

Hunger News & Hope

...a Seeds of Hope publication

The Perfect Storm

*How Aid Cuts, Drought & War Will Kill
20 Million People This Year —
if We Don't Help*
by Chelle Samaniego

The coffers are almost empty. Humanitarian aid has begun to run dry, like the rivers in the countries it's meant to save. Famine is decimating the landscapes in four countries that desperately seek aid to survive. And the global super powers who normally help in these situations are turning a blind eye on the neediest and hungriest of God's children.

A March 2017 report from the International Committee of the Red Cross said we only had three to four months to save millions of people from starvation.

That three to four months is now.

"We have kind of a perfect storm now where protracted conflict is overlapped or exacerbated by natural hazard—drought in particular—in the Horn of Africa, which is leading to the situation we are facing now," said Dominik Stillhart, Director of Operations for the Red Cross.

Two months ago, United Nations humanitarian chief Stephen O'Brien told the UN Security Council that without collective and coordinated global efforts, people will simply starve to death and many more will suffer

See "Perfect Storm" on page 2



What You'll Find Inside:

2-4

The Perfect Storm,
continued

4

A Word of Hope
& Warning

5

What You Can Do
for Hungry People:

1. *Write a Letter to Congress*
2. *Fast & Pray*

6

What Does It Mean
to Be Saved?
A Reflection

7

A Video about Climate
Change & Hunger

8

Quotes, Poems
& Pithy Sayings



Perfect Storm

continued from page 1

and die from disease. He estimated that more than 20 million people face imminent famine in, not one, but four countries: Somalia, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen. Of these 20 million, 1.4 million are children.

UN officials says this comprises the largest humanitarian crisis since the United Nations was founded in 1945.

The UN defines famine as occurring when “acute malnutrition rates among children exceed 30 percent, more than two people per 10,000 die per day and people are not able to access food and other basic necessities.”

Somalia

UN Secretary General António Guterres, visiting Somalia two months ago, declared, “People are dying. The world must act now to stop this.” In Somalia alone, 5.5 million people are threatened so severely by drought and famine that \$825 million is needed *now* to help half the country’s population survive the next six months.

Somalia has lurched from crisis to crisis since 1991, when the central government imploded. The UN defines famine as occurring when “acute malnutrition rates among children exceed 30 percent, more than two people per 10,000 die per day and people are not able to access food and other basic necessities.” Somalia has hit those marks several times.

In 1992, a similar combination of drought and war set off a famine that killed hundreds of thousands of people and started a cycle of international intervention that, despite billions of dollars and more than a dozen transitional governments, has yet to stabilize the country.

In 2011, during the country’s last declared famine, 260,000 Somalis perished during a two-month period. Current estimates speculate that close to 46,000 families have lost most of their animals since the beginning of the year. And, due to the drought and lack of water, a cholera epidemic is



threatening villages. It took the lives of 183 people in January and February alone.

Aid workers have repeatedly had trouble delivering supplies to the cities and villages because of violence between government troops and a militant group called Shabab, who seem to do everything they can to block help from Western sources, including the “execution” of those who accept aid from “infidels.”

Nigeria

As the Islamic extremist group Boko Haram and the Nigerian military wage war against each other, thousands are dying from diseases caused by poor hygiene and dirty water. The militants, most infamous for their abduction of 200 schoolgirls in the town of Chibok three years ago, have chased off farmers, burned villages and stolen cattle for barter.



The Nigerian military, in retaliation, has burned villages to create a clear path to the insurgents, banned motorbikes because they were frequently used in suicide bombings and attacks, and stopped commercial fishing at Lake Chad because Boko Haram was said to benefit from profits.

Once known for its rich agricultural history, Nigeria is now on the break of famine with humanitarian aid groups not able to truly assess the hunger situation due to roadblocks and unsafe conditions.

South Sudan

In South Sudan, where the United Nations has already declared famine in certain areas, emergency food rations are blocked from distribution by both rebel forces and government soldiers.

South Sudan has known little but turmoil and hardship in its six-year history. Fifty percent of the population experience severe food insecurity. Human rights violations, drought and an ongoing civil war since 2014 create a multitude of blame and shaming.

In one town, 4,000 out of the 6,000 residents live in extreme starvation. A state of famine has already been declared in two counties, with a third soon to join them. To make things worse, that part of Africa is entering the lean season (even in a good year) for crops. Officials say that, without humanitarian aid, hundreds of thousands of children’s lives are at risk.

