This paper was written for USCR by Hiram A. Ruiz, consultant to USCR and deputy director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement of the District of Columbia. It was edited by Virginia Hamilton, and produced by Koula Papanicolas of the USCR staff. The cover photograph is courtesy of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

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BEYOND THE HEADLINES

REFUGEES IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

The global refugee problem is at an important juncture. In the past, refugees were a temporary phenomenon. They came and went. . . . Now, however, they come and stay. . . . The world is tiring of this persistent emergency. . . . Many asylum countries are increasingly concerned that they may be left with a long-term presence and are pulling up the welcome mat.

W.R. Smyser, former United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees

In the Horn of Africa, the prolonged stay of thousands of refugees, most of whom have lived in exile since the late 1970s, is creating negative repercussions both for refugees and for countries of asylum. In Djibouti, a small country with few resources, observers say that the government’s resentment of the continuing presence of refugees has led to what they have termed less than voluntary repatriations and has made it increasingly difficult for new asylum seekers to gain recognition of their refugee status. Refugees in Somalia, mostly of nomadic background, are rapidly becoming urbanized because of their long stay in refugee camps larger than most Somali towns. Many observers worry that these refugees—particularly those born or raised in the camps—may be unable to return to their former nomadic way of life. In the Sudan, where there are nearly a million refugees, local officials in areas with large refugee populations complain that the refugees are a drain on resources, that they take jobs away from the Sudanese, and that they cause social problems in the towns and cities. The Ethiopian government, whose policies and actions have caused many of the problems and produced most of the refugees in the Horn today, tries to shift attention away from its refugee-producing policies to its returnees and incoming Sudanese refugees.

As 1988 begins, famine—which only three years ago contributed to the death of an estimated one million people and the displacement of hundreds of thousands more—once again threatens the people of the Horn. Already, our morning newspapers feature grim photographs of emaciated children and alarming headlines of impending disaster. A new wave of famine victims can only complicate the already difficult situation for refugees in the Horn.
To appreciate fully the extent of the current tragedy in the Horn of Africa, and to understand the complex situation facing refugees and famine victims—and the governments and people of the countries that host them—we must scrutinize more closely the issues involved. We must look to the area's history for an understanding of present conflicts; to government actions that cause people to flee their country and policies that enable drought to result in famine; to the difficult search for long-term solutions; and to the individual hopes and sorrows of the people beyond the headlines.

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The Horn of Africa, so named because on the map it resembles the horn of a rhinoceros, is located in the northeast corner of Africa and comprises three countries: Somalia, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. It is an area rich in history, culture, and in the diversity of its land and people. Stretching from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, the Horn encompasses highland forests, fertile fields, barren deserts, and long, sandy beaches. It is a mix of African and Arab, and home to Moslems, animists, Christians, and Jews. The Horn is a land of nomads and farmers, of music and poetry, of scorching heat and cool, starlit nights. It has witnessed the rise and fall of great empires, and the imposition of colonial rule. It was a battlefield of the second World War and remains a battlefield of the Cold War.

Today, the Horn is known most widely as a land of refugees. Its refugee population is currently said to be more than 1.3 million, including an estimated 430,000 Ethiopian refugees in Somalia; 677,000 Ethiopian refugees in the Sudan; 205,000 Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia; 13,500 Ethiopian refugees in Djibouti; and 15,000 Somali refugees in Ethiopia. There are an additional 140,000 refugees in Sudan from countries outside the Horn.

Many factors have contributed to their flight: Ethiopia's 1962 annexation of Eritrea; the 1977-78 Ogaden War and the reprisals against civilians that followed; fighting between Ethiopian government troops and Eritrean, Tigrayan, Oromo, and Somali insurgents; forced moves of people to new villages or other areas in Ethiopia; civil war in southern Sudan; and famine.

This mass uprooting of people has brought a new dimension of problems to the Horn. Countries that are among the poorest in the world suddenly have had to provide food, shelter, and health care for hundreds of thousands more. Much needed aid from the international community has brought with it numerous Western organizations to implement or monitor its distribution. National governments have had to learn to work with these agencies, which are often wary—not without cause—that aid intended for refugees might be diverted. People in the countries of asylum have generally welcomed their neighbors, but have become alarmed when their forests have been cut for firewood or when wages have dropped because surplus labor is available. Refugees have been separated
not only from family and friends, but also from their lands and traditional ways of life. As local people, governments, and international organizations grow weary, they begin to challenge the refugees’ motives for remaining in the countries of asylum, to question the amounts or types of aid given to them, and to complain about their impact on the country of asylum.

Understanding the problems of refugees in the Horn is difficult. Four countries are involved—the three countries of the Horn, plus the Sudan, which has received so many of Ethiopia’s refugees. The refugees come from different countries and a wide range of backgrounds. In some cases, refugees are crossing the same borders in opposite directions, e.g. Ethiopian refugees to the Sudan and Sudanese refugees to Ethiopia. Each refugee group has had different reasons for fleeing. And, the flight of famine victims to refugee camps in neighboring countries exacerbates existing problems and further confuses an already complex situation.

The search for solutions is no less difficult. Each of the three “durable solutions” pursued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)—voluntary repatriation, local settlement, and resettlement—poses problems. At this time, voluntary repatriation is impossible for many—or most—refugees because the situations that caused their flight continue. Local settlement is often not feasible because the countries of asylum do not have the resources, particularly arable land, necessary to make it politically feasible to absorb the increased population. Resettlement in a third country is an option available to only a very few. Countries offering resettlement have low quotas for admission of African refugees (the United States, for example, first set a 1987 ceiling of 3,500 for all of Africa, and then reduced that to 2,000). Some observers believe that even these limited levels of resettlement create more problems than they solve. They argue that some refugees leave their countries not for fear of persecution, but in search of a better life in the West. Nevertheless, the complexity of finding solutions cannot be allowed to deter us from the search. Where there are no generic solutions, people must be helped one by one.

The drought and subsequent famine that hit Ethiopia in late 1987 and that continue in 1988 also raise many concerns, including one that a new famine will divert attention—and aid—from refugees to famine victims, thus compounding the refugees’ current problems and slowing the search for solutions. Many people, however, are concerned about the nature of the famine itself. Why has it come so soon after the 1984-85 famine? Is the famine a result of natural phenomena, or have the policies of the Ethiopian government also been to blame? Can—or should—the West continue to come to the aid of the Ethiopian government?

It is difficult, in the Horn of Africa, to distinguish clearly between refugees and famine victims. The same policies that cause many refugees to flee their homes are, observers say, also to blame for the famine. Many refugees have been the victims of famine, and many famine victims share the refugees’ grievances. The
“For refugees, war and famine are not abstract concepts—famine is the pain of hunger; war is the tragic loss of loved ones.”
immediate needs of both groups are the same: food, water, shelter. However, while it is clear that the governments of the countries of asylum (and, at their invitation, UNHCR) are responsible for assisting refugees, a question arises concerning who is responsible for assisting famine victims when they cross international borders.

This paper seeks to promote an understanding of the complex situation in the Horn of Africa by presenting the historical context for many of the problems in the Horn today, detailing the specific circumstances that led each refugee group to leave its home, discussing the problems facing both refugees and governments in the countries of asylum, and presenting contrasting perspectives on the causes of famine.

To governments, international organizations, and concerned individuals, this paper recommends actions needed to improve the situation of refugees, the relations between refugees and local people, and the ability of countries of asylum to provide assistance.

The Horn in History

The conflicts that have produced many of the Horn’s refugees are not new. Some are extensions of unresolved disputes dating back decades, if not centuries. To understand the nature of these long-standing conflicts and their role in today’s refugee crises, we must examine the history of the Horn—and its people.

The Axumite empire During the first century AD, while the Roman empire was expanding its rule throughout the Mediterranean world and Europe, another empire—with its capital at Axum—arose in the northern highlands of present-day Ethiopia. Its people, descendants of the area’s original Cushitic inhabitants and migrants from the Arabian peninsula who crossed the Red Sea during the first millennium BC, were early converts to Christianity. The rise and expansion of Islam in the seventh century led to the Axumite empire’s gradual decline, and in the eleventh century a new power—the Amhara—assumed control and created the Abyssinian empire.

Somali and Oromo expansion At the time of Axum’s collapse, another people—the Somali—began a period of expansion. The Somalis’ exact area of origin and earliest history are still debated. Their ancestors may have originated in the south of present-day Ethiopia, then migrated to the northern coast of Somalia, where they intermixed, during many generations, with Arabs who had settled in coastal ports since pre-Islamic times. Somalis became fervent Moslems and identified closely with their culture’s Arab components.

The Somali, a nomadic people, did not have a centralized form of government and did not develop a nation-state such as Axum or Abyssinia. They developed
a socio-political system of large clan-families, each with a geographic base, and complex intra- and inter-clan relations. The Arab/Somali coastal ports thrived from trade between the Horn (including Abyssinia), Arabia, and the Orient; the northern port of Zeila and the eastern port of Mogadishu were, as early as the tenth century, visited by merchants from as far afield as Persia and India.

In 1525, a powerful Moslem Sultan mounted a Jihad—a holy war—against the Christian Abyssinian empire. With support from many of the Somali clans, including the Issa, his forces shattered the Christian army and occupied much of Abyssinia. In 1543, with Portuguese backing, the Abyssinians repelled the Moslem
The Ethiopian Feudal System

According to one scholar, feudalism in Ethiopia was the bedrock of the entire political and social system. Without the feudal structure the Shoa-Amhara would never have been able to control Ethiopia as long as they did. With its complex system of land tenure, Ethiopian feudalism created a hierarchy in which each individual, from emperor to peasant, had his place. In theory, all land belonged to the Emperor. In practice, however, the system of rist and gult rights left actual control over much of the land in the hands of semi-autonomous feudal lords. Rist—de facto ownership—was the inherited right to use of land; it applied both to nobles and peasants. Gult was the right to collect taxes on land and its produce.

Landless peasants were forced to work for rist holders. Even peasants who owned rist land, however, were subject to taxation by the gult holder. Thus, the use of the land became not only an instrument of social control, but also helped to perpetuate oppression and poverty. The Church was an active participant in the feudal system, holding extensive rist and gult lands and ensuring its followers’ acquiescence to the feudal system.

army. Abyssinia, however, became embroiled in religious turmoil, which opened the way for the expansion of yet another group, the Oromo, who swept through the region south of the empire and into Abyssinia itself. While the Oromo who remained in the south lived in quiet isolation for nearly three hundred years, some of those who settled in the north became active participants in Abyssinian political and social life. By 1780, Oromos numbered among the empire’s most powerful lords.

