

Horn of Africa Crisis

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Habiba Ibrahim Ali (right), 20, a Somali woman who arrived in recent weeks at the Dadaab camp in northeastern Kenya, walks with another woman and their children to a new extension of the world’s largest refugee settlement which was originally intended for 90,000 occupants and now has over 400,000.

Families walk across the East African desert on a journey of desperation and hope for weeks, battling hunger, wild animals, and bandits before arriving at the Dadaab refugee complex in northern Kenya. In parts of Somalia, it hasn’t rained in over two years, and many families have lost their animals.

“We didn’t have any real choice. We could have stayed home, but soon we all would have died like the animals,” said one refugee. “By coming to Dadaab, we stay alive, and my daughters can go to school. We’d like to go back home someday, God willing, but it’s hard to survive without rain.”

Established two decades ago, the Dadaab refugee complex is actually composed of three separate camps. It’s been bursting at the seams with more than 1,300 new arrivals every day for several weeks. Long lines of refugees are seeking shelter, food, and other materials needed to survive the hot and dusty environment.



Fatima Hassan Mohammed, an 80-year old Somali woman

who fled drought and war in her country, rests outside her makeshift hut in the bula baqti section of the Dadaab refugee camp in northeastern Kenya. She arrived five months prior, and some other family members who arrived recently helped her make this hut, an improved model over what she had before.

The drought is affecting millions of families throughout the Horn of Africa - Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. Although global climate change plays a role, other factors contribute to the suffering. United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called the situation a “catastrophic combination of conflict, high food prices and drought.”

In Somalia, military conflict and governance issues have made life difficult, and a militant group has prohibited most aid groups from working in its territory. In Ethiopia, stressed pastoralists seeking grazing lands closer to rivers are finding huge swaths of land taken over by foreign agricultural companies, at times to grow bio-fuels.

Global food prices have soared across the region, so although many markets are full, most people can’t afford to buy the food they need.



Photos and narrative by the Rev. Paul Jeffrey. Jeffrey is a missionary with the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church, documenting the work of the church around the world as senior correspondent for Response, the magazine of United Methodist Women. He also provides coverage of emergencies for Action by Churches Together (the ACT Alliance), a Geneva-based global alliance of churches responding to disasters. Additional text by Linda Bloom, a UMNS multimedia reporter based in New York. Follow her at <http://twitter.com/umcscribe>.



Weary from her long journey, a newly-arrived Somali girl watches through a razor wire fence the activities inside the reception center of the Dagahaley refugee camp, part of the Dadaab refugee complex in northeastern Kenya.

The Dadaab complex is managed by the ACT Alliance, the international network of churches and church agencies responding to emergencies and development challenges. The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is a member of the ACT Alliance, and supports the work there, which is carried out by another ACT Alliance member, the Lutheran World Federation. Managing the Dadaab complex means ensuring that the more than two dozen UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations there coordinate their work to avoid overlaps or gaps in service.

UMCOR is supporting partner organizations ACT Alliance, Church World Service, and GlobalMedic in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia, with emergency grants to meet immediate food, water, and shelter needs of people displaced by the crisis.

A woman obtains water from a spigot in the Dadaab refugee camp in northeastern Kenya. With thousands of families living on the periphery of the camps, the ACT Alliance is moving families into formal new extensions of two of the camps. Hundreds of tents are being pitched, water services installed, and health care made available.

Besides making sure that needs for shelter, food, medical care, and protection are met, the ACT Alliance coordinates a network of Community Peace and Security Teams composed of refugee men and women who provide self-policing for the camps, often intervening in disputes in the stressful environment before they turn violent.

The ACT Alliance, which assumed management of the complex in 2008, has also introduced democratic elections in which refugees choose their own leaders—assuring refugees a voice in how the camp is run and more quickly resolving the inevitable tensions that arise within such a large, concentrated population, as well as between the refugees and the local host communities.

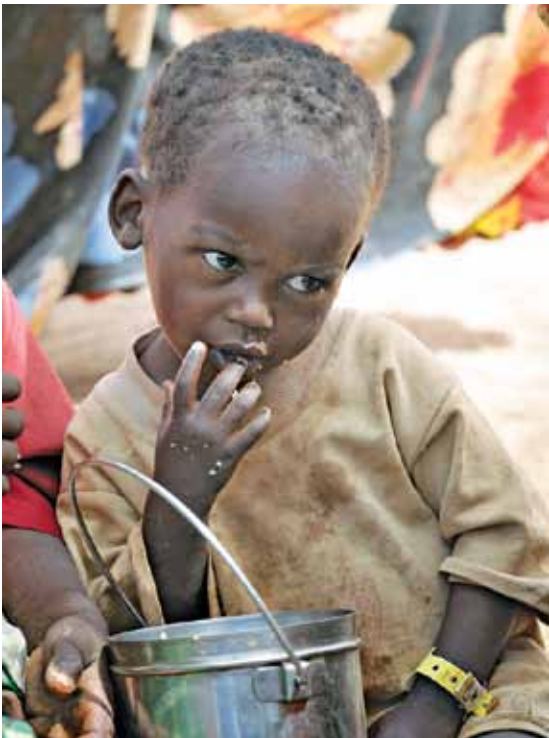


A Somali refugee child eats while waiting to be registered in the Dadaab refugee camp. The boy's yellow wristband means he has been received but not yet registered.

