



CANADA'S PERIODICAL ON REFUGEES

REFUGEE

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SPECIAL ISSUE ON SOMALIA

The Tragedy of Somalia

Somalia is going through the most difficult period in its history. War and drought have devastated the whole nation. The country has yielded to anarchy. The state has ceased to exist, the support system (government institutions) has collapsed, and the country has fallen apart.

And the war has destroyed the infrastructure and has ruined the production capacity of the nation. As a result, over half of its eight million people are starving to death. The people have become very dependent on international relief. According to the United Nations' estimate, one in four Somali children are dead by the age of five, and there is little hope of survival for others.

The root cause of the current food crisis in Somalia (the South) is the military regime's destruction of the economic infrastructure. At present the warlords of Muqdisho are preventing the people from returning to the land, where they were formerly self-sufficient in food production. Consequently, death has taken its toll. Even before the overthrow of Siad Barre in 1991, the military government devastated northern Somalia. In 1988 Siad Barre

declared war on the North, destroying the region's economic base.

The international community did not pay sufficient attention to the plight of the Somali people in the early stages of the calamity. Relief aid arrived after UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali accused the West of negligence in what he described as the worst human disaster in living memory, but the relief was too little and too late.

The warlords struggling for power in Muqdisho did not make the inter-

national relief workers' task easy. The food donated to alleviate the plight of the destitute people is looted daily and turned into a profitable business. In certain cases, food was used as a source of power by the warring factions.

Because of strategic interests during the Cold War, Somalia was at the top of the superpowers' political agenda in their effort to control the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to which Somalia has access. Aware of the international politics, Somalia's military government took

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sides in order to accommodate the superpower that would best serve the interests of the ruling military junta.

While gross human rights violations persisted in Somalia for over twenty years under the ousted military dictator Siad Barre, the United States gave generous economic and military aid to keep the military government in power. Throughout the 1980s, Siad Barre benefited from the United States' military and diplomatic support, without which he could not have survived the public pressure.

The public's frustration with the system increased throughout the last decade. However, the military government suppressed any organized opposition at the national level. The government adopted a policy of divide and rule. It instigated interclan wars and pitted clans and family members against each other. The family unit and traditional leadership were destroyed. Even clergymen were not spared, as they were considered a security risk by the military regime. As a result, they were oppressed by the government and vilified by an unjust media.

The social fabric of the nation was unravelled. Opposition movements were formed out of necessity to stop the military's atrocities against the people, particularly the clan to which the opposition movement's leaders belonged. Most of the movements had no political agenda or national vision other than to depose the military dictator. Once Siad Barre was ousted, power struggles started among different factions of the same group, resulting in the present chaos in the South and the birth of the self-proclaimed Somaliland Republic in the North.

The international community has a role to play in finding a solution to the crisis. Any effort that will help end the warlords' activities is urgently needed. Any conflict resolution package made without full participation of the traditional leaders will not be practical. Therefore, an effective utilization of the traditional leadership's arbitration services and the moral authority of the nation is needed if the international community, particularly the Security Council of the United Nations, tries to resolve the Somalia issue once and for all.

In Somaliland the political situation is under control and is relatively stable, but the economic situation is not much better than that of Somalia. The people are on the brink of famine because of poverty and a lack of support systems. To prevent a potential tragedy, international donors should offer substantial assistance to the people of Somaliland to rebuild their shattered economy before it is too late. One has to believe that reconstruction of Somaliland can save the situation from developing into the chaos that now prevails in Somalia.

In this issue our contributors give in-depth analyses on the root causes of this human disaster. My article is a background analysis on the myth of Somali nationalism that discusses the factors that instigated the union of the two regions that comprised Somalia, the weak foundations on which the union was built, and how the political elite in power used regional disparities to perpetuate their control of the state. The article by Daniel Campagnon provides a full sketch of the nature of the military regime in Somalia. He explains how Siad Barre transformed the central authority of the state from a bureaucratic system to one of personal rule, as well as the shortcomings of the system. Alain Gascon describes the relationships between human suffering, politics and the environment. Ogenga Otunnu's article deals with the plight of Somali refugees and the Somali-Kenyans in Kenya. He analyses the reasons for the cold reception extended to the Somali refugees in Kenya. He also explains why Kenyan authorities have perpetuated maltreatment of Somali Kenyans, and why they are increasingly viewed as a security risk to the state. Joan Simalchik addresses the issue of Somali refugees in Canada who have survived torture and persecution from the ousted government in Somalia. She describes how difficult it is for them to integrate into the Canadian mainstream without proper counselling. We hope the different scholarly approaches of the writers in this issue will contribute to a better understanding of the Somali crisis. ■

Dr. Saeed Sheikh Mohamed is a Research Associate with the Centre for Refugee Studies

IN MEMORIAM

Kerry Reade

Kerry Reade was born on June 6, 1954. He died on November 3, 1992. After graduating from the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, in 1978, a graduation delayed by his years of world travel, Kerry Reade joined the Department of Employment and Immigration on January 29, 1979 and rose to become director of settlement for the Ontario region on July 6, 1989. I was with him at a conference in Hungary in May 1991 when we had to send Kerry home early because he became ill on the trip. Though Kerry sometimes rallied and returned to his duties, he never really recovered. Kerry Reade will be remembered with deep love by the many resettlement agencies and individual refugees he personally helped, the department officials with whom he worked, his friends and acquaintances. He was a wonderful son and brother for his parents and three sisters. Kerry was a compassionate, caring director of settlement who left this world a better place than he found it. We invited Elizabeth Gryte to write a memorial tribute to Kerry in this issue dedicated to Somali refugees, the refugees who were most on Kerry's mind when he died.

Howard Adelman, Editor

I knew Kerry for ten years as a colleague, neighbour and friend. I remember those attributes that everyone recalls—his intelligence, dedication and struggle to push and risk within the system to make it better for newcomers. His enormous courage became more and more evident the closer he came to the end of his life. In addition to a true sense of fair play, he had the patience to listen, a genuine respect for all points of view, and the determination to ensure that they were expressed. His concern was always for the outsider, newcomer or stranger, whether in his own house or country.

Because of Kerry's crazy sense of humour and talent for telling a story, some of his friends (whom I never met) and their exploits have become a lasting part of my memory. And any description of Kerry would be incomplete without an acknowledgement of his great beauty and sense of style.

What I believe made Kerry so special and so effective in his work was revealed in one of those moments of intense frustration. When the world of work was not evolving as it should, Kerry and I played true confessions. He told me something about himself, which he saw as a flaw. He confessed that, as a child, he never dreamed of what he wanted to be, whether a fireman, a veterinarian or even a rich man. He felt that he lacked ambition. He was extraordinarily lucky to have fallen into work he loved and to have found a cause in which he truly believed.

If asked what he would do if he suddenly won a million dollars, his plans always centred around refugee work. During one of the times when bureaucratic hurdles appeared insurmountable, preventing him from opening up reception houses to provide temporary shelter for refugees coming to Canada, Kerry talked about buying lottery tickets and using his winnings to realize his dream. He overcame the obstacles and started the reception houses.

The clarity of Kerry's goals and beliefs and the continuing satisfaction he derived in working towards them made him a powerful and trustworthy advocate for the rights of refugees and newcomers. He was ambitious for others. Perhaps because of that he was able to accomplish far more and affect many more lives than by struggling to advance his own career. My luck was in being able to work with him. My ambition is to follow his example.

Elizabeth Gryte