Ethiopian imperialism  The powerful Amhara King of Shoa, Menelik II, transformed the map of the Horn. Menelik, who was crowned in 1888, established a new capital, Addis Ababa, in recently conquered Oromo lands. This alienated not only the Oromo, but also the Tigrayans, who quite correctly perceived this as an indication that the Amharas would exclude them from power.

Menelik led a series of military campaigns during which many neighboring peoples—including Oromo, Sidama, and Somali—were subjugated, the area under the Empire’s control was more than doubled, and Ethiopia established itself as a formidable imperialist power in the Horn. (For clarity, the term Ethiopian empire will be used to refer to Abyssinia after the start of its imperialist expansion.) Menelik declared all land in the conquered territories property of the Emperor. He allocated gult rights (see Box on page 8) to these lands to the military leaders.
of his expeditions, to the administrators he sent to the regions, and to those leaders of the conquered peoples who pledged allegiance to him. These new landlords then sub-leased their lands to their officers, soldiers, and relatives, who would be responsible for making *gult* payments to them. The conquered peoples were also forced to provide free labor to the new landlords.

The conquered territories were, in effect, colonies of the imperialist Ethiopian state. The new Amhara landlords and administrators considered their own culture, language, and religion superior to that of their “subjects” and attempted to impose these upon them. For the colonized peoples, the bloodshed of the conquest, the loss of their lands, and the imposition of Amhara domination fostered an animosity toward Amharas and a desire for independence that remain at the heart of many of the conflicts and refugee issues in the Horn today.

**European colonialism** The European powers became interested in the Horn in the mid-nineteenth century, intensifying their involvement after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Britain, concerned by the French presence at Djibouti, strengthened its hold on the northern Somali coast, establishing the British Somaliland Protectorate.

Italy occupied the Red Sea ports at Assab and Massawa in 1882 and 1885 respectively, extended its control along the Red Sea coast, and established its colony of Eritrea. It also signed protectorate agreements with Somali clans along the northern Indian Ocean coast, and secured leases for lands in what is now southern Somalia from the Sultan of Zanzibar.

The Ethiopian Emperor, Menelik II, having enjoyed considerable military success in his military campaigns in the south, went on a diplomatic offensive against the Europeans. In 1891, intent not only on asserting the empire’s independence, but also on securing equal status for Ethiopia among the colonial powers, Menelik wrote to the European powers: “Ethiopia has been for fourteen centuries a Christian island in a sea of pagans. If Powers at a distance come forward to partition Africa between them, I do not intend to be an indifferent spectator.” Menelik soon translated his words into action. He attacked and defeated the Somali clans in the Ogaden.

In 1895, Italy, seeking to impose a *protector* status on Ethiopia by force, launched an invasion from Eritrea into the Ethiopian province of Tigray. To the shock of Europe, Menelik defeated the Italians. His diplomatic efforts enjoyed equal success. He negotiated plans for France to build a railway between Addis Ababa and Djibouti. France also reduced the size of the area it claimed, ceding lands inhabited by the ’Afar, who now found themselves split up among French Somaliland, Italian Eritrea, and Ethiopia. Thus, at the end of the nineteenth century, a number of imperialist powers—including Ethiopia—had taken control of the Horn of Africa, fragmenting most of its indigenous national groups with artificial borders.
The twentieth century  Menelik II died in 1913, and the power struggle following his death lasted 17 years. The eventual victor was a Shoan Amhara noble, Ras Tafari, who in November 1930 was crowned "Haile Selassie I, Conquering Lion of Judah, Elect of God, and King of Kings of Ethiopia." Haile Selassie introduced a new constitution that gave him absolute power, and he appointed loyal followers as governors and administrators in all the regions. He also sought to bring Ethiopia into the twentieth century: he built more schools, founded the Bank of Ethiopia, expanded health services, and forged links with the international community. He did not, however, attempt to end feudalism, the system that kept most Ethiopians living in abject poverty, nor the Amharas' domination of the empire's social and political structure.

Meanwhile, events in Europe were affecting the Horn. The rise of fascism in Italy led to a renewal of Italian expansionist ambitions. In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia. In August 1940, after declaring war on Britain and France, Italy invaded and captured British Somaliland. Its success, however, was short-lived. Within seven months, the British recaptured Somaliland, took Italian Somalia and the Ogaden, and, supported by Ethiopian guerrillas loyal to Haile Selassie, captured parts of western Ethiopia. Haile Selassie then took control of the Ethiopian resistance forces and, on May 5, 1941, successfully reentered Addis Ababa.

Toward Somali independence  After the war ended, the Allied leaders, needing to determine the future of Italy's former colonies, sent a UN commission to the Horn to study the issue. For Somalia, the commission recommended a period of trusteeship for the unified Somali territories—including the Ogaden—leading eventually to independence. Ethiopia, however, objected vociferously. Emperor Haile Selassie, following his exile and successful reentry into Ethiopia, had gained considerable stature as the leader of an independent Christian country that had been occupied by Axis forces during the war. The Allied leaders yielded to his wishes. Although Britain supported Somali unity, it turned over control of the Ogaden to Ethiopia in 1948. Said the noted historian, I.M. Lewis:

As the victim of fascist aggression, Ethiopia had naturally every right to the most considerate and generous treatment. But it was unfortunate that, in the process of satisfying her claims to reparation for the events of the past, protesting Somalis should be sacrificed and the collective Somali desire for national self-determination be cast aside almost as soon as it had achieved an articulate expression.

The UN General Assembly established an Italian trusteeship, under UN supervision, which ended in 1960, when Somalia became independent. British Somaliland was simultaneously granted independence, and the two former colonies united to form the new, independent state of Somalia. The new state refused, however, to acknowledge the borders it inherited—particularly the border with
Ethiopia—affirming that Somalia would not be complete until all Somalis, including those in the Ogaden, Djibouti, and northeast Kenya, were united.

The democratically elected, post-independence governments in Somalia soon slid into widespread corruption and nepotism, in part due to the pervasive effects of the complex clan system, which dominated Somali political life. In 1969, ostensibly responding to the corruption and disarray in the elected government, the armed forces took power, declared a Marxist revolution, and established a Supreme Revolutionary Council to head the new government. Somalia developed close links with the Soviet Union, which offered both military and nonmilitary assistance and sent a large number of advisors to Somalia. Somalia’s friendly relations with the Soviet Union ended in 1978, when the Soviets supported Ethiopia in the Ogaden War. Since then, Somalia has developed close ties with the West, particularly the United States.

Eritrea  Britain took over administration of the Italian colony of Eritrea in 1941. The UN commission visited Eritrea in February 1950. Despite strong Eritrean sentiment in favor of independence, it proposed an association with Ethiopia, though with a significant level of autonomy. As in the case of Somalia, the UN’s decision had less to do with self-determination than it did with superpower interests. The U.S. Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, made this clear in an address before the UN Security Council in 1952: “From the point of view of justice, the opinions of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless, the strategic interests of the United States in the Red Sea basin and considerations of security and world peace make it necessary that the country has to be linked with our ally, Ethiopia.”

The UN General Assembly adopted the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in September 1952. From the start, however, Haile Selassie’s representative in Asmera set out to undermine the authority of the elected Eritrean Assembly and to promote Ethiopian dominance. In 1962, the Eritrean Assembly voted to end federation, thus allowing Ethiopia’s full annexation of Eritrea. That vote, Eritreans claim, was taken under duress. “The assembly was surrounded by units of armed forces and police, and there were machine guns inside the building when the ‘vote’ was taken. Those who stayed away, or walked out in protest, were arrested and beaten.”

Revolution in Ethiopia  During 1974, the Ethiopian government’s inability to stop a separatist insurgency in Eritrea, coupled with criticism that Emperor Haile Selassie ignored a two-year drought that killed 200,000 to 300,000 Ethiopians, led to massive demonstrations by students, soldiers, and workers in the capital. Junior officers in the military gradually took control of the government and deposed Haile Selassie, who—after 45 years as Ethiopia’s emperor—died in detention in August 1975.
The National Movements

In Ethiopia, there are more than 70 languages and an indeterminate number of national or ethnic groups. The opposition of many national groups to the Ethiopian government's rule can be traced to the nineteenth century, when the Amhara-dominated Ethiopian Empire first conquered their homelands. Events since the second World War, particularly the international community's legitimization of Ethiopia's borders, have crystallized that opposition and laid the ground for the evolution of a number of national movements seeking either total independence or regional autonomy.

**The Western Somali Liberation Front**  Clashes between Somalis in the Ogaden and Ethiopian forces began soon after Somalia's independence. Ogadeni Somalis' demands for self-determination led to the formation of the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), which became a significant force in the Horn in the mid-1970s. The unrest following the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia brought the WSLF new backing from the Somali government, which had previously wavered in its support. Somali President Siad Barre's inability to negotiate successfully with Ethiopia about self-determination in the Ogaden led to Somalia's official recognition of the WSLF in late 1975.

From 1975, the WSLF successfully began attacking Ethiopian troops and establishing control over parts of the Ogaden. By 1977, with support from Oromo and 'Afar opposition groups, it claimed control of more than 60 percent of the Ogaden and was able to cut the rail link between Addis Ababa and Djibouti, a major economic blow to the Ethiopian regime. In September 1977, the WSLF, with clandestine support from Somali government forces, achieved its most striking victory: it captured the main town of Jijiga, only 100 kilometers from Harer, the Ethiopian military command center for the Ogaden.

In February 1978, Somalia openly joined in the fighting. By then, however, the Soviet Union had shifted its support to Ethiopia, which received massive Soviet and Cuban military assistance, enabling it to repel the Somali invasion. Somalia was defeated; the WSLF has not recovered from the blow. Although it has continued some guerrilla activity, it is not now a major force in the Ogaden.

**The Eritrean national movements**  Even before Ethiopia's 1962 annexation of Eritrea, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), the first in a series of Eritrean liberation groups, was formed by Eritreans studying or working in Arab countries. Support for the ELF—both within Eritrea and from neighboring Arab states—grew after 1962, but conflicts among its leaders weakened the group and opened the way for an Ethiopian army offensive in 1967. The ELF suffered major setbacks, and thousands of Eritreans went into exile in the Sudan. The internal dispute also led to the emergence of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) as the strongest national group.

