

## A campaign of lies and slander against Sudan

"The land of famine . . . the land of civil war . . . the land with 10 million at risk of death. . ." These were the images cited, and criticized, by Prof. Abdalla A. Abdalla, an agriculturalist and the Sudanese ambassador to the United States, in his welcoming remarks to participants at the Sudanese embassy-hosted conference June 6-7, in Washington, D.C. Abdalla explained that "the image of the Sudan in the United States has come to be based on certain perceptions that are not founded on truth," because the media select what they consider "newsworthy items." Thereby, you get only the "tragic story," but not the means to see the truth.

The propaganda barrage against Sudan has been especially heavy since August 1990, when the Khartoum government opposed the U.S. stationing of troops in Saudi Arabia, and subsequently opposed the Persian Gulf war. The most common falsehood is that the El-Bashir government refuses to acknowledge famine, and to feed its people. Here is the record:

When the rains failed in 1989-90 and 1990-91, the government contacted the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization in August 1990, to send a mission to make a crop failure assessment. The FAO issued its final report in December 1990, to which the Sudanese government concurred, estimating that 1 to 1.2 million tons of grains were required by about June 1991, to fill the food gap caused by the harvest failures. In December, President Gen. Omer El-Bashir issued an international appeal for food aid.

Additionally, the government took steps in October through December to sow a second wheat planting. Instead of 300-500,000 wheat acres in 1990-91, acreage to wheat was doubled to 1 million. In irrigated areas, there was also an increased sowing to sorghum.

The government also attempted to purchase additional imports, with little means to do so. And the appeals for international assistance came at the same time as the U.S. buildup for the Persian Gulf war. The United States condemned Sudan's disapproval of the deployment of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia, and in October, the U.S. turned back a commercial shipment of 45,000 tons of wheat bound for Sudan. At the same time, the International Monetary Fund declared Sudan a "non-cooperating member," and moved to cut off financing.

When the U.N.'s World Food Program shipped 19,000 tons of grain to Port Sudan at the same time that the U.S. diverted the 45,000-ton vessel, American officials

protested, and demanded that the Khartoum-based World Food Program official, Trevor Page, be removed from office for obstructing U.S. wishes.

During the war against Iraq, U.S. ships interdicted vessels in the Red Sea bound for Port Sudan with cargoes of agriculture chemicals for the winter wheat crop, and delayed arrival until past the time of use.

However, by April 1991, the expanded planting resulted in close to 800,000 additional tons of grain—celebrated in Khartoum as a "harvest of joy." Finally, the United States also pledged to provide over 300,000 tons of relief food, but in the context of stepped-up propaganda and operations against Khartoum.

On May 19, a "60 Minutes" CBS television network show ran a special segment on Sudan, featuring slanders by Roger Winter, head of the U.S. Committee on Refugees, which is funded by the U.S. Departments of State and Justice and private foundations. Winter said that the Sudanese government is blocking food relief shipments because "domestically, they were embarrassed to admit their food self-sufficiency program didn't work. Internationally, they were allied with Saddam Hussein." The show presented U.S. Ambassador to Sudan Jim Cheek criticizing the government for "hatching a futile scheme to make Sudan self-sufficient overnight."

In this context, the U.S. Congress rubber-stamped the Bush administration's demand for a Horn of Africa foreign assistance proviso authorizing the United States to provide relief matériel to chosen agencies that would by-pass governments in cases where "humanitarian" concerns justified overriding sovereignty.

### The refugee crisis

Further aggravating the situation, as of the end of May, Ethiopian refugees were entering Sudan at the rate of 20,000 a day. There are now estimated to be 240,000 newly arrived Ethiopian refugees, in addition to the 2 million already in Sudan as of the beginning of 1991.

The government issued repeated calls for help, and on June 17, a statement was released by Col. Mohammed El-Amin Khalifa of the Revolutionary Command Council, reporting that the Sudanese Refugees Commission had mobilized convoys of trucks with supplies for the refugees, and formulated a three-month contingency relief plan, at a cost of \$18 million and 10 million Sudanese pounds.

On June 27, the Sudanese government reached an agreement with the U.N. World Food Program director, James Ingram, on procedures to handle relief supplies for the refugees. The response of the U.S. State Department has been to charge the Khartoum government with bombing the refugees.