But international aid workers report that the fighting has caused severe problems in getting food to the people who need it most. A humanitarian base operated by the United Nations recently came under attack, and aid workers report many stories of atrocities told by the people who make it to



the bases. And, in March, six aid workers sent to complete a school were attacked and killed.

Yemen

In Yemen, aerial bombings by Saudi Arabia and a trade blockade prevent people from getting the food and water they need. Prices have skyrocketed with increased demand and selfish ambition. Militant groups choose starvation as a control tactic, causing millions of the nation's children to starve. Current estimates place 17 million Yemeni living in severe food insecurity, with 6.8 million in a state of emergency.

With a population of 28 million, Yemen's food crisis is dependent on food, water, medicine and supplies reaching those in need. One group is preventing the food and supplies

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from coming into the country, while the other is on the ground preventing the food from getting to the people in need.

The small country is divided into four hostile forces: the government led by Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, the Houthis (Shia-led insurgents who, according to Al Jazeera, began as a peaceful theological movement), a group called Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and a group controlled by ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant).

According to a recent article in *The Guardian*, the Saudi Arabian government, backed by the United States and Britain, has shut down the Yemeni port of Hodeidah (located on the Red Sea) on the grounds that Houthi rebel fighters used the port in order to import munitions and "other goods for its war effort." Houthi insurgents have also been accused of extorting money from traders to increase cash reserves and effectively using the port as a military base to import guns and rockets. Prior to this shut down, 90 percent of Yemen's food supply entered the country through Hodeidah.

Fathers who once worked stable jobs are now homeless, feeding their children out of trash cans, because of the war and the displacement that comes with it. In the city of Ibb, refugees of other areas are living in tents, trying their best to survive. In addition, 20 percent of long-time citizens of Ibb are now seeking food and humanitarian aid. Since they have never needed help before, they are embarrassed to seek assistance. Aid workers have also fled or been forced out.

Juma'n Abdullah Hasan, a 29-year-old former shoemaker, was featured in *The Guardian's* March article. "My life was great, happy and full of peace. I used to stitch shoes and by the end of the day I earned about \$10," he recalled. "We used to eat three meals in the day and sufficiently, but these days we only eat bread."

Which Came First—Climate Change or War?

Climate change knows no human-made boundaries. Imagine that your village sits on the bank of a river. This river—once flowing abundantly—is now a trickle. Nearby villages notice their water is drying up and come to get water—your water. What do you do?

You get a gun. At least, that's what is happening in many areas. Villages protect their resources to save their families. War is declared. All they are doing is trying to survive, right?

The Climate Change Vulnerability Index 2017 shows that four of the five countries most affected and at risk due to climate change are in Africa. In fact, 27 of the 33 most extreme cases are located on that continent. And, lest we begin to think they must have done something wrong to cause this, we must realize that climate change contributes to increased droughts in places where they have the least amount of carbon emissions.

Let me repeat that. Our overuse of fossil fuels in the West affects parts of Africa that have the least documented amounts of carbon emissions.

In Nigeria, half the population has no access to clean water because of pollution in the River Niger. Another nation, the Republic of Mali, also needs this river for food, water and transportation.

In areas of East Africa known for its agricultural bounty, rainfall has been consistently below average, resulting in a

See "Perfect Storm" on page 4



Perfect Storm

continued from page 3

reduction in crop yields and livestock productivity.

So, rivers dry up. Pollution makes water resources unusable. People and livestock do not have clean water to drink. Crops fail due to lack of water. Food resources diminish. People get hungry. People want food. People will do anything to get food. People blame others for lack of food. Babies die.

Could our world's hunger crisis end by abolishing pollution and violence? Aid officials say all the food and water all of us need exist on this planet in abundance—even within these hard-hit countries. But armed conflict that is

“When you have an entire generation of people being wiped out and the free world turns its back, it provides a convenient opportunity for people to spread extremism.”

—Former US President George W. Bush

often created by personal rivalries between a few men turns life upside down for millions, destroying markets and driving up the price of food and water.

In a statement released by National Public Radio (NPR), former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson stated, “If we don’t address these humanitarian situations, they contribute to the civil conflicts that are there, and they nurture long-standing grievances and resentments.”

