

INTRODUCTION

In May 1991 there was a dramatic change of government in Ethiopia, in which the government of former President Mengistu Haile Mariam was militarily defeated by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). If the new government of Ethiopia and the administration in Eritrea abide by their promises of ensuring democracy and respect for human rights, there is the very real prospect that war and famine will be banished, for the first time in a generation.

This report is concerned with the thirty years of wars and famines in Ethiopia between September 1961 and the overthrow of the Mengistu government in May 1991. The starting date is inevitably somewhat arbitrary: alternatives could have been chosen at various dates between 1960 and 1966. September 1, 1961, was the occasion of the first armed clash between the newly-formed Eritrean Liberation Front and the army, and is generally recognized by Ethiopians as the "official" outbreak of the war in Eritrea. Other wars started at dates ranging from 1962 to 1975.

Why this Report Now?

The principal wars in Ethiopia are now over. It is now too late to influence the policies of the Mengistu government, or those of the international community towards that government. Yet there are a number of reasons for continuing concern with the past. One is that justice demands that many of those were responsible for perpetrating human rights abuses during the war should be brought to trial. Africa Watch welcomes the promise by the new government headed by the EPRDF that such trials will take place in accordance with internationally-accepted norms of due process and in the presence of international observers. This report, while not intended to provide the specific evidence needed to obtain criminal convictions against individuals for violations of the humanitarian laws of war, documents the range and extent of abuses that such trials should be concerned with.

A second reason is that the sufferings of the Ethiopian people need to be documented. The minimum duty of a human rights organization to the hundreds of thousands of victims of war and famine is to record their plight, so that they are not forgotten by history, and that history is not rewritten to conceal or distort embarrassing facts. In order to understand the problems facing the peoples of Ethiopia at the present time, it is also necessary to understand the horrors they have suffered.

A third reason is that the documentation of the abuses inflicted upon the civilian population by successive Ethiopian governments leads directly to an obligation on present and future governments not to repeat the same crimes. By showing that the methods of counter-

insurgency warfare adopted in Ethiopia have led to a wide range of abuses, Africa Watch hopes to discourage the adoption of such methods in future, not only in Ethiopia but in other countries as well. When governments face insurgencies, their response must be constrained by human rights considerations.

In addition, the analysis of the genesis of famine contained in this report has broad implications. The repeated famines that have struck Ethiopia, and in particular the great famine of 1983-5, were in large part created by government policies, especially counter-insurgency strategies.

It is possible that, at the time, neither government, army nor international relief agencies were fully aware of the way in which these actions were creating exceptionally severe famine. Members of these institutions could thus plead ignorance when faced with the unacceptable consequences of what they did and failed to do. Ignorance is the flimsiest of excuses, especially when -- as in this instance -- there was a notable lack of investigation into the causes of the famine. After the examination of the evidence which we have relied on in compiling this report, no such plea of ignorance should be acceptable in the future. This report is intended to demonstrate conclusively, not only that war created famine, but that particular strategies which the government adopted to fight the wars created a particularly severe form of famine. Moreover, international aid supplied to the government and to relief agencies working alongside the government became part of the counter-insurgency strategy of the government, and thus -- while meeting real and immediate need -- also served to further the government's war aims, and prolong its life.

The findings of this report therefore have implications, not only for the Ethiopian government and other governments faced with insurgencies, but for relief agencies faced with the humanitarian needs resulting from civil strife elsewhere in the world. This report raises disturbing questions about the nature of the relationship between humanitarian agencies and the host government. It calls into question the ethic of relieving actual suffering wherever it is to be found, without preconditions other than safe access and accountability for donations given. In the wider context of a counter-insurgency operation, the supply of such relief may actually extend, intensify, or legitimize that counter-insurgency operation, which is creating more suffering than is being relieved by the humanitarian intervention. This is a tough ethical dilemma with no easy solutions, but one that must be faced and debated by the international community. Putting conditions on the provision of humanitarian assistance is bound to provoke the criticism of "playing politics with the hungry." But, when more powerful actors are already playing politics with the hungry, for a relief agency to ignore this fact is naive and may merely result in it becoming their unwitting tool.

