

No More Famine

"Drought will undoubtedly recur in Africa, famines must be prevented. They are not inevitable".

*Brad Morse, Director, United Nations
Office for Emergency Operations in
Africa*

My primary responsibility as Canadian Emergency Coordinator/African Famine has been to assist the government and people of Canada in responding to the urgent needs of Africans. But there can be only one human response to the African famine — the determination that it must not happen again.

In travelling across Canada and in many parts of Africa I have often heard people ask whether we can prevent the next famine. The people of Africa and the people of the world are not prepared to accept famine as just another catastrophe to which the poor are prone. Mass starvation — in its destructive effect on people, social order and morality — is as much the enemy of mankind as war.

During the past 17 months I have often encountered another reaction as well: deep and widespread fear that the famine of 1984-85 will recur. This famine followed an earlier one in 1972-73 and was a long time in coming. The warning signs were apparent long before they were heeded. The suffering was deeply rooted.

Drought, one of the most severe in modern African history, played a major part in triggering the famine. In just two years — 1981 and 1982 — food production in twenty-four sub-saharan African countries fell by 15 per cent. But the scale and the intensity of the suffering that followed were measures of how near to disaster Africa had moved by the 1980s. Food production per capita had declined steadily over the previous 20 years. Massive damage had been done to land, water and trees. International economic pressures squeezed the life out of African economies. Year by year, the people of Africa were forced downwards, from subsistence to destitution, from survival to death.