

22 million Africans could starve, U.S. says

Reuters, April 20, 1994

ADDIS ABABA, April 20, (Reuter) - More than 22 million people scattered across 10 East African countries could die of starvation without help, a U.S. government aid official said on Wednesday.

Fred Fisher, director of the U.S. Agency for International Development regional office for East and South Africa, said drought and man-made factors created "an emergency crisis" in the Horn of Africa.

He told a news conference in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa that those especially at risk among 22.6 million people facing hunger in the 10 countries were refugees and those displaced by civil war, tribal clashes, anarchy or drought.

"Unless somebody does take care of them and if they will have no access to food, they are in danger of dying", he said.

The entire Rwandan population of 7.6 million people should be considered at risk because of war and massacres since the president was killed on April 6, he said.

Fisher said the United States, as the world's major donor of food aid, was preparing to help the needy in the 10 countries against the additional threat of widespread famine if drought worsened.

"Because rains are late or have failed in the region, the U.S. government fears the region could be facing drought of the magnitude of the great famine of 1984-85 with many millions at risk."

He listed the famine hit countries as Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania.

The United States would provide Ethiopia with 360,000 tonnes of food aid, nearly half the 770,000 tonnes Addis Ababa appealed for to feed its 6.7 million people facing hunger this year, Fisher said.

Washington would give 60,000 tonnes of food to the Red Sea state of Eritrea for its 1.3 million people hit by famine.

He said the situation in Somalia, where international aid had helped cut the number of famine-affected people from 1.5 million to 700,000, was bound to worsen after the withdrawal of U.S. troops and other Western U.N. contingents last month.

(c) Reuters Limited 1994