Horn of Africa

Visit

31st August – 3rd September 2011

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Famine in the Horn of Africa – the Facts

- The droughts afflicting the Horn of Africa are the worst for 60 years and have devastated cattle and crops.
- Across the Horn of Africa, in Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Uganda and Djibouti, the number of people needing help has risen to over 12 million.
- Famine has taken hold in six areas of Somalia – Afgoye, Bay, Lower Shabelle, Middle Shabelle, Mogadishu and Southern Bakool – causing tens of thousands of people to die and forcing hundreds of thousands to leave their homes and seek refuge in Kenya and Ethiopia.
- Over 1,000 Somalis are arriving each day in Dadaab camp in north east Kenya, the world’s largest refugee camp. There are now over 440,000 people in a camp that was built for only 90,000. 80% are women and children.
- The situation is set to deteriorate over the next few months due to high levels of malnutrition, a likely increase in food prices and because the much needed rains are forecast not to fall.
- Despite appeals by the United Nations and humanitarian agencies for $2.4 billion, they are still $1 billion short of their target.
- The UK government is one of the largest donors to the UN appeal. We have contributed $188 million and pledged a further $22 million - £125 million.
- The British public has shown enormous generosity, donating over £57 million to the Disasters Emergency Committee’s appeal in just 8 weeks.

UK aid is helping over three million people including:
- providing 130,000 refugees in Dadaab with safe water, food and healthcare.
- helping 200,000 people in Kenya, including providing food and treatment for starving mothers and children.
- vaccinating over 800,000 children in Somalia and providing food and farming supplies to hundreds of thousands of people.
- providing food and shelter for 1.36 million people in Ethiopia.

Somalia

- The famine and droughts are threatening the lives of over 4 million people – over half the population. 750,000 people are at risk of dying in the next few months alone.
- Half of those who have died are children - one child dies every six minutes.
- Somalia has been afflicted by conflict for many decades - there has been no effective government since 1991. The conflict makes poor people even more vulnerable in a drought and stops Aid getting to many who need it.
- It is one of the poorest countries in the world. Most of the population live on less than $1 a day. There are only two nurses and not even one doctor for every 100,000 people. 1 child in 10 dies before its first birthday.
- Women and girls are oppressed. 98% of women are subject to Female Genital Mutilation and one in ten will die in childbirth.

**Kenya**

- Because of the droughts, 3.7 million people out of a population of 39 million need help.
- In parts of northern Kenya, 37% of people are severely malnourished (the UN emergency level is 15%).
- Food prices have more than tripled in the last year. Soon, nearly 70% of people will be affected by food insecurity.
- Though Kenya’s economy is the largest in East Africa and the number of people living in poverty has fallen over the last decade, about a quarter of Kenyans still do not have enough money to buy the food they need and 1 child in 8 dies before their fifth birthday.

**Ethiopia**

- Because of the droughts, nearly 5 million people need help.
- 300 Somali refugees continue to arrive in the Dolo Ado camps every day, where there are now 120,000 people.
- The Ethiopian government used a global early warning system to prepare for the drought. Over the years, with the support of the UK and other donors, they have also built up their protection from drought. So, unlike in Somalia, Ethiopians have not been forced to flee.
- In Ethiopia over 30 million people (out of a population of 80 million) live in extreme poverty and one child in ten dies before their fifth birthday.
The reasons for my visit to the Horn of Africa

I visited the Horn of Africa in order to:

- See at first hand the devastating suffering caused by the drought and famine in Somalia and north east Kenya.
- See the important work that is being carried out by the Aid Agency, Islamic Relief, a member of the Disasters Emergency Committee.
- Witness the major impact of the relief work supported by the UK Department for International Development.
- Show my constituents of Somali and Kenyan origin the concern I have for the people in their home country.
- Understand the particular impact of the famine on women.
Visit programme

1st September

- Briefing at the British High Commission by Alistair Fernie, Head of the Department for International Development in Kenya and Somalia, his Deputy, Mike Harrison, and Mike Nevin, Deputy British High Commissioner.
- Informal drop-in to the Visa section.
- Visit to the office of Islamic Relief Kenya. Briefing from Rashid Abdalla, Head of Emergency Programme, Islamic Relief Kenya.
- Discussion, hosted by Islamic Relief, with representatives of Oxfam, Save the Children, World Vision, CONCERN, Merlin, CAFOD, ActionAid, Islamic Relief, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Danish Refugee Council.
- Meeting young Kenyans at the British Council to hear their views on how the UK, through its development policies, can support Kenya and their vision for Kenya’s future.
- Meeting at UN Women with Zebib Kavuma, Kenya Programme Manager and Simone Ellis Oluoch-Olunya, Somalia Programme Manager.
- Discussion, hosted by the British High Commissioner, HE Rob Macaire, with representatives from UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP), OCHA, the humanitarian aid department of the European Commission, (ECHO), UNHCR, UN Women and the Hon. Mohamed Elmi, Member of Parliament for Wajir and Minister for the Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands.

