

Terrorist Groups Block Africa Famine Relief

While almost 13 million people are on the brink of starvation in the Horn of Africa, relief agencies are frustrated that they may be unable to help those most desperate. It's not because they don't have the food. It's because terrorist groups linked to al-Qaida are preventing the aid from getting there.

Todd Nettleton with Voice of the Martyrs says Somalia is the biggest challenge. "The al-Shabaab militant terrorist group has made it a stated goal to completely rid the country of Christians. They literally are hunting down Christians, and anyone who is thought to be Christian or rumored to be a Christian is a potential target."

Well-known Christian aid groups have been forced out of the country in areas where al-Shabaab cell groups are in power. Nettleton says: "There's so much lawlessness. And in the midst of that, you have so many people who are starving to death. But the reality for someone who identifies themselves as a Christian to go in: they really paint a target on their back just to go into the country."

While VOM isn't a famine-relief organization, they are helping Christians who are struggling there.

Despite the threats, World Concern is working there, says Chris Shaeach. He just returned from an area along the border of Somalia and Kenya where Somalis are trying to get out of rebel-held areas. "We met refugees traveling out of the hardest-hit areas of [Africa's Horn]—some of them [walking] up to 250 miles on foot just to try and find food and water for their families."

Shaeach says it's always difficult working in a conflict zone,

and in this case, "it's heart-breaking knowing that people who are really suffering and dying cannot receive any aid. The only way they can get aid is to walk."

Many of them physically can't do it. For those that can, "some of them travel at night to increase their own safety; but they do run the risk of being attacked by lions and other wild animals."

Since World Concern is a Christian organization, they're doing everything they can to aid those in need. "Where we have permission and where we have the capacity, we will continue to reach the people who are needy and try to get into areas wherever possible."

While they're helping those who are hungry physically, they're also reaching those who are hungry spiritually. "There can be opportunities to talk about our faith. One of the important things for us is that our faith is not just in word, but in deed."

The United Nations says the crisis will worsen before it gets better. Pray that God will protect those working in these difficult areas and that many will support their work financially.