The Eritrean national movement reached its peak in late 1977, when the
EPLF and ELF controlled 90 percent of Eritrea. However, conflict between the two groups enabled the Ethiopian army, with increased Soviet military assistance, to turn the tide against the EPLF/ELF and recapture much of Eritrea. By 1980, more than 70,000 people had died in the Eritrean conflict. Today, the ELF exists as a political organization active only among refugees, while the EPLF continues to be militarily involved in Eritrea, where it still controls much of the countryside. Through the Eritrean Relief Association, the EPLF sponsors relief programs in areas it controls. Some observers now believe that the EPLF is unlikely to achieve a full military victory. Therefore, twenty five years after Ethiopia’s annexation of Eritrea, the world’s longest civil war continues, with no end in sight.

*The Tigray People’s Liberation Front*  
Tigrayan opposition to Shoan Amhara rule began during the reign of Emperor Menelik II, in the late nineteenth century. In 1943, Tigrayan peasants rebelled against Ethiopian troops, but the bombing of the Tigrayan capital, Mekelle, by British warplanes defeated them. In 1958, further resentment arose when the Ethiopian government imposed Amharic as the official language in Tigray.

The Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) was formed in February 1975 with the twin political objectives of “national self-determination” and “people’s democratic revolution.” Though in its first years the TPLF was involved in battling other opposition groups, by 1978 it turned its attention to fighting the Ethiopian regime and implementing its social programs in Tigray. By introducing land reform and women’s rights in areas under its control, the TPLF won considerable support from peasants and women in Tigray. Between 1979 and 1982, the TPLF claimed to have extended its control to 85 percent of the Tigrayan countryside. The Ethiopian government has mounted several military campaigns against the TPLF, but has met only limited success.

*The Oromo Liberation Front*  
Oromos, who make up half the population of Ethiopia, see themselves as a nation colonized by the Amharas. The suppression of the Oromo language and the usurpation of their land by the Ethiopian government have long been a major unifying force among Oromos, whose resistance to Amhara rule has surfaced repeatedly in the last century. In 1965, an Oromo underground movement sprang up in Addis Ababa. Though it was crushed in 1967, many of its younger, more radical members went on to form the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a separatist organization calling for the establishment of an independent Oromo state.

The OLF has faced problems with Somalis. At times, it has worked closely with the WSLF and the Somali government, but at other points they have been in conflict. This is due, in part, to overlapping homelands, and to an affinity between some—but not most—Oromos and Somalis. The OLF’s traditional base of operations has been in the southern provinces, particularly Bale. However, the villagization program implemented in those areas during 1980-82 pushed the OLF into the northern regions of Hararge and Wollega, where they have recently scored successes and control some rural areas.
**Flight from Ethiopia**

During the last decade, nearly two million people in the Horn of Africa have abandoned their homes and sought asylum in neighboring countries. Many reasons have been given for the refugees’ flight: war, persecution, forced relocation, drought, famine. However, little in-depth research has actually examined the causes of each group’s flight. This is understandable—when large numbers of refugees suddenly arrive on the border, it is difficult enough just trying to meet their immediate needs for food, water, and shelter. However, the lack of a thorough understanding of the reasons people leave their homes impedes the ability to find long-term solutions once the emergency has passed. Without knowing the circumstances that prevailed in the refugees’ home area when they left, how can we determine when it is safe enough for them to return? Nevertheless, from the statements that arriving refugees make to UNHCR, government officials, aid workers, and the press, we are able to understand, at least in general terms, the major causes of these large-scale migrations.

Internal developments in Ethiopia, and the Ethiopian government’s policies and actions, are—directly or indirectly—responsible for the flight of most of these refugees.

**Persecution** The Ethiopian government, under the leadership of Mengistu Haile-Mariam, is widely regarded as one of the world’s most repressive regimes. The State Department’s human rights report for 1986 says that “Ethiopia’s record on human rights remains deplorable. Ethiopians have no civil or political freedoms and no institutions or laws to protect their human rights.” Amnesty International, in its 1987 report, expressed concern about reports of “widespread torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners.”

The Ethiopian government has ruthlessly stifled political opposition. According to a UN Commission on Human Rights report, “Widespread killings and mass arrests marked the period from November 1977 to mid-1978, when chiefs of kebeles [neighborhood associations] were publicly asked by Mengistu to sow ‘red terror’ against opponents of the government.” It has been reported that more than 5,000 (some reports have claimed 30,000) students and other dissidents were killed in Addis Ababa during that period—some even being forced to dig their own graves before being executed. Thousands more were reportedly arrested and tortured, or simply disappeared. Although the red terror eventually abated, its memory has lived on. A constant outflow of young, urban refugees attests to the fears that many who oppose the regime experience.

**Civil conflict** The Mengistu regime’s response to continued demands for regional autonomy has been much the same as that of Haile Selassie—to pursue
military solutions. Since the revolution, the Ethiopian government, which maintains the largest army in sub-Saharan Africa, has engaged in continuous civil war with one or more of the insurgent groups. The fighting has affected most regions of the country and has had a devastating impact on the people, the land, and the economy. The hundreds of thousands of refugees who have fled Ethiopia are only one consequence of the fighting. Many more have been internally displaced, and even those who remain in their villages face untold hardships. The civil wars result not only in the killing of many innocent civilians and the looting and burning of villages; they also bring the destruction of the land. Both government and rebel troops are said to burn crops and fields to prevent the other side from reaping any benefits from the land. Unfortunately, the farmers and their families are the primary victims of these practices.

The resettlement program One of the two most controversial and widely criticized of the Ethiopian government’s policies has been the “resettlement” program. According to the government, resettlement refers to the moving of large numbers of people from areas where the land can no longer support them, to areas where land is being underused. The Ethiopian government intensified the program in late 1984, ostensibly as its plan for assisting victims of the famine.

Critics say that the real aim of the resettlement program is to depopulate those areas of Ethiopia where the liberation fronts have most support in order to strengthen the government’s war effort against them. According to a report issued by Médecins sans Frontières, a French medical assistance agency that worked in Ethiopia until its expulsion from that country, “the resettlement program has nothing to do with humanitarian preoccupations and exists purely for military and political strategy.” Others disagree. A staff report submitted to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee states: “All donor governments, including the United States, have acknowledged that a long-term, well-planned resettlement program, on a voluntary basis, is justified. In fact, it was AID [the U.S. Agency for International Development], in the early 1970s under our assistance program to the government of Emperor Haile Selassie, who drafted the original plans and designs for many of the current settlements.”

A July 1987 news report in The Christian Science Monitor found support for this view: “Almost everyone in the capital city of Addis Ababa—from Western aid workers and diplomats to Ethiopian civil servants—says that resettlement can be an effective step in a much larger program to rehabilitate Ethiopia’s ravaged and eroded highlands. Analysts say that it is not a question of whether it should be done, but of how.”

Ethiopia resettled more than 800,000 people before the international outcry over the brutality of the program’s implementation led the government to halt it temporarily. Cultural Survival, a U.S.-based research organization that conducted a study on the resettlement program, states that 100,000 people died being
forcibly resettled. While many speculate that that figure is too high, there is no question that the resettlement program caused much suffering and led to a great many deaths. The extent of that suffering is described by Cultural Survival in its report, based on interviews with Ethiopian refugees who fled the country after being resettled. The report states that, of those refugees interviewed, “None... had been resettled voluntarily. They had been deceived or captured when taken. Nearly all with families had been separated from members of their family by the move... Accounts given of the trip south [to the resettlement sites] were consistent in reporting conditions of deprivation and life-endangering coercion. Water and food were distributed once a day if at all; vehicles were tightly packed and many people died en route.”

**Villagization** The Ethiopian government’s strongly condemned “villagization” program moves peasants from their scattered farms into new, centralized villages. Although the pace of villagization slowed following international criticism of its implementation, it is still being pursued. Unlike the resettlement program, which affects only some areas of the country, villagization is envisioned for Ethiopia’s entire rural population. According to Ethiopian officials, its purpose is to enable the government to provide better services—such as health care and education—to people in the rural areas by grouping them in accessible villages. Again, however, critics disagree. A July 1987 article in *The Christian Science Monitor* reported that “Many Western and Ethiopian observers see the real reason behind villagization as the government’s desire for firmer control over the rural population. Villagized people are required to attend frequent political meetings to hear the latest government ‘agitation’. . . . And the villages allow better access to potential military recruits.” Others say that the aim of the program is to “cut off peasant support for anti-government separatists.”

In areas where villagization has already been carried out, critics note, there is little evidence of the services that the government promises. This is not surprising, as the government has allocated virtually no financial resources for its mammoth undertaking.

As with the resettlement program, it is the way in which villagization has been implemented that has drawn most severe criticism. In northern Hararge region, one of the first areas to be villagized, government troops and local militia were reportedly brutal in forcibly moving peasants from their lands to the new villages. One aid official working in Addis Ababa told USCR that the “zeal” which the local militia displayed in forcing the peasants to move was “unpardonable”. He added that the major problem with the program is that it tried to go “too far too quick.” The forcible imposition of villagization in Hararge led 33,000 refugees from that area to flee to Somalia.

**Famine** Among the most severe criticisms levelled at the Ethiopian government are those concerning its role in the 1984-85 famine. In January 1986, *The
World Today published an article containing the following condemnation:

A prudent and concerned government would have needed nothing more than to rise from bed each morning and look at the sky to realize, by the summer of 1984, that Ethiopia was in trouble. Foreign relief workers began to send back to their headquarters in Addis Ababa reports of the devastation done by the drought, and of the growing numbers of starving peasants. . . .

But in the absence of attention to the issue by the government of Ethiopia . . . neither Western governments nor the Western press were immediately aroused. The Ethiopian government was preoccupied to the exclusion of all else with preparations for the . . . celebration of the tenth anniversary of the 1974 revolution.

By the time that the Ethiopian government acknowledged the drought and famine, four to five million people were at risk of starvation.

Throughout the relief operation within Ethiopia, Western governments and aid agencies accused the Ethiopian government of obstructing rather than facilitating their efforts. The World Today noted, “There were never enough [trucks] to clear the ports of the 100,000 or so tons of grain that began arriving monthly from January [1985] on. Predictably, much grain was lost to spoilage. . . . Frantic Western efforts to get the Ethiopian government to mount an emergency airlift or overland convoy brought no adequate response. . . . This meant that during the critical first half of 1985 it was impossible to get food to most of those in need.” In addition, Western donors were annoyed that the Ethiopian government gave almost no public recognition to the immense Western relief effort, while bestowing lavish praise on the Soviet Union for its minimal assistance.

The 1984 drought, and subsequent famine, displaced many hundreds of thousands within Ethiopia and sent many others into neighboring countries. An estimated 100,000 went to Somalia, 10,000 to Djibouti, and more than 300,000 to the Sudan. The number of deaths attributable to the famine is not known, but some estimates put the figure at about one million. There are, however, many reasons people starve, and drought—according to some critics of the Ethiopian regime’s policies—is but one of them.

