

# SUPPLEMENT TO

# Berhane

# The Peace Messenger

Edited by

Ali Hindi, Amanda Woolley, Amanuel Yemane, Peter Riddell

Published by

The Endless Bookcase

Suite 14, STANTA Business Centre, 3 Soothouse Spring,

St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL3 6PF

Copyright © Ali Hindi, Amanda Woolley, Amanuel Yemane, Peter Riddell 2023

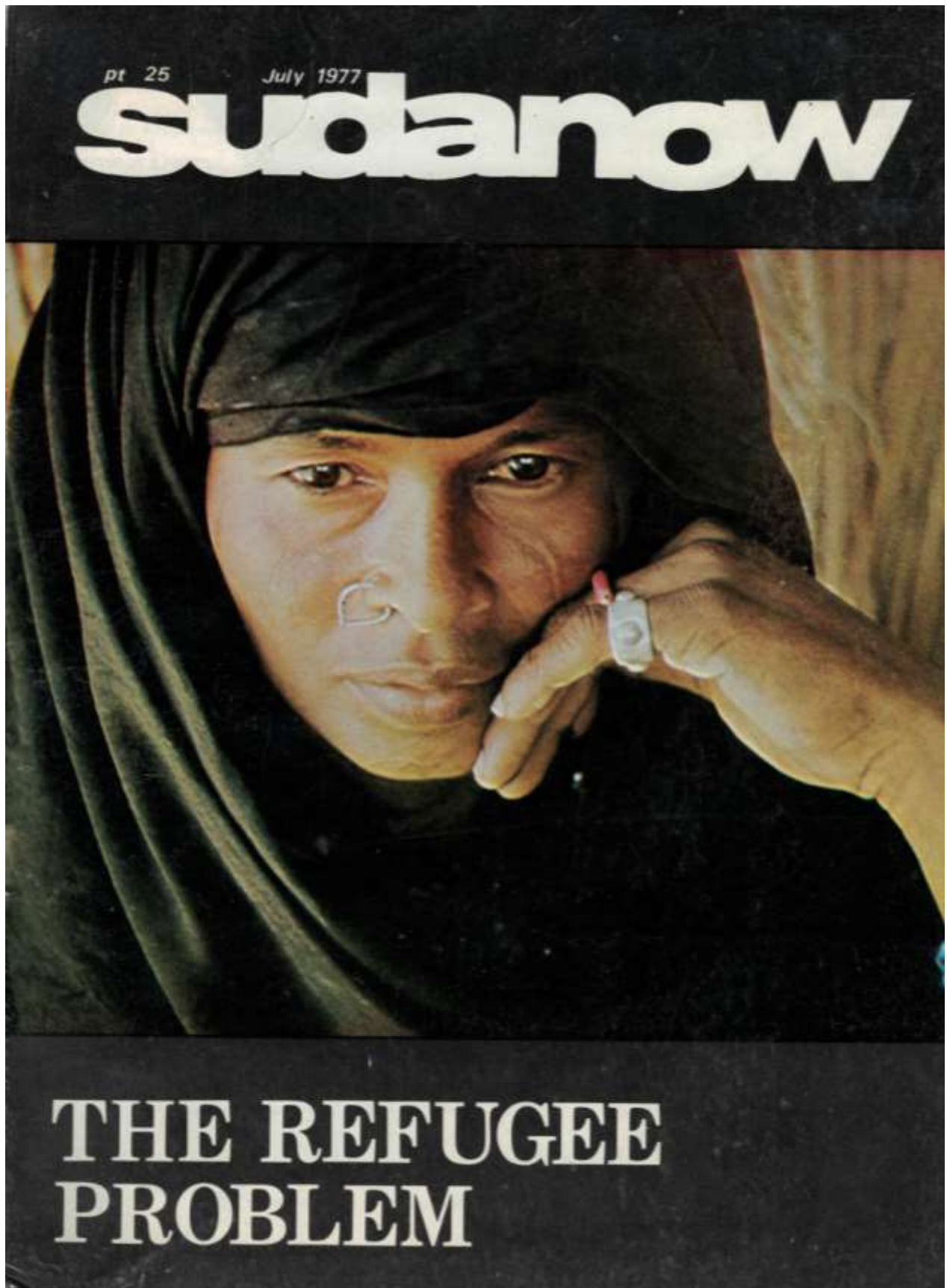
All rights reserved



## INTRODUCTION

This document has been created for the purpose of providing a downloadable supplement to *Berhane The Peace Messenger* Edited by Ali Hindi, Amanda Woolley, Amanuel Yemane & Peter Riddell.

It contains facsimile copies of the articles provide in Appendix 1. The appendix contains examples of Berhane's journalism articles from Sudanow and Africa World Review.



SUDANOW, July 1977



The resignation of waiting: Ethiopian refugees at Um Gulja

## THE REFUGEE PROBLEM

On June 20 Sudan, along with other African countries, commemorated the third African Refugees Day, instituted by the OAU as a yearly event.

Sudan plays a special and vital role in the problem of refugees. At present the country is host to about 200,000 Eritrean and 50,000 Ethiopian refugees, as well as a group of 6,000 who came twelve years ago from what is now Zaire.

Refugees from Eritrea and Ethiopia have been entering the country intermittently since 1967, when they fled from the late Emperor Haile Selassie's regime. But since the advent of his successors, the military junta of Colonel Mengistu, oppression has increased to

such a degree that refugees have flocked across the border.

Reporter Berhane Woldegabriel, himself from Eritrea examines the problems refugees face and looks at the aid organisations operating in Sudan.

**W**HAT do the refugees hope for when they enter this country? Where do they go, and what happens to them?

Broadly, they can be divided into three categories: those who are settled in long-stay camps or agricultural development schemes; those who make their way to the towns to find work or continue their studies; and those who intend to leave

Sudan for other countries.

All the Eritreans or Ethiopians who enter the country, whether through Port Sudan, Gallabat or Hamdait, are registered at the nearest police station. They are then sorted out: Eritreans to the temporary settlement at Wad el Hillayu, and Ethiopians to Um Gulja, eight kms from Gedaref.

Most of them, particularly those with a rural background, remain in these temporary settlement areas where security, food, medicine and education are provided. The policy is that later they are transferred to villages near development schemes where they can work, or they are given enough initial support to



*Time to chat for wounded refugees recovering in Gedaref hospital*

attain self-reliance.

The 18,000 Eritreans, mostly nomads, who fled to this country in 1967, were initially aided by \$211,900 worth of food commodities by the World Food Programme. They are now living in Gal en Nahal successfully growing simsim and dura.

The group of 6,000 refugees from Zaire who arrived about twelve years ago were settled at Rajaf near Juba with \$600,000 of aid from the UNHCR. They are also now economically self-sufficient, and in fact have been so successful that, according to one official, they enjoy a higher standard of living than many of their Sudanese neighbours.

At the moment, a scheme is underway to transfer about 24,000 of the 30,000 refugees who have been living since 1975 at the temporary camp of Wad el Hillayu, only a few kilometres from the Eritrean border. This is being organised by the Ministry of Interior's Refugee Commissioner's Office, in collaboration with the relief organisations.

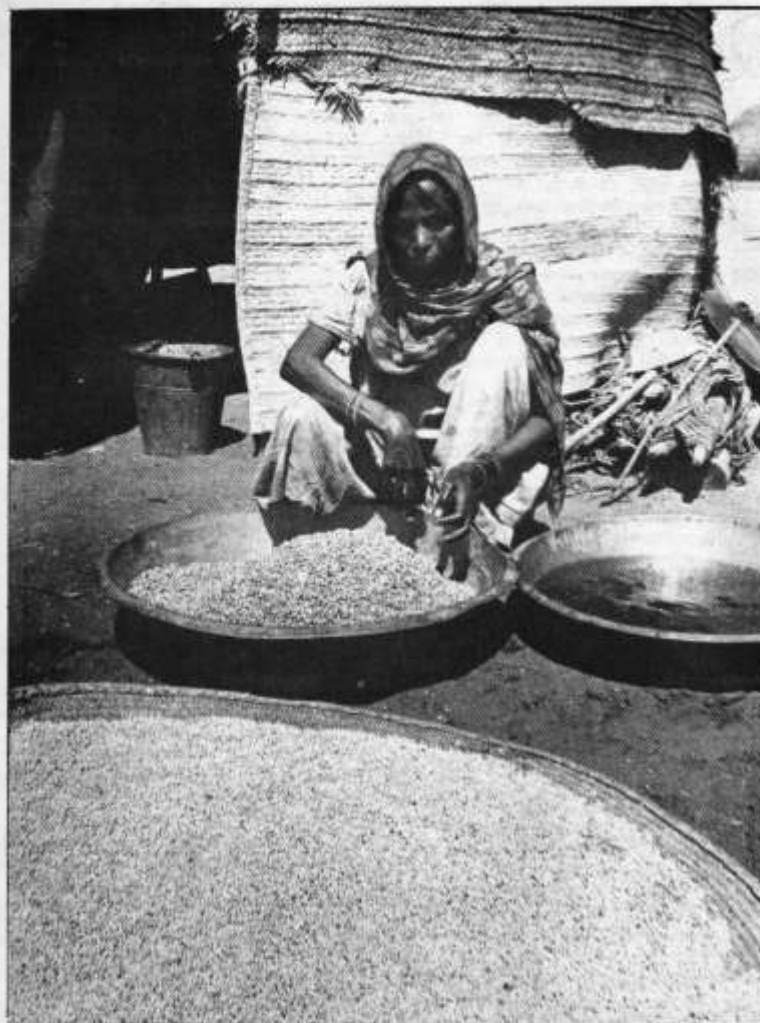
Although there are about 2,000 Sudanese farmers near Wad el Hillayu, there is no work there for the refugees. Thus the authorities are resettling them near to developing scheme areas such as Khashm el Girba, Es Suki, and possibly Rahad, where they can readily sell their labour and be self-reliant.

Others will be installed in the Presidential Decree Area where each family will get 10 feddans. UNHCR has also allocated \$2.8m for basic infrastructure such as building materials (£s30 per family hut), roads, wells, farm tools, tractors and so on.

The need for self-sufficiency is obvious. Even with the help of relief organisations, a developing country like Sudan cannot support a large number of refugees indefinitely. Relief for refugees is considered to be emergency aid that does not exceed a year. The Eritreans at Wad El Hillayu have already stayed two years and relief can no longer be justified. The World Food Programme has coined a new term, 'quasi-emergency'; it will continue

*Not too young to know about war*





*Washing the sorghum ration at Wad el Hillayu*

to supply food during the resettlement period and diminish its assistance as the settlers begin to become self-reliant.

The World Food Programme Senior Adviser in Khartoum, Mr Jean-Pierre Noblet said 'We don't want to produce professional refugees.' 'They have to be transferred', said Mr Ismail Ibrahim, the Commissioner's Office Representative in Gedaref. 'The food just won't be there after September.' Even ERA and ERCCS officials, although they would prefer to see displaced Eritreans living in the liberated areas of their own country, nevertheless agree that the refugees must be self-supporting until they return to Eritrea.

However, most of the refugees at Wad el Hillayu are against the idea of leaving

this temporary settlement. The committee of the refugees made this clear during a recent visit to the area by the Ministry of Interior's Commissioner for refugees, Mr Omer Mohamed Ismail, and Mr Kozlowski, UNHCR representative in Khartoum. The refugees argue that the Eritrean problem, whose armed struggle against Ethiopia has been going on for 16 years now, will soon be solved and they will be able to go back home. Wad el Hillayu is only a few kilometres from the border the deeper they move into Sudan they feel their identity will proportionally fade. They also claim that the proposed settlement areas have no adequate water supply and are infested with malaria.

But according to Mr Ismail, the areas

have been well studied and Sudanese citizens live in these areas. 'In fact, a Swedish medical team that went to study the area reported that it is even healthier than Wad el Hillayu itself,' he said with a somewhat cynical smile. Some refugees who want to be moved suggest that the refugee team leaders who are responsible for the weekly distribution of rations, are most strongly against the new idea, and to maintain their own interests they disseminate such stories. But the team leaders, like the rest, know that the World Food Programme and the UNHCR cannot go on supplying relief to people who could be self-supporting.

Some refugees can only see a political solution. 'We wouldn't have any of this trouble if only the world would rally behind the Eritrean cause and get rid of Mengistu's regime,' said Wadi May Guaila, a refugee at Wad el Hillayu.