2nd September

- Visit to Wajir in north east Kenya with Islamic Relief.
- Briefing from Roble Hajj Mohamed, Wajir area manager for Islamic Relief.
- Visit to Kukale village to see the distribution of food aid, a mobile child health clinic, and a well, dug by Islamic Relief, to provide clean water
- Met with Nadif Dagane and Ahado, a mother and her daughter, receiving treatment for malnutrition at Griffu district hospital.
- Visit to Hagadera, one of the three main camps in the Dadaab refugee camp complex.
- Briefing from Mr Harun Komen, the director of Dadaab for the Kenyan Department of Refugee Affairs.
- Met Zeleke Bacha from the International Rescue Committee, (IRC) an NGO working in Dadaab to provide healthcare to malnourished children and support for abused women refugees
- Meeting at the IRC’s women’s centre with Somali women refugees to hear their experiences.
- Debrief with the High Commissioner in Nairobi
Discussions with the Somali Diaspora in Camberwell and Peckham

Before I embark on a visit abroad I always have discussions with the diaspora community in my constituency. I’m grateful to the Old Kent Road Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre, SE1 5JH, for hosting a meeting with the Somali community for me and Islamic Relief. There is, of course, a high level of concern for those who are suffering and being driven from their homes by the famine. Many of the diaspora send money back to their villages of origin.

There was strong support for the work of the Aid Agencies and for the resources the UK government is putting into the Aid programmes in the Horn of Africa. And a determination to provide vocal support for the commitment of the Government to increase the UK Aid programme to 0.7% of our Gross National Income by 2013. But concern was expressed that the UK government needs to do more to press the rest of the international community to be as decisive and generous in their financial response to the famine. This is a responsibility which should be shared among the international community. It can’t be left to Britain alone.

Concern was also expressed that those in the most desperate need, in the areas most beset by conflict, are the least likely to get the Aid. They argue for greater support for those agencies which are working on the ground and greater engagement by the Government with the diaspora community. There was also concern about food and money being robbed by the militia and not reaching those who it is intended for. For a full report of the meeting please see [http://www.harrietharman.org/meeting-with-members-of-the-somali-community-to-discuss-what-is](http://www.harrietharman.org/meeting-with-members-of-the-somali-community-to-discuss-what-is).

Meeting members of the Somali community at the Old Kent Road Mosque. (Islamic Relief/ Sara Petrai)
Protecting people in north east Kenya from the effect of the drought.

Wajir – 400 miles north east of Nairobi

The people of north east Kenya are mainly pastoralists: communities who depend on their cattle, sheep, goats and camels for their livelihood. The vegetation in the area is prolific – with a covering of trees and bushes. But, the area is parched and all the vegetation is dry as bones, crisp and brittle as a result of the failure of the rains for 3 years.

Livestock has been decimated by the drought. We saw dead livestock including goats and a huge, beautiful giraffe lying dead at the side of the road.

The people we met in Wajir, north east Kenya, all told us of the loss of most of their livestock in the drought. One woman, whose husband was 200 kilometres away herding on the Somali border told me that he used to have 20 cattle and now only has 10. She has 6 children and has to depend on the monthly food pack handed out by Islamic Relief. She was so frail and thin that she was not strong enough to pick up the pack and had to get help to carry it back to her home.
A mother of 5 children told us that she used to have a herd of 25 goats and now only has 5. Some have lost all of the herds they have built up over the years and are now left with nothing.

To protect against malnutrition, and to enable families to survive the drought without being forced to flee their village communities and become refugees, Islamic Relief runs many programmes in Mandera and Wajir, the two districts of Kenya worst hit by the drought. In Wajir they work closely with Save the Children. Islamic Relief’s work in Wajir includes:

- Providing emergency food supplies to thousands of children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, widows, the elderly and the disabled. In the village I visited 200 people were receiving 18kg emergency family food packs, to last a month, of rice, beans, sugar, flour and cooking oil.
- Mobile health clinics for children, monitoring malnutrition levels and giving out high-protein food supplements.
- Hospital services for children too weak or ill to feed themselves.
- Digging wells and boreholes to provide over 75,000 people with clean, safe water.
- Supporting farmers and pastoralists with training, equipment, seed and animal health services.
Saving the lives of starving children

In the Griftu district hospital, we saw Islamic Relief’s work to restore to health children dying of starvation. I met Nadif Dagane, mother of Ahado, a 4-year-old girl, whose arms and legs were as thin as twigs. She was awake but lying completely lifeless on a bed with her mother. I was told that she was near to death when she was brought in to the hospital, unable to take any nourishment by mouth and also suffering from malaria. But now she is being fed through a tube, they expect her to make a full recovery, leave the hospital in 3 weeks and be looked after with the help of Islamic Relief back in her village.