The causes of the 1984-85 famine, and the human tragedy it wrought, have been the subject of intense political debate. As one well-known observer of developments in Ethiopia says, “famine is usually an indication that governments or elite groups are extracting too much food from the countryside with too little compensation to those producing the food.” He adds that “the most significant causes of famine in Ethiopia were official government policies . . . both agricultural and military . . . [that] refugee farmers report made it impossible for them to produce food for their families let alone surpluses to sell.”

The current course of Ethiopia’s agricultural policies has been evolving since
the 1974 revolution. Within months of coming to power, the new regime began to turn Ethiopia into a socialist state. On March 4, 1975, it nationalized all rural land and formed "peasant associations" to enforce its policies—the first step towards collectivization of farming throughout the country. Those peasants who owned land were angered by their loss of ownership; however, it was the landless peasants outside the Amhara highlands who were most indignant. A century earlier, they felt, their land had been stolen by the Amhara empire. In 1974, they hoped the revolution would return their land to them. It didn't. Instead, the land was nationalized, leaving the peasants feeling that their land was still controlled by Addis Ababa.

During the first two years following nationalization, farmers continued to plant, but kept more of their produce for themselves or sold it to private traders. According to Cultural Survival, "After 1977, when the government's ability to enforce sale of produce to the state-run Agricultural Marketing Corporation increased, however, many farmers simply did not plant extensive areas in crops for fear of expropriation." Peasants were further affected by subsequent government policies. Peasant associations required farmers to work on state-owned farms, to contribute their labor on projects such as building houses for the militia, to attend regular association meetings, and, finally, to pay ever-increasing taxes. U.S. government officials say that "Ethiopia's agricultural policies provide no production incentive for the peasant farmer—the source of ninety percent of Ethiopia's agriculture production. . . Consequently, total agricultural production has stagnated since 1980." In order to pressure the Ethiopian government into raising the artificially low prices for agricultural products and freeing farmers to sell what they grow at market rates, both the European Community and the World Bank are withholding development aid worth $250 million from Ethiopia.

In mid-1987, a drought that one U.S. official termed "as serious or even more serious" than the drought of 1984, hit Ethiopia, and the issues raised by the 1984-85 famine are again being debated. Now, once again, five million people in Eritrea and Tigray are facing the terror of famine. The international community, led by the United States, has taken steps to get food to the affected areas (both government and rebel-controlled), in order to avoid starvation and large-scale population movements to other areas of Ethiopia or to the Sudan. Initially, the Ethiopian government cooperated with the international community's famine relief effort by providing full information on the situation and not interfering with private groups working in the country. By mid-November, 1987, however, U.S. officials were indicating that Ethiopia was not doing enough to avert another disaster.

The relief effort was dealt a severe blow on October 23, 1987, when the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) destroyed 23 UN trucks and 450 tons of food—enough to feed 45,000 people for one month. A few days later the
EPLF attacked a military convoy and then a group of commercial truckers. The EPLF has told USCR that it has not changed its policy of allowing free passage of relief supplies, but claims that the Ethiopian government abuses this policy by using relief convoys as a cover for transporting military supplies. The October 23 convoy, however, was carrying food—and its loss is already being felt. On November 14, 1987, the Washington Post reported that the international relief effort appeared to be failing, as large numbers of drought victims had begun migrating on foot in search of food. Four days later, the Post reported that the Ethiopian government had closed the main road between Asmera and the Tigrayan capital of Mekele. According to the director of AID’s disaster relief office, “This is not a situation where there is a lack of resources from the donors... There is a lack of political will on the part of the combatants in this 25-year-old struggle to provide the necessary safe passage.”

The roads have reopened and relief convoys are making their way to Mekele, but the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) has refused to guarantee the relief trucks’ safety, so food is not reaching many TPLF-controlled areas. According to one aid worker, “There is a perverse game between the government and the rebels to make aid not work, unless, of course, they can turn it to their advantage.”

As of January 1988, enough food aid has been sent or pledged to last Ethiopia through April. More, however, is needed. According to the UN official in charge of coordinating the emergency relief effort in Ethiopia, “It will take five months for a food shipment to get here if it is pledged this week. If we don’t get the pledges now, there will be a break in the [food] pipeline.”

In the United States, despite concern for the fate of the people affected by the famine, there are those who question to what extent the West can or should continue to aid Ethiopia, when that country’s government continues to pursue policies that are seen as at least partly responsible for the problem. As U.S. officials have said, “Agricultural policies cannot compensate for a lack of rain, but appropriate farm policies can help generate surpluses in good years that will meet deficits in bad years.”

The question of whether humanitarian food aid itself directly or indirectly benefits the government is hotly debated. Many in the West cannot support denial of food to the hungry. An Irish missionary in Addis Ababa told Time, “If you can stomach thousands of children dying for lack of food because you don’t like the government, that is your problem.” But, he added, “My problem is to feed them all, children, the parents, the aged, the young, wherever they may be.” Another observer stated that food aid “may indeed help a corrupt and totalitarian regime, but you cannot ignore the fundamental necessity of life.”

There are, however, other, very different perspectives. Cultural Survival’s report
concludes with a scathing condemnation of the Ethiopian government and a stern warning to Western aid agencies:

If the West is willing to feed starving Ethiopians without asking how they came to be in that condition or evaluate whether Western assistance programs alleviate those conditions, then they will face a monumental task in the future. The government of Ethiopia is establishing a social and economic system that will produce starving people for generations to come. . . . The provision of ‘humanitarian’ assistance, with no questions asked, helps the Ethiopian government get away with murder.

Refugees and the Countries of Asylum

The response of refugee-receiving countries in the Horn has, by any standard, been extremely generous. The fact that these countries, among the poorest in the world, opened their doors to hundreds of thousands of refugees in their time of need must be recognized and applauded. Now, however, the welcome is wearing thin. The refugees’ prolonged stay in the countries of asylum is affecting all concerned: refugees, local people, and the governments themselves. Each refugee group and each country is responding differently.

Ethiopian Refugees in Somalia

According to the Somali government, there are 840,000 refugees in Somalia. This figure is widely disputed. There is evidence to show that more than 317,000 of these—perhaps as many as 400,000—have returned to Ethiopia. Somalia’s continued denial of this is due to its economy’s dependence on the aid that it receives for refugee assistance. That the international community, including UNHCR, has allowed food to be sent for refugees who are no longer there is an ironic reflection of the complex politics of aid.
Refugees in Somalia are at a crossroads. Staying on in the camps, while not easy, has its benefits: free food, water, education, and health care. However, it also has its costs: among them, the loss of a way of life. Many have left the camps and returned on their own to the Ogaden and their former nomadic life. Others, particularly Oromo farmers, are now taking advantage of an official voluntary repatriation program to return to their homeland in southern Ethiopia. Those remaining in the camps, however, face a problem that could seriously affect their lives. Their prolonged stay is transforming a nomadic population into a sedentary, urbanized one.

Refugee camps in Somalia have populations ranging between 10,000 and 30,000. Few towns in Somalia or the Ogaden have such large populations. Nomads whose lives once revolved around the search for water for their animals now need only walk to the nearest set of water taps. Boys who once learned the art of tending to camels now complete their education in the camp school and look forward to a job in the city.

Refugees who were once farmers also face problems as a result of their stay in camps. As Somalia has little arable land for them to work, they sit idly and collect rations, while their children fail to learn traditional skills. Now, some farmers are going home. Although the Somali government initially resisted the farmers’ efforts to return officially, since December 1986 it has actively cooperated with UNHCR in a voluntary repatriation program. As of September 1987, a total of 3,388 refugees had left Somalia officially and returned to Sidamo province in southern Ethiopia. UNHCR expected another 1,500 refugees to return by the end of 1987, and says that up to 10,000 more have expressed interest in repatriating. Each returnee family has been promised food for one year and an assistance package which includes agricultural tools, seeds, two cows, and 12 goats. The Ethiopian government is providing land and offering an “orientation” program to familiarize the returnees with the changes that have taken place in Ethiopia since their departure. The UNHCR offices in both Somalia and Ethiopia consider this exercise very important, as they hope that a successful voluntary
repatriation program here may give impetus to such programs in other countries. The Ethiopian government, meanwhile, is said to value the program because it diverts attention from its role in producing so many of the Horn's refugees.

Although the experience of each refugee hosting country is unique, developments in Somalia since the start of the 1978 refugee influx serve as a good example of the complex social, economic, and political upheavals associated with large-scale refugee programs.

The first refugee crisis  The exodus of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Ethiopia into Somalia began in 1978, following Somalia's defeat in the Ogaden war. (See Box, page 12) There had been earlier arrivals: Oromos who had fled fighting between the OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) and Ethiopian troops in 1976, and war refugees who had entered Somalia as the Ogaden conflict escalated in 1977. It appears, however, that reprisals by victorious Ethiopian troops against the Somali and Oromo population of the Ogaden and southern provinces sparked the mass outflow of refugees.

The refugee influx continued into 1981, exacerbated by Ethiopia's implementation of the villagization program in Bale beginning 1978, and by drought in the Ogaden during 1979-80. Most of the refugees were nomads of the Somali Ogadeni clan, although a substantial number were Oromo (both nomads and farmers). The Somali government, which continued to claim the Ogaden as Somali territory, initially received the Ogadeni Somalis not as foreign refugees, but as displaced Somali nationals, and attempted to assist them on its own. This soon proved to be far too large a task for Somalia's limited resources, and, in September 1979, it appealed to UNHCR for international assistance (a request which necessitated that the government redefine Somalis from the Ogaden as Ethiopian refugees). Unfortunately, it took six months before Somalia's request for aid was set in motion, and even longer for substantial help to arrive. During this time, 1979-80, Somalia was, according to the Refugee Policy Group, "arguably the worst refugee situation in the world, with reports of refugees dying of malnutrition-related diseases and even starvation in the refugee camps."

Despite praise for its hosting of such a large refugee population and recognition of the burden the refugees posed, the Somali government also came under criticism. Some observers believed that the government was allowing refugee relief aid to become an essential component of Somalia's economy. Others criticized the widespread corruption: "The general poverty of the indigenous population and the ad hoc character of the National Refugee Commission and other government agencies dealing with the refugee problem," said Cultural Survival, "contributed to the misuse and even outright stealing of food and medical supplies intended for the refugees."