Meanwhile, there are the problems encountered by relief operations everywhere. Medical facilities are good, with more than five clinics operating in Wad el Hillayu, but food supply is often irregular.

Delay of supplies is common. Recently, nothing but medical supplies arrived for over a month. As this coincided with the resettlement drive, many refugees saw it as a deliberate attempt to pressurize them.

It was in fact just an unfortunate coincidence. Mr Noblet explained that there are not enough silos, either at Port Sudan or at the camps. Thus consignments have to be carefully-timed, which is not always possible. And there is the problem of conveyance from the port. 'There are certainly food commodities still waiting for transportation from Port Sudan,' said Mr Michel Barton, UNHCR representative at Gedaref.

In 85 cases out of 100, according to a settlement officer in Gedaref, refugees with an urban background leave the settlement areas very soon for the major cities such as Khartoum and Port Sudan. There, they either look for work or a place to study, or they try to go abroad.

It is not an easy matter for a refugee to obtain a work permit. It is issued if the refugee finds a person or company willing to employ him. The prospective employee has to endorse the permit application with a letter to the office of the Commissioner for Refugees in the Ministry of Interior. The Office hands the refugee a form to be completed by the employer specifying the conditions under which he is hiring the refugee, who then takes the form to the Labour Office to be granted the permit.

The problem is that employers generally hesitate to comply with the



The Wad el Hillayu camp

formalities, for various reasons, including the possibility of employing a refugee at less than the standard wage for the job. 'Since we badly need work, we find ourselves trapped in a vicious circle', one refugee complained. The Commissioner says 'We have several times asked prospective employers in general to be more cooperative'. Until they comply, this continues to be a vexed question.

Refugees who want to continue their education, in schools or colleges, also have their problems. Language is the main difficulty. According to the Ethiopian curriculum which was imposed in Eritrea, elementary schools teach in Amharic, and, apart from a few Arabic schools, junior and senior secondary schools teach in English. In Sudan, schools teaching through the medium of English are scarce, and many of them are private. So refugees face the problems both of finding a place and finding finance.

For those who know Arabic, everything is relatively easy. 'What applies to a Sudanese also applies to a refugee', said a teacher from Piastre Institute where Eritrean refugees mainly from Gal en Nehal, and Sudanese learn together. Those who do not speak Arabic ask for placement in Comboni schools (in Khartoum, Port Sudan or El Obeid) or Khartoum's Unity High School, where the medium of instruction is English. Obviously, not all of them find vacancies in these schools.

Those who are fortunate enough to do so have the difficulty of obtaining scholarships to support themselves. 'Last year we had to suffer a lot of financial problems because the UNHCR did not help us regularly enough', said one student.

Last year, the UNHCR financed 200 students on one-year courses at

## WHO IS PROVIDING HELP ?

SEVERAL DIFFERENT refugee relief agencies operate in Sudan. Perhaps the best known is the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) which first came here in 1968 to work with refugees from Ethiopia. In the early 70's, the agency also assisted in the repatriation and rehabilitation of many returning Sudanese.

In Third World countries, the UNHCR provides emergency relief aid when needed, but its main functions are to ensure the safety of refugees and to give them material assistance, either on a temporary basis or, if necessary, to help them attain a position of self-reliance. The goods and funds supplied by the agency are mostly channelled through the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees in the Ministry of the Interior. This office is responsible for transporting and distributing most of the food, tents and other goods supplied by various agencies. Although the UNHCR supplies refugee travel documents to the Government, it is, contrary to widespread belief, the Ministry of the Interior which issues the papers to individual refugees. This was stressed by Mr Anthony Kozlowski, UNHCR Representative in Khartoum. 'Travelling does not solve the refugee problem,' he said. 'They are still refugees.' He pointed out, however, that many refugees are understandably very keen to go abroad, particularly to the Gulf, where thousands are now working and are thus able to support themselves and their families.

Many of those remaining in the Sudan benefit from the UNHCR programme, directed by Mr Kozlowski and, in El Gedaref, by Mr Michel Barton. The programme includes about 965 scholarships and a Local Settlement budget of \$2,773,000. The total UNHCR budget for Sudan for next year amounts to \$3,591,300.

Also under the auspices of the UN comes the World Food Programme (WFP), which is more commonly thought of as an agency that supplies food linked to local development projects or at times of natural disaster. However the WFP first came to Sudan in connection with the resettlement of 50,000 inhabitants from Wadi Halfa and is therefore familiar with the problems of displaced people. Mr Allam Hassan Allam, who was the Chairman of the Commission responsible for the Halfa settlement, points out that large numbers of Sudanese are therefore

experienced in this field. As Director of the Food Aid Central Office, a department of the Ministry of Planning, he is himself now working closely with the WFP and the departments are based in the same building at UNDP headquarters in Khartoum.

The provision of food to refugees is inevitably a complicated business. One difficulty lies in the fact that the quantity and type of food sent depends on what is available at the Rome headquarters, according to the UN Adviser to the WFP in Sudan, Mr Noblet. There are also holdups due to transportation difficulties, notably after the foods have arrived in Port Sudan. Where possible, such deficiencies are remedied by consignments supplied directly to the camps by the Sudan Council of Churches.

Necessarily, the basic provisions consist of dry goods, normally wheat, skimmed milk, edible oil, pulses, fish and sugar. In Sudan, the wheat is sold for hard currency and replaced by sorghum, which increases the weight of cereal by 10 to 15 percent. Mr Noblet said this food is supplemented by fresh vegetables and meat given by the UNHCR, although several refugees from Wad el Hillayu claimed that they received no fresh food.

Rumours of refugees starving to death are strongly denied by the authorities on the spot, and in fact, such stories seem to stem solely from dissatisfaction with delayed and inadequate food supplies. For example, 10,000 tonnes of WFP foodstuffs have been standing in Port Sudan since March.

Despite these problems, the WFP remains the major supplier of food to the refugees and since 1967 has given 12,687 tonnes of food, worth \$4,235,400, to those from Eritrea and Ethiopia. Food worth a further \$1,173,000 has been allocated for settlement programmes.

The UNHCR sends some of its funds to the Refugee Counselling Services (RCS). This is a semi-autonomous organisation formed by the UNHCR, the WFP, the Ministry of the Interior, the Sudan Council of Churches and Sudanaid, and is based in the UNHCR premises in Khartoum. RCS was set up as a joint body in June of last year to avoid duplication of services to refugees living in or passing through the capital.

The staff of four are understandably busy, and work long hours in their efforts to cope with their numerous



*Swedish doctor at the paediatric clinic in Wad el Hillayu*

cases, many of them urgent. They deal with many refugees with specific needs, such as seamen requiring documents to find work at Port Sudan or the mentally and physically handicapped.

RCS also administers a number of scholarships for students in secondary school, university and vocational training, especially in Khartoum and Kassala Province. In cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior and the Labour Office, RCS also helps find employment for those who finish their education.

There are also small allocations for refugees who want to return to their countries. RCS has helped several Zairians and Ethiopians to go home, but repatriation is usually the responsibility of the UNHCR. Some South African refugees have been assisted in transit, but at present there are none requiring help in Khartoum.

Apart from its stop-gap food supplies, the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) also belongs to the RCS, through which it channels financial aid. Its main concern is

to provide medical services in Kassala Province. Many of the refugees have been wounded, and Doka and Gedaref hospitals cannot cope with the numbers involved. Between February and April, 14,280 refugees were treated in these two hospitals. Except at times of sudden influx of refugees, those living in Wad el Hillayu seem to be satisfied with the medical services, in fact one resident commented 'We get more tablets than food.'

The SCC employs two British doctors who work in the camps at Um Gulja, 12 km west of Gedaref and at Um Rakuba. These two camps alone house more than 9,000 people. In addition, these doctors also work at the other four settlements around Shoak. There are dressing-stations at Um Gulja, Um Rakuba and Um Gargur. These stations are additional to the normal Government facilities in the Gedaref area: two hospitals, six dressing-stations and six dispensaries. The Commissioner's Office has sent £6,000 worth of medical supplies over and above those provided by the other agencies.

At the biggest camp, Wad el Hillayu, with its 30,000 refugees, there is a well-equipped pediatric and ante-natal clinic which is run and financed by a Swedish church organisation under the auspices of the SCC. Established almost two years ago, the clinic has a doctor, a nurse, a social worker and an engineer. There is a pharmacy, a laboratory and examination rooms, but no facilities for in-patients. Refugees are trained as medical assistants and dressers, as happens elsewhere in the camps.

This clinic is complemented by an out-patients clinic for adults run by the independent West German organisation Asme Humanitas. There is a staff of one Australian nurse, two Eritrean health officers and some dressers. But the problems are not only medical. Morale tends to be low among the refugees, who have lost not only their homes and, perhaps, their friends and families, but also self-respect derived from supporting themselves.

Because the refugees' plight is assumed to be temporary, only short-term projects lasting a year can be set up. These can

accomplish a good deal to help the inhabitants, however. Sponsored by the SCC, Dr Katherine Homewood, an anthropologist who is married to one of the British doctors, is organising a weaving scheme based around handlooms which several refugees have brought with them. It is hoped that more looms will be made, as many refugees are skilled in this trade.

Meanwhile in Um Gulya, Dr Jonathan Boyce, in addition to his medical tasks, is directing the construction of latrines. As well as providing work for the residents, this should go a long way towards reducing the risks of epidemics, which are especially great in the rainy season.

The SCC Coordinator for refugees, Mr Damas Deng Ruay, also envisages the provision of some social amenities, including meeting-places for indoor games, eating, watching films and study. Education is, indeed, a major factor in the SCC programme, and 87 students will be sent to various educational institutions here and abroad in the next academic year.

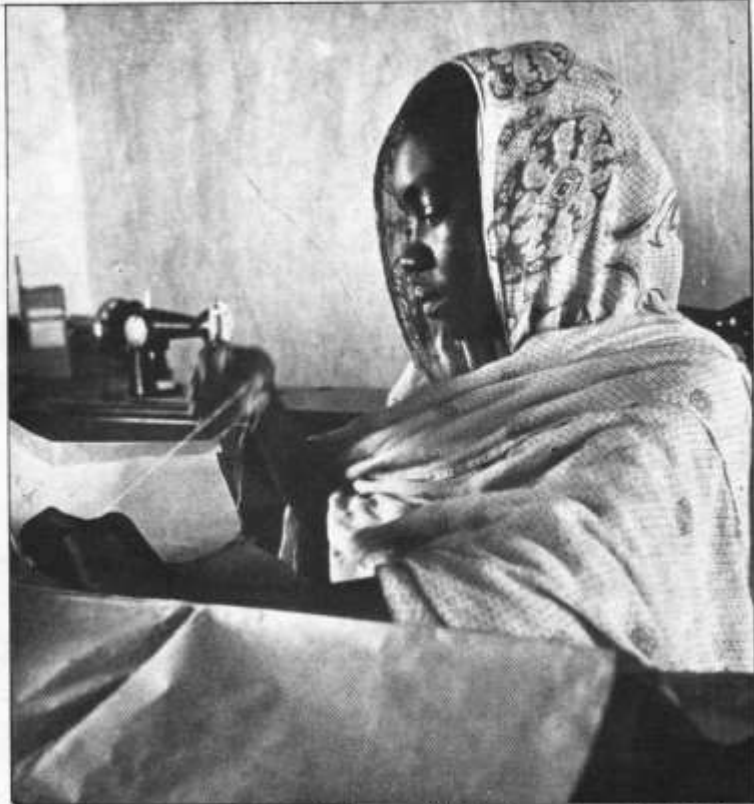
The SCC also suffers from the usual transportation difficulties in supplying goods. 'In terms of food-supply, we are only filling in the gaps', says Mr Damas. Sorghum, powdered milk, split peas and soya beans have been provided so far, but 272 bales of cloth and 10,000 blankets are held up at Port Sudan.

The same point was made by the Rev H. Dejemeppe, General Secretary of Sudanaid, which is also a member of RCS. He explained that 100 tents sleeping ten persons each and another ten large tents for stores and administration offices have been waiting at the port for almost two months. These are urgently needed, especially since it has been raining for some time in the area.

Sudanaid has also sponsored some school students in Port Sudan, as well as providing a grinding mill in Kassala Province to save many women the tedious task of crushing sorghum by hand. The association has also contributed \$294,650 towards the 1977 budget for refugees in Khartoum.