The level of severe malnutrition in the Horn of Africa worries is high. There are two declared areas of famine in Somalia. "It's heartbreaking, (these) stories of people walking for 25 days, having lost half of their families, having survived by drinking their own urine," aid worker Maurice Bloem told United Methodist News Service. "That's the situation we're talking about."

Church World Service, the United Methodist Committee on Relief, and other members of the faith-based ACT Alliance are coordinating their response to the hunger crisis. A "call for action" report by the Global Nutrition Cluster, a U.N. inter-agency standing committee, showed the prevalence of "global acute malnutrition" among the population of Somalia ranged from 23.8 to 55 percent – an estimate that Bloem, deputy director of Church World Service, said he considered "really alarming."

Problems with food shortages in the Horn of Africa have been building over the years but came to a "critical mass" in recent months, said Melissa Crutchfield, UMCOR executive for international emergency response. "This is not a sudden onset disaster, but it's one that is finally getting the media attention that it needs to generate awareness and the subsequent support," she added.



Africa Crisis: UMCOR Responds

As of July 29, the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had appealed for \$2.4 billion from the international community to address the emergency, which is expected to continue for three months or longer.

The World Food Program and UNICEF airlifted hundreds of tons of specialized nutritional food for malnourished children in Somalia. The World Food Program now is feeding more than 1.6 million people in Kenya.

UMCOR partner organizations

The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is holding conversations with partner organizations working in the Horn of Africa and planning a regional response to the growing hunger crisis provoked by severe drought in the region. According to the United Nations, today's drought is the worst the region has seen in half a century and has left an estimated 11 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. It has provoked acute malnutrition and death, especially among children and other vulnerable populations.

"UMCOR is very concerned about the escalation of the crisis in the Horn of Africa and is talking with ACT Alliance, Church World Service, GlobalMedic, and Muslim Aid to devise a regional response to it," reported Melissa Crutchfield, UMCOR executive for International Disaster Response.

Somalia, where relief efforts have been hampered by ongoing violence and war, has seen tens of thousands of its weakened citizens flee to neighboring Kenya and Ethiopia. The Somali population in three refugee camps in Dadaab, Kenya, has increased by more than 30 percent in recent weeks, to 400,000 people. Nearly half the Somali population—3.7 million people—is estimated to be in crisis, the UN said; most—2.8 million—can be found in the war-torn southern part of the country, where the violence has impeded the work of food agencies for more than a year.

If the effects of the drought are not checked, famine could spread to the rest

of southern Somalia within two months, the UN underscored.

"UMCOR is working with our partners to act as quickly and as comprehensively as possible," Crutchfield said. "While we do, we ask for your continued prayers and support for those affected by this crisis."

Long-term interventions and immediate aid

Long-term interventions range from assistance with better agricultural practices and other forms of livelihood to assessing the impact of various factors on global food systems. "You need to ensure that, ultimately, people can better take care of their own needs," he said.

In an interview with CWS's Chris Herlinger, Sammy Matua, based in the agency's East Africa regional office in Nairobi, said his office already is at work helping communities implement adaptive agricultural methods that improve household food security.

UMCOR's board of directors on Aug. 1 approved four grants for \$20,000 each to support:

- ◆ CWS-implemented work in the Mwingi and Kibwezi areas of Kenya, which includes five months of immediate relief measures, such as family food packages and nutritional supplements for young children, and initiatives to improve food security and livelihoods;
- ◆ ACT Alliance members in Ethiopia responding through food distributions and food for work, malaria prevention and capacity building;
- ◆ ACT Alliance members in Somalia providing for a variety of emergency needs – food, shelter, clothing and water – along with long-term assistance to promote agricultural, income-generating activities;
- ◆ GlobalMedic, bringing in water purification tablets to Kenya and Somalia to provide 9.6 million liters of clean drinking water as well as purifier sachets for an additional 1.85 million liters of clean water.

HORN OF AFRICA CRISIS

YOUR SUPPORT IS NEEDED

UMCOR is working with partners ACT Alliance, Church World Service, and GlobalMedic in Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia to provide food, clean water, and shelter for those who have been displaced and are living in refugee camps because of drought and hunger in the Horn of Africa.