The numbers game  The issue of just how many refugees there were proved
controversial almost from the start. In 1981, the Somali government claimed there were 1.3 million refugees in the camps and over 700,000 more spontaneously settled in the countryside. Given that the population of the Ogaden in 1976 was estimated at between 500,000 and a maximum of one million, it is not surprising that these figures were widely rejected by the international community. A UN survey carried out in 1981 indicated a probable camp population of between 450,000 and 620,000 (no estimate was made of those living outside the camps), but the Somali government rejected the findings. In early 1982, a "planning figure" of 700,000 was "negotiated" between the Somali government and the Secretary General of the United Nations. This figure, which even at the time was considered too high by some aid agencies and donor countries, remained the official population of Somali refugee camps until further influxes in 1984 and 1985 led to its being raised to 840,000.

Somalia, a poor country with few resources, has had strong reasons for insisting on an inflated figure. Food aid for refugees represents a substantial increase in its available resources. Observers say that surpluses created by food that comes in for refugees who have left can be distributed to poor Somalis, or can be used to offset military expenses by feeding the army, or can help to line the pockets of government officials. Why UNHCR has failed to end this is not clear. It may be that, by taking too strong a stand on this issue, UNHCR fears it may be asked to leave, thus leaving at risk the refugees who are there. Also, UNHCR may not be under the kind of pressure that might be expected from donors. Some observers argue that Somalia's strategic importance to the West—due to its location at the entrance to the Red Sea and next door to Soviet-backed Ethiopia—has made donors ambivalent about the extent to which to challenge the numbers issue.

However, the most disturbing aspect of the whole numbers game is that UNHCR in Ethiopia has detailed information indicating that 317,000 refugees, and perhaps as many as 400,000, may have returned to Ethiopia. In fact, since 1981, UNHCR in Ethiopia has spent more than $43 million dollars to assist refugees who have returned from Somalia.

Ethiopian refugees began returning spontaneously from Somalia to Ethiopia in 1980, even as the influx into Somalia continued. By 1984, the League of Red Cross Societies, which was implementing UNHCR's program of assistance in the Ogaden, had registered 317,000 refugees who had returned from Somalia. Despite the League's detailed analysis of the returnee caseload, some knowledgeable observers argue that their figures, too, may be inflated.

Between 1985 and February 1987, another agency registered a further 194,000 returnees in the Ogaden (bringing the total returnees registered to 511,000), but because UNHCR in Ethiopia questioned the registration process for this latter group, it estimated the actual total of returnees since 1980 at around 410,000. Based on this, USCR estimates the number of refugees in Somalia at 430,000.
Faduma, her husband, and their 7 children are ethnic Somalis from the Ethiopian village of Borale. They fled to Somalia in 1985 when the Ethiopian government began to implement its villagization program in her area. Although Borale is only a week's walk from the refugee reception center at Tug Wajale, it took them almost a month to get there because of the young children. At Tug Wajale, they found a crowded and unsanitary campsite. Luckily when a new camp was opened at Daawala, Faduma's family was among the first to be moved. Faduma told USCR: "If there is peace, and if there is a possibility of going back home, I would like that—but not while things remain the same."
The 1984-85 and 1985-86 refugee influxes  The reasons for the 1984-1985 influx into Somalia's northwest and Gedo regions are not clear. Many observers believe that those who went to Somalia during this period were forced to leave their homes by the famine that followed the 1984 drought in Ethiopia, while others argue that villagization and armed conflict between Oromo and Somali insurgents were at least partly to blame. It is also difficult to know just how large the 1984-1985 influx was, although over 100,000 names were added to the official refugee population. While the Somali government, UNHCR, and donor governments argued over how many of these people were actually new arrivals (there were suspicions that many were from existing refugee camps), whether they were refugees or drought victims, and where they should be accommodated, there was an outbreak of cholera. More than 1,000 people died during the epidemic, though the total could have been much higher given the appalling conditions at Gannett, the site where the refugees were encamped on the outskirts of the northern city of Hargeisa. However, through the efforts of the Somali government's Refugee Health Unit, and a quick response from the international community, a tragedy of even worse proportions was averted.

Although Gannett was subsequently closed and the refugees moved to another new camp, problems continued. To prevent new arrivals from heading to Gannett, the Somali authorities established a reception center at Tug Wajale, only a few kilometers from the Ethiopian border. Tug Wajale quickly became very overcrowded and concern arose that the unsanitary conditions there would lead to another health crisis. Despite pressure from UNHCR and the international community to move the refugees to a better site farther away from the border, for many months the Somali government insisted that the refugees remain there. The government finally yielded to international concern and pressure, and the majority of the refugees at Tug Wajale were moved to a new camp at Daawaali. At the peak of the 1985-86 influx into Tug Wajale, the Somali government estimated that there were over 80,000 new arrivals. However, the move to Daawaali permitted a count to be carried out. It showed that the actual number of new arrivals was only 33,000.

In 1987, the Somali government agreed to participate in a census of the refugee population. The first stage of the census, aerial photography of all the refugee camps, has been completed. The next phase involves not only a count of the refugees, but also a socio-economic survey intended to clarify the refugees' level of self-reliance. Based on the result of the census and socio-economic survey, UNHCR plans to make a determination of the refugees' level of need, and assist accordingly. Giving different amounts of aid according to the level of self-sufficiency attained in each camp or by each family—"differential rations"—could potentially reduce the total amount of food aid needed for refugees in Somalia. But some observers believe that, ultimately, the government of Somalia will not cooperate with the proposal.
At the 38th session of UNHCR’s Executive Committee, in October 1987, the Somali government announced that “those refugees who could substantiate their self-sufficiency could apply for citizenship.” This could indeed further the search for durable solutions for refugees in Somalia.

Detained in exile There remains another very small group of refugees in Somalia whose plight warrants the attention of all those concerned with human rights. They are the refugees who are detained in Shelembod camp, near the coastal city of Merca. Their problems reflect yet another aspect of refugee crises—what happens when refugees enter countries of asylum that are hostile to them.

The refugees in this group, most of whom are Amharas, are denied the rights and freedoms that other refugees in Somalia are accorded. Shelembod camp was created in 1982 to house Ethiopian refugees who for several years had been imprisoned in Somali jails. Although many from the original group of 73 refugees who were transferred from prisons to this camp when it opened have been resettled in third countries, more than 360 refugees remain in Shelembod—some have been there for up to five years. Few are willing to return to Ethiopia, and local settlement in Somalia is unlikely since the government of Somalia apparently believes these refugees cannot be allowed to move freely within the country. A USCR Issue Brief published in October 1987 recommends that the governments of the United States and of other countries willing to help offer to resettle these refugees in order to end their plight.

Ethiopian Refugees in Djibouti

Djibouti has a population estimated at between 300,000–430,000, and a delicate political balance between its two main national groups, the Afar and the majority Somali Issas. Its government maintains a neutral stance in the Somali-Ethiopian conflict. However, its vital rail and trade links with Ethiopia require that its relations with that country remain on particularly good terms.

Despite a 60 percent unemployment rate, the Djibouti government says that the country is a magnet for so-called “economic migrants” from Somalia and Ethiopia. These people, officially regarded as illegal aliens, number between 50,000 and 150,000, or roughly ten to thirty percent of the population of Djibouti. (In the absence of any official figures, estimates vary widely.) The government blames them for many of the country’s economic and social problems. It claims that they work for low wages and take jobs away from Djiboutians, causing Djibouti’s high rate of unemployment. Since they work unofficially, they do not pay taxes, but they do use government services, which causes a strain on resources.

The presence of these aliens seriously complicates the situation for refugees in Djibouti. Most Djiboutians, including many government officials, do not dif-
differentiate between refugees and illegal aliens; therefore, not only are the refugees’ unique reasons for being in Djibouti overlooked, but they too are blamed for many of the problems that the government says the large numbers of illegal aliens create.

Djibouti has grown weary of its role as host to the refugees, many of whom have now been there for ten years. It sees them as an extra burden it neither needs nor wants. This attitude has prevailed since the early 1980s and has shaped the government’s policy and actions towards refugees both rural and urban.

**The rural refugees** Somalia’s defeat in the Ogaden war, and the reprisals that the Ethiopian authorities reportedly took against the population of the Ogaden, caused a massive flow of refugees not only into Somalia, but also into Djibouti. The influx, comprised mostly of rural Somali Issas from northern Hararge region, began in 1977—the year of Djibouti’s independence from France—and reached an estimated 45,000 by late 1978. Their arrival not only posed a severe strain on Djibouti’s resources, but disrupted the balance between the country’s two national groups and potentially threatened its important relations with Ethiopia. Most of these rural refugees were placed in two camps, Dikhil and Ali Sabieh, each with a population of over 15,000.

Djibouti received substantial help from the international community, through UNHCR, in assisting the rural refugees. However, by 1983, the Djibouti government had grown impatient with the problems it felt they were imposing. That year, Djibouti and UNHCR began a repatriation program aimed primarily at the rural refugees. The government stated that because it believed the situation that had caused their flight no longer existed, and because Ethiopia had declared an amnesty for all refugees, it was therefore safe for them to return. Between September 1983 and mid-1984, 15,000 repatriated under UNHCR auspices.

The repatriation program was widely criticized. Press reports alleged that refugees were intimidated into “volunteering” for repatriation, and UNHCR was accused of ignoring the coercive measures taken by Djibouti officials. In particular, the government officer in charge of the refugee camp at Ali Sabieh had, according to statements given by refugees to the Refugee Policy Group, “applied a great deal of pressure and coercion on the refugees, in the form of arrests, jailings, and threats, to encourage them to go back to Ethiopia.” The 1984 drought in Ethiopia forced an end to the repatriation program; by that time, however, Ali Sabieh camp had been closed, and the refugee population in Djibouti had been reduced to 17,000.

The 1984 drought in Ethiopia brought a further influx of 10,000 rural people into Djibouti. These new arrivals were decreed to be drought victims, not refugees. Although they were offered temporary assistance by the Djibouti government, UNHCR, and the international community, it was made clear that they were expected to return to Ethiopia as soon as possible. In late 1985, assistance to
this group was terminated, their camp was closed, and most went back to Ethiopia. That these people were categorized as drought victims, apparently without consideration of whether they had other reasons for fleeing Ethiopia, was seen by some observers as a sign that Djibouti—and the international community—was growing weary of long-staying refugee populations.

Although the rural refugee population was halved by the 1983-84 repatriation, the Djibouti government was anxious for the remaining refugees to leave. In July 1986, it issued a circular stating that Djibouti did not have the resources to continue hosting a large refugee population, that the reasons causing the refugees to leave Ethiopia no longer existed, and that the refugees should therefore "no more be considered as refugees." It then announced a new repatriation program. The circular led to fears among both refugees and concerned observers of a repetition of the coercion reportedly used in the 1983-84 program. Nevertheless, refugees from Dikhil did begin to sign up for repatriation, albeit in small numbers.