Founded in Juba in 1972, Sudanaid is part of the Episcopal Commission for Aid and Development, of which the Bishop of Juba, the Rev Vincent Majwock, is president. Its activities are mainly geared to development in the Southern Region, but it carries out emergency programmes when necessary. It has appealed to the Catholic organisation Caritas Internationalis, of which it is a member, for more tents and medical aid.

Medical services are also provided by Eritrean organisations. The ELF and



*A new craft for a new life: learning to sew at Wad el Hillayu*

ELF/EPLF each have a clinic at Wad el Hillayu. The two major liberation fronts each manage humanitarian organisations. The EPLF runs the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) and the ELF runs the Eritrean Red Crescent and Red Cross Society (ERCCS).

Both Dr Yusuf, ERCCS Chairman and Mr Bitsai Gerense, member of the ERA Executive Board, stressed that they help displaced Eritreans regardless of political affiliation. The two young organisations have won the confidence of international agencies such as the Red Cross and the WCC. The SCC has granted £3,000 to the ERA and £250 to the ERCCS.

Most of the work of the Eritrean Relief Agencies takes place within the liberated areas of Eritrea itself, however. It is estimated that there are about 850,000 displaced Eritreans, many of whom are roofless and the victims of hunger and related sicknesses such as anaemia and tuberculosis. In response to this situation, the ERCCS and ERA have built half a dozen hospitals (in caves or excavated under mountains), as well as about 80 clinics distributed more or less evenly

around the country.

To meet present needs, as well as those arising from the drought which threatens, both agencies need more funds, which they hope to acquire by appealing to international philanthropic organisations, friendly countries and benevolent individuals. They also hope to enable displaced Eritreans to stay within the liberated areas, where they can retain their sense of identity and play their part in rebuilding the country. However, while the Ethiopian Air Force controls Eritrean air space, many refugees prefer to seek safety in the Sudan.

Those working in the field agree that the Sudan, itself a developing country, has been particularly generous in its treatment of the refugees, both in material terms and in allowing them freedom of movement. It is to be hoped that the hard work of all the agencies involved will only be a temporary measure for, like refugees everywhere, the Eritreans and Ethiopians would certainly rather be able to go home.

—Berhane Woldegabriel



*A convivial moment in the safety of Um Gulja camp*

vocational schools in Kassala, New Halfa and Gedaref. But the refugees found it hard to adjust to the conditions there, and about 100 of them withdrew one by one. Of those who successfully completed the courses, some are now working in this country, some are still unemployed and others have gone abroad, mostly to Saudi Arabia.

Due to the severe shortage of vacancies in the English schools in Khartoum and elsewhere in the North, a group of about 15 students were sent to continue their studies in the Southern Region, where many higher secondary schools use English as the medium of instruction. Again due to adjustment difficulties, this scheme met a marked look of success.

All the students who found schools in the year 1975-76 were financed by the Refugee Counselling Service of the UNHCR. Some who entered the country

later found schools, but due to lack of funds were unable to continue their studies. Mr Nasser, head of the Counselling Service, said that there were 21 refugee students in Comboni schools in Port Sudan, El Obeid and Khartoum.

The Commissioner for Refugees recently came up with an idea that could alleviate the problems of those who could not complete their secondary education and are thus unable to go to University. He has proposed the setting up of night schools for 300 students in Khartoum and Kassala.

It is hoped that the UNHCR will be able to finance this scheme, but it is very much a matter for the future. Mr Tony Kozlowski, UNHCR Representative in Khartoum, pointed out 'As a big organisation, we should be approached at least a year ahead. This idea arose only three months ago. But who knows?

Somehow we may find the resources to carry it out'.

The Commissioner's Office has already asked the UNHCR for \$352,000 to support refugees currently engaged in full-time study. The new night schools would mean an additional \$156,000.

Of the 56 Eritrean and Ethiopian students at the University of Khartoum, the IUEF finances 47 and the UNHCR nine. The Sudan Council of Churches was also approached by individual students to finance their education at the University, but as Mr Damas Deng Ruay, Refugee Co-ordinator for the SCC, explained, 'The students applied too late for their applications to be duly processed'. However, he added that \$20,000 has been earmarked for the next academic year, for students at all levels.

Most of the travel documents issued in



Photographs by Bente Faarner

*Concern for her child comes first to this Eritrean mother*

Khartoum to Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees have been for onward passage to Jeddah. Refugees can obtain either a passport from the Ethiopian Embassy, or a UN Conventional Travel Document (CTD), or sometimes both. The Ethiopian

Embassy gives passports to refugees it recognises as Ethiopian nationals, and has issued about 6,000 over the last two years.

Roughly the same number of CTD's, in fact 5,900, have been issued over the

same period of time by the Refugee Commissioner's Office in the Ministry of Interior.

Mr Kozłowski stressed that, contrary to popular belief among refugees, the UNHCR does not issue CTD's to individual refugees. It is the country granting refugee status that issues them. UNHCR, from its headquarters in Geneva, supplies the countries concerned with the necessary documents on request.

Although in principle every refugee is entitled to a CTD, certain conditions must be fulfilled. The refugee has to have a genuine reason for travel, supported by valid documentary evidence.

Acceptable reasons include scholarships, promise of employment, promise of an accredited entry visa to the country of destination, or an invitation to settle with relatives or friends in the country of destination. It is also important that all refugees have a round-trip ticket.

In the light of his previous experience in UNHCR offices in West Africa, Mr Kozłowski commented that the Sudan is one of the most liberal countries in the issuing of CTD's.

In spite of, or maybe because of, this policy, the refugees seen lining up in the Ministry of Interior all complain bitterly about the delay in the issue of documents. One said despairingly that he couldn't even get through the gates, let alone present his case to the authorities. Others claim that appointments are not respected, and there are even allegations of corruption — that the requisite forms can be obtained speedily if money changes hands.

The Commissioner, however, stresses that his staff are in fact working flat out to cope with the refugees' requirements. Part of the apparent muddle, he says, is due to the tendency of many refugees 'to hang about after they have finished with the formalities, just waiting for their friends, or relatives or to meet new arrivals'.

He said that appointments are kept as promptly as possible, but many refugees come days before the appointment time. In effect the Ministry of Interior is used as a rendezvous, and this interferes with what would otherwise be a smooth process.

Dissensions of this sort are unfortunate, but on the whole relations between refugees, Sudanese people and the Government are very good. Commissioner Omer thinks that in some ways the presence of Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees has had a liberalising influence on some Sudanese attitudes. 'After all' he said, 'as countries and peoples we already have a lot in common.'

**SUDANOW, June 1981**

current affairs



Ugandans heading for Kaya: 'no food supplies outside Juba'

REFUGEES

# Easing the burden ?

June 20th is 'African Refugee Day' — announced by the Organisation of African Unity and endorsed by the United Nations. Its purpose is to increase public awareness around the world of the continued suffering on this continent of more than five million people, and to motivate yet more fundraising programmes. It comes exactly one year after the International Conference on Refugees in Sudan, and follows in the wake of the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, held last April in Geneva. Both conferences were judged to be well-orchestrated and successful, yet little progress has been made towards actually resolving the basic problem. The stream of refugees has in some cases turned into a flood, and the predicament of both refugees and their host countries is becoming ever more complicated. Berhane Woldegabriel looks at the current state of affairs in Sudan,

how the aid agencies are operating, and some of the social consequences involved in sheltering refugees:

**O**F THE ESTIMATED five million refugees in Africa, 525,000 are being sheltered in Sudan. In Geneva last April, the Sudanese delegation to the International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA) reported that Sudan was hosting some 390,000 refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea, 39,000 from Uganda, 7,000 from Chad and 5,000 from Zaire.

The Geneva conference follows the conference held in Khartoum last June to publicise the refugee situation in Sudan. Perceiving a 'major human crisis,' the UN Secretary General — in consultation with the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) — arranged

the ICARA conference to focus public attention on the plight of refugees across the whole of Africa.

ICARA was without doubt a success in that it raised more than the target figure of \$500m, in pledged donations. There was a general feeling of sympathy for Sudan, and the delegation's leader — Internal Affairs Minister Ahmed Abdel Rahman Mohamed — expressed the opinion that this sympathy would be manifested in terms of concrete assistance. Of course, a great deal of work has already been undertaken by agencies such as UNHCR, and ICARA will have served mainly to augment the existing programmes of refugee assistance, while alerting worldwide attention to a crisis which — compared with the Vietnamese boat people, for example — has so far been under-reported in the international media. Each Asian refugee receives about \$50 per year in aid; an African refugee

**letters**

**Direct complaints**

I SHOULD LIKE to express my views with regard to Mr Sobit Abbe's letter (April, 1981) entitled "Beating a dead line," concerning inadequacies in the telephone-system.

The Sudan Telecommunications Corporation incorporates a number of systems, both new and old. Some of these systems are of a mechanical and electromechanical nature and are subject to numerous mechanical defects which cause call-failures. In the near future, such systems will be replaced.

What Mr Abbe terms in his letter "inarticulate noise," may well be the engaged signal and what he calls "the dead line" may be mechanical or other faults. Mr Abbe complains that one is often unable to reach other parties "with a telephone for which you pay the maximum charges." I should like to point out that telephone exchanges have automatic devices, such as overflow meters, which register the number of unsuccessful calls, and the subscriber is subsequently not charged for them.

There are good telephone-systems in Sudan which operate well as a result of the application of modern technology. There are systems which operate international lines: could Mr Abbe point out the reasons for their unreliability? If one system in a particular part of the country is unreliable, it does not necessarily mean all telecommunications systems in the country malfunction. Mr Abbe should have been more specific.

Christopher Meteng Amos  
Department of Telecommunications  
Atbara

**Juba price hikes**

A WORD ON some of the exorbitant prices charged by traders in Juba. Last month's prices for dura, sugar and other essential commodities were still relatively low: Ls23 for 50 kilogrammes of sugar and Ls17 for 50 kilos of dura - they are now costing Ls36.70 and Ls24 respectively. The President has declared sugar to be a government monopoly - so who has changed this declaration?

Price rises seem to be decided by individual traders who think they have friends in government. Through raising the price of sugar, the government, or whoever it is, is denying the man in the street his tea and the business of local breweries. Why is the government allowing this to happen, and why do traders have more influence on government decisions than the common people, who the government know are being made to suffer?

In reality, a sack of dura is now too expensive for most inhabitants of Juba, who have to depend on "retail block marketing" - one tin of dura now costs Ls8.

There are further price-rises in other essential commodities.

Abenyio Aichar Marko  
Regional Ministry of Cooperation  
and Rural Development  
Juba

**Change of course**

IF ONE GLANCES at the recent performance of pupils in School Certificate English Language papers, one can notice a drastic fall in standard. The main factor behind this is the lower standard of linguistic ability possessed by pupils, but this has been aggravated by the fact that the aims implicit in the summary questions are considerably confused and ambiguous.

The issue of changing the English Language syllabus recalls the introduction of the Nile

Course. Although this course is appreciated by many and holds out much hope for the future, there is one point which needs mentioning. The outstanding drawback of Book Four is that it contains so many units and so much material that it can in no way be covered during the school year. A reduction in the number of questions per unit would be useful. To put it in a mathematical formula: the pupils' response to the work varies inversely with the abundance of work.

One further point - teaching a language primarily involves inculcating, in pupils, the ability to communicate information and thought. If the teacher can report, to the Ministry or other people concerned, on the problems of English Language teaching, and simultaneously, if the ministry can furnish the school with periodicals and magazines specialising in teaching, the teacher would not lose touch with the latest innovations, and the ministry would have useful feedback from the people concerned.

Abdul Rahman M. Abdel Magid  
White Nile Secondary School  
Ed Dueim

**No blame**

I WAS SURPRISED to read Ateng Alier's letter in last month's *Sudanow* in which he criticised the decision of General Lagu and the advisory technicians not to urge for the construction of the proposed oil-refinery in Bentiu. I am sure that neither General Lagu nor the technicians have made a mistake. As a politician, General Lagu played his part by leaving the choice of the site up to the technicians concerned. He went on to explain that as a natural resource, oil belongs to the whole nation, and at a time of economic crisis the first priority must be to get the oil up from under the ground and not waste time in political debate.

General Lagu further stressed that as long as the oil was found within the nation's boundaries, there would be no need for politicians to argue about it. May I further remind Mr Ateng Alier that under certain circumstances - and this is one - the arguments of technicians override those of politicians: no blame should be attached to those who took the decision.