Main Findings

Violence against Civilians

The most characteristic feature of the war has been indiscriminate violence against civilians by the Ethiopian army and air force. The army deliberately killed and wounded tens of thousands of civilians and the air force bombed civilians and civilian targets. It is not possible to produce an accurate estimate for the number of innocent people killed over the decades, but it undoubtedly exceeds 150,000 (leaving aside those killed by famine and the resettlement program). The atrocities discussed in this report are but a fraction of the total number which occurred, although most of the major massacres, especially in the north, are mentioned. Every investigation uncovers more abuses, and many investigations into massacres already documented discover more victims -- injured people who died later and forgotten victims who had no relatives in the vicinity to pronounce them missing. Very few incidents of killings turn out to be less than has been reported.

Deaths from the war will continue even after the fighting is over, because many areas remain heavily mined, and unexploded munitions lie buried in many marketplaces, fields and roads, waiting to claim victims.

These gross violations have occurred consistently over thirty years. Some years have been worse than others, but throughout the rule of the Emperor Haile Selassie, his immediate successors, and Colonel (later President) Mengistu Haile Mariam, there was no significant attempt to curtail such abuses.

Counter-Insurgency Strategy

Throughout the war, the government followed a more-or-less consistent set of counter-insurgency strategies, with significant variations. These consisted of:

- (1) The forcible relocation and control of much of the rural population, using protected villages, forced resettlement from the insurgent zone, and restrictions on movement.
 - (2) The systematic restriction of food supplies (both commercial and relief) in insurgent areas, by cutting key roads or by bombing marketplaces and transport links.
 - (3) The use of indiscriminate violence and exemplary terror against civilians who remained outside the controlled zones, using both ground forces and aerial bombardment.
 - (4) The fostering of divisions within the insurgent movements, and the use of rebel forces opposed to neighboring governments to fight against insurgents inside Ethiopia.
- The strategies were implemented differently in different parts of the country.

Villagization was enforced in the south-east, the west and Eritrea, but not in Tigray, where restrictions on movement, forcible resettlement (after late 1984) and the use of terror were used instead.

This combination of strategies is familiar from many insurgencies around the world. The Ethiopian case stands out as particularly destructive because of the extraordinarily prolonged level of sustained violence, and the frequent lack of any compensatory assistance to the relocated and restricted population. Because of the fragile rural economy and the dependence of rural people on mobility and a range of economic activities, this was particularly damaging, and a major contributor to famine.

The Creation of Famine

One consequence of the government's military policies, particularly during the early 1980s, was the creation of famine. The great famine of 1983-5 is officially ascribed to drought. While climatic adversity and related factors certainly played a part in the tragedy, closer investigation shows that widespread drought occurred only some months after the famine was already under way, and that information on food production and food prices gives an account which contradicts important elements of the drought hypothesis.

In recent years, "war and drought" has become the favored explanation for famine. This is closer to the truth, but remains vague. It is not war itself that creates famine, but war fought in particular ways.

The most important factors explaining the famine are the counter-insurgency strategy adopted by the government, and restrictions and burdens imposed on the population of non-insurgent areas in the name of social transformation.

Repeated military offensives destroyed the crops in surplus-producing areas, and with them much rural employment. The bombing of marketplaces restricted rural trade and exchange, impeding the redistribution of the surpluses that existed locally. In the areas where the government retained some control, restrictions on migration, labor and trade, and policies of forcible relocation in protected villages, served to prevent hungry people from utilizing time-honored strategies for obtaining food, by labor migration and petty trade.

These restrictions were enforced far beyond the areas of insurgent activity, partly from fear that the insurgency would spread, and partly from ambitions for socialist transformation. Other burdens on the peasantry such as punitively high delivery quotas of staple grains to the Agricultural Marketing Corporation and heavy taxation also contributed to the famine. Economic policies themselves are not within the mandate of a human rights organization. However, when these policies are implemented with a ferocity and single-mindedness that

leaves no room for dissent leading to possible revision, and when they do in the event contribute to famine, at least the manner in which they are enforced warrants consideration as an abuse of basic human rights.

Some responses to the famine only served to make matters worse. The government's resettlement program was a disaster when considered from almost any angle, and killed a minimum of 50,000 people. The large-scale provision of food relief to the government-controlled areas of the north was a controversial initiative, which allowed the government to extend its control to contested areas, and maintain that control longer than would otherwise have been the case. Despite the fact that the government had access to only a minority of the famine-stricken population in the north, the great majority of relief was channelled through the government side. This almost certainly prolonged the war: the rebel fronts only regained the military position they held in 1983/4 (at the beginning of the famine), some four to five years later.