Compared with the 1983-84 repatriation, during this program—which continues as of January 1988—there have been relatively fewer reports of refugees being intimidated to register for repatriation. Both UNHCR in Djibouti and high-ranking Djibouti government officials have given USCR their assurances that the current repatriation is totally voluntary. Many observers agree. However, an article in the Canadian magazine Refuge reported that the Commissaire of Dikhil, the government officer in charge of Dikhil camp, has used various methods of harassment to intimidate refugees into registering for repatriation. The report said that "there were frequent visits by parties of soldiers to the camp in the small hours of the morning, opening tents and shouting that people must leave," and added that "water was shut off in the camp for three days.” The report on which this article was based was challenged by UNHCR.

UNHCR, anxious to assure the voluntary nature of this repatriation program following criticisms of its role in the 1983-84 program, has closely monitored the entire repatriation process, from the time refugees register until they arrive in Ethiopia. UNHCR Djibouti staff have accompanied every repatriation train until its final destination in Ethiopia, where UNHCR Ethiopia staff take over monitoring of the process. The returnees are given substantial material assistance by UNHCR in the hope that the generous aid package—including animals and a year's food rations—will encourage others to sign up for repatriation. Both UNHCR and independent observers have stated that the returnees have not faced problems with the Ethiopian authorities upon their return.

Although the current repatriation program has generally been considered successful, only a limited number—3,490 as of October 1987—of the estimated 15,000 rural refugees at Dikhil camp have repatriated. Government officials and those familiar with the refugee program in Djibouti believe it is unlikely many more will leave voluntarily. They say that many of the refugees derive considerable
income from their involvement in black market trade with Ethiopia or from having a family member work in Dikhil or in Djiboutville. Besides their food rations, many of the refugees receive medical care, and primary education is provided for their children; Dikhil refugee camp—which has so many permanent structures that it is in effect an established town—has electricity and other amenities, such as a library.

Something very important is missing from this argument, however: the rural refugees' point of view. While it cannot be denied that the refugees have a higher standard of living than they would probably have in Ethiopia, neither can it definitively be stated that this is their only reason for not returning. The refugees are undoubtedly aware of continuing human rights abuses in Ethiopia; of the general instability caused by on-going civil wars, drought, and famine; and of the problems associated with the villagization program in the region they come from. It would be quite reasonable, therefore, to assume that these factors might also influence the refugees' continued stay.

The urban refugees Individual refugees, the so-called urban or political refugees (as opposed to the rural refugees), have also sought asylum in Djibouti since 1977. Mostly, they are educated young men who have fled because of actual or feared political persecution in Ethiopia, or to avoid conscription by the Ethiopian military. At the same time, because refugees usually make rational choices, many of them may also be influenced by the prospect of better opportunities, i.e. jobs, further education, or resettlement in a third country. However, it is this—the search for better opportunities—which the Djibouti authorities and UNHCR appear to believe is the urban refugees' primary motivation. Others strongly disagree. The apparent predisposition on the part of the Djibouti government to believe that many of those who seek political asylum are in fact economic migrants seems to be an important factor in the government's rejection of many asylum applications.

Between 1982 and 1986, an established procedure existed for urban asylum seekers applying for recognition of their refugee status. While the system worked well on paper, the reality of the procedure was quite different. After being interviewed, asylum seekers could wait in the transit section of Dikhil for months or even years before their cases were decided. The eligibility committee would meet infrequently and at short notice. Corruption was widespread and often only those with money or those women who succumbed to sexual pressure would gain approval for identification papers. Although those whose applications were rejected could appeal, many chose not to do so. Those who did appeal, and were rejected, were expected to leave the country, although in reality they usually stayed—but without any identification papers. Officially, these people became illegal aliens.

This is where the major problem lies. The government of Djibouti has a policy
of deporting illegal aliens, and police often carry out round-ups and forcible deportations. Undocumented asylum seekers or those whose applications for refugee status have been rejected are thus subject to deportation as illegal aliens (although those with enough money to pay bribes have been able to buy their way out). In mid-1986, the government stopped the asylum application process altogether.

In December 1986, a tragic incident focused attention on Djibouti’s forcible deportation of persons it considers illegal aliens, and threatened the positive response that the new refugee repatriation program initially received. A group of 125 Ethiopians who were arrested in Djiboutiville and declared to be illegal aliens were locked in a metal freight container on a train bound for Ethiopia. When the train arrived in Ethiopia and the container was opened, six people were found dead; they had suffocated.

This was the most dramatic in a series of disturbing incidents that have brought Djibouti’s human rights record into disrepute. This incident was not directly connected to the repatriation program, and none of the 125 were known to UNHCR; nevertheless, because it occurred shortly after the repatriation began, many people associated the deaths with the repatriation program. Therefore, much of the effort that went into assuring the international community of the voluntary nature of the repatriation program was undermined.

Consideration of urban refugees’ applications for refugee status resumed in May 1987. UNHCR urged the asylum seekers who were staying in Djiboutiville illegally—and thus outside UNHCR’s protection—to go to Dikhil, where they could be guaranteed protection. Once at Dikhil, they were interviewed by both Djibouti government and UNHCR officials. Since Djibouti is not a signatory to the Organization of African States’ convention on refugees, which broadly defines the term refugee, it applies the narrower definition found in the 1951 United Nations convention, under which a refugee must be able to demonstrate persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. When this definition is interpreted narrowly, it can be very difficult for an individual to prove that he is a refugee. That is what happened to this group. A large majority of the applicants, unable to prove to UNHCR and the government that they had cause to fear persecution in Ethiopia, were rejected. Those who were rejected felt betrayed by UNHCR. Some of them began a hunger strike and demonstration—during which they burned the UN flag—that resulted in a confrontation with the army. More than one hundred demonstrators—including four whose applications for asylum had been among the few accepted—were arrested.

UNHCR took the position that as the majority of those arrested had been rejected and had not appealed the decision, they had become illegal aliens and therefore were not under its protection. UNHCR did appeal to the government
on behalf of the four whose refugee status had been recognized, but to no avail. All those who had been arrested were deported to Ethiopia. (According to UNHCR, all of those deported, including the four with refugee status, made their way back to Djibouti within a short time of their deportation.)

As a result of these and other incidents, the refugees and asylum seekers in Djibouti remain deeply suspicious of the UNHCR office there, with the probable result that asylum seekers will, in the future, be less likely to come forward to apply officially for refugee status.

**Ethiopian Refugees in Sudan**

The 1984-85 influx of more than 300,000 starving Ethiopians into Sudan caught and held the world's attention and compassion for many months. As rains returned and famine eased, however, most of them went home, and the world turned to other crises. But the problems of refugees in Sudan did not go away. There were hundreds of thousands of refugees before the 1984-85 influx, and even more after it. Today, they face growing animosity. The government of Sudan, faced with numerous problems, including a civil war, increased political opposition, and economic decline, is finding the refugees a burden and is asking the international community for increased assistance.

Of the 817,000 refugees in the Sudan, 677,000 are from Ethiopia. They fall into many categories: rural refugees living in UNHCR-assisted refugee reception centers or settlements; rural refugees who are self-settled in rural areas and who do not receive UNHCR assistance; urban refugees living in cities with government permission; and urban refugees who are self-settled in cities, particularly Khartoum, Gedaref, Kassala, and Port Sudan, and who do not receive UNHCR assistance.

The refugees in UNHCR-assisted settlements are mostly Eritreans who are likely to remain in Sudan for some time. They no longer receive full food rations and are encouraged to support themselves through farming or wage-earning activities. The urban refugees who are officially permitted to live in the cities—a small minority of the total urban refugee population—either have jobs or receive assistance. It is the self-settled refugees—both rural and urban—who are not assisted by UNHCR, who pose a problem. In areas with large concentrations of self-settled refugees, local officials have vehemently blamed them for their areas' economic and social woes.

The first large influx of Eritrean refugees was in 1967, when tens of thousands fled an Ethiopian military campaign against the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and entered Sudan, where they were welcomed by Sudanese generally sympathetic to their cause. In 1969, six agricultural settlements were established for these refugees, though many others settled spontaneously in the border areas.
More Eritreans arrived in 1970, 1972, and 1975—coinciding with increased fighting in Eritrea—but it was after the major influx of 1978 that the Sudanese Commissioner for Refugees and UNHCR began a large-scale settlement program. Between 1978 and 1983, fourteen settlements were established throughout eastern Sudan. These settlements, where refugees were given land, tools, seeds, and other forms of agricultural assistance, were—like those established before them—expected to become self-sufficient, able to provide all their own food needs. The amount of land allocated to each family was not enough, however, for the family to achieve self-sufficiency. Also, some settlements were located in areas where the land was poor, or were far from main roads or towns where the refugees could have access to markets. Therefore, to achieve even a minimum level of self-sufficiency, they had to find other work in nearby Sudanese farms or towns. By the end of 1983, there were 132,500 refugees (mostly Eritreans) living in settlements in Sudan.

The Ethiopian famine victims The catastrophic drought of 1984, the worst to hit Ethiopia this century, and the widespread famine that followed, prompted one of the largest and most publicized exoduses in recent times: 160,000 by the end of 1984; more than 300,000 by April 1985.

The two main refugee reception centers, Wad Sherife and Wad Kowli, were living nightmares. The population of Wad Sherife, a camp designed for 5,000, soared to 128,000. The death rate reached levels “relief workers had never seen.” UNHCR, the government of Sudan, and the international community mobilized to respond to the crisis, airlifting food and supplies, bringing in medical personnel from numerous Western aid agencies, and digging water wells.

The move of Tigrayans to Sudan during this period was largely coordinated by The Relief Society of Tigray (REST) and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front. REST, having helped bring the Tigrayans to Sudan, was subsequently instrumental in coordinating their repatriation. Beginning April 1985, just as the massive influx was ending, many of the Tigrayans began to return to Ethiopia. By the end of June, in anticipation of summer rains which would enable them to plant new crops, an estimated 55,000 Tigrayans left Sudan and walked home. Many more remained behind, waiting to see if the rains would indeed come. Because the 1985 harvests in Tigray were fairly successful, another 65,000 Tigrayans left Sudan between January and April 1986.