Deng Thon Arok,  
Khartoum

**Boom coming ?**

I ENJOYED YOUR interesting article on the Kenana Sugar Project which appeared in the April issue of *Sudanow*.

In further consideration, I should like to bring to your attention a *US News and World Report* (September 1977) forecast which focuses on Sudan:

"... Keep an eye on Sudan, a big country with enormous potential. The African nation south of Egypt has lots of land - almost one third as much as America's 48 contiguous states - and lots of Arab funds to exploit it.

"A US Department of Commerce aide has estimated that Yankee export to the Sudan will rise some 23% in 1977. Road, railway, port and airport construction can use US equipment. So can sugar and peanut processing, grain handling and textile projects. To some, the Sudan's potential is a sleeper. To others, in Africa, the Sudan is the coming boom country."

Joseph Apkarian  
Sarkis Izmirlian Corp  
P.O. Box 112  
Khartoum



The Sudan News Agency has a network of correspondents both throughout Sudan and abroad. Our modern communications systems include local and international press telex, telephotos, radio contact with provincial capitals, special express services and teleprinter services to Juba and Wad Medani. Most of these facilities are available (by arrangement) to visiting journalists.

We publish the following bulletins which we deliver to subscribers:  
Daily Bulletin (Arabic)  
Daily Bulletin (English)  
Weekly Review (English)

**SUDAN  
NEWS  
AGENCY**

Gamhoria Street, Khartoum  
po Box 1506  
Telex 418, 419 or 275

	Tel.
General Manager	75771
Deputy General Manager	75772
English News Service	72895
	81670
Arabic News Service	74726
	74795
Bulletin Subscriptions	76420, 75910

**current affairs**

receives \$20.

What remains uncertain at present, is the extent of the amount pledged to Sudan. As yet, no one knows how much of the total pledged at the conference will be in cash, and how much will be in relief supplies - foodstuffs, medicines, blankets and so on. The donors have not been specific on this matter; moreover, a few donors included aid which they had already provided or announced, when calculating their contributions.

Equally important is the way in which funds are used: it is notoriously easy to spend aid money without achieving effective results. This concern was reflected in the call for aid measures to be coordinated amongst the experienced development agencies.

Last month, as part of its programme to assist the settlement of refugees in Sudan, the World Food Programme (WFP) signed a new agreement with the government to provide food worth \$17m. at current prices. The senior advisor to WFP in Sudan, Mr. Gaston Eyben, explained that the aim is to assist the government in its efforts to enable refugees to be self-supporting.

'WFP believes that refugees have to participate actively in the economic development of the country of asylum,' he stressed, explaining that the idea is to reduce the food aid progressively as the degree of refugee self-sufficiency increases. Exception is made for vulnerable groups - those who cannot become self-sufficient through their own efforts, such as the sick, orphaned and the physically handicapped. Under this new



**Starting a new life: how long can they be supported?**

programme, 152,000 refugees will move from temporary camps to less temporary settlement areas. The main beneficiaries will be refugees from Uganda, Chad, Ethiopia and Eritrea. There are also some 5,000 Zaireans in the southern Sudan - although whether they qualify as refugees is debatable, since they returned to Sudan after having been voluntarily repatriated to Zaire.

'They have been here in Sudan off and on for over fifteen years,' one local official pointed out, 'and they would

probably be quite content to stay indefinitely. Economically speaking, they are better off than the Sudanese in the neighbouring villages.' Because of this evident self-sufficiency, it is unlikely that they will be included in the new aid programme.

There has always been migration across the borders: some two million of the present Sudanese population are of Chadian or Nigerian origin, for example. For them, there has been time to integrate. The main difference now is that the rate and volume of influx has increased beyond the normal integrative capacity of the host society.

The World Food Programme's involvement in Sudan is one of its major activities in Africa. Aside from the \$17m. resettlement aid, a programme is being conducted with a budget of \$75m., covering such diverse elements as youth training, feeding schools, reforestation schemes, rehabilitating railway workshops and a great deal more. In fact, the WFP could be said to have cut its teeth in Sudan: its first ever project was to participate in the transfer of flood victims from Wadi Halfa to New Halfa. Since then, WFP commitment in Sudan has totalled \$142m. The \$17m. resettlement agreement, although signed last month, was in fact pledged after the June conference on refugees in Sudan held in Khartoum last year: the programme itself is expected to take some three years.

The chief difficulty encountered by the WFP - and other agencies - has always been that of transporting food supplies



**Refugees from the Ethiopian conflict: on the way to self-sufficiency?**

## current affairs

from Port Sudan to the settlement areas in the hinterland. Although completion of the Port Sudan - Khartoum highway has eased that stage, river transport is still a source of vexation.

'Last February, we arranged a contract with the River Transport Corporation to transport 43,000 bags of dura from Renk to Juba, at the rate of six barges a month, before the start of the rainy season,' explained Mr. Eyben. 'To date, only two barges have made the journey. We have no supplies in Juba for the Ugandan refugees living outside the capital,' he told *Sudanow* last month.

The inaccessibility of the Chadian refugees also creates difficulties; they are encamped in a region more than two thousand kilometres from Port Sudan, and are dependent on supplies brought by rail via Geneina, or by lorry across extremely rugged terrain. Air freighting has been used, but this, too, has encountered problems (*Printout*, February, 1980). To help alleviate the situation, an agreement has been reached with Sudan Railways to provide extra wagons for WFP purposes. In the past, there has been a chronic shortage of rolling stock.



Settling in: Southern Sudan's meagre infrastructure is already overburdened

Even in the Eastern Region, which has a well-developed infrastructure, refugee camps and settlement areas have run short of WFP staple supplies such as dura, edible oil, beans and milk-powder, while these items turn up in retail shops in the area. In reference to this, Mr. Eyben outlined some of the difficulties inherent in

INTERVIEW : AHMED ABDEL RAHMAN MOHAMED

## 'Alerting public opinion'

*The International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA), held in Geneva in April at the instigation of the UN General Assembly in consultation with the OAU, has generally been regarded as a success. A total of \$560m was pledged in financial and food aid, of which it is expected that Sudan will be a major recipient - sheltering, as it does, one-tenth of the refugees on the continent. Amongst the donors, the EEC, UK, USA and France have hinted that Somalia and Sudan should receive the lion's share of their contributions. Leading the Sudanese delegation at ICARA was the Minister for Internal Affairs, Ahmed Abdel Rahman Mohamed. Soon after holding a press conference on his return last month, he spoke to Berhane Woldegabriel:*

**SUDANOW:** What were the objectives of April's ICARA conference?

**AHMED ABDEL RAHMAN:** The conference aimed at focusing worldwide attention on the plight of refugees in Africa; mobilising additional resources for refugee programmes on the continent and helping those countries which are giving asylum to refugees to

shoulder the attendant burden on their economies.

**Q:** What role did Sudan play in the conference?

**A:** Our delegation played a significant part. The head of Sudan's permanent mission in Geneva is the current chairman of the UNHCR executive committee, and also chairman of the coordinating committee for the conference. The Sudanese delegation had to apply itself to a number of thorny problems on the eve of the conference, especially over Afro-Arab cooperation. We played a leading role in drafting a statement which was read by a member of the delegation on behalf of the African contingent - deploring the invitation of Israel and demanding an investigation into the matter. The statement satisfied both the Arab and the African countries and ensured Arab participation in the conference.

Sudan also put forward a set of recommendations on behalf of the African countries, which were adopted unanimously by the conference. These concerned the need to follow up the initiatives resulting from the conference, to ensure the participation of the

experienced, specialised agencies in programmes sponsored by the UNHCR, and to adopt objective criteria for the allocation of funds.

Our delegation was, moreover, able to hold discussions with other delegations - particularly those of donor countries - and with the High Commissioner and his staff on specific topics related to refugee assistance.

**Q:** How many delegations attended the conference?

**A:** There were 84 countries represented, a number of liberation fronts recognised by the OAU, and 31 UN agencies, regional and voluntary organisations.

**Q:** Why was there particular opposition to Israel's attendance, when some African countries have created an equal number of refugees?

**A:** Israel's participation in the conference was opposed first because it has created a refugee problem and refused to abide by all the UN resolutions calling for the Palestinians to be allowed to return to their homeland with compensation. It is not an ordinary refugee problem: it is a problem of displaced people being denied entry to their land.

**current affairs**

running such a huge operation in a less developed country: 'Once the foodstuff arrives at Port Sudan, it becomes the property of the government. WFP pays half the cost of distribution from Port Sudan to the needy areas, but the periodic food shortages are chiefly due to transport delays. The percentage of WFP goods which find their way into shops is negligible, albeit visible.'

He cited two possible reasons behind this phenomenon. The first is outright misappropriation of supplies 'Which I don't believe is the case here' — and the second, which he accepts as true, is that 'some beneficiaries prefer cash to one or two of the food items, so after it has been distributed, they sell it to local merchants.'

The WFP imports wheat, but this is usually sold through the Ministry of Commerce and Supply, since the refugees' staple grain is dura. However, according to Mr. Eyben: 'a ton of wheat cannot buy a ton of dura in exchange.' The reason for this is not that the wheat is sold off cheaply, but that the cost of dura is constantly increasing. All WFP consignments are brought in free of duty,

except for a provincial tax on the transaction of dura.

The involvement of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has increased steadily with the growth of the refugee population in Sudan. Last year it had a budget allocation of \$12m.

— although actual spending exceeded the amount — and \$25m. has been allocated for the current year. 'It seems likely too, that we may end up spending more than that this year,' revealed Ekber Menemencioglu of the UNHCR Information Department.

Unlike previous years, the UNHCR has stopped compiling its own statistics on refugees and their needs, and has accepted the validity of figures issued by the office of Dr. Abdel Rahman Beshir the government's Commissioner for Refugees. The government has more officials at frontier posts and refugee encampments, compared with the number of UNHCR field supervisors, and is responsible for carrying out registration of refugees, distribution of materials and providing security. Asked about the UNHCR's new-found confidence, Dr Beshir replied: 'With more practice, we have naturally improved the efficiency of

our own services. Besides, why shouldn't they accept our figures?' The other side seems to agree: 'We are here to cooperate with the government in helping refugees, not to contradict it,' said the UNHCR's public information officer.

The detailed programme of action for 1982, jointly compiled by the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees and the UNHCR, will be submitted to the UNHCR Executive Committee meeting, which will meet next month in Geneva. Mr. Menemencioglu declined to answer questions concerning the content of the programme and the budget estimates for the coming year. 'We cannot disclose details before the meeting is held,' he said.

UNHCR's current projects in the Sudan include the overhauling and improvement of the domestic water supply in Qala en Nahal. Ten years ago, the area had some 20,000 refugees from Eritrea. Now the total population — including some 8,000 local inhabitants — is 41,000. Financed by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), this renovation work is scheduled to begin in four months time; at the end of the rainy season. The Rural Water Corporation

Second, Israel recognises the racist regime of South Africa, whose practice of apartheid has been condemned by all African countries. There is strong co-operation between Israel and South Africa in trade, armaments production and research into the manufacture of atomic weapons. Thus Israel constitutes a common enemy to both Africa and the Arab world.

**Q:** Could you outline the extent of participation and commitment of the UN agencies in the conference?

**A:** All the UN agencies were represented. Resolutions adopted by the conference called upon them to maintain close liaison with UNHCR and the development organisations so that medium and long-term assistance is neither drawn up arbitrarily nor taken on separately from current development programmes. They were asked to embark on policies and programmes for refugee assistance which paid close attention to their coordination. Humanitarian and relief agencies such as UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNICEF were asked to review and enhance their capacity to respond promptly and adequately to the needs of refugees in Africa.



**Q:** Bearing in mind recent calls for Afro-Arab solidarity, to what extent did the Arab oil states participate and contribute?

**A:** The conference provided the opportunity for the oil-producing Arab countries to acquaint themselves with this particular African problem. So far the response has been encouraging. Following the Geneva conference, Saudi Arabia announced that it was donating \$30 million, the UAE pledged \$2 million and Algeria \$300,000 to the

general fund, while Egypt has contributed \$1 million specifically for Sudan.

**Q:** Most of the refugees in Sudan are from Ethiopia and Eritrea. The United States has contributed half of what was pledged at the conference, while the USSR did not contribute at all. How do you assess this?

**A:** This is a political question which I cannot answer in full. However, the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc countries do not usually contribute to refugee programmes, since they maintain that the problem has its roots in imperialism. It is not our intention to make excuses for them.

