

Sudan leader warns: 'millions of deaths'

by Mary Lalevee

In an interview with the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, Sudanese head of state Gen. Siwar ad Dahab made an urgent appeal for Western aid "to help our country in its great economic difficulties." He said:

"Sudan is going through a catastrophic drought, with six million people suffering, one-quarter of our whole population. If nothing is done, *millions of people* will die of hunger and thirst. The scale of misery is already greater than in Ethiopia and other African countries hit by drought [emphasis added]."

General Dahab called for the "cancellation of our un-supportable foreign debt, so that we can make a new start without this oppressive burden. . . . I call on the world, on the Federal Republic [of Germany], on the Western democracies, to do something decisive, so that our young democratic bud will flower, and not wither and die."

In an earlier plea for aid, General Dahab had told envoys from 40 countries that one million of the country's six million face starvation. "Many children aged 6 to 12 years are also experiencing malnutrition. These children, unless attended to by intensive feeding programs, will undergo irreversible physiological damage."

The director of the U.N. World Food Council, Eugene Whelan, had warned on April 21, "One million people could die in the next two months" in Sudan unless emergency relief aid reached the country. Speaking in Nairobi, Kenya, he said, "They need medicine, they need vaccine and inoculants, things we take for granted in many countries of the world." They needed more than "just straight grain," he said. If no action is taken, he warned, "there's going to be a catastrophe that will be as bad or worse than the one taking place in Ethiopia."

There is no reason for anyone to die, or for any catastrophe to occur. Indeed, a crash military-style mobilization begun today could stop deaths from starvation tomorrow. All it takes is a decision by the heads of government of the Western world to start such a mobilization and end support for the policies of the International Monetary Fund and other financial institutions which have created this horrific situation.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization described the scale of the crisis in the April issue of its *Food Outlook*, saying that it is "becoming more serious," with the worst affected countries being Chad, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, and Sudan.

"In Chad, widespread food shortages, severe malnutri-

tion, and deaths from starvation continue to be reported. Despite the construction of a temporary causeway and permanent bridge over the Logone River, the present cereal distribution capacity is still seriously below minimum consumption needs. In Ethiopia, the food situation remains critical. . . . In Mali, 1 million people have been affected by drought. The food situation is deteriorating and is aggravated by distribution difficulties. In Mozambique, 2.5 million people are affected by food shortages; for 1.7 million of them the situation is critical. . . . In Niger, the food supply situation is extremely serious and is likely to deteriorate further. An estimated 400,000 persons have been displaced and livestock herds have been decimated in many areas. In Sudan, food shortages are increasingly serious and it is now clear that a concerted international relief effort is required *in the weeks ahead* if a major disaster is to be averted [emphasis added]."

Not only starvation is killing people, but epidemics are taking a devastating toll of human life, particularly infants. At a conference on epidemic control now taking place in

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Yaounde, Cameroon, the secretary general of the Organization for the Control of Epidemics in Central Africa, Dr. Kembo, reported that in a survey of the region taken in March, the number-one killer of children under five was found to be diarrheal diseases, and the number-two: measles.

Several experts have confirmed that many diseases were brought under control in the 1960s, but starting in the 1970s, erupted uncontrollably. This was due to the increased destruction of the African economies at the hands of the IMF, leaving African governments totally lacking in means to invest in health infrastructure or simple sanitation facilities. The clean water supplies and sewer systems we take for granted in the West simply do not exist in Africa. Less than 20% of the population has access to clean water, and this percentage is going down.

The same pattern occurs in the animal world: An expert at a Paris Veterinary Medicine Institute described how the animal disease of rinderpest was brought under control by a massive inter-African campaign in 1962, but then, "In 1980, it recurred on a large scale." He stressed:

"The resurgence of these diseases is linked to the economic situation of Africa. African countries have no means to make veterinary services available on the necessary scale."