While a small number of the Eritrean refugees who entered in 1984-85 also went home, the majority have stayed in Sudan, which means there are now more refugees than the agricultural settlements can accommodate. Four new settlements are scheduled to open in 1988, but only about 20,000 refugees will be transferred there. As the government appears unlikely to provide any more land for further settlements, a large number of the Eritrean refugees now in reception centers will probably remain there indefinitely.
When the fighting between Ethiopian government troops and the EPLF reached Mohamed's village in Eritrea, he lost his oldest child, his home, and all his livestock. He saw no alternative but to take his family to safety in the Sudan. Mohamed's family was among the 128,000 refugees who made their way to Wad Sherife reception center. He saw much suffering there. Yet, when after two years at Wad Sherife he was moved to a new reception center at Shagarab, he was sad to leave: Having left one home, he was reluctant to leave another. Now, four new agricultural settlements are scheduled to open and Mohamed would like the chance to farm. But that will mean another move—to an area even further away from his home in Eritrea.

Mohamed stays informed about developments in Eritrea and knows that his village is now under Ethiopian government control. He wants to go home but, as he told USCR, will only return "when Eritrea is controlled by the Eritrean people themselves." Meanwhile, his main concern is for his children. His wife has recently given birth to twins and he wants them to grow up in Eritrea. "The future of my children must be in their country."
The 1987-88 famine in Ethiopia has aroused fears of a new influx of famine victims. The Sudanese representative to UNHCR's Executive Committee, referring to a potential influx of new famine victims, said that Sudan was "unable to receive any more of them from any country." He added that a new influx would "add to the negative aspects of [the] refugee presence in Sudan." *Time*, in a December 1987 article, quotes another Sudanese official as saying, "We have been involved in refugee problems since the . . . 1960s. Enough is enough."

Some observers believe that these statements are made primarily to deter the famine victims from entering Sudan, but that the Sudanese will, in the end, receive and assist them. That the statements were made at all is, however, a reflection of the changes of attitude in a country once hailed for its generous and humanitarian policies toward refugees.

**Self-settled refugees** The Eritrean refugees who are self-settled (i.e. not assisted by UNHCR) in the rural and urban areas of eastern Sudan (and whose exact number can really only be guessed at) have been there for many years, and will almost certainly remain there many more. Therefore, the growing Sudanese animosity towards their continued presence is of great concern, and the need to find solutions that much more urgent.

Recognition of the impact of refugees on eastern Sudan is not new. In 1980, a United Nations mission that visited Sudan to study the problem concluded:

The refugee burden in the eastern province [of Sudan] is particularly onerous. . . . While UNHCR and WFP [World Food Program] have been active in supplementing the Government's efforts . . . a substantial portion of the needs of the refugees, especially of those spontaneously settled in rural areas, remains uncovered.

Unfortunately, very little has yet come of their proposals. It is not surprising then that government officials have become increasingly frustrated with the refugees' presence and wary of promises of assistance from international organizations. In the face of increasing complaints from the Sudanese people about deterioration in the public services, the refugees have become the scapegoats on whom all can be blamed.

But the myth and the reality of the refugees' impact are not always the same, as a year-long study of refugees in the Kassala area undertaken by the Free University of Amsterdam and the University of Khartoum has shown. The study set out to test a series of hypotheses based on popular beliefs about the negative impact caused by the refugees—that they are a drain on health and education services, that they cause lower wages and higher rents, and that they are having a serious impact on the environment.

The last of these hypotheses was confirmed. The others, for the most part,
were not. In education, the study found that although Eritrean students do take up some valuable school places, schools restrict their numbers; and, in any case, many or most Eritrean children attend schools operated by the Eritrean liberation groups. In the field of health, the study found that refugees do not use public services in proportion to their numbers, although the degree to which they do use such services leads to longer waits at hospitals and clinics and reduced availability of drugs for the Sudanese. The question of increased rents raised interesting results. The study found that only 15 percent of Sudanese rented their houses, so that the majority of those affected by higher rents were the Eritreans. Although rents have risen dramatically, the increases are in line with general inflation rates during the last ten years. In the labor market, the research team concluded that there has been "a clear deterioration in wages and salaries for most groups over the last ten years. But although some of this must be due to the influx of Eritreans, it would go too far to ascribe it entirely to that factor."

Some of these findings have been disputed by local government officials.

While local officials in Kassala complain about the refugees' impact, the attitude towards the refugees themselves is not hostile. Not so in Gedaref, where there are greater differences between the local people and the refugees, and where resentment of their presence has led to violence against them. In Gedaref, refugees are said to cause social problems and offend local mores. They are accused of violent crimes, of making and selling alcohol (prohibited by Sudan's Islamic Law), and of engaging in prostitution. As a result of such problems, the Sudanese government has threatened to remove all urban refugees from towns and cities and to place them in "urban camps" outside the cities.

However, the example of a camp created years ago as a "semi-urban settlement" suggests that grouping urban refugees in camps could be unproductive. Tawawa, located just outside of Gedaref, is a nightmare for the refugees who live there. A large majority of its population of more than 12,000 are single young men who are frustrated because in Tawawa they see no hope. Many of them can find only seasonal or part-time jobs (if that), and there is little to occupy their time constructively. Prostitution is widespread. The result is an explosive level of tension which, when mixed with alcohol and political factionalism, can lead to violence.

To help Sudan cope with the impact of the refugee population in various regions, the European Community and the World Bank are, at the behest of UNHCR, implementing development projects aimed at improving infrastructure and services in the "refugee-affected areas." These projects can ease some of the tension that has arisen in recent years, can improve the situation for local people and refugees, and can demonstrate to the Sudanese government and people that the international community supports and appreciates their efforts on behalf of the refugees.
The exact roots of Ethiopian Judaism are not known. It is thought Jews arrived in Ethiopia early in the first century A.D., three hundred years before Christianity and six hundred years before Islam. The term Falasha, which comes from an ancient word meaning stranger, is considered derogatory by Ethiopian Jews. The Beta Israel, as they prefer to be known, evolved an independent Jewish state in the highlands of Gonder province, which by the early 1600s had a population of half a million. In 1616, however, they were conquered by Abyssinia's Christian emperor. Since that time, their numbers and their fortunes have steadily declined. By the early 1980s, they numbered only 30,000.

The Beta Israel became an impoverished and persecuted minority, completely cut off from the outside world. Indeed, one of the first foreign Jews to establish contact with them—in 1867—found that they "were surprised to discover that they were not the only Jews left in the world." In the early twentieth century, attempts to enlist aid for the Beta Israel were not successful; in fact, many Jewish authorities did not even consider them to be Jews. This did not change until 1975, when the state of Israel finally accepted the Beta Israel as Jews entitled to Israeli citizenship.

The 1974 revolution in Ethiopia only brought further problems. In 1981, the governor of Gonder forbade the practice of Judaism and the teaching of Hebrew, and closed the Beta Israel's schools and synagogues. By 1984, whole communities of Beta Israel were deciding to migrate to Israel. Since the Ethiopian government did not allow this, their only choice was to leave clandestinely and walk to Sudan, hoping to get to Israel from there. Between March and August 1984, over 12,000 Beta Israel made their way to the Sudan. From there, in a secret operation known as operation Moses, the Israeli secret service, with assistance from the U.S. government and the agreement of certain Sudanese officials, coordinated the airlift of most of them to Israel. When news of the operation appeared in the Western press, however, the Sudanese government, embarrassed that its role in the operation had been made public, put a premature end to the airlift. A number of Beta Israel remain in the Sudan, but given the Sudanese government's sensitivity on the issue, it will be difficult for them to finish their journey to Israel.
Sudanese Refugees in Ethiopia

Although Ethiopia produces most of the refugees in the Horn, it too hosts refugees from neighboring countries. Between mid-1983 and November 1987, more than 205,000 refugees from southern Sudan fled the civil war in their homeland and sought asylum in Ethiopia.

Like Ethiopia, Sudan—Africa’s largest country—is home to a wide variety of national, linguistic, and religious groups. Broadly speaking, however, the country is divided into a Moslem, Arab-oriented north, and a Christian and animist, African-oriented south. During the colonial period, 1899-1955, Sudan was under Anglo-Egyptian administration. At independence, it was northerners who took power; they have since dominated the country politically and economically. From independence until 1972, north and south engaged in a prolonged civil war, which ended when Khartoum granted the south a limited regional autonomy. Sporadic fighting continued until 1983, however, when civil war—which continues to this day—again broke out. The immediate cause of the renewed fighting was Sudanese President Gaafar al-Nimeiri’s introduction, throughout the country, of Sharia (Islamic Law). Southerners resented this imposition of Islam on non-Moslems. They saw it as an unacceptable extension of northern domination and disregard for southerners’ cultures and religions. Although Nimeiri was ousted in April 1985, Sharia law, and the civil war, remains.

The renewed civil war has ravaged the south, internally displacing hundreds of thousands of southerners, many to Khartoum or other areas of the north, and sending more than two-hundred-thousand others into exile in Ethiopia. Many refugees in Ethiopia claim they fled Sudan because they fear Sudanese government troops, who, they say, looted and burned their villages and confiscated their property. Meanwhile, some Sudanese complain that the refugees in Ethiopia are supporters of the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), and that the Ethiopian government allows the refugee camps to be used as bases for SPLA guerrillas.

UNHCR and the Ethiopian government assist the refugees in Ethiopia, with the aid of the international community. Although their initial aim was to place the refugees in agricultural settlements where they could be self-supporting, the rapidly increasing numbers have led to the majority being accommodated in reception centers. The Ethiopian government has pledged further land for agricultural settlements, but as of November 1987 had not made it available. The refugees currently in Ethiopia are likely to stay as long as the fighting in Sudan remains at its present level of intensity, and even more Sudanese refugees may flee to Ethiopia if fighting prevents them from farming in their home areas.
Somali Refugees in Ethiopia

The newest, and smallest, refugee group in the Horn is that of Somalis who crossed into Ethiopia during 1987. These refugees are from the northwest region of Somalia, where the Somali National Movement (SNM), a group opposing the Mogadishu government, has been most active. The SNM, which operates from bases inside Ethiopia, was formed in 1981 by a group of northern Somalia intellectuals and businessmen who felt Mogadishu was restricting the north’s economy. The arrest of a number of well-known citizens of Hargeisa—the north’s main city and former administrative capital during British rule—led to riots in 1982-83 that temporarily challenged the authority of President Siyad Barre’s regime.

The assassination in Hargeisa, on December 19, 1986, of the local chief of the National Security Service (Somalia’s secret police), the appearance of pro-SNM slogans on building walls, and public disturbances in Hargeisa since January 1987 resulted in a government crackdown against suspected SNM sympathizers. This was the most immediate cause of the flight of several thousand Somalis into Ethiopia.