**Q:** How much aid, whether in cash or in kind, has been pledged to Sudan, and to what extent does this correspond to the country's needs?

**A:** It is still rather early to say exactly what proportion of the contributions were earmarked for Sudan. However, certain countries did allocate fixed sums: for example, the United Kingdom has pledged \$1 million specifically for Sudan. Other countries such as the United States declared their sympathy

current affairs



Chadian refugees queuing for food: will it arrive?

(RWC), whose responsibility it will be, will have until the beginning of the next rainy season to carry out the task. A major pipeline, 36 kilometres long will carry water from two *haffirs*, or water-

holes, beside the seasonal river, Rahad. It will then be pumped through minor pipes up to Salmin, the furthest village. Since the existing two *haffirs* are exclusively for the human population, the RWC plans to build a third *haffir* for animals.

and indicated during discussions that substantial sums would be allocated to Sudan. Some countries praised Sudan's policy towards refugees and expressed satisfaction at the soundness of the projects we have put forward. We are optimistic that further aid will be forthcoming, although this will require that we keep in continuous contact with the donors.

**Q: How would you evaluate the results of the June 1980 conference in Khartoum in relation to the Geneva conference?**

**A:** The June conference was a success in so far as it provided the opportunity to formulate a strategy of detailed projects for coping with the refugee influx. It also alerted worldwide popular opinion to a problem which had hitherto suffered from neglect and lack of publicity, and encouraged the African community to take a similar approach. The idea of ICARA in Geneva could have been inspired by the June conference in Khartoum. Finally, when we were asked to submit our proposals for the Geneva conference we were more or less ready with suggestions for relief, medicines and the long-term needs of the refugees.

**Q: What is Sudanese policy regarding the naturalisation of refugees or the extension to them of Sudanese nationality, in view of the summit meeting between Ethiopia and Sudan last May, with its agreements on the mutual repatriation of refugees from both countries?**

**A:** Sudan's policy towards refugees rests on its commitment to the principle of voluntary repatriation. The government is prepared to cooperate with any neighbouring country towards the realisation of this goal. Successful repatriation, however, depends on creating favourable conditions to induce refugees to return. Unfortunately these conditions have not yet been established. Hence a negligible number has actually returned: only 250 have gone back to Ethiopia, for example, while thousands are still pouring in from Uganda, Chad and Ethiopia.

As for naturalisation, government policy encourages repatriation, so while refugees are accepted in the country and given asylum *en masse*, naturalisation will be granted on an individual basis when it occurs. Each case will be dealt with according to its own merits.

A similar water project is being sponsored by the UNHCR in the Gedaref area — where there are about 30,000 refugees, mainly from the Ethiopian province of Tigray. Demand for water has increased in recent years as considerable internal migration to the urban area and the continuous influx of refugees has swelled the population. The amount of water obtainable from the pumping station at Showak on the River Athara has fallen, however, as canals from the dam at Khashm el Girba have silted up and begun to meander. UNHCR proposes to spend \$700,000 on repairs and improvements to the present supply system. A water expert contracted by UNHCR from Anglia Consultants told *Sudanow* that the Showak pumping station itself was 'a good installation'. The generators — totalling 920kw — and water treatment plant, now ten years old, are still in good working order, according to Mr West. The 72 kilometres of twenty-inch pipeline have been damaged in places by cattle herders seeking to water their animals (and themselves), but elsewhere the pipe is intact.

Similar problems were encountered along the Kassala-Haiya highway when Rashaida herders took matters into their own hands (Development, November 1980). The Italian company Recchi then set an example the water authorities at Gedaref would be well-advised to follow: they installed special *haffirs* to give the Rashaida proper access to the water. 'Controlling the loss is much better and safer than being stubborn and taking the inevitable risk of having pipes broken — which lets a great deal of water just drain away into the swamps,' said Mr. Recchi. It is said that underground water at Abu Nagga, 12km south of Gedaref, could provide a feasible auxiliary to Showak, if necessary. As well as the refugees, the 250,000 local inhabitants of Gedaref will benefit from the UNHCR's project. When the desilting and repairs have been completed, Showak water station will be able to pump some 12,500 cubic metres of water in an eighteen hour day — equivalent to 50 litres per person.

In addition to assisting the 7,000 Chadian refugees registered in Geneina, the Red Crescent and the UNHCR are taking part in a medical programme aimed at providing the area's 100,000 residents with vaccination against meningitis.

'The UNHCR's biggest education programme is to be found in Sudan,' claimed their public information officer, explaining that the organisation has been building primary schools, supplying school equipment and supplementing

current affairs



Eritrean refugee prepares injera: no strain on the bread queues

teachers' wages in various parts of the country. In 1980 the UNHCR provided scholarships for 1,250 students in technical and academic secondary education. Two UNHCR schools have also been completed recently; one in Kassala and one in Juba. Each has a capacity of 500 pupils and will be open to both Sudanese and refugee children.

'The Sudanese government is uniquely generous in its treatment of refugees, in providing land for settlement,' averred Mr Menemencioglu, going on to say: 'I was in Pakistan with the UNHCR. It is a good country, but the government simply can't help in the same way. It has no extra land to give to the refugees. This is why I object to the use of the word 'camp' here; there are settlement areas in Sudan, but never camps. Refugees can move around the country freely here; in Thailand they are kept in camps

surrounded by barbed wire.' This is a slight exaggeration, in fact; while land is provided in certain areas, there are still camps - without wire - at Tawawa and Um Gulja, which differ from Mr Menemencioglu's description.

There are three kinds of settlement: emergency reception areas, agricultural settlements and urban or semi-urban settlements. Emergency reception areas are near the borders, where newly-arrived refugees receive food, medical treatment and protection. Generally, refugees arrive exhausted after long hours or days of walking to cross the border, suffering from both the accumulated stresses of conditions in their home country and the fear of interception in their flight for survival. Agricultural settlements are a more long-term measure, in which a refugee family may receive ten feddans of land to work for themselves, as in Qala en

Nahal. Others work as agricultural labourers alongside existing government agricultural schemes such as Es Suki or Khashm el Girba, earning wages by picking cotton or weeding for Sudanese tenant farmers - who are sometimes unable to pay them enough to subsist.

Even when refugees have been provided with their own land on which to support themselves, the way the farms operate can present problems. Mahari Solomon and Girmai Ammanuel are refugees from Eritrea, currently in their final year at medical school in the University of Khartoum. As part of their field-work for the university, they spent some time working at Qala en Nahal, which is as established an area for Eritrean refugees as Goz Rejab is for the Zaireans.

The young refugee doctors indicated in their reports that the tractors provided for the settlements by the government are lacking spare parts, even when they manage to obtain fuel. This by itself is characteristic of the country as a whole: less acceptable perhaps is that these tractors are only available to most refugees after the ploughing season has passed. During the season the equipment is often monopolised by non-refugees or those few refugees who have managed to obtain four times the usual allocation of land. This makes it more difficult for the others to be self-supporting.

Refugees of urban origin usually want to settle in the towns, and are thus thrown into competition with Sudanese nationals for limited housing and public utilities. As it is, the rate of *internal* migration - gravitation of people from the rural areas of Sudan towards the towns - has accelerated to the point where it is causing problems of security and unemployment. Moreover, their abandonment of the land is leading to the decline of the traditional rural economic sector and reducing the country's Gross Domestic Product. In times of shortage it is the refugees who take the blame for overcrowding (Current, October 1979).

'We are used as scapegoats for every failure in the system,' complained Kibrom Taame, a young Eritrean refugee working in town: 'After all, we don't drink petrol - how many refugees have cars? If there is a shortage of bread at the bakery, people complain about us; yet we don't eat bread, we eat home-made *injera*! If one of us queues for bread, it is most likely a servant, collecting it for his or her Sudanese or European employer. We are thankful that the Sudanese let us live in their country, but for my own part, I don't take a penny from the UNHCR or the government. My brother in Jordan is feeding me, and if the authorities would sell me a travel docu-

**current affairs**



**Eastern Sudan: herders break the pipeline for water**

The Khartoum Conference on Refugees in Sudan in June 1980 has been described by the Minister for Internal Affairs as a success in demonstrating the magnitude of the refugee problem and the means to ameliorate it. Following the conference the following contributions were pledged:

DONOR	NATURE OF AID PLEDGED	AMOUNT
Islamic Development Bank (Jeddah)	Construction of hospital at Lua and health centre at Obari for Ugandan refugees in Equatoria	\$0.9m
European Economic Community (EEC)	For settlement of refugees	\$4m
United States Aid	For improvement to Port Sudan water supply and new water project for refugees at Asotriba near Port Sudan	\$2.6m
Sweden	Water project at Qala en Nahal	1m krona
United Kingdom	Tractor workshop and training in Gedaref area. \$10,000 to Ugandan refugees in South	\$0.85m
Pakistan	For Ugandan refugees in Southern Sudan	\$25,000
Islamic Solidarity Fund (Jeddah)	For priority programme	\$150,000
Italy	Food aid	0.6m lire (not yet received)

In the same way that Pakistan sent aid to Sudan, despite problems of a similar nature at home, Sudan has sent 80,000 bags of rice to Tanzania and Somalia as a gesture of friendship.

ment, I would immediately leave to join him.'

The Minister of Internal Affairs sees a pattern emerging here: 'It is dangerous to generalise, but on the whole the Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees are mostly young and urban-oriented - they prefer to stay in major towns. This adds to unemployment and leads to a rise in house rents. Their lifestyle is also more conspicuous: the attention they attract tends to make them a target for adverse criticism. The Ugandan refugees are less anxious to come to the major towns, and the Chadians are more nostalgic about their homes: they hardly accept the reality of being refugees,' he remarked.

Three days before the arrival in Khartoum of Secretary General Fikreselassie of the Ethiopian Provisional Military Administrative Council (Dergue) for the 12th anniversary celebrations of the May Revolution, several truckloads of Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees from the Three Towns were rounded up without warning and apparently at random. They were detained indefinitely in Omdurman prison. This action emphasises the perceived security risk posed by these refugees, although it is not clear exactly why those who were left at liberty were not also suspect. Nonetheless, with the increasing moves towards rapprochement between Sudan and Ethiopia, the question for many refugees must be: how much longer will they be transported out of the capital or held in detention every time a high-level Ethiopian delegation visits the country?

One attempt to cope with the special needs of urban refugees is the Refugee Counselling Service, which assists with some of their immediate problems and finances scholarships. However, the process is a slow one and only a few refugees could be said to have benefited from the scheme so far.

What does the future hold? Sooner or later it seems, there must be voluntary repatriation or assimilation into the local community. The alternatives of resettlement abroad - or emigrating to work abroad - are open to only a privileged few. As far as the rest of the refugees are concerned, it is a question of waiting until suitable conditions prevail in their home country. If their stay is prolonged, however, there is the risk of becoming part of a segregated community without naturalisation: the result is perhaps a ghetto mentality and the social degradation that accompanies it.

Last year, according to government figures, some 4,000 refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea emigrated; the majority to Saudi Arabia and West Germany. These figures are considered

## current affairs

Country of origin	Numbers at end of 1979	Influx during 1980	Influx during Jan-March 1981	TOTAL
*Ethiopia	390,000	25,000	4,000	419,000
Zaire	5,000	—	—	4,000
Uganda	39,000	34,000	11,000	84,000
Chad	7,000	11,000	4,000	22,000
Total	441,000	70,000	19,000	529,000

\* 4,000 emigrated to other countries.

to be conservative estimates\* by some observers, who point out that 3,000 left for West Germany alone.

Refugees who qualify to emigrate are entitled to Conventional Travel Documents (CTD's), which are issued free by UNHCR to government refugee offices and sold to the refugees at a nominal price of seven pounds. If a refugee goes abroad with a CTD and then incurs the displeasure of the country he arrives in, then the original host country — Sudan — is held responsible and must take him back. Consequently references, a sponsor and an entry visa for his destination are necessary before the CTD is issued to a refugee. More than 20,000 CTD's have been issued since 1975. Osman Sabbe, leader of the tiny Popular Liberation Forces of Eritrea, told *Sudanow* six months ago that there were now about 70,000 Eritrean refugees working in Saudi Arabia, the majority of whom left via Sudan. On the question of voluntary repatriation, Ethiopia claimed at the ICARA conference that 151,000 refugees had returned from various countries; the UNHCR in Khartoum puts the number of returnees from Sudan at around 400.

