



# CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

# REFUGEE

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**SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE HORN OF AFRICA**

April 1994

## Horn of Africa: Its Intractable Dilemmas

The Horn of Africa is a vast territory extending from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean on the south of the Arabian peninsula. Generally, the countries of the Horn include Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti. The people of this region represent a variety of ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds. Due to its strategic geographical significance, the Horn of Africa has been a victim of foreign aggression for centuries. State boundaries within the Horn, for example, are the result of European colonialism. Colonial rule and the process of its establishment created additional conflict that caused the displacement of many populations in the region. After independence, the Horn was once again victimized, by the military and dictatorial regimes which replaced the former colonial authorities. Civil servants often found themselves struggling with government jobs for which they were not prepared. The result was total social, economic and political disaster for the region (Siad Barre of Somalia and Haile Mariam Mengistu of Ethiopia are but two examples).

The legacy of colonialism has been reinforced by ethnic, tribal, religious and other differences and inequalities.

Exacerbated by superpower intervention, drought and famine, this legacy has caused the mass exodus of refugees and internally displaced people in the Horn. The 1984-85 famine in Ethiopia, the 1986-88 famine in southern Sudan and the present crisis in Somalia and southern Sudan are clearly related to the colonial legacy. In fact, refugee movement within the Horn has become a vicious cycle of violence, political instability and famine. At present, there are more than five million refugees, making the refu-

gee population in the Horn the biggest in Africa and second highest in the world. This refugee problem has also become an obstacle to development. Whereas some of the obstacles to development are imposed from within, the international economic disorder also plays an important role in retarding the development of the region. As René Dumont (1969) clearly pointed out:

The looting of the Third World has never stopped since the period of slavery and colonization. It is con-

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tinuing in our own day in the form of unfair system of trading in which raw materials initially agricultural and subsequently mineral are brought far below their value.

It could be added that the same is true of the human capital of the region, with regard to the "brain drain" phenomenon. The marginalization of the developing countries has had a disastrous effect upon the people and countries concerned. Therefore, it is important that there be more pressure from Africans to get fair play within the international economic order. The concepts of self-sufficiency and self-reliance are fundamental for Africans in order to get respect. Any assistance channelled toward developing countries should be long-term developmental aid with a view to achieving self-reliance.

One method of achieving self-reliance is by establishing linkages between educational institutions of the North and South. With this in mind, the Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, has in principle agreed to initiate joint research with the Institute of Development Research, Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia. Such North-South cooperation will benefit scholars, local and international NGOs, and more importantly refugees, returnees and displaced people.

This special issue is intended to raise some fundamental issues concerning the Horn of Africa. Much of the information contained in this issue is based on field work, participatory observation and discussions with refugees, returnees and displaced people, and local and international agencies which have first hand information about the countries in question. Jean-Pierre Mputu addresses the main reasons that caused the departure of millions of refugees from the Horn. One of the fundamental issues raised in this issue is a look at the background of the existing crisis in Somalia. In that regard, Hassan Mohamed looks at the multi-dimensional nature of the conflicts and wars in the Horn by presenting different views than those held by the mainstream media and academic writings.

Shoa Asfaha and Véronique Lassailly-Jacob address the issue of self-sufficiency, local integration and future prospects within the context of UNHCR-sponsored agricultural settlements that were established in Eastern Sudan for Eritrean refugees. Alastair and Patta Scott-Villiers, and Cole Dodge outline the failure of the international community in dealing with the 150,000 Sudanese refugees who were pawns in Sudan's civil war and who were repatriated from Itang refugee camp in Ethiopia in 1991. This pattern was also demonstrated within the context of the Tigrayan refugee repatriation where nearly 200,000 Tigrayan refugees returned to Tigray (Teklewoini, 1993; Hendrie, 1991). John Morris provides an overview of the situation of the displaced in the Sudan. Aggravating problems are shown to be the war between the North and the South, the change in land tenure toward mechanized farms, and the obstacles put in the way of aid agencies by the warring factions. The future of Sudan is not seen as a bright one amongst her neighbours in the Horn.

Generally, the Horn is confronted with a variety of obstacles and challenges for future development. Although the initiative to look at long-term developmental policies and programs has to come from within, external pressure from the international community and attitudes toward the region must also change to reduce the tension in the region and the displacement of people. ■

*Yohannes Gebresellasia, Guest Editor.*

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