

Christian Relief Group Goes on High Alert to Respond to African Famine

World Relief's Clive Calver warns that a food crisis in Malawi threatens to become the worst famine of the last 60 years

A food crisis sweeping through southern Africa is poised to reach famine proportions in Malawi, where a half million people need immediate food assistance and an estimated 3.2 million face starvation by next April.

Observers expect it to become the single biggest famine of the last 60 years unless relief agencies, American churches and divine help intervene, according to World Relief President Clive Calver. Many of those immediately affected by the shortage are the country's Christians.

The failure of this year's harvest, combined with a similar failure from last year, is the primary cause, said Calver, who just returned from Malawi.

"People began to starve last year. This year they ate the seed and the crops when they were still green," he said.

Aggravating the situation is AIDS, which is taking HIV-stricken men out of the fields. In addition, there is a lack of medical care and vitamins, and granaries are almost empty. Indigenous pastors who met with Calver and other members of the World Relief team all related similar tragic stories about the effects of the shortage.

One pastor said he had witnessed people eating grass because they had nothing else to eat, then dying later of starvation. Another said the worst thing she had seen was women and children being sexually exploited or abused in exchange for food.

“Children may be converted to Islam through food distribution. [There is] disintegration of the family unit [with] HIV-AIDS pandemic, as women and children seek to satisfy the body and stomach in exchange for sex,” another pastor reported.

In addition to Christians’ helping from a purely humanitarian motive, Calver said, it is essential that the American church realizes the spiritual importance of helping.

“Islam is feeding its people, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses are feeding their people. For us not to do so discredits the gospel.”

Calver said \$40 is required to feed a child for a year and save a youngster’s life. He emphasized that prayer in addition to donations is essential. The amount of help is still “a drop in the ocean” compared with the need, he said.

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