Following the American Refugees Act of 1980, the US government announced quotas for resettling refugees from various parts of the world in the United States. The quota for Africa for the last fiscal year (October 1980 — September '81) was put at 3,000 — one-third of whom are to be chosen from refugees in Sudan. In the previous year about 200 Eritreans and Ethiopians were accepted, and since then a further 350 have been resettled in the United States. The remaining 650 will follow gradually, and the scheme is expected to continue next year — probably at a higher rate. Mrs Jean Kirkpatrick, the United States' UN representative, has said that \$11m would be available to help resettle refugees from Africa. This approach to the refugee problem has not pleased the African countries themselves, however, according to *West Africa* magazine: 'Many African

delegates in Geneva... felt uneasy about the US proposal, and the UN High Commissioner, Mr Poul Hartling, said that the UNHCR is not encouraging resettlement for refugees in third countries.'

Although the refugees will have to wait the customary five years to be eligible for American citizenship, they are nonetheless required to sign a document agreeing to register for conscription before they even arrive in the US. 'This is just a formality really; so far there has not been any conscription as such.'

Red Sea Province	55,000
Kassala Province	277,000
Blue Nile Province	15,000
Khartoum Province	33,000
Other cities in Northern Sudan	30,000
Upper Nile Province	2,000
Jonglei Province	3,000
Eastern Equatoria Province	88,000
Northern Darfur	22,000
Total	525,000

\*4,000 emigrated to other countries

according to one rather apologetic American official. The US quota represents one in five hundred (0.2%) of the refugees in Sudan, and strict criteria are applied before selection. Applicants are preferred to have relatives already in the US, and to demonstrate that they risk genuine persecution if obliged to return to their own country.

Applicants are screened initially by the UNHCR branch office. Most are sponsored by organisations such as the Lutheran World Service, the U.S. Catholic Federation and the International Rescue Committee with whom they are connected by the American Council of Voluntary Agencies. An American immigration officer comes to Sudan every two months or so to finalise the arrangements. The refugee is expected to repay only \$250 of the cost of resettlement after he has entered the US and started work.

One official from the Ministry of Internal Affairs said that, in his opinion, the resettlement programme does not help Sudan. 'First,' he reasoned, 'those who leave are the able refugees who could support themselves easily by participating in Sudan's economic development. Those who are left behind tend to be the unskilled, the disabled, the sick and the elderly. Secondly, I am afraid that this scheme will attract more refugees to Sudan in the false hope of transit to the American *El Dorado*. Moreover, this could mean an immense loss of human resources to their country of origin. I am sure that the US government recognises that this is not a permanent solution to the refugee problem in Africa.'

Naturally, the various Eritrean, liberation fronts are capitalising on the registration for conscription controversy; and the irony that a refugee who could have fought for his own cause might end up fighting for someone else's. The fronts regard the refugees as potential pools of support, and thus have no wish to see them resettled or assimilated. Of the latter they need not worry: the head of Sudan's Passports and Nationality Office, General Osman Abu Afan, has made it clear that a refugee cannot expect to achieve Sudanese naturalisation.

Africa has half the world's entire refugee population, which must reflect the existence of unpopular governments whose interests do not lie with the interests of their people. Governments which fail to win the support and sympathy of their people too often resort to the use of sheer force to subdue them and perpetuate their own authority. Too often we are reminded of Lord Acton's pithy remark: 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' When this happens, it is inevitable that those who can, take up arms to fight — while those who cannot fight take refuge in neighbouring countries.

It would, however, be unrealistic to lay the blame entirely on 'tyrannical African leaders.' 'He wouldn't have fallen if he hadn't been pushed,' runs a Tigrinya proverb. Were it not for outside interference — be it the drawing of boundaries for colonial purposes, the unscrupulous sale of arms to escalate conflicts, or fullscale superpower intervention — there might be no need for pledging conferences, resettlement programmes and other manifestations of the 'humanitarian's burden.'

As UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim stressed at the Geneva conference, it is the causes of the problem — and not just the effects — which need the attention of such conferences. ■

current affairs

FUELLING DEVELOPMENT ?

# Oil: troubled waters

*Contention over the location of Sudan's new oil refinery was brought to an end last month when the Southern Region High Executive Council endorsed — though not without dispute and reservations — President Nimeiri's selection of Kosti. The Kosti site had been strongly advocated by the Central Ministry of Energy and Mining and by Chevron Corporation, both of which believed that technical, operational, and financial factors favoured it. Many Southerners, however, strongly preferred to build the refinery near the crude oil itself, that is in the Southern Region. The consequent contention marked the first serious challenge to Sudan's new policy of regionalisation in that it pitted the valid concerns of the central government against the valid concerns of one of the country's regions, and it did so over an issue of fundamental importance. Provisionally it would appear that*

*Sudan's political system was capable both of recognising and surmounting this challenge, and of doing so without leaving behind a fatal level of bitterness. Alfred Logune Taban reports:*

**A BEL ALIER, PRESIDENT** of the Southern Region's High Executive Council (HEC), last month released a statement endorsing President Nimeiri's decision to locate Sudan's first major oil refinery in Kosti, despite the fact that most of the oil to be refined lies under the ground in the Southern Region.

Alier's statement stressed that the Presidential decision followed a thorough consideration both of Southern public opinion as reflected in the HEC and the People's Regional Assembly and of the technical studies and recommendations of Chevron, which has spearheaded the drive to discover and realise Sudan's oil potential. It went on to observe that the

Regional Government's endorsement of the Presidential decision was predicated upon its understanding of the President's constitutional prerogatives; of his consistent concern for the welfare of the Region's citizenry, manifest most recently in his handling of the November 1980 border dispute; and of his extensive study of the technical and social aspects of the highly disputatious refinery issue.

Notably, the statement sought to quell Southern unease by highlighting the trade-offs proffered by the Central Government in view of its recognition that however technically and financially sound the Kosti decision, it is not a popular one with Southern citizens. HEC President Alier noted that President Nimeiri had directed the Central Ministries of National Planning, Finance and National Economy, and Industry to intensify construction work on the Melut sugar project, the Tonj Kenaf factory, the Mongalla agro-industrial complex, the Anzara scheme, and other government projects in the region, at a cost of some \$100 million. The President also directed that the concerned ministries allot a

INTERVIEW : PETER GATKUOTH

## Oiling cauldron

**SUDANOW:** *When welcoming the decision of President Nimeiri to build the refinery in Kosti, the HEC President Abel Alier said that the move came after thorough consideration of Southern public opinion. Does this mean that Southerners are happy with the decision?*

**PETER GATKUOTH:** Well, I wouldn't say that Southerners are happy to see the refinery built in Kosti; but as Sayed Abel Alier indicated, we in the HEC and in the Regional Assembly had an opportunity both to determine the state of opinion in the Southern Region and to argue our case. The people of the South clearly wanted the refinery in Bentiu. Three reasons stood out. Firstly, Bentiu is very underdeveloped and the refinery would improve things in this regard. Secondly, the Southern Region is poorly connected to the North as regards transportation infrastructure: so why take the oil from Bentiu, refine it in Kosti, and then try to send it back to the South? Thirdly, this is the first major commercial discovery of raw materials in the South and as a matter of pride — to contribute to the national economy — we wished the refinery to be located here.

These factors, as well as security and

psychological considerations were adequately conveyed to the President. The Regional Assembly, the people's voice in the Region, thoroughly explored the situation and resolved that the refinery should be in Bentiu. Chevron placed its technical considerations before the President, as did the Central Ministry of Energy and Mining. The President of the Republic was the single channel correlating all these findings. After careful study he decided that Kosti was in the best interests of the Sudanese people.

**Q:** *Was the President's decision an easy one to accept?*

**A:** Well, it's a decision of the President and it has to be accepted. Both the Constitution and the Self-Government Act authorise a specific role for the President and it is now our task to implement his decision. If, for example, the Regional Government resigned, the President — by virtue of his constitutional authority — would simply step in and replace the departing government with one that could secure peace, law, and order. Since he decided on Kosti it is my responsibility, it is the responsibility of the Regional Government, it is the responsibility of every citizen of the

Region, to see that our system and our Constitution are respected. We must abide by his decision because it is we, the people of Sudan, who elected this President; he should be assisted by the Assemblies, Regional and National, to wisely administer the affairs of Sudan. And this was the position we in the HEC took when we supported the President.

**Q:** *President Nimeiri mentioned Kosti as the refinery site back in November. Did Southerners not take him seriously then?*

**A:** His November speech to the National Assembly was not really a decision or a decree. It was an outline of work presented by the President on behalf of all the ministries. The Ministry of Energy and Mining incorporated Kosti in their draft and it was thus contained in the speech. A month later Sayed Abel Alier and Sayed Bona Malwal were briefed by the Ministry and Chevron regarding Kosti. Bona immediately returned to Juba carrying this information and this was the start of our intervention. After study both the HEC and the Regional Assembly decided that Bentiu was better. We put our arguments in a seven page memorandum



June - September 1996

ISSN: 0961-7949

Price: UK £2.00; USA \$5.00; Nigeria N30; Ghana C1,500; Egypt £10; South Africa R12.00; Zimbabwe \$3.00; Germany DM10.00; CFA 1,500

## Racism, Resistance and Politics of National Liberation

### IN THIS EDITION

- The changing face of Racism
- DuBois on Racism
- Racism and National Liberation
- Germany and African Migration
- Slavery in the Sudan
- Race, Publishing and Power
- Eritrea: Stranded Refugees
- Sierra Leone: Peace at last?
- Resistance Writing in the US

### Prejudice



Compliments: Greenwich Action Committee Against Racial Attacks (GACARA)

### Resistance



Africa World Review June-September 1996

Eritrean refugees trapped in the same dusty camps in the Sudan:

## Refugees who missed the liberation boat still wait

Despite the formal independence of Eritrea in May 1993, the Eritrean refugees in Sudan continue to live as card-carrying second-class citizens in sub-human conditions in camps and settlements, stranded by the political wrangle between Sudan and Eritrea and the perpetual shortage of funds of the ever stressed United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, writes **Berhane Woldegrabel**.

**T**he situation of ten million African refugees who are currently dispersed round the continent poses a serious challenge to international organisations. In particular, the UNHCR in Geneva and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa need to work out new strategies that could bring about lasting solution to the apparently insoluble problems that face these refugee communities.

The issue of the half million Eritrean refugees who remain in Sudan more than three years after their country achieved independence illustrates these problems.

The three conventional solutions in the case of long-term refugee settlement have been as follows. The first is to assimilate and naturalise refugees in their host countries. The second, to resettle refugees in "third countries" (e.g. in the USA and Canada). The third option, which is the most preferred, is voluntary repatriation to countries of origin. The last option presumes that the political or social situation which had threatened their lives and had compelled them into exile no longer exists.

Sudan is the largest country in Africa. In the 1980s, it granted sanctuary to hundreds of Palestinians and to more than 1.2 million refugees from six of its eight neighbouring states. Since then virtually all of the Ugandan, Zairian, Chadian, Libyans and Palestinians have either returned to their respective countries of origin or found themselves other "third" countries to resettle in. Most of the Eritreans and Ethiopians in Sudan are still there despite the end of the long Ethio-Eritrean war in 1991.

There are around half a million Eritreans in Sudan, most of them in refugee camps.

Clearly the three conventional solutions have failed to put an end to the life of uncertainty and anguish of the "stateless" Eritreans. Despite the hospitality of the Sudanese people, refugees were used expediently as scapegoats by Sudanese political parties. The 1974 Asylum Act of Sudan prohibits naturalisation of refugees, and prevents them from owning any fixed assets, such as land, houses etc. University education in medicine, pharmacy and engineering was barred to them. Subsequently, refugees remained economically marginalised and political vulnerable.

Formal resettlement of Eritrean refugees from Sudan to the USA, Canada, Australia and Europe, regarded as an option to solve the refugee problem and assist Sudan simultaneously, always fell short of resettling 2,000 people per year. In other words, at that rate, it will take at least 250 years to transport all the estimated half a million Eritreans out of Sudan, assuming that the receiving country continues its willingness to take refugees whose population growth remains constant.

As indicated above, particularly where naturalisation is not permitted and resettlement in "third" countries is too slow to be viable, voluntary repatriation of the refugees to their home countries becomes the most preferred of the three options. For the Eritreans and many Ethiopians in Sudan and for many others in similar circumstances such as the Afghans in Pakistan, there must be at least a **Fourth Option**. The development

of this option is primarily the task of the UNHCR, but the refugee units of regional organisations such as the OAU also have an obligation to seek a viable solution to the seemingly intractable refugee problem.

