

# War overtakes drought as key hunger cause

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Civil strife has replaced drought as Africa's main cause of starvation, according to a United Nations report published yesterday which shows that 11 of the 20 states facing "exceptional food emergencies" have been affected by war or internal fighting.

Peace talks yesterday between 15 Somali factions in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, appeared near collapse after the group led by General Muhammad Farrah Aidid accused the UN sponsors of misinformed meddling in Somali politics.

The starvation report says that the countries most in need of assistance in addition to Somalia are Malawi and Mozambique. Malawi has had to cope with a vast influx of more than a million refugees from the Mozambican civil war. Also Kenya has absorbed 400,000 refugees from Somalia in the past year as well as enduring a severe drought in the north.

Eritrea and Ethiopia have enjoyed bumper harvests in the past year, but will have to seek international

help to feed the 1.1m refugees from fighting in the southern Ogaden region and Somalia, and from Ethiopia's own civil war. The end of that conflict, in 1991, has led to the demobilisation of 840,000 soldiers, and they and their dependants all need feeding. Drought in Ethiopia has affected 2.4m people, causing devastating crop and livestock losses.

Last year, Angola was the only southern African country to receive reasonable levels of rainfall, but the recent upsurge in fighting between government and rebel forces has resulted in the country facing widespread malnutrition. Angola will need 120,000 tonnes of food from donors; 80,000 have been pledged for this year.

Launching the report from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, the agency's director, Edouard Saouma, said yesterday: "International agencies must spread the aid net wider if the countries most affected by civil war and drought are to make

it through 1993 without widespread loss of life.”

Somalia has been the worst affected by civil war, which is the root cause for the deaths of at least 350,000 people and threatens two million more lives. However, the UN report noted that the prospects for recovery and for effective distribution of food had improved since the arrival of the American-led humanitarian intervention force.

General Aidid’s claim of UN interference in Somali politics came after rival clans fought on the northwestern outskirts of Mogadishu the previous evening. The clash pitted the Murusade clan, loosely allied to the north Mogadishu warlord, Ali Mahdi Muhammad, against the Suleiman clan, linked to General Aidid. The dispute is partly over land rights and partly a reflection of anger among the Murusade that they are not represented at the UN-sponsored peace talks.

Yesterday American marines, trying to restore order to the capital, shot and badly wounded a Somali gunman north of Mogadishu after he fired at them.

UN officials in Addis Ababa said they were trying to prevent General Aidid from pulling out of the two-day meeting in the Ethiopian capital. His Somali National Alliance said : “UN bureaucrats have failed time and again to demonstrate an understand-

ing of the intricate problems” of Somalia.

The African tragedy that has perhaps received least attention has been that in Sudan where, due to drought and the civil war in the south, three million people will need 324,000 tonnes of food this year. Distributing aid will remain difficult in the south because of fighting between the Muslim fundamentalist government and factions of the Christian and animist Sudanese People’s Liberation Army.

Last year five aid workers and journalists were murdered in southern Sudan shortly before aid work was suspended in the area because of fighting and insecurity. Relief has recently been resumed but on a smaller scale.

The report also said that civil strife in Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Zaire was the main cause of malnutrition and starvation there. Africa needs 5.2m tonnes of food aid this year for more than 20m people. “Food aid pledges (from foreign donors) for 1992/1993 cover some 80% of the estimated requirements ... however, less than half the pledges have actually been delivered and there is an urgent need for donors to expedite shipments,” the report said.

By Sam Kiley in Nairobi and Our Foreign Staff.