The SNM maintains bases on the Ethiopian side of the border, and it appears that many of the Somali refugees are SNM sympathizers. However, a joint mission of the Ethiopian government and UNHCR found groups of refugees who are not at SNM bases and who have been deemed to be of concern to UNHCR. In July 1987, UNHCR agreed to assist 5,000 of these refugees, provided that the refugee status of each individual be determined and that they be moved to a more appropriate site, farther away from the border (and SNM bases), where water and agricultural land are available. By November 1987, the number of Somali refugees in Ethiopia had grown to more than 15,000.

Another group of about 20,000 from central Somalia has gone to Galadi in eastern Ethiopia. Indications are, however, that these people are drought victims and not refugees connected with the problems in the northwest.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There have been waves of refugees and displaced persons in the Horn of Africa for years. Regrettably, the prospect is for more of the same. The magnitude and duration of the tragedy strain compassion’s endurance. It is all too easy, when confronted with numbers in the hundreds of thousands or problems that are seemingly insoluble, even for people of good will to lose sight of the individual human beings who make up the numbers, whose anguished lives make up the total tragedy. But to see the problem and not see the people is to miss the heart of the problem. For refugees, war and famine are not abstract concepts—famine is the pain of hunger; war is the tragic loss of loved ones.
The Horn of Africa, despite its rich and ancient history, is an area little known to most people in the West. During the last decade, however, it has been catapulted to world attention by a series of dramatic and tragic upheavals: war, revolution, famine, human rights abuses, civil conflict, and forced movements of people. The news media has brought this suffering into our homes through pictures of starving children, or of mothers clinging to dead babies. Many of us responded by contributing to fund-raising efforts organized to help the refugees and famine victims.

Emergencies pass, however, and the once-dramatic becomes commonplace. The media moves on to other crises in other corners of the world. But the refugees stay behind—in the Horn of Africa, an estimated 1.3 million of them. They still need food, water, shelter. They need to be able to work, to stand on their own feet, to contribute rather than to burden. They need hope.

Now, in 1988, the people of the Horn are again enduring famine. The all too familiar pictures of starving children are upon our front pages, and, once again, headlines warn that millions face starvation. In Ethiopia, aid agencies are trying to get food to people in their villages, but some people in the more remote regions have already begun to move toward other areas where they hope there will be food. Neighboring Sudan has warned that it will not receive more famine victims from Ethiopia. The cycle begins anew.

It is not in our power to undo what has been done. However, we can identify and condemn those actions and policies that continue to send refugees and famine victims into neighboring countries, and demand that they be stopped. We can influence the course of the refugees' stay in the countries of asylum: by working for generous and humane policies towards refugees; by ensuring that adequate aid is given, not just to feed refugees, but to create ways of helping them to feed themselves; by offering our assistance to the governments and people of countries that, desperately poor themselves, have opened their doors to those in flight. And, we can press for changes enabling refugees to return home. Toward these ends, USCR makes the following recommendations:

1. The government of Ethiopia must cease violating the basic human rights of its citizens.

The overwhelming majority of refugees in the Horn of Africa are Ethiopians who have fled the abusive policies and actions of their government. The Ethiopian government's persecution of political dissidents has been well-established, and its poor human rights record is well-known. Its use of force to implement controversial resettlement and villagization programs has been widely and rightly condemned. Refugees, and the international community, are paying the price for the Ethiopian government's actions. We call upon the Ethiopian government to cease using coercive methods to implement its resettlement and villagization
programs, and to desist from persecuting its citizens because of their political beliefs, religion, or national identity.

Given recent history, it is critical that programs of voluntary repatriation to Ethiopia incorporate an assessment of human rights conditions in those areas where refugees would return.

USCR supports truly voluntary repatriation programs. The repatriation process must, however, include safeguards for refugees. If refugees are to return to Ethiopia, it is incumbent upon the Ethiopian government not only to halt the abusive policies and actions that caused the refugees to flee, but also to demonstrate that it has done so by allowing UNHCR representatives, independent observers, and refugee leaders to make on-the-spot assessments of the situation in the areas of concern.

2. USCR challenges both the Ethiopian government and the national insurgent groups to put people before politics and to desist from actions, such as the burning of fields or the obstruction of relief efforts, whose main victims are innocent people.

The conflicts between national insurgent groups and the Ethiopian government appear to be intractable. Nevertheless, the prolonged suffering engendered by these conflicts demands that solutions be found. In the meantime, the wanton destruction of homes and fields, and attacks on those trying to bring relief, must end. Until the conflicts are resolved, all sides should at the very least minimize the suffering they cause innocent civilians. Food must not be used as a weapon against civilians.

3. The government of Somalia should cooperate fully with UNHCR in carrying out an accurate census and socio-demographic survey of its refugee population.

Assisting large refugee populations is expensive, and there are many demands on available resources. By maintaining inflated refugee figures, the government of Somalia undermines the credibility of UNHCR's requests for aid to refugees not only in Somalia, but throughout the world. The socio-demographic survey potentially can offer valuable information on the problems being experienced by refugees in Somalia and may suggest ways to counteract the negative effects of their prolonged stay.

The Somali government's offer of citizenship to refugees who attain self-sufficiency is laudable. We urge the Somali government to translate their words into action by initiating procedures for refugees who are eligible and interested in applying for naturalization.

4. The government of Djibouti should ensure that its resentment of the continued presence of undocumented aliens and refugees in that country does not translate into mistreatment of refugees or a prejudiced consideration of their requests for asylum. The world community should closely monitor Djibouti's actions toward refugees and asylum seekers.
The problems that countries with limited resources, like Djibouti, face in hosting large refugee populations cannot be ignored. It is regrettable that in Djibouti this has led to a highly negative attitude towards refugees. Nevertheless, Djibouti has both a moral and legal obligation—under the 1951 UN convention on refugees—to protect those who have sought asylum there. Top government officials have often reasserted Djibouti’s commitment to honoring its obligations. Yet other officials, usually cited as “at the local level,” have ignored this commitment and abused the rights of refugees in their care. If the government does not put an end to this, it risks continued condemnation from the international community and all those concerned with human rights.

Encouraging refugees to go home while fully protecting the right to asylum is a difficult and sensitive task. USCR is not in a position to know if it is safe for the rural refugees in Dikhil camp to go home. Many observers argue that it is, but that many refugees prefer not to return. If this is indeed the case—and only an objective investigation of the situation in the rural refugees’ home area could satisfactorily show that—then positive and humane methods of encouraging the refugees to return home, on a fully voluntary basis, should be sought. While refugees must not be pressured to return home if they genuinely fear for their safety, neither should they abuse their rights and the generosity of the international community by refusing to go home if it is clear that they can safely do so.

The government of Djibouti and UNHCR have often rejected urban asylum seekers’ petitions during the past two years, saying that the urban refugees only arrive in Djibouti to pursue a better life. It appears that this assessment owes more to the government’s annoyance with the presence of refugees and aliens in general than it does to a thorough analysis of the problems the urban asylum seekers faced in Ethiopia. The government of Djibouti and UNHCR should reexamine their motives and respond more humanely to the predicament of those who have felt compelled to abandon their homes and hoped to find safe haven in Djibouti.

5. UNHCR should vigorously reaffirm its lead in the protection of refugees in Djibouti.

Some refugees in Djibouti say that they have lost confidence in the ability, and the will, of UNHCR to protect them—an unfortunate development that must be overcome.

USCR appreciates the many pressures under which UNHCR must work, and the excellent job it does in bringing assistance to more than a million refugees in the Horn. But we are concerned that in the past it has not been sufficiently vigilant in safeguarding their protection in Djibouti. UNHCR has been accused of acquiescing to forcible repatriation, in 1983-84, of refugees under its protection and, in 1986-87, of lacking vigilance in protecting the rights of asylum seekers. We appeal to all members of UNHCR’s staff, to its Executive Committee, to the
donors who finance its operations, and to the agencies which implement its programs to work together to overcome this past image and to ensure that the protection of refugees is UNHCR's first priority in Djibouti, and that finding durable solutions fully consistent with this priority is its primary objective.

6. USCR urges the government of the Sudan to counteract the growing antipathy towards refugees in that country, to adopt measures enabling refugees—particularly those in urban areas—to develop their economic potential, and to reassert its long-standing policy of sheltering uprooted neighbors.

The Sudan, which in 1984-85 alone opened its doors to over 300,000 refugees and famine victims, has, in the past year, backed away from its laudable record concerning them. Government officials have blamed refugees for economic and social problems, and local people have given violent expression to their resentment. Now, it threatens not to allow Ethiopians displaced by the current famine to enter Sudan. Refugees and famine victims cannot, however, be blamed for Sudan’s problems. A combination of declining resources, inflation, increased population, and civil war has led to many of the problems the Sudanese complain about.

Rather than moving resistant urban refugees to camps where they don’t want to be, and where a host of social problems—such as those at Tawawa—are likely to be created, it is preferable for the Sudanese government to promote their economic integration by removing restrictions on their ability to work or start small businesses. The refugees, many of whom have skills now being wasted, could thus realize their economic potential and contribute to the Sudanese economy rather than burden it.

7. USCR calls upon the international community, including the U.S. government, to respond to the problems faced by the countries of asylum in the Horn by supporting projects aimed at developing the infrastructure and economic base in areas with large refugee populations—particularly of self-settled refugees—and to promote local settlement projects that countries of asylum cannot themselves afford to finance.

The international community shoulders the financial burden for providing refugees with their immediate needs: food, water, health care, education. It is a lot to ask that it also finance projects designed to help refugees become self-sufficient or to help the people and governments of countries that host refugee populations. But there is no choice. Without such help refugees would remain perennially dependent on outside help, and countries of asylum would increasingly resent their presence, leading to hostility between refugees and local people and possibly threatening refugees' security.

Specifically, we encourage support for the kind of projects under consideration by the European Community, the World Bank, and the United Nations for assisting
"refugee-affected areas" in eastern Sudan and local settlement of refugees in Somalia.

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When it comes to refugees—even in massive and persistent situations such as in the Horn—we, as individuals, can make a difference. We can protest abuses of human rights and refugee protection. We can encourage our elected representatives to vote for programs of assistance to refugees. We can contribute to one of the many voluntary organizations that depend on our support in order to carry out their work with refugees. And, equally important, we can keep ourselves informed of the problems refugees are facing. Refugees have few fears worse than that of being forgotten.

The human tragedy in the Horn, at its most fundamental level, is one created by people. And, fundamentally, it must be resolved by people.

USCR/Hiram A. Ruiz
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