

PRAY - GIVE - SPEAK OUT

AN INTERFAITH APPEAL FROM CANADA'S FAITH COMMUNITIES

SOUTH SUDAN – SOMALIA – NIGERIA – YEMEN

As faith leaders in Canada, we call upon our communities and all Canadians to mobilize in response to one of the world's largest humanitarian crises since the Second World War: the grim reality of multiple famines occurring simultaneously in four separate countries – South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria and Yemen – threatening some 20 million people. United Nations agencies have already confirmed that South Sudan has 100,000 people in famine conditions, 1 million more who are on the brink of famine, and another 5.5 million at risk of famine by July 2017.¹ A declaration of famine has not been made by UN agencies since July 2011 when some 260,000 people died in Somalia – half of them children under the age of five. The world must not let those horrors be repeated.

Situations of war and violence are mainly responsible for this crisis.² The protracted civil war in South Sudan is widely considered the principal cause of the famine there. The United Nations Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide issued a chilling report in November 2016, noting that in South Sudan “there is a strong risk of violence escalating along ethnic lines, with the potential for genocide.” Conflict, hostilities and lack of security are similarly the main causes of the severe food insecurities happening in Somalia, Yemen and northern Nigeria.

Our joint appeal is a unified cry from the heart, with one voice and one message. Ours is the insistent call for peace and the need to protect the vulnerable. The protection and promotion of human dignity are foundational elements of all our faith communities. Willful indifference towards violations against human dignity is always wrong, at all times and in all places.

We appeal to our faithful, and all people of good will, to:

- **Pray:** Remember the people of South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria and Yemen during times of personal and community prayer. Pray for peace, for government leaders and for humanitarian workers in the region. Remember especially the 1.4 million children who are the most vulnerable. For people of faith, prayer is always timely and efficacious. It unites our deepest communal and personal concerns and hopes with the needs and sufferings of our sisters and brothers, whatever the distances that separate us.
- **Give:** Make a financial contribution to one or more of the various reputable aid agencies working to alleviate this crisis. The Government of Canada has created a “Famine Relief Fund”. For every donation made between March 17 and June 30, 2017, by individuals to registered Canadian charities, including many of those development and relief agencies sponsored by our faith communities which operate in the region, the federal government will contribute an equivalent amount to the Famine Relief Fund. According to the United Nations, the present humanitarian crisis far exceeds the current availability of resources and the amount of funding so far committed by countries around the world.³
- **Speak out:** Take the time to become better informed about this crisis, and to speak about it with your family, friends and neighbours. Discuss this compelling world issue with your local community agencies. Contact your local Member of Parliament to communicate your concerns.

¹ UN News Centre, “Famine declared in region of South Sudan – UN”, 20 February 2017 {<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56205>}.

² Somini Sengupta, “U.N.’s famine appeal is billions shy of goal”, *The New York Times*, 23 March 2017 {https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/23/world/africa/un-famine-nigeria-somalia-south-sudan-yemen.html?_r=0}.

³ United Nations press release, “Amid humanitarian funding gap, 20 million people across Africa, Yemen at risk of starvation, emergency relief chief warns Security Council”, 10 March 2017 {<https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12748.doc.htm>}.

In addition to the Famine Relief Fund, the Government of Canada has committed \$119 million to South Sudan, Yemen, Nigeria and Somalia, of which \$37 million is allocated specifically to South Sudan. Canada is also contributing 10 peacekeepers to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. Yet much more needs to be done. We urge the members of our respective faith communities to join us in encouraging our government to continue calling for greater humanitarian assistance and a cessation to the violence.

Our government has made known its intention to participate more fully at the UN Security Council in the coming years. Now is the moment for our Prime Minister and all Canadian leaders to live up to that aspiration by speaking out clearly and consistently to end the violence taking place in South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria and Yemen.

Canada's voice must be heard in this dire moment, especially as it celebrates 150 years of Confederation. Our faiths call us to share the gifts with which we have been so generously blessed and to be accountable for how we assist others when they are in need.

Signatories:

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