Humanitarian Aid Cuts

Humanitarian aid cuts slather the headlines as the US anticipates devastating budget cuts in foreign aid. The previous administration, under Barack Obama, began to assist in humanitarian efforts in Somalia when the 2011 crisis hit. Decisions were made at that time to increase US aid to save hundreds of thousands of lives. Now, with a new president in office, the United States threatens to withdraw aid substantially and will no longer be the chief donations reserve for United Nations aid programs.

Former US President George W. Bush recently said that this withdrawal of aid—never mind its obvious lack of compassion for hungry people—will ultimately prove to be bad for the safety of the American people. The Bush administration created a program called PEPFAR to prevent the AIDS virus being transmitted to unborn infants in Africa. PEPFAR, at present, is still an actively funded (and successful) program.

PEPFAR was a critical boost of humanitarian aid in Africa, stopping a pandemic that would potentially have erased an entire generation. Bush is now calling for full continued funding of PEPFAR.

The former president spoke to NPR in April about the national security ramifications of ignoring a country, or countries, in crisis. “When you have an entire generation of people being wiped out and the free world turns its back, it provides a convenient opportunity for people to spread extremism,” he said.

—Chelle Samaniego is a freelance writer and social media specialist living in Waco, TX. She worked with the Waco Homeless Coalition as a VISTA volunteer and is an active member of the McLennan County Hunger Coalition. She is also the Seeds of Hope Social Media editor.

Sources: The New York Times, The Guardian, National Public Radio, BBC News (British Broadcasting Corporation), Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Al Jazeera. For current information on how these countries fare over the summer, go to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network website (fews.net), created by USAID (United States Agency for International Development), using information from NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration), NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), and USGS (United States Geological Survey), among others. ■

A Word of Hope & Warning

In May, the US Congress passed a bipartisan budget deal that would fund the government through the end of the 2017 fiscal year. The bill provides more than \$1 billion for famine relief in the countries described on pages 1-4 of this issue. It also protects domestic and international poverty-focused programs from budget cuts proposed by President Trump.

In addition to funding famine relief, the bill keeps funding flat for international maternal and child nutrition programs, including the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. The bill also increases funding for global health programs and development assistance.

However, the Trump administration is proposing steep cuts to foreign aid (as well as domestic hunger and poverty programs) for 2018. These cuts would have catastrophic consequences for millions of people in poverty—in the US and around the world. The proposed budget would cut foreign aid by more than one third, and would possibly fold the US Agency for International Development into the State Department, which many anti-hunger activists worry will redefine USAID’s mission. And the administration is proposing these cuts as the world is experiencing the worst famine crisis in decades.

“Hunger and poverty provide fertile ground for terrorists and others who would do us harm,” David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, said in April. “It would do the administration well to look more closely into the important role U.S. foreign assistance plays in our national security. This includes an independent USAID that is focused, evidence-based and results-oriented with strong technical expertise and adequate resources.”

—from Bread for the World

What You Can Do for Hungry People

1. Write a Letter to Congress.

Bread for the World's Offering of Letters is a long-proven method of making your voice heard about the US response to hunger in our country and in the world. The late Senator Paul Simon, brother of Bread for the World founder Art Simon, once wrote that the act of writing a letter to your legislator about hunger issues was almost certain to save a life.

This year's Offering of Letters, *Doing Our Part to End Hunger*, focuses on urging Congress to make funding decisions that put the US and the world on track to ending hunger by 2030.

We have made great progress reducing hunger and poverty in our country and around the world, but our work remains unfinished. Families, churches, community groups and businesses all need to do their part to end hunger. It's crucial that our government also does its part.

In order to end hunger by 2030, Congress must invest in key programs that have a proven track record and improve the lives of hungry men, women and children. Dismantling or cutting funding for these programs by the 115th Congress would take us backward and make the goal of ending hunger by 2030 unlikely.

The Offering of Letters kit has an issue overview, *Hunger and the Federal Budget*, which helps to explain which anti-hunger programs are important and why Congress should maintain them. The kit also includes biblical reflections that show what the Bible can teach us about helping to feed our neighbors.

The kit contains stories of real people whose lives are affected by US foreign aid and also those of people who

are affected by domestic hunger programs. It also includes practical suggestions and instructions about how to write your letters to Congress.

The Offering of Letters kit is available in English and Spanish at www.bread.org. You can download all of the sections from the website. You can also order the kit by calling 800-822-7323, ext. 1072 or emailing publications@bread.org.

