

The Canadian Response

Canada was one of the first countries to respond to the African famine. Even before the media drew the world's attention to the gravity of the situation, Canadian emergency food aid was being unloaded at Ethiopian ports, the Canadian community of voluntary organizations was mobilizing its resources, and a special task force chaired by the Department of External Affairs was assessing the situation. Once alerted to the crisis, the reaction of the Canadian people was swift and effective. All across the country, Canadians developed new and imaginative ways of mobilizing assistance. Provincial governments and municipalities provided considerable leadership. For example:

- "Ethiopia Airlift" in Halifax raised funds to airlift food and other emergency supplies during Christmas 1984;
- The Quebec government created a \$4 million fund to match contributions raised through Le mouvement des caisses populaires Desjardins (Credit Union Co-ops);
- Mayor Adams of St. Catharine's, supported by Ridley College and the Lincoln County Separate School Board, raised \$40,000 for famine relief;
- The Saskatchewan government matched the federal government dollar for dollar on a shipment of 23,000 tons of wheat for Ethiopia and Sudan; and
- Mayor Harcourt of Vancouver established — and exceeded — a fund target of \$1 million for his city.

The Canadian community of voluntary organizations — large and small, and from all parts of the country — played an absolutely vital role in organizing and mobilizing emergency support for Africa. At the outset, many of these organizations were as overwhelmed as the government by the extraordinary interest and concern of the Canadian people. Contributions and offers of assistance flooded in. In a short period of time, many of the well-established agencies had geared themselves up for emergency action; new voluntary organizations appeared on the scene. These groups have built and maintained a pipeline of assistance which begins with the contributions of ordinary Canadians and ends, thousands of miles away, with the provision of help to the African people.