We visited Kukale village where we met villagers pumping water into their jerry cans and donkeys drinking from the trough supplied from the shallow well dug by Islamic Relief. In Wajir, they have dug or renovated 20 shallow wells and 7 boreholes which provide the villagers and their livestock with constant fresh water and obviate the need for trucking of water which is expensive and which has to be rationed.

Faria Abey with her 20-month-old son, Abdullai Adou. He was admitted to hospital with severe malnutrition but after just two weeks of treatment is now on the road to recovery. (Sara Petrai/ Islamic Relief)
Aid to prevent drought leading to famine, to respond quickly to famine and action needed to tackle climate change and help those affected adapt.

The food aid, water supplies and health care that Islamic Relief is bringing to these villages is undoubtedly helping to save lives and protect the people from the disruption of having to abandon their lands.

The evidence that Aid works and that famine prevention is possible comes from Ethiopia. The steps the Ethiopian government and Aid Agencies have taken to provide a “food safety net” for their people has meant that they have not had to become refugees. This is in stark contrast to Somalia where the conflict and lack of access for Aid have meant that there has neither been protection from famine nor the emergency relief for people in their home villages.

Fatuma Ali, 44 receiving an emergency food pack. Fatuma’s husband died five years ago and she has ten children. She is totally dependent on food aid after her ten cattle died in the droughts. (Martin Cottingham/ Islamic Relief)

To ensure that there is a rapid response to famine as soon as it is needed, there should be a new International Emergency Fund. Once malnutrition takes hold it causes more suffering and is more costly to treat. Priority will need to be given to disaster risk reduction’ – initiatives such as the development of drought-resistant crops,
rainwater harvesting, small-scale irrigation and crop nurseries.

And, because of climate change, further long-term solutions must be found for those who have been pastoralists for generations but whose lands will no longer sustain their cattle.

**Dadaab camp – for 440,000 who have fled Somalia**

Our 20-seater plane flew in to Dadaab, over terrain which is so dry it looks like the surface of the moon. But as we came in to land on the tiny airstrip we saw, spread out in a grid pattern below us, an endless vista of hundreds of thousands of tents. Around the camp is a sprawl of makeshift huts.

The camp was first established back in 1991 in response to those fleeing the violence and hardship in Somalia. It was set up for no more than 90,000.

The director of the camp, Mr Harun Komen, told us that with at least 1,000 more refugees arriving every day, he expects the camp will soon grow from the present 440,000 to more than half a million. His one message for us to take back to the UK and to the rest of the world is that the situation will only get worse unless the conflict in Somalia is ended.

**A camp of women and children**

I met a group of women refugees in a Women’s Centre run by the International Rescue Committee. They told me that to get to the camp they had to walk hundreds of kilometres with their children. One had walked for 30 days. Many walk at night to protect their children from the searing heat. But that makes them even more vulnerable to physical attack and rape. They are already undernourished when they flee their homes, but when they and their children arrive at the camp they are in an even worse state, suffering from exhaustion, dehydration and malnutrition. All of the women I spoke to said it was the conflict that had caused them to flee. None of them had their husbands with them. Their husbands were either dead or disappeared. 80% of those in the camp are women and children. All of them said that they long for the fighting to be over and if there was peace they would return to Somalia. But the reality is, the longer they are in the camp the less possible that will be.
The struggle to improve conditions and make the camp safe

The UNHCR and the many agencies working in the camp struggle to improve the conditions there. But there is some reluctance from the Kenyan government who fear that improving the facilities and responding to the increased numbers by enlarging the camp will simply serve to attract yet more refugees. We heard concerns that there is some infiltration of the camp by Al-Shabaab. The camps endure cross border raids of robbery.