Many churches and congregations set aside a time for writing letters together. Some of them bring the letters together for a blessing before sending them to Washington. ■

2. Join a Nationwide Fast to Advocate for Poor People.

Just before press time, an impressive, interfaith array of faith leaders made a bold statement calling for a nationwide, monthly fast to ask for God's help with their advocacy for hungry and poor people. Leaders from several faiths, the heads of large Christian denominations and a member of the US Congress are joining in the effort.

The fast, called *For Such a Time as This*, begins May 21 with a 3-day fast and continues with prayer and fasting every 21st day of the month through December 2018, the last month of deliberation by the 115th Congress. The 21st was selected because the third week of each month is when food assistance provided by the government typically runs out.

On May 23, US President Donald Trump will release his budget for fiscal year 2018. By all accounts, the budget is expected to continue the President's push for unprecedented cuts to programs that help hungry and poor people in the United States and around the world. There is no doubt that

these measures will take food out of the mouths of children and elderly and disabled people.

The massive cuts proposed by this administration could derail the extraordinary progress made against hunger in the past 10 years. Much of this work has been accomplished with strong bipartisan efforts within the government.

Participants of the fast harken to the book of Esther, when Queen Esther was encouraged, at considerable risk, to speak to the king on the behalf of her people.

—From *Sojourners and Bread for the World*. For more information, go to <https://sojo.net/articles/such-time-call-pray-fast-and-advocate>. You can sign up for the fast and download a *fasting-and-advocacy toolkit*.



What Does It Mean to be Saved?

by David Tonghou Ngong

art by Susan Daily, IBVM



In his book, *Speaking of a Fabulous Ghost*, the South African theologian Gerrit Brand draws from an observation about the Christian idea of salvation he once encountered in South Africa. The observation is that speaking of the Christian idea of salvation is like speaking about ghosts—one often hears that ghosts exist but one hardly sees them, if at all. Similarly, one often hears about saved people and intricate explanations of the Christian idea of salvation but one hardly sees a saved person.

Brand's observation is that Western understandings of salvation are often abstract and without substance, while African understandings of salvation are often substantial but lack theoretical underpinnings. Another way of putting this is to say that in Africa people often want to see what salvation looks like, rather than only hear that they are saved, while, in the West, people appear more comfortable in only hearing that they are saved rather than seeing it.

While this observation may not fit quite neatly in either Africa or the West, living in the deep US South (Alabama) for five years now, I can say that this is true of the churches I have attended and

the one I now attend. Down here, salvation means dying and going to heaven, and the point is driven home every Sunday.

Even more, the church I attend holds to the belief of "once saved, always saved," which underscores the abstract nature of salvation because the struggles of daily life do not affect it. However, daily life is the very site in which the struggles of salvations are enacted.

It is in daily life that we struggle with the question of whether one can be a saved person and a racist at the same time. It is in daily life that we struggle with whether one can be a saved person while fleeing for dear life from the wars in South Sudan and Syria. It is in daily life that we wonder whether the bodies of the Syrian toddler washed ashore in Turkey and the African migrants drowning in the Mediterranean Sea may be saved bodies.

It is in daily life that we wonder whether a child is already saved even as she lives under the threat of hunger and gun violence in an American city. It is in daily life that we wonder whether I can be saved while my neighbor is unsafe.

Is it not in daily life that the child was born in a manger so that salvation may not remain a rumor?

—David Tonghou Ngong is originally from Cameroon, Africa, and is currently Associate Professor of Religion and Theology at Stillman College, Tuscaloosa, AL. He is a graduate of Baylor University. This meditation was originally published in *God's Love Made Visible*, the 2016 Advent book of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, TX, David's home church during his student days.

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Resources

New Bread for the World Video Shows that Climate Change Causes Hunger

A new series released in April by Bread for the World Institute warns that climate change is already impacting global hunger as well as agriculture in the United States.

"Many Americans do not think of climate change as a cause of hunger," said Asma Lateef, director of the highly respected Bread for the World Institute (BFWI). "Yet changing climate patterns are resulting in droughts, floods and other extreme weather events across the globe. People are no longer able to grow food in places they have been farming for generations. Climate change is a contributing factor to the strife and famine we are witnessing today."