The drought, considered the worst in 50 years, is affecting 11 to 12 million people. Your generous gifts will support UMCOR's current and future efforts there to alleviate suffering for so many.

International Disaster Response,
"Horn of Africa"
UMCOR Advance, #982450

HOW TO GIVE

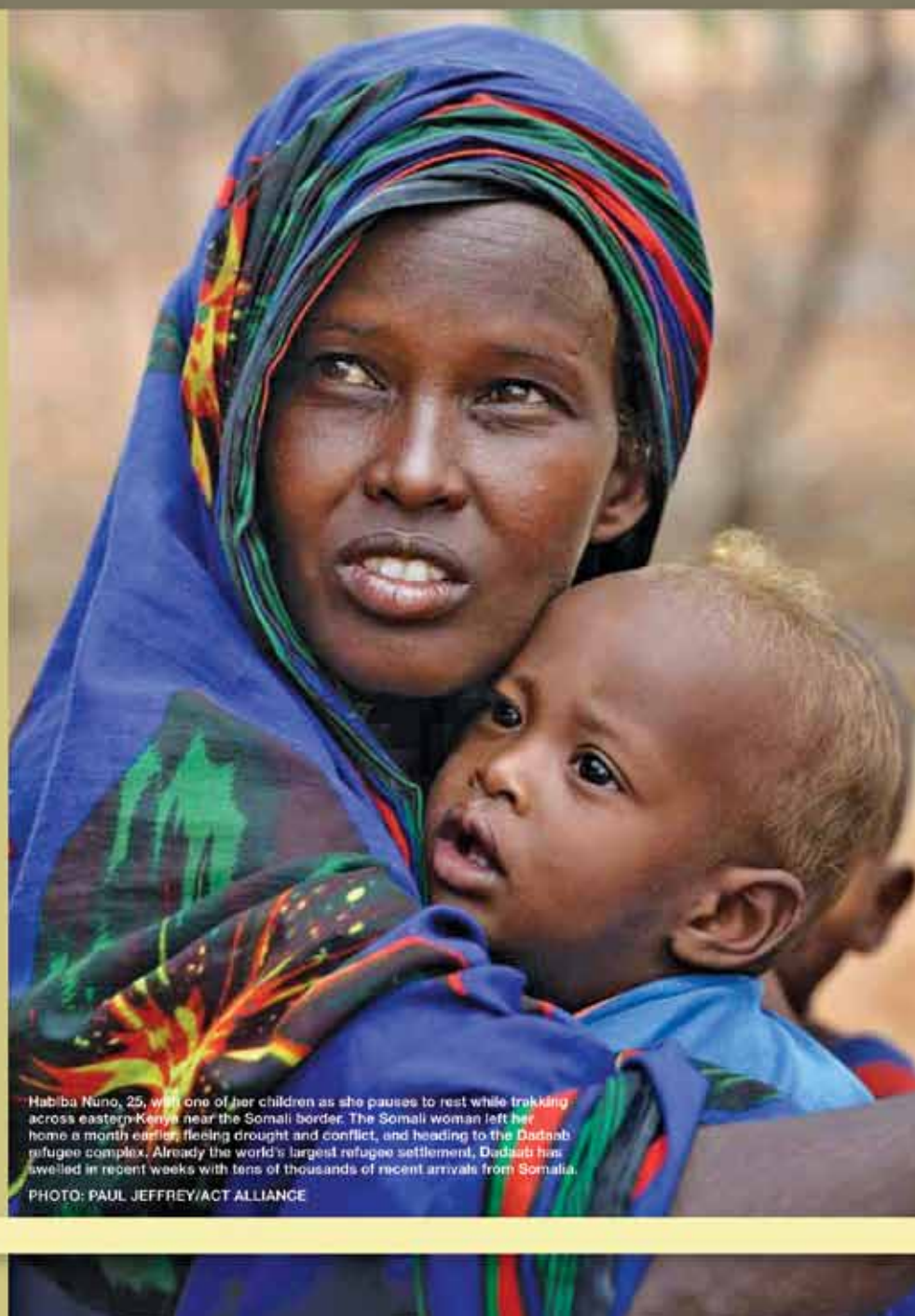
Give to International Disaster Response – Horn of Africa – UMCOR Advance #982450.

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Habiba Nuno, 25, with one of her children as she pauses to rest while trekking across eastern Kenya near the Somali border. The Somali woman left her home a month earlier, fleeing drought and conflict, and heading to the Dadaab refugee complex. Already the world's largest refugee settlement, Dadaab has swelled in recent weeks with tens of thousands of recent arrivals from Somalia.

PHOTO: PAUL JEFFREY/ACT ALLIANCE

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