### Sudan, Eritrea & UNHCR

In the political wrangle between Sudan and Eritrea and the perpetual shortage of funds of the ever pressurised UNHCR, the half of a million or so Eritrean refugees who have been surviving in settlements and camps in distressing circumstances will continue for some more years to come despite the formal independence of their country in May 1993.

Soon after the Eritrean Liberation Front (EPLF) set the country and its capital city - Asmara - free from 40 years of Ethiopian occupation in May 1991, the Eritrean refugees in Sudan might have expected that after their long wait they would return home at last. Little did they know that the authorities had agreed that most of the refugees should stay where they were - in the hot and dusty semi-deserts of Sudan. After the referendum of 1993, Eritrea became a member of the United Nations and will soon celebrate its third year of formal independence (actually fifth year of liberation), however the refugees are still left to survive in misery, with little hope to look forward to.

Three years ago, the UNHCR and the governments of Sudan and Eritrea had signed agreements to systematically and swiftly resettle the exiled Eritreans back in their country. Practically however, the scheme is scarcely in operation, while overtly the three parties are



Ready and waiting

conducting a face saving diplomatic manoeuvre so that the voluntary repatriation programme could appear to be progressing.

#### The role of the UNHCR

According to the UNHCR, at the pledging Conference of the Eritrean Programme for the Rehabilitation of Eritrean Returnees (PROFERI), held in Geneva in July 1993, only \$32.5 million, nearly half of it in food aid, was pledged by donors out of the requested \$111 million for Phase One. The goal of Phase One was to repatriate "approximately 135,000 returnees to sustainable communities throughout Eritrea. This planning figure includes 100,000 returnees from Sudan who would require repatriation transport as well as integration assistance in Eritrea."

The start of the Pilot Operation phase which planned to repatriate 25,000 refugees by December 1994 was still more than a few thousands short by May 1995. The delay was "due to late finalization of the Memoranda of Understanding as well as some logistical problems." according to the UNHCR 1994-95 report on Eritrea. In March the UNHCR referred to the modi-

fication made to the original plan of the Pilot Operation, and stated the reason to be "unexpected development".

The UNHCR spent a total of nearly half a billion dollars for refugee programmes in Sudan, which was mainly directed to Eritreans, whose influx into Sudan started as early as 1967. Although it is generally believed that a little over 10% of funds earmarked for refugees actually reach the ordinary refugee in a settlement or a camp, the programmes budget was presumed to have been utilised in building temporary thatched hut accommodation, sinking water wells, erecting primary health centres, elementary schools and grinding mills, and in the construction of a network of summer weather roads in the thirty five refugee settlements in the semi-deserts of Eastern Sudan. About 200,000 Eritreans lived in 30 of those planned settlements either as agricultural wage labourers in the vicinity of large-scale cotton and sugar cane plantations, on plots of land allotted to them by the government of Sudan. Many of them practise pastoralism to supplement their meagre incomes. The remaining 200,000 or so, usu-

ally referred to as "spontaneously settled" live in urban centres, including the capital, Khartoum, without any direct assistance from the Government or UNHCR.

The UNHCR is apparently short of funds, as more and more demands are being put as a consequence of the civil wars in Europe, Africa and the ex-soviet Union. Unless some special funds are allocated by the International Community for Eritrean refugees, the UNHCR as it stands, is unable to earmark the \$350 m. which the Eritrean Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (ERRC), calculates is necessary to resettle the refugees back home.

It is economical for the UNHCR to spend less than \$20m annually, to maintain its refugee programme of nearly thirty years in Sudan, than to commit itself to a \$350 million operation inside Eritrea. Although it is rightly believed that voluntary repatriation is the most appropriate and durable solution to the refugee problem, such a venture will require of the UNHCR to build some infrastructure for basic health, education and other community services for the returnees. The buildings provided in these circumstances would have to be more durable than those in the refugee settlements.

#### The role of Sudan

Across the Eritrean border, Sudan needs the \$15.2m. in hard currency that it receives from the UNHCR for the refugee programme. It is already some time since Sudan lost virtually all development (not humanitarian) aid from its traditional donor governments and major international financial institutions, ostensibly for its expansionist Islamist policies.

The impact of the international embargo imposed on Libyan economy following allegations after the Lockerbie bombing has also deprived Sudan of the support of a former ally. Colonel Ghadafis regime has withdrawn millions of dollars worth of Libyan money in remittance from Sudan, and has dismissed hundreds of thousands of Sudanese from their jobs and expelled them from Libya during the last quarter of 1995.

## Refugees

However, to the government of Sudan, refugees are not only hostages to be bailed out by the UNHCR, but also a political trump card to manipulate Eritrean policy in favour of Sudan. About 80,000 Eritreans have returned home, most of them from Sudan and without any help from UNHCR. They were supporters of the EPLF which has become the government. Most of those left in Sudan are Moslems and belong to the Tigre, one of the two main ethnic groups in Eritrea. With a resident population of less than three million, Eritrea is a country of nine ethnic groups or nationalities.

According to a UNHCR employee who left Sudan in mid-December 1995, more than 120 Eritrean refugees were arrested by Sudanese security personnel in Kassala town not far from the Eritrean border. The authorities gave no reason to the relatives who dared to ask of the victims for the arrests.

Sudan accuses Eritrea of plotting against it with Uganda and Ethiopia, and with the connivance of Israel and the USA. Eritrea also accuses Sudan of similar conspiracies, alleging that it has used its Islamic fundamentalist influence on the *Al Islah* party within the Yemeni coalition government, and ignited the Yemen-Eritrean war over Hanish, the Eritrean islands in the Red Sea, in late December 1995.

### The role of Eritrea

The Tigre nationality, generally known as the Beni Amir, has its kin in Eastern Sudan. For most of the war for Eritrean independence from Ethiopia, many of the Eritrean Tigre, who like their Sudanese counterparts are traditionally suspicious of the Abyssinian highlanders, who are Christians (save the Jebertee), were behind the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). The ELF predates the EPLF in its struggle for Eritrean independence, but was defeated by a combined force of the EPLF and the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) in 1982. Some of the refugees in Sudanese settlements were victims of that war and still bear a grudge against the EPLF-controlled government.



Waiting for liberation train

In an attempt to accommodate all Eritreans and establish a broader base, the Eritrean government has provided ministerial posts to a couple of ex-ELF leaders and managed to attract some of their followers. Nevertheless, in the advent of Islamic revival, or fundamentalism (depending on how one wishes to view it), some Eritreans have joined the anti-government Eritrean Islamic Jihad (EIJ), an armed organisation. Despite the Sudanese governments emphatic denial, the National Islamic Front (NIF), the party of Dr Hassan El Turabi, which is currently ruling Sudan, is no doubt supporting the EIJ. There are reliable reports that Sudanese security officers have been discouraging Eritrean refugees from returning home, but persuading them to join the Islamist organisation, or any of the relatively secular ELF fronts of Abdella Idris or the ELF-RC, whose leader of 20 years, Mr Ahmed M. Nassir, was replaced democratically in October 1995 by Ibrahim M. Ali.

Eritrea has severed its diplomatic relations with Sudan, and subsequently sued the latter in international forums, such as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa and the European

Union - African Caribbean and Pacific countries (EU-ACP) at Brussels. Eritrea has even raised the issue in the United Nations. Since then, Sudanese efforts to strengthen the Eritrean opposition forces from the pool of refugees in Sudan have become overt.

In June 1995 Asmara hosted a conference of all the main Sudanese opposition parties who vowed to oust the NIF government in Khartoum. The Eritrean government is alleged by the Sudanese government of General Omar El Bashir of providing a training camp to the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) of Colonel John Garang, and radio broadcasting facilities to the National Democratic Alliance, the umbrella organisation for the major Sudanese opposition forces. Eritrea vehemently denies these allegations. President Isaias Afewerki told Richard Dowden, a British journalist, 'We are out to see that this [Sudanese] government is not there any more...we will give weapons to any one committed to overthrowing them.. *Al Mustaqbal*, an Arabic paper published in London stated, that President Isaias statement in *the Economist*, amounted to "a declaration of war".

Another Sudanese allegation which Eritrea dismisses as baseless, is military training provided to members of the Beja Congress Party, yet another opposition to the government in Khartoum. Like the Beni-Amir, the Hadendwa too have their kin (the Hedareb) in Eritrea.

As Eritrea was to Ethiopia an outlet to the Red Sea, the Beja land controls the Sudanese outlet to the Sea. If Khartoum and the rest of the country is cut off from its sea ports of Port Sudan and the ancient Suakin, the government of General El Baashir is liable to crumble, if only through shortage of oil.

If with the participation of the Beja force the Sudanese government fell, the Beja will have accomplished the mission and be redundant in Eritrea. The question is, like the Arab Mujahideen who returned from post Cold war Afghanistan, the Beja may, like the Afar (or the pre-1977 Somalia of Siad Barre) entertain the notion of struggling for greater land. But such a Beja land would have to be carved out not only from Sudan, but from Eritrea as well. Their current alliance could become a political time bomb to the power elite in Asmara in a way the Afar on the opposite side of the country are perceived to be.

The Eritrean government, despite its good intentions is not fully prepared to accept the returnees from Sudan for two reasons. First the country has been impoverished by the 30 years war for independence. Four years after independence, it has not yet managed to produce enough food for itself, despite relentless efforts. Thus, a sudden increase in the existing high level of unemployment, by adding a 20% to the current total population may destabilise the government. Secondly, also linked to the destabilisation factor, is the mutual suspicion between the EPLF authorities and the ELF-sympathisers within the returnees. These economic and political risks associated with the return of refugees from Sudan is a liability which Asmara finds it expedient to procrastinate.

#### Fourth Option?

It is clear that the UN, the OAU and some international NGOs, are striving to find long term solutions to the root causes of involuntary displacement of peoples through the processes of economic development and conflict resolution. The UNHCR, despite its ever expanding tasks and limited resources, has shown commendable flexibility when it broadened its mandate to include its active involvement in the rehabilitation process of ex-refugees in the countries of their origin. However, there is still a basic policy problem as illustrated by the situation of the Eritrean refugees in Sudan.

All three authorities to the tripartite agreement in Geneva in 1992 took part in a diplomatic exercise rather than a practical solution. As usual, the loser is the weakest party, the refugees who have hardly any say when their destiny is determined by politicians whose priorities are different from theirs. Do not people in similar predicaments in the world now deserve a stronger UNHCR or perhaps a different institution? The OAU is too poor and the rest of the capable world either is too busy or too indifferent to resolve the problem. The Eritrean official in charge, Dr Nerayo Teclamarium has claimed that his organisation, the ERRC, could transport, resettle and rehabilitate all the half million Eritrean refugees in Sudan within five years, if only he could raise \$350m. Is \$10m. a year for five years too much to ask from the G7 (worlds seven leading industrial countries), especially after their Cold War era involvement in the war in Eritrea left it in economic disaster?

#### Refugees

Eritrea is unlikely to speak out for the refugees because, as much as it is aware that it cannot guarantee a decent and sustainable existence for all the returning refugees, and probably thinks that publicising the issue will reflect badly on itself, as there is no legal obligation on Sudan to accommodate refugees who are wish to return to their country. The USA and particularly the UN, which could have

granted Eritrea its independence as early as 1950 and prevented the 30 year war, are responsible for the problem of Eritrean refugee repatriation.

#### Islamic fundamentalism

Soon after Sudan declared itself an Islamic State under divine laws (*the Sharia*), and deliberately undermined democracy and secularism as the bases of "good governance", development aid was cut, and Sudan was internationally regarded in a negative light. The West views Sudan as a breeding ground and sponsor for strands of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. Sudan was thus systematically isolated as a *pariah* in the society of nations, and was made "unattractive" to the international media, apart from some favourable representations in the Arabic press. More isolation means less publicity, and subsequently less attention from international organisations. This works against the interests of the refugees who are also suffering from the partial withdrawal of resources by the UNHCR.

However, whilst the three conventional solutions for refugee settlement are not working, in an urgent case such as that of the Eritreans in Sudan it is crucial that the international community renews its humanitarian assistance to Sudan in this respect, whilst still emphasising the need for Sudan to reform its human rights practices. In the meantime, donors of humanitarian aid to Sudan will need to formulate mechanisms that would guarantee the channelling of resources to the refugees more directly as opposed to the mere trickles that currently exist. This strategy would provide a fourth option in the apparent absence of any other workable solution at present.

