

Somalia Famine Declaration Long Overdue

Famine is a deadly killer. It is declared only when malnutrition in the population shoots over the level of 30 percent and two children per every 10,000 die each day. Declaring a famine draws more attention for aid and relief to the people in crisis.

But when the UN finally declared famine in two areas of Somalia on July 20, malnutrition was at 55 percent and six children per every 10,000 were dying every day.

And this wasn't the only delayed reaction seen.

Earlier, the Somali terrorist organization Al-Shabab lifted the humanitarian aid ban on July 6 when they saw the situation was at critical levels. The UN didn't drop their first aid containers to Somalia until July 17.

"It's been a one to two year process [for Somalia] to get where they are now," says Jeff Palmer with Baptist Global Response. "Now it's just reached critical levels and the media are here, of course, and major news networks are just beginning to pick up."

But for Baptist Global Response, their mission was not so delayed as governmental responses. Palmer states, "This is not a new thing. We're already in there. We've been there. We're going to be there for long term. It is critical now, so I am glad that they did declare [famine]."

When asked why the UN waited so long to declare famine, Palmer comments: "There could be a number of reasons: Donor fatigue right now ... and the problems of working in Somalia with some of the sanctions and things that are there. I'm not sure what all those are."

Baptist Global Response currently has four teams in the general area of the Horn of Africa. They focus most of their work on the nearly 800,000 refugees fleeing Somalia and starvation.

BGR also have some covert work with partners directly in Somalia, but there are many barriers that make their efforts there difficult. The sheer overwhelming numbers of people still in need, the armed violence of war and UN sanctions against the country are just a few of the obstacles to their ministry.

Food relief is the focus of most BGR programs. But as the rainy season comes in October, they will also work to get products such as seed and livestock back to the people.

BGR staff are praying that the rains will indeed come and that the people will make it through January and February before harvest time.

Along with meeting their extreme needs physically, Baptist Global Response always pairs their efforts with the encouraging message of the gospel.

"Anytime people go through cataclysmic things within their life ... they question: 'Why is God doing this?'" says Palmer. "We try to give them a message and comfort of hope in God and a positive witness, making sure that we meet their needs because we want to help people where they're hurting."

So far, Baptist Global Response has been able to give a quarter of a million dollars worth of relief to the people in the Horn of Africa. Palmer says, "It's a drop in the bucket, but we're hoping to be able to do drops where they count the most in some of these critical areas that are falling between the cracks."

Please pray for those still suffering from starvation that they might get the relief needed. Pray also that Baptist

Global Response efforts would grow with increased funding so they may advance their relief ministry along with the gospel.