Despite the considerable investment in the camp it is a struggle to maintain, let alone improve, the conditions because of the ever-increasing numbers. The level of violence is a threat to the refugees – women alone with their children without their husband or village community. The Kenyan police provide little reassurance as they are few in number and they themselves have been accused of violence and rape of the refugees. And there has to be a high level of security for the aid workers, who are under a curfew, so that they all have to be inside their heavily protected compound by 6pm. All the convoys through the camp have armed guards. Our plane was the last out that night and the pilot was highly anxious to take off before night fell.
Somalia – no end to the flood of refugees without an end to the conflict

Mumina Mohamed and her one-year-old daughter Hindia Aluh. Hindia is severely malnourished and is receiving food provided by Islamic Relief to save her from starvation. Six months ago Mumina and her husband owned 25 cattle – now only ten are left. (Sara Petrai/ Islamic Relief)

Many of the Kenyans we met in Wajir were the descendants of those who had fled the violence in Somalia in past decades. Roble Hajj Mohamed, who manages the Islamic Relief operation in Wajir told us his father fled Somalia in 1934 at the age of 19. The conflict in Somalia has afflicted generations and caused millions to flee to Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and to America, Canada, the UK and the rest of Europe.

The current drought, on top of the conflict, is causing death, suffering and displacement and is a major problem for the Kenyan government and the people of north east Kenya.

There is a new urgency to tackle the conflict in Somalia. First and foremost for the sake of those in Somalia who are enduring dreadful suffering. But also because Somalia is a source of instability not just to the countries in the Horn of Africa but to the wider world – including the UK.

The Transitional Federal Government only controls a very small area of the country, mostly in Mogadishu, the capital. The rest of the country is ungoverned, fought over by warring clans. But there are opportunities to make progress. In particular, the UK government should:

• Continue and increase Aid to Somalia. We welcome the Government’s commitment to focussing Aid on conflict-affected states. It is much harder to deliver than it is in countries such as Kenya – but it where the suffering and the need is greatest and without food aid people have to flee. There needs to be an open recognition by the Government that it
is not possible to monitor, account for and audit Aid programmes in war-torn Somalia in the way which is rightly done in stable areas. But that should not preclude the Aid increase, which saves lives as well as establishing our genuine concern for the Somali people.

- Though the UK government has no official presence in Somalia, there are Aid Agencies who are well-established and building relationships on the ground, including in the most dangerous South Central Region. The Government should bring together all the British-based Aid Agencies – such as Islamic Relief and UNICEF - who are working in the most dangerous areas and build on their work to help develop the civic society which is needed to underpin the development of peace and stable governance.

- Whilst those currently living in Somalia have no experience of being part of a peaceful and stable country, there are many in the Somali diaspora who do, and who want to play their part in rescuing their country from the ravages of violence. The Government should deepen its engagement with, consultation with and support for, the Somali diaspora in this country. They have advice to give as well as a direct role to play in the future of their country of origin.

- Whilst attempts through the UN, the EU and other Western Groupings have yielded little progress, there is an opportunity both for the African Union to play a greater part in the search for peace and for the Organisation for Islamic Co-operation (OIC), which brings together 57 governments of Muslim countries, to play a leading role. The UK Government, which has just appointed a special representative to the OIC, should give as much support as possible to them to enable them to play a pivotal role.

**Acknowledgements**

I’d like to warmly thank Islamic Relief, first and foremost for the important work they are doing in the Horn of Africa, but also for sponsoring my visit and for making all the arrangements. Thanks in particular to Jehangir Malik, Director, Islamic Relief UK, Nasr Mufahli, Country Director, Islamic Relief Kenya, Roble Hajj Mohamed, area manager in Wajir, Rashid Abdullah, Head of Emergency Programmes, Islamic Relief Kenya, Sara Petrai, Martin Cottingham and Shaheda Dewan, Islamic Relief UK

Thanks to Zeleke Bacha and Sophia Jones-Mwangi, International Rescue Committee who arranged our meeting with the women in Dadaab camp.

I’d like to thank the team at the High Commission particularly Alistair Fernie, Mike Harrison, Ada Mwangola (DFID) and Lisa Pearson. In particular, I’d like to thank our High Commissioner, Rob Macaire for his advice and warm hospitality.

Thanks to Alison Coutts of the British Council, to UN Women, to Alice Macdonald, my political adviser, and the many people I met on my visit, who shared their expertise and experiences with me.
Will Ross, BBC East Africa correspondent, accompanied us on our visit to Wajir and Dadaab and produced a report which was broadcast on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on September 5th.

For more details of Islamic Relief’s work see http://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/

Top 20 donors to the UN Appeal for the Horn of Africa

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As of 5 September 2011

Source: UNOCHA. For a full list see http://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=search-reporting_display&CQ=cq280711155411jdeciQYh1W&orderby=USD_commitdisbu&showDetails=

Figures in the report as of 5 September 2011.