- This article is dedicated to my friend and colleague Dr. Ahmed A. Karadawi who spent most of his adult life working for and with refugees and died in Sudan in November 1995. ■

**Berhane Woldegabriel is an Eritrean journalist living in London.**

**AFRICA**  
**WORLD REVIEW**

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2000 ISSN: 0961-7949  
Price: UK-£1.00; USA-\$2.00; Germany-DM5.00; Nigeria-N100; Ghana-c1.500; Zimbabwe-Z\$20; South AfricaR6; Liberia-L\$40; CFA Countries-cfa750

**WHICH WAY AFRICA?**

**The Challenge of Africa in Crisis**  
**Rethinking the Crisis in S. Leone**  
**Liberia: A Denial of the Obvious**  
**Ghana: Will Rawlings Leave after 19 years in Office?**  
**Eritrea: War For Unity**  
**Combating Racism in Europe**

This issue of AWVR is funded by  
Department for International Development (DFID)  
through Development Education Association (DEA)  
and

AWARDS FOR ALL

Africa World Review September-October 2000

## ERITREA

**ERITREA: War for Unity**

*Like other African states, there is no ethnic group that is unique to Eritrea. The ethnic groups in Eritrea can also be found in the neighbouring states. After independence the Aferwerki government vowed to radically transform the country to the level of Singapore and therefore asked for discipline and loyalty from its citizens. Above all, the government believes that 'national unity' is the gateway to self-reliance. It has a mission to achieve this objective but it is Eritrea's neighbours that have had to pay the price of the search for Eritrean 'national unity'. How this objective has pursued is the focus of this article.*

Since the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia began in May 1998, a number of causes have been postulated. The usual ones cited are the boundary issue, the deterioration of economic relations since the launch of the Eritrean currency, the Nafta, and national pride. While I agree that there is no single cause I also believe that the most important is the issue of national unity because it has two dominant ethnic groups.

The war has emanated from the Eritrean government's desire to fulfill its single most important objective - to unify the disparate ethnic groups of Eritrea. The number one and most important of the six goals of the National Programme of the ruling party - the PFDJ (1994) has been National harmony.

To create a strong Eritrean economy along the lines of Singapore the nine (or ten) ethnic groups must be 'united' and exhibit a level of commitment and dedication similar to the one that enabled them to win their independence.

Before the Italians colonised the area they named Eritrea, at least part of Eritrea was an extension of the Ethiopian empire whilst most of the lowlands looked to Sudan. Throughout thirty trying years, up to independence, the common enemy in the war for survival were the Ethiopian governments of Emperor Haile Selassie and Colonel Mengistu.

The experience of 60 years of Italian rule, followed by 11 years of British administration engendered the feeling in Eritreans that their exposure to western culture and administrative systems warranted their difference from the rest of that part of Africa. Ironically the colonisers felt (despite the 60 years) that Eritrea was in the same predicament as the surrounding countries. When the future of Eritrea was under debate in the late 40s both the foreign Ministers of Italy and Britain, Sforza and Bevin, proposed the division of Eritrea by uniting the predominantly Moslem lowland area with Sudan and the mainly Christian highland area with Ethiopia. However, this plan was



**Presidents Afewerki of Eritrea and Meles of Ethiopia**

defeated in the United Nations in 1949. After federation, as the Ethiopian grip on Eritrea became increasingly oppressive, the war was in effect a statement that Eritrea was indeed a historical entity rather than a historical accident.

The government is well aware of the fragile nature of the unity of the Eritrean State, and quite justifiably the primary aim of the government of President Isiyas, before and after independence has been national unity.

This objective has been emphasised by the President and members of his cabinet as well as the secretary of Eritrea's only legal party People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) at every opportunity at mass rallies and in their statements to local journalists. When the first Eritrean constitution which took 3 years and \$5m to draft was commissioned by the government, Dr Bereket Habteselassie, the Head of the Constitution Commission, emphasised that the Commission was totally independent and involved more than 1/2 million people in its deliberations.

"The only advice we received from President Isayas Afewerki, he admitted, was to uphold national unity"

National unity is also at the top of the PFDJ's programme, implying that the country needs to get united to defeat poverty, disease and illiteracy, which at present is below 20%. Even in peaceful years with good rain, Eritrea has never produced enough food to feed its estimated population of 4 million (20% of whom are in exile). Contrary to what most Eritreans wish to admit, it is (according to the figures of the World Bank) still one of the 10 poorest countries on earth. The paradox is that Eritreans in refugee camps in Sudan and those on social security in Europe do not like to admit this.

Once, in 1995 I had an opportunity to ask an old school friend, the Eritrean Minister of the Economy (now Foreign Minister) what his main problem was as a minister. Without hesitating, he replied, "How to convince our people that our economy is starting from zero." He went on to say, "I

## ERITREA

do not know from where we got this idea, maybe we (the EPLF) made them believe it or they formulated it themselves but they seem to believe that our economy will hit the roof in a very short time." To be fair to the minister, Haile Woldetensae, he was quoted in the local press Hadas Eritrea, as saying that the ousted Ethiopian regime (Dergue) had impoverished Eritrea so much that the Eritrean economy was starting from "below zero". What has national unity to do with this? Unconsolidated, Eritrea won the war for independence mainly because of the military competence of the EPLF, and because the fight against the Dergue had "united" the Eritreans, irrespective of their ethnic, religious and other cultural differences. They resolutely fought together and won. The government of President Isyas Afewerki wants to maintain the same kind of unity and commitment of the people in their fight for economic development. It seems that if the President realised that poverty is not as massive and as real a unifying factor as the ruthless troops of the defunct Dergue. What went wrong?

Eritrea, as mentioned earlier, has been historically divided (like Scotland) by geography into highlands and lowlands, the highlanders in Eritrea, being predominantly Christian (Eastern Orthodox), sedentary farmers, speaking Tigrinya, and looking away from Arabia- some even feel insulted to be referred to as Arabs. Those in the lowlands are predominantly Moslem, Tigré speaking and aspire to be Arabs to the extent that in the drafting of the constitution they fought tooth and nail to make Arabic an official language together with Tigrinya, the de facto official language of United Eritrea.

In order to discourage disparity between ethnic groups, the government proclaimed that there was no such thing as a national language, although during colonial times, Tigrinya and Arabic were both accepted as lingua franca. Instead, under this government, all languages are given equal importance, and elementary education is conducted in the local language, whilst secondary education is in English. Ironically, the effect of this has been to strengthen sub-national cultures on a local and regional basis.

Whilst Tigrinya is the language of elementary education throughout the high-

lands, the government has refused to include Arabic, which is not the first language of any Eritreans other than the Rashaida and the merchants who have migrated from Yemen, but for centuries has been the medium for Islamic education. It can be argued that one motive for the conflict with Yemen over the Hanish islands was to demonstrate to the people that Eritreans are not Arabs. However, western lowlanders do generally identify themselves as Arabs, and Arabic, which they opted to use during the federation period clearly unifies them as Moslems, and gives a common basis for their relations with their kin in Sudan.

Tigrinya has a common root in the old language of Ge'ez, from which Amharic, a major language of the Ethiopian highlands is also derived, and both are written in the indigenous African script fidel. In the late 1980s, the EPLF made an attempt to replace Arabic script and fidel with a Latin script, in order to create a uniquely Eritrean script (as happened in Somalia). This failed because it was deeply unpopular.

Eritrea is composed of nine or ten ethnic groups, depending on interpretation. All have kin outside the boundaries of the country. They were united in their struggle for independence, but 30 years was not long enough to melt so many ethnic groups into one national identity, particularly as the country is so poor, two of the ethnic groups are equally (50:50) dominant, and the infrastructure is not developed.

Therefore, as soon as independence was achieved and the hitherto common enemy, the Dergue, was removed, these different ethnic communities also started to identify themselves distinctively. Until then, the struggle for independence had overshadowed these distinctions. As a result, the government found it necessary to decide that there would be no political parties based on sub-national identity such as ethnicity or religion. On the other hand, on a local basis, the communities started to contribute on a voluntary basis for local and ethnically based projects. Elementary schooling in local languages bolsters such developments.

The President, who in his guerilla years saw every corner of Eritrea and its people realised that post independence unity is

not as cemented as he had wished. So it seems that in order to achieve his dream of a prosperous and developed Eritrea, along the lines of Singapore, an equivalent to the Dergue was necessary as an external threat that would guarantee the unity of the nation, to generate the commitment and stoic perseverance required by the programme for development.

A highly orchestrated and propagated "Macro economic" policy was laid out in 1996 and expectations were high, as an off-shore oil exploration was also under way on the Red Sea. This may have contributed to the armed conflict against Yemen for what finally became the struggle for the Hanish Islands. This was finally decided by international arbitration, which was settled in favour of Yemen.

Eritrea also engaged in skirmishes on the border of Sudan, in which western lowlanders were mainly deployed against their neighbours, and in a dispute with Djibouti, which involved the Afar people on both sides of the border. Whilst these disputes have been settled, it seems plausible that a strong motivation for engaging in war (at a time when all energies might have been better engaged in development) against its neighbors may have been to carve out an Eritrean identity of those people who have common ethnic and cultural ties in Yemen, Sudan and Djibouti.

Similarly, the border dispute with Ethiopia was intended to enhance the divisions between the highland Eritreans, who are culturally akin to the highlanders of Tigray. Unfortunately, the conflict took a turn that neither side was prepared for, and has been too destructive both in human and financial terms.

After 1991, when the TPLF and OLF in particular stood their grounds to let Eritrea (which was de facto independent) go through an internationally observed referendum, the traditional elite in Ethiopia - predominantly the Amhara - had on the whole, a different opinion. Subsequently, Meles, who is of the same ethnic group as Isyas, was regarded as a puppet of his former guerilla mentor. Isyas, so much so that he was dubbed the 'Eritrean Ambassador to Ethiopia' by some independent papers in Addis Ababa. So the 1998-2000 war, in effect,

ERITREA

brought him to the Ethiopian camp. Not as the Tigrean who was giving unwarranted economic advantage to Eritrea, to the extent that Eritrea once earned more hard currency from the sales of Ethiopian coffee than did its producer, but as the reclamer of Ethiopian pride, who had been previously humiliated by plucky little Eritrea. On the other hand, Isayas, who is known for his ability to control circumstances, seem to have miscalculated and, like most miscalculations, it misfired.

The outcome of the war, if at all, is that the Eritrean nation is shaken and traumatised, rather than solidified. According to a friend of mine, Habtegiorgis Abraha an ex-ELF combatant and now a human rights activist, the fact that over 70,000 people crossed to Sudan as refugees, instead of going east to the Sahel province, or even to the capital Asmara, clearly illustrates blood and historical ties are stronger than the social machinations of a state. He further noted that despite independence, the EFDJ (the ruling party) has continued to behave as a liberation front rather than a government.

Eritrea: What happens next?

Presently, Eritrea is inhabited by two types of citizens-former combatants of the EPLF and the rest of the citizens. As the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia involved more than 200,000 troops, the number of first class citizens baptised by war has increased. This new group is now raising questions against the authority.

Once peace is established, a solution could be found to the regional problems in the Horn. Notwithstanding the indispensability of friendly co-operation with Djibouti, Sudan and Yemen, the relations with Ethiopia could be based on mutual exchange of "idle resources" which they can afford to barter. For example, Eritrea has Red Sea coastline of 1200 kilometres. Therefore, it can afford to allow landlocked Ethiopia access to the coastal area. In return, Ethiopia, which is the aqueduct for the region, could allow Eritrea access to the Tekze river on a reciprocal basis, and systematically irrigate the Ansaba and the Gash Barka regions to ensure food security for the peoples of the two countries.

Any armed organisation worth its salt knows that it can shoot its way to power. As illustrated by State of Chad, today's government could be expelled from political power until it goes to the field as an illegal armed opposition and then shoots its way back to authority. Eritrea has already paid more than enough in blood to entertain this regrettable method. Most of Eritrea's current problems emerged from the government's unwillingness to work with the various opposition groups. It is time for the formation of a national government, consisting of the EPLF/PFDJ and all the opposition organisations. Moreover if armed organisations against neighboring governments (like the National Democratic Alliance of Sudan and the OLF of Ethiopia) continue to operate from Eritrea, and if conflict by proxy replace peaceful dialogue, its meager resources will be drained and there will be no peace between Eritrea and its neighbours.

Berhane Woldegabriel  
Freelance Journalist

