been a large-scale destruction of standing crops and food grains in storage, but also many agricultural lands will lie idle for some time to come.

14. In previous reports to the General Assembly and to the Economic and Social Council, attention has been drawn to the long-term adverse effects on the agriculture of Ethiopia by widespread soil erosion, deforestation and over-grazing. The mission once again emphasized these matters in its discussions with the authorities.

15. Only 60,000 hectares of land are receiving irrigation in the entire country, and most of this land is growing cotton, sugar cane, and coffee. While the cash crops have certainly a place in the national economy, the food crops are equally, if not more, important. Some irrigation schemes are in the planning and designing stages, but these are ambitious schemes and will take a long time to fructify. The mission, in the course of its discussions with the Ethiopian Government authorities, emphasized the need for a large-scale programme of minor irrigation involving construction of wells, ponds, tanks, small dams and canals, etc. These cost small amounts, and their construction does not take years as is the case with the major irrigation projects. Ethiopia has a number of rivers, apart from many mountain streams and rivulets, and there is considerable potential for a large-scale minor irrigation programme. The economics of the growing of food crops - as opposed to cash crops - by irrigation have been questioned in some quarters, but the overriding needs of food production must, in the national interest, ultimately prevail over arguments such as these.