

Introduction

On November 1, 1984 the Government of Canada created the office of Canadian Emergency Coordinator/African Famine with a mandate to assess the African famine, work with voluntary organizations to channel Canadian relief supplies to Africa and recommend concrete steps for the government to take in responding to the crisis. On March 14, 1985 I submitted a first report on my activities. It focussed squarely on the famine itself and on the urgent needs of tens of millions of Africans. As I acknowledged, there was barely time to assess the situation in the drought-stricken areas of Africa, let alone to think through the long-term implications of the crisis.

The Coordinator's report was referred by the government to the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence (SCEAND). In its own subsequent report, SCEAND highlighted the fact that the famine was far from over and underscored the importance of getting at the basic, long-standing causes of the crisis. The Committee recommended that the Coordinator's Office be continued for a one-year period. On May 31, 1985 the Honourable Monique Vézina, Minister of External Relations, announced the extension of the mandate until March 31, 1986.

In accordance with this extended mandate, the Coordinator's Office has concentrated its energies during the past eight months on the following tasks:

1. identifying African emergency needs, coordinating Canadian relief efforts and managing a Special Recovery Fund;
2. keeping the Canadian people informed about the crisis in Africa and encouraging public participation in the search for solutions; and
3. advising the government on its response to the African crisis and on the views of the Canadian public.

This report addresses each of these key areas of activity. It provides an update on the famine and on the continuing African and international responses to it. It describes the remarkable involvement of Canadians in providing emergency assistance to Africa. The Coordinator's Office will issue two other reports: the first on the findings and analysis of a nation-wide opinion poll on Canadian attitudes towards Africa; the second on Forum Africa, an initiative designed to encourage community discussions of the famine, public participation in government decision-making and individual initiatives by people and organizations in all parts of our country.

This report focuses on the long-term and fundamental nature of the African crisis. The famine did not materialize out of thin air: it is deeply rooted, both in Africa and in the international system as a whole. Nor will it disappear simply by the provision of food aid. Africa is in the midst of a crisis which must be addressed on an on-going basis over the next few decades if the present course of decline is to be turned in the direction of development and hope. More than patience is required. Sacrifice and reform will be demanded of the people and governments of Africa and their international partners.