To make matters worse, it's the people who were already poor and marginalized who are now being hardest hit by the effects of climate change. If left unabated, climate change will continue to increase hunger and poverty around the world. Climate change not only affects people in Somalia and other countries suffering from hunger crises, but also environmental conditions in the United States.

The first in a series of Hunger Reports videos, *Too Wet, Too Dry, Too Hungry*, was released in April. It anchors the award-winning Hunger Report 2017, *Fragile Environments, Resilient Communities*, published by the Bread for the World Institute.

"Climate change is a sort of amplifier of all the weaknesses and fractures within our world already. It makes it much, much harder to cope with what are already very difficult problems," said Bill McKibben, environmentalist and founder of 350.org,¹ who is interviewed in the video. "The most fundamental

human needs—food and water—are now at risk in a way that they've never been at risk before."

"Progress in recent decades shows that ending hunger is possible within our lifetimes," Lateef added. "However, the world will not be able to end hunger without addressing the causes of climate change. And we must help people become more resilient to the damage already caused by changing climate patterns."

—To watch *Too Wet, Too Dry, Too Hungry*, go to www.hungerreport.org/episode-one. We also encourage you to download the full *Hunger Report* at www.hungerreport/2017.

1. 350.org is an international environmental organization that mobilizes citizens to encourage world leaders to address human-driven climate change and climate-change denial. The group's aim is to publicize the increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the world and work toward reducing those levels from 400 parts-per-million to 350 parts-per-million, which is considered by scientists to be the upper limit of safety for the earth's atmosphere.

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Developing a Heart for the Hungry...



...a hunger emphasis primer for beginning churches

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 - Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
 - Christian Reformed Church in North America
- Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
- Reformed Church in America

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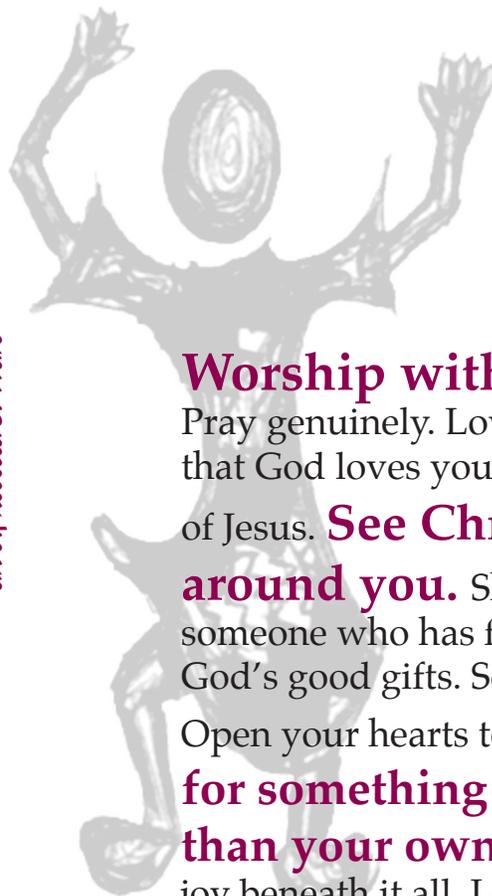
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Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group seeks out people of faith who feel called to care for poor and hungry people; and to affirm, enable and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

art by Rebecca S. Ward



Worship with all your heart.

Pray genuinely. Love your church. Believe that God loves you. Remember the stories

of Jesus. **See Christ in the people**

around you. Share God's love with someone who has forgotten it. Delight in God's good gifts. See that all of life is holy.

Open your hearts to the Spirit. **Search for something deeper and better than your own comfort.** Live in the

joy beneath it all. Let God make your life wonderful. Moses preached that we choose life in an amazing variety of ways. This text [Deut. 30:15-20] provides a wonderful chance for us to hear: **"Today I set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life."**

—Brett Younger, commentary on
Deut. 30:15-20 in Feasting on the Word

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Seeds is housed by the community of faith at Seventh & James Baptist Church. The mailing address is 602 James Avenue, Waco, TX 76706; Phone: 254/755-7745; Fax: 254/753-1909; E-mail: seedseditor1@gmail.com. Web: www.seedspublishers.org. Copyright © 2017; ISSN 0194-4495. Seeds of Hope, Inc., holds the 501(c)3 nonprofit tax status.

Seeds of Hope also produces *Sacred Seasons*, a series of worship materials for

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