The famine of 1983-5 in northern Ethiopia is estimated to have killed a minimum of 400,000 people (not counting those killed by resettlement). Something over half of this mortality can be attributed to human rights abuses causing the famine to come earlier, strike harder, and extend further than would otherwise have been the case. Famine also struck other areas of Ethiopia, for similar reasons, causing tens of thousands of deaths. The famines of 1973-5 killed at least 40,000 in Wollo and 55,000 in the Ogaden; the famine of 1965/6 also killed tens of thousands.

The Treatment of Soldiers

Soldiers were victims of the war too. At least 100,000 soldiers were killed. From the mid-1970s onwards, the government was continually increasing the size of its army, which numbered over 450,000 by 1990. Conscripts were increasingly obtained by forceful and deceitful means, such as press-ganging or using food aid as a bait. Many were below the age limit for military service according to international and domestic law. In the army, they were subjected to a range of abuses, including summary execution for disciplinary offenses. While not formally conscripted, women were subjected to rape and kidnapping by soldiers. The EPLF and Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF, a founder member of the EPRDF in January 1989) treated prisoners of war well, though the International Committee of the Red Cross had disagreements with both fronts concerning the latter's access. Prisoners of war were attacked by government airplanes, and were subject to detention and torture or worse by the government following their release. The Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) and Somali army treated prisoners less well, and frequently killed them. The rebel fronts also used methods of conscrip-

tion which on occasion were violent.

Inflaming Local and Neighboring Conflicts

Deliberately or inadvertently, the Ethiopian government inflamed other conflicts. It supported insurgent groups in Sudan and Somalia, which committed human rights abuses. The destabilization of border areas and the availability of modern weaponry through the market or through militias and insurgents in neighboring countries helped to make local disputes between ethnic groups more violent. Several small groups in southwest Ethiopia have suffered severely from the depredations of their well-armed neighbors, as a direct if unforeseen consequence of government policy.

The Record of the Rebel Fronts

The rebel fronts committed abuses against civilians and prisoners of war. Some of the rebel fronts have extremely poor human rights records. However, in the case of the EPLF and TPLF-EPRDF, these abuses were on a much smaller scale than those committed by the government forces.

The policies of respecting civilians were the EPLF's and TPLF-EPRDF's "secret weapon," and meant that with every atrocity committed by the government, more civilians supported -- at least passively -- the rebels. Similarly, the released prisoners of war were the best propagandists for the rebel cause within the government army. The history of the war is therefore, in a very real sense, a demonstration of the futility of evil.

The war in the north was essentially not fought between the government army and the fronts; it was fought between the army and large sections of the people. It is this asymmetry between the contending parties that was the major reason why one side behaved in a manner radically unlike the other. It was an appreciation of this fact that enabled the fronts to win.

The Impact on Civil Politics

With one exception, this report does not deal directly with civil institutions, either in government- or rebel-held areas of the country. This exception is chapter 6, which deals with the Red Terror of 1977/8, in which the urban insurgency of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) was crushed by the government, in the process killing a minimum of 10,000 educated people and suppressing any form of dissent for over a decade. This bloody episode was civil repression turned into all out warfare, which is the principal reason why it is included in this report.

More generally, the wars seriously stunted the growth of civil society in Ethiopia. The war was an excuse for the indefinite continuation of military rule -- albeit under a civilian mask during 1987-90 -- and the creation and maintenance of security forces empowered to violate human rights with impunity; it was an excuse for severe censorship and the restriction of civil and political rights. Even after Marxism-Leninism was formally abandoned by President Mengistu in March 1990, there was no progress towards the respect for civil and political rights, and even regression, with the establishment of a *de facto* state of emergency throughout the country, under military administrators.¹ One casualty of the war, not documented in this report, has been the stifling of any initiatives towards democracy, the rule of law, and the development of civil society. These will be documented in future Africa Watch publications.

The International Role

The international community has played a mixed role in Ethiopia's recent history. Until 1977, Ethiopia was a close ally of the United States, and received extensive military and economic assistance. Thereafter, it was a close ally of the USSR, and was shunned by the US, which provided no development nor military aid, and was a constant critic of government actions. Other western countries, such as members of the European Community, provided extensive economic assistance though not military supplies, although the west's ally Israel broke with that policy in 1989, when it supplied armaments in return for the emigration of the Ethiopian Jews.

