

STATEMENT BY SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE HEARING
ON DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE

March 29, 1974

As Chairman of the Subcommittee on African Affairs, I have been particularly concerned about our disaster relief efforts in Africa.

Another year of devastating drought threatens the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in Africa -- not only in the six West African states called the "Sahel," but in Ethiopia and parts of other African states as well. The \$50 million included in S.12412 for disaster relief in Africa is desperately needed.

The most urgent need is for food and medicine to keep the survivors of the droughts alive -- and for adequate transportation to ship these commodities. There is every indication that these disaster relief needs will be greater this year than they were last.

In the Sahel, much of the livestock is dead, which last year constituted the nomads' food reserve.

The family grain reserves which fed the farmers after last year's bad harvest are gone. These farmers will join the tens of thousands of nomads living in crowded refugee camps around cities where food is being distributed. The health problems in these camps are tremendous, where people weakened by severe malnutrition live in extremely crowded conditions.

Again this year, in Ethiopia as well as the Sahel, thousands may starve due to the inadequate transportation of relief supplies. There are few roads in the areas affected by drought -- almost none of them paved. Many of the people are in isolated settlements, difficult to find or to reach with relief supplies. We have recently read reports that floods in the drought-affected areas of Ethiopia have added to these difficulties of relief distribution. If the rains come to the Sahel this year, they will cause similar transportation problems.

Roads and bridges must be built and repaired now, in preparation for the peak of relief need. Grain must be stockpiled in remote areas. There must be adequate stocks of food in place to feed people when this year's meager harvests run out. A washed out bridge or heavy rains could mean weeks without relief food supplies reaching isolated areas.

There must be no discrimination, waste, or corruption in the distribution of food relief. Adequate supplies of food must reach all who need them. Numerous reports from both the Sahel and Ethiopia have indicated that for a variety of reasons relief has not been equitably distributed. A recent report by the Carnegie Endowment, "Disaster in the Desert,"

charged that nomads were being discriminated against in the distribution of food relief in the Sahel. We have heard reports from Ethiopia that food has been held in the warehouses of provincial governors and landlords while people starved. We have also heard that in Ethiopia families have abandoned children so that their other children might have enough food to survive.

The international donor community must provide enough food and medicine so that recipient countries do not have to choose among groups in their populations when distributing food, and so that heads of families do not have to decide which of their children will live and which will die.

Adequate transportation must be provided so that people will not starve because of their location. At the same time, distribution of food must be carefully monitored. We cannot allow food to sit at ports or in landlords' warehouses while people are starving. We cannot allow some to be adequately fed while others go hungry because they are of the wrong tribe or social class.

As massive as it will have to be, disaster relief represents only a small part of the assistance that must be given these drought-stricken countries in Africa in the next

year. If they are ever going to be able to feed their populations, they must be given substantial recovery assistance as well. In the many years of drought, thousands of acres of farmland have been claimed by the desert; and as much as 70% of the herds in these countries have died. A return to food and livestock production as it was before the drought is both impossible and undesirable -- for the deterioration of the land was caused as much by the way it was being exploited as by the years of dryness. The people of the Sahel will have to be given the tools needed to change their methods of farming and livestock production if this drought-ravaged land is ever to support them. Water resources that have gone unexploited -- major rivers and surface water -- will have to be harnessed. New high-yielding varieties of seed, fertilizer and pesticides will have to be provided. Farmland must be protected by the planting of trees and better crop rotation. Stronger cattle must be bred from the surviving herds, and nomads must be taught better range management techniques. Grain storage facilities must be built and enough grain supplied to begin a food reserve system, so the people of the Sahel do not have to face another drought with no reserve stocks.

These "recovery" projects must be carefully planned by people who know best how to use the human as well as the natural resources of the area without doing serious damage to either the cultural patterns that are thousands of years old or the ecology. In many cases, a few simple changes in methods of production will have a tremendous impact. But these changes must be the right ones.

These natural disasters in seven of the poorest countries of the world have brought to light some serious problems in international assistance -- both disaster relief and economic development assistance. In every case, the drought struck hardest in those areas where the poorest people lived. Most of them had not been brought into the development process, did not have access to any modern agricultural technology, and were not even reached by roads. In every case, the critical situation confronting these people was not noticed or dealt with until many had already died.

A year ago, many of those dealing with the disaster in the Sahel pointed out the need for using modern technology to assure that such disasters did not recur.

They said that a more effective "early warning system" must be developed, so that famine could be averted by preparing for food relief as soon as we knew that there was a drought and the harvests would be small.

They said our Earth Resources Technology Satellite could be used to find water resources in these dry areas.

They said that a data retrieval system was being established in the U.N. where all relevant information on the drought-stricken areas would be available to all donors.

Finally, they said that our assistance would be used to bring these people into the development process -- to enable them to use better seeds, fertilizer and livestock and farming production techniques.

Yet less than a year later, in Ethiopia, thousands of people in some of the world's poorest areas again died of starvation before the international community realized there was a crisis.

In this year's Foreign Assistance Act, Congress made it clear that U.S. foreign assistance was to go to improving the standard of living of the world's poorest people -- to enable them to produce more food, to provide health services for them and to train them in the skills they needed to become part of their countries' economic development. I would hope that AID will spend a substantial part of this \$5 billion in assuring that modern technology is used to serve the world's poorest people -- both to deal more effectively with their

disasters and to enable them in the future to build better lives for themselves.

It is clear that the American people support disaster relief assistance. As controversial as the foreign aid program is, recent polls show that Americans strongly support humanitarian assistance to those threatened by famine. Even more telling is the overwhelming private response to appeals for funds to help the people of the Sahel. The American people have given generously through their churches and through special funds like AFRICARE to relieve suffering in West Africa. I am certain they would support this commitment by the U.S. government to prevent famine and provide hope in these drought-stricken countries.

I urge the Committee to act finally on this authorization to permit allocation of this assistance which was appropriated during the final session of the 93rd Congress.

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