

Introduction

In October of 1984, Canadians first began to be aware of the extent and gravity of the famine in Africa. On November 1, the Secretary of State, the Right Honourable Joe Clark, designated an Emergency Coordinator to begin the difficult task of assessing the extent of the food crisis in Africa, working with the voluntary sector to channel Canadian efforts to feed the hungry and to propose concrete steps for the government to take in the African crisis.

Canada was the first country among the donor nations to designate an Emergency Coordinator for the African Famine. The Coordinator, David MacDonald, has led three missions to Africa to assess the situation there. In Ethiopia, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and the Sudan, the missions have enabled Mr. MacDonald and representatives from labour, business, the voluntary sector and all three national political parties to gain a personal understanding of the hardships being suffered by people in Africa.

The African crisis is a complex one, both in humanitarian terms and in a broad foreign policy sense. For example, Canada is already spread very thin in the Third World. We are active in more than 80 countries, whereas larger countries like France concentrate their international aid efforts on half that number. If we are going to focus more of Canada's aid in Africa, what ripple effect will this have on our aid efforts to both Asia and South America as well as our support of United Nations' organizations? Only when these larger issues have been addressed as part of the foreign policy review presently underway can we decide and define the role of major institutions such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), vis-à-vis the role of the United Nations, External Affairs, the World Bank and other multilateral institutions that Canada finances.

My mandate was clearly focussed on assessing the famine situation and proposing concrete steps to alleviate the situation. Obviously, this cannot be done in isolation. The role of other government departments such as CIDA and Canadian assistance to international organizations has to be considered but, in the four months of my mandate, there has barely been sufficient time to assess the situation in the drought-stricken areas of Africa. My report will, therefore, concentrate on this issue and the immediate Canadian response to it. Beyond the large-scale problems, the planning and preparation of emergency relief and of general plans, always somewhat abstract, beyond even the unbearable scenes shown on television, we and they have directly encountered the overwhelming horror of the refugee camps. We have seen wretchedness multiplied to infinity, whole families starving, separated, decimated — but still retaining in the midst of catastrophe an extraordinary dignity and a kind of hope which profoundly moved us.

Urgency is still, and even more, the central issue. Sudan is now at the point at which Ethiopia was 15 weeks ago. Rain has still not fallen, and it may be a long time before it does. The ecological chain has been broken, and it cannot be put back together without assistance. Apart from all that, the intensity of the famine has led, on a nationwide scale, to such a state of disorder that no government in the world could, unaided, regain control of the destinies of these millions of men, women and children.