Between 1977 and 1991 western aid to Ethiopia rose tenfold. Much of this aid was humanitarian famine relief. Though not achieving all that its proponents claim, this aid no doubt saved many lives and livelihoods. However, there is a more questionable side to aid. In

¹ See: "Ethiopia: Mengistu's Empty Democracy," [News from Africa Watch](#), March 5, 1991.

the crucial year 1985, about 90 per cent of the aid was given to the government and to humanitarian agencies working on the government side, despite the fact that they had access to only a minority of the famine-affected population. Much assistance was given without scrutinizing the context in which it would be utilized, and in fact served to support the counter-insurgency strategies of the Mengistu government. Instances include the "rehabilitation" assistance to the south-east during 1980-2, the Food for the North Initiative of 1985-6, and the outpouring of aid in 1987-8. More generally, international assistance undoubtedly prolonged the Mengistu government's life.

The US government was consistently critical of the Mengistu government's human rights record. However, the main US investigation into government culpability in creating the famine was given a restricted agenda which obliged it to find the Ethiopian government "not guilty" of deliberately using starvation as a weapon of war. Had the investigation been mandated to examine a slightly broader set of issues and a longer time period, the verdict would have been much more likely to be "guilty." The British government was also critical, but to a lesser degree. Most other major donors did not include a significant consideration of human rights concerns in determining their relations with the Ethiopian government. The UN in particular was more eager to conceal evidence of abuses, especially those associated with famine and famine relief, than expose them, and the European Community gave substantial aid with no questions asked.

The US was the only major donor to direct the majority of its assistance to the rebel held areas in 1989-91, in accordance with an objective assessment of the numbers of needy people to be found there.

During 1989-91, a major concern of Israel and the US was the population of Ethiopian Jews, known as Falashas. Israel supplied arms to the Ethiopian government in exchange for allowing the Falashas to leave. The US lobbied for the Falashas to be allowed to emigrate but objected to the arms supply.

Despite repeated approaches by the Mengistu government, the US refused to give economic or military assistance. Apart from humanitarian concerns and the Falasha issue, the US was active in trying to obtain a negotiated peace. The US was ultimately successful in assisting the handover of power from the Mengistu government to the EPRDF and EPLF with less bloodshed than would otherwise have occurred. This was achieved through persistent diplomatic efforts and through pragmatism, notably the abandonment of the long-standing US objection to Eritrean independence.

Structure

For the most part, this report is structured chronologically. Some parts may appear repetitive -- but the war was repetitive: there were thirteen major offensives in Eritrea alone, ten in Tigray, and a dozen in the southeast. Following the historical background, it breaks naturally into five sections, which cover the following periods, provinces and topics:

- (1) Insurgency and counter-insurgency under Haile Selassie and during the first years of the revolution, up to and including the Somali invasion (chapters 2-4).
- (2) Counter-insurgency in the years between 1978 and 1984, when the army was newly equipped and expanded with Soviet assistance, leading to victory over the insurgencies in the southeast, the Red Terror in the cities, and the creation of famine in the north (chapters 5-9).
- (3) The use of humanitarian relief for war and programs of social engineering, including pacification in Eritrea, the withholding of relief from Tigray, resettlement and villagization, in the period 1985-8 (chapters 10-13).
- (4) War and famine during the last years of the Mengistu government, when the EPLF and TPLF-EPRDF had won the military advantage (chapters 14-16).
- (5) Neglected issues and regions: conscription and the treatment of soldiers and prisoners of war; the wars in the southwest, and the wars in the east including those involving Ethiopian refugees in Somalia (chapters 17-19).

A final chapter deals with the policies of western governments to Ethiopia, with a focus on the United States.

Wars and Famines, 1961-77

The "official" outbreak of the war in Eritrea was September 1961, when the army first engaged the forces of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). Over the following decade the army acted in a brutal and destructive manner towards civilians and their villages, farms and animal herds. There were numerous massacres of civilians, hundreds of villages were burned, and much of the population was forced to relocate in fortified government villages. The worst atrocities occurred during 1967 and 1970-1. The ELF and the younger EPLF also engaged in abuses such as kidnappings and assassinations, and fought against each other.

