

Humanitarian Relief Newsletter



AN UP-DATE OF HUMANITARIAN NEWS AND ISSUES IN ERITREA



UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Urges Donors To "Translate Pledges Into Cash-In-Hand" For Eritrea

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L-R: Mr. Musa Bungudu, OCHA Eritrea, Ms. M. McAskie, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, OCHA, Mr. Simon R. Nhongo, UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Deragon Haile-Melekot, Commissioner, Eritrea Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC), Mr. Christian Balslev-Olesen, UNICEF, Mr. Teclmichael Woldegiorgis Deputy Commissioner, ERREC.

"Up to 70 percent" of the Eritrean population is suffering as a result of the fall-out from war or drought," said Ms Carolyn M. McAskie, UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Eritrean Capital, Asmara, 10 June.

Speaking at the launch of the 2003 Mid-Year Review (MYR) of the Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal, (CAP) Ms McAskie said that one of the most important challenges at present in Eritrea is "how to make sure that [the current] drought does not equal famine".

Mr. Deragon Haile-Melekot, the Commissioner of the Eritrea Relief and Refugee Commission, one of six panelists at the launch, expressed the Government's support for the CAP, adding his appreciation to the donor community, the UN system, the international Red Cross movement and NGOs for their support.

Ms. McAskie said her two-day visit, to Eritrea (June 9 - 11) was aimed at alerting the international donor community to the dire humanitarian situation in Eritrea. She urged donors to "translate their pledges into cash-in-hand". Ms McAskie noted that Eritrea's critical situation was not receiving adequate international attention. "There is a feeling in the UN capitals (New York, Rome and Geneva) as well as in many donor capitals that we haven't done enough to carry the story of what's really happening in Eritrea to the world," she said, adding that "part of the syndrome is that people who might be at risk don't make good photo opportunities."

Ms. McAskie complimented the Government of Eritrea for its commitment to the current humanitarian challenges in the country. She expressed her respect for its independent approach. The Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator said, "the support of the international community is absolutely necessary...at this time." She added that it is essential to "work hard at a new partnership" between Government authorities and the international community to help make delivery of vital aid more effective and efficient.

At the launch of the CAP, Mid-Year Review, Mr Simon R. Nhongo, UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator, expressed concern with delays in the arrival of food aid pledges. To avert starvation Eritrea requires 476,000 MT in food aid, and while 48 % of that amount has been pledged, only 19 % of the total has actually reached the country. Mr Nhongo noted that the coming two months would be the most critical period of the year when many vulnerable families would have exhausted their reserves of food. To avert famine, Mr Nhongo said Eritrea would need at least 250,000 MT of general food aid for over 2 million people and supplementary food for 400,000 women and children. He said the



Ms. McAskie with Amb. Legwaila Joseph Legwaila, head of the UN Peace Keeping Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

means should be found to speed up the supply of food pledged to the needy.

During her visit to Eritrea, the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator met the Eritrean Foreign Minister, Mr. Ali Said Abdella and Mr Deragon Haile-Melekot, Commissioner of ERREC. Ms. McAskie was briefed on the Eritrea and Ethiopia peace process by the Special Representative of the Secretary General, and head of the United Nations Peace Keeping Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, Ambassador Legwaila Joseph Legwaila. Ms. McAskie also met with the UN Country Team and representatives of non-governmental organisations and international donors.

On 11 June, Ms. McAskie visited drought and war affected Tsorona and the Hazemo Plains in Debub Zone, where she saw the effects of the worst drought in over a decade in an area normally regarded as one of the most agriculturally productive in Eritrea.



The women of Tsorona give gifts to Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator,

Photo Credit: Jorge Aramburu, Yemane Haile.