Shortly after the 1974 revolution, the ELF and EPLF combined in a major attempt to defeat the army in Asmara. 1975 was to be the most bloody year of the war to date. The government continued to use indiscriminate violence against civilians, it instituted a food blockade of the Eritrean highlands, and tried to mobilize a huge peasant army to overwhelm the fronts by sheer weight of numbers.

From the start, the policies of scorched earth and the use of a food blockade as a weapon

meant that the war was fought at the cost of creating hunger among the civilian population.

Haile Selassie also faced insurrections in the northern provinces. In the 1960s the main such revolt was in Gojjam, due to discontent over taxation and land measurement. In Wollo, inter-ethnic fighting in the lowlands, coupled with government-promoted or sanctioned processes of land alienation and enforcement of crippling tenancy agreements in times of drought all contributed to the creation of famine in 1972-4, a famine made worse by the government's concealment of it and refusal to consider assistance. After the revolution, there were insurgencies led by feudal leaders in all the northern provinces. The suppression of the Afar revolt in 1975 was particularly bloody and led to much loss of civilian life.

In the southeastern part of Ethiopia there were two separate insurgencies during the 1960s and 1970s. One insurgency was in the Ogaden, where the WSLF, supported by the Somali government, was active. The second insurgency involved a number of Oromo movements; in the 1960s led by Wako Gutu in Bale and Sheikh Hussein in Harerghe, in the 1970s led by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Somali Abo Liberation Front (SALF) in the 1970s. The government's military response included indiscriminate violence against civilians and war against the economic base -- killing animals, poisoning wells, cutting food supplies, and restricting movement. These military strategies were instrumental in creating the famines which struck the area in 1973-4.

In 1977 the Somali army invaded the Ethiopian Ogaden, first secretly and then openly, leading to a large-scale conventional war. Both sides in the war committed abuses against the civilian population.

Counter-Insurgency, 1978-84

In 1977 a number of simultaneous military changes occurred which heralded a significant break with the past. These included: the Somali invasion of the Ogaden, Ethiopia's break with the US and the turn to the USSR, the massive enlargement and re-equipment of the army, the prosecution of the Red Terror, and the undisputed ascendancy of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam.

The defeat of the Somali army in 1978 was followed by six years of intense counter-insurgency warfare against the forces of the WSLF and the OLF. The continuing war was waged largely in secret, and ended in the defeat of the WSLF and the eclipse of the OLF. Other rebel fronts such as the SALF and the Sidama Liberation Front were also defeated. The government strategy included:

- * Repeated military offensives, involving many abuses against civilians, including indiscriminate aerial bombardment of villages;

- * A policy of forcible relocation in protected villages;
- * The use of Somali opposition movements to fight against the WSLF.
- * Pressure on Somalia and the international community to obtain the repatriation of refugees.

A particularly insidious element in the government strategy was the utilization of international humanitarian aid for counter-insurgency purposes.

1977/8 also was the year of the Red Terror, in which Colonel Mengistu crushed the urban opposition of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) by a massive campaign of killing, detention and torture, and intimidation. Later, the terror was turned on the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement, the government's erstwhile ally. Tens of thousands of young people were killed, and the government became addicted to the use of terror as a weapon of war.

The Mengistu government was simultaneously fighting an intensified war in Eritrea, seeking to crush the Eritrean insurgency with a vastly-expanded and re-equipped army and air force. The years 1978-84 saw an expansion of the scorched earth and forced relocation policies of earlier years, together with saturation bombing of areas of rebel strength. A series of large-scale offensives culminated in the huge "Red Star" offensive of 1982. These years witnessed the demise of the ELF, and the retreat of the EPLF to the mountainous Sahel district close to Sudan. Government policies led to wholesale ecological destruction, which, together with the damage to livelihoods caused by the war and restrictions, were major factors creating famine.

Meanwhile, in Tigray, the government faced the insurgency of the TPLF, which was fighting a classic guerrilla war throughout the province. The government's counter-insurgency strategy included:

- (1) Military offensives into the TPLF heartlands, which were also the richer, surplus-producing districts of the province;
- (2) The bombing of marketplaces to disrupt commerce;
- (3) The imposition of strict bans on the movement of petty traders and migrant laborers.

As well as directly causing large-scale civilian suffering and death, this combination of policies meant that the normal processes of redistribution of surplus grain to poorer areas and migration of seasonal laborers to richer areas were no longer able to occur, leading to intense famine in the food deficit areas. A close investigation of the evidence for drought and production failures confirms that these cannot account for the timing, severity or extent of the famine of 1983-5. Instead, an analysis of the timing and location of the major offensives of 1980-1, 1983 and 1984, and the timing and scope of the restrictions, confirms that the government's counter-insurgency strategy was the prime culprit for the disaster.

Simultaneously, a set of restrictions and impositions placed upon rural people in government-controlled areas, including punitive taxation, requisitioning of food for the

Agricultural Marketing Corporation, forced labor on government projects and state farms, and bans on labor, migration and trade. Poor people were often forced to sell their reserves of food to meet these demands, which were backed up by sanctions such as imprisonment. These brought large sections of the population close to the brink of famine. These policies were pursued partly for reasons of counter-insurgency and partly from ambitions for socialist transformation.

The famine killed in excess of 400,000 people. The human rights abuses made it come earlier, strike harder, and reach further. Most of these deaths can be attributed, not to the weather, but to the government's gross violations of human rights.

Humanitarian Relief as a Weapon of War, 1985-88

In late 1984 the famine reached the television screens of the west. This caused a massive inflow of relief, which was utilized by the government in its counter-insurgency strategy in the north. It coincided with renewed offensives in Eritrea and Tigray and the launching of the programs of resettlement and villagization.

The relief aid generously provided to the Ethiopian government and the humanitarian agencies working alongside it was a boon to the government's war plans. The politics of aid resulted in the government side receiving a disproportionate share of the assistance compared to the rebel-held areas. In Eritrea, aid was used as part of a military pacification strategy, with aid agencies moving in behind the military to secure newly-occupied areas. This allowed the government to score significant military successes in 1985, and to control areas it had been unable to hold on to before. Most aid agencies, in particular the United Nations, preferred not to face the dilemmas of providing aid in such a situation, and thus actively abetted the army's efforts. Some relief was supplied directly to the army and militia.

When counter-attacking in 1987, the EPLF disrupted the relief programs. These actions gained international condemnation, but the government continued to object to plans to allow safe passage to humanitarian supplies. The relief programs have also to be considered within the wider context of the pacification strategy.

In Tigray, the government preferred to withhold aid from the province, thus starving the people. The government attempted to conceal this fact, and in doing so was abetted by the United Nations, which in August 1985 produced a mendacious report endorsing the government's claim that it was feeding most of the famine victims in Tigray, at a time when it was in fact feeding very few indeed. A huge army offensive into Tigray in 1985, as well as being particularly bloody and destructive, was aimed at preventing clandestine relief supplies coming across the Sudanese border to TPLF-held areas. Relief convoys, feeding centers and

refugees were all attacked from the air. As in Eritrea, the government was able to make substantial military gains on account of the famine, but it also deeply alienated the rural people, who realized that they would never be free from famine while the Mengistu government remained in power. They were thus prepared to undergo great hardships in order to fight against it.

The government's main response to the famine was a gargantuan program of forced resettlement. This involved numerous abuses of human rights, including the violent and arbitrary manner in which resettlers were taken, appalling conditions in transit and on arrival, the displacement of indigenous people in the resettlement areas, and violence against resettlers who attempted to escape, including enslavement by soldiers of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The resettlement program is estimated to have killed at least 50,000 people.

The famine period also saw the beginnings of a comprehensive villagization program. First implemented in the east as a counter-insurgency measure, it was spread to other areas as an attempt at social engineering. The implementation of this program also involved violence and coercion, especially in the war zones.

The EPLF and TPLF-EPRDF Ascendancy, 1988-91

Early 1988 marked another watershed, in which the rebel fronts in Eritrea and Tigray decisively gained the military initiative. The stalemate in the war was broken, and their military victory duly followed three years later. The government continued to fight the war with total disregard for the rights of civilians, and the army and air force engaged in reprisal killings of civilians. 1988 was a particularly bloody year in the war, during which the government cast aside all restraint in its repeated attacks on civilian targets. The massacre of 400 Eritrean civilians by the army at Sheib and the death of 1,800 people when the Tigrayan market town of Hausien was bombed are two of the most notorious examples.

In 1989 the TPLF defeated the army in Tigray and occupied the whole province. The government attempted to destroy what it could before leaving, and then sent bombing missions against major towns including the capital, Meqele. In 1990, the EPLF captured the port of Massawa, which the government then tried to destroy using aerial bombardment. Meanwhile the war intensified in the provinces of Gonder and Wollo and spread to Gojjam and Shewa, where the army continued to commit numerous abuses against civilians. Abuses continued up until the last days of the Mengistu regime in May 1991 -- for example, just a few weeks before, over 100 Tigrayan prisoners were summarily executed in Gonder prison.

The years 1988-91 also saw continued food shortages, and belated efforts by the international community to ensure that civilians on all sides had access to relief. These plans

were continually subject to political interference, to a certain extent by the fronts but very largely so on the part of the government. The besieged Eritrean capital, Asmara, witnessed the worst extremes of hunger during 1990-91, where military requisitioning of food and the imposition of a blockade created severe suffering. In Tigray, despite the exceptionally severe drought, severe famine was avoided because the TPLF did not impose the same burdens and restrictions on the populace as the government had done earlier in the decade.

Other Wars

From the 1960s, and increasing in intensity during the 1980s, there has been a series of wars in western and southwestern Ethiopia. These have included:

- * An insurgency by the EPRP in western Gojjam, against the Mengistu government and (latterly) the EPRDF.
- * An insurgency by the OLF in western Wollega, against the government. This and the war in Gojjam were also inflamed by the resettlement and villagization programs, and saw large-scale violations of human rights during 1989-91.
- * Conflict between the OLF and the SPLA, which had a wing of its own army inside Ethiopia, operating in alliance with the Ethiopian army. The SPLA committed atrocities against local civilians, and the OLF attacked a Sudanese refugee camp in 1990. The main exodus of Sudanese refugees back to Sudan in May-June 1991 was not, however, related to attacks by the OLF or EPRDF.
- * Conflict between the Anuak of Illubabor province and the government, inflamed by resettlement, villagization and the presence of the SPLA.
- * Local warfare by pastoralist groups in Gamu Gofa who are either self-armed or armed by a neighbor. These wars are local disputes intensified by the selective availability of arms to certain groups following on alliances with pastoralist militias in southern Sudan. The Kenyan government has also been responsible for abuses against these pastoralists.

In eastern Ethiopia, following the defeat of the WSLF and OLF in the early 1980s, fragmented wars have continued on both sides of the Ethiopia-Somalia border. Both governments supported insurgent groups operating in each other's territory; Ethiopian refugees were armed by the Somali government, and the insurgent groups clashed with each other and with the two national armies. The war between the Somali National Movement (backed by Ethiopia) and a Somali-backed Oromo front, inside northern Somalia during 1988 was a result of this process of fragmentation and manipulation.

Following the EPRDF victory in May-June 1991, there was an upsurge of local violence in southern and eastern Ethiopia, involving banditry, inter-communal strife, and resistance to the

imposition of any form of central authority.

The Total Impact

The cost to Ethiopia, in human, economic and social terms of the last thirty years of war and famine has been literally incalculable. According to the very conservative estimates contained in this report, the wars and famines have cost a minimum of one million lives, and possibly as many as 1.5 million. An even greater number have been wounded, traumatized, forced to flee as refugees, or have been displaced within the country. The economy is bankrupt, the natural environment irreparably damaged, the country torn apart, and the growth of civil politics aborted. The last thirty years have indeed been evil days.

Recommendations

Africa Watch's recommendations to the government of Ethiopia and the administration in Eritrea include:

- * That those primarily responsible for gross abuses of human rights be brought to trial, before an independent court, with due process of law.
- * That a permanent Human Rights Commission be set up with wide ranging powers to investigate allegations of human rights abuse.
- * That an inquiry into the causes of famine be set up.

Africa Watch considers that the aid donors need to reconsider carefully their role in providing humanitarian assistance in situations of armed conflict and human rights abuse.

Africa Watch's recommendations to the aid donors include:

- * That they should cooperate with the inquiry into the causes of famine, and accept responsibility for any instances in which they have abetted or failed to prevent human rights abuses.
- * That they adopt human rights conditions for the delivery of emergency aid.