

Chaos in Iraq Food Aid A Disaster for Africa

by Paul Gallagher

An unusual protest by the director of the World Food Programme (WFP) to the UN Security Council has highlighted the fact that the huge American-driven food aid program for conquered Iraq—a program now completely stalled in the absence of security in the country—is causing the food crisis in Africa to become disastrously worse.

WFP Executive Director James Morris' April 27 complaint was diplomatically stated and did not name the United States; it introduced a report primarily concerned with what to do about the drought, war, and economic crisis which now threatens nearly 45 million Africans with malnutrition or even starvation. But Morris decried a "double standard," by which Iraq aid was robbing Africa's emergency food supplies. This is the unfolding global human cost of the Iraq war pointed to by *EIR* six weeks ago ("Iraq War Drastically Distorts World Food Aid," *EIR*, April 18). "There are over 40 million Africans in greater peril" than Iraqis, Morris warned, "most of them women and children, and they would find it an immeasurable blessing to have a month's worth of food," as most Iraqi families had had when the bombing ended.

Morris' complaint was the more unexpected because he himself, on March 28, had issued a WFP appeal for a gargantuan \$1.3 billion six-month emergency food aid program for Iraq—the largest such appeal in history, and equal to nearly 70% of all WFP's aid resources for the whole world in 2002. That this would badly hurt the desperately needed aid to Africa, North Korea, Afghanistan, Palestine, etc. was obvious; especially when, as Morris said in his UNSC report, "Global food aid continued to plummet [in 2002], dipping below 10 million metric tons—down from 15 million in 1999. Chronic hunger is rising in the developing world outside China." The Iraq appeal was the all more lunatic, because a) the country had imported only about \$400 million in foodstuffs per year under the UN Oil for Food Program (OFFP) since 1995; and b) WFP aid was required at all, only because the OFFP has been broken up and stopped by the U.S./British invasion and occupation, and Iraq's oil production is now not even meeting its own petrochemical consumption needs.

'Double Standard' Is Not the Word

The huge Iraq appeal was part of American/British war policy, and WFP had had "no choice" but to carry it out. Half of its \$1.8 billion in food aid donations in 2002 came from the United States; yet total donations are falling at the same

time, so the agency has no leverage. The result is that since the months before the war, worldwide food aid has flowed to the borders of Iraq and piled up by the hundreds of thousands of tons. Most of what has actually entered the country has been stolen, including the WFP's grain trucks. And as confirmed by *Der Spiegel* journalists reporting on May 10, the rest is wasting in Jordan, Turkey, Syria, and Kuwait; WFP truck caravans cannot bring it in because they would be attacked and the food and trucks stolen. Meanwhile, WFP is forced to cut UN food assistance rations in African countries by 25-30%, as emergency appeals for more than 40 million people go 40-60% unmet.

A look at the international contributions, or "donations" of food aid in recent weeks shows the absurd consequences of the U.S./British "biscuit war" policy. In the first 10 days of April, \$272 million in food aid was pledged for Iraq, 71% of the total of \$384 million for the whole world over that period. The first 10 days of May were even more extreme: \$137 million (about 300,000 metric tons of grain worth) pledged for Iraq, and only \$4.45 million for the rest of the world. In six weeks since it was announced March 28, the Iraq appeal has drawn nearly \$600 million (roughly 1.5 million metric tons of grains) in pledges, largely from the United States and British Commonwealth countries. Compare this to \$428 million (under a million tons) donated or pledged to WFP for all of Southern Africa for the 15-month period from January 2002 to March 2003; or the 29,000 tons for the Palestinian territories over those 15 months.

The hunger crisis in Africa has expanded and worsened over that time, from 30 million people facing more or less severe lack of food last Fall, to 38 million by December, and nearly 45 million now. Drought, debt, and war are the worst causes. Throughout this time, WFP officials have forecast that food aid stocks in African countries would run out by April-June 2003. This has already happened as donations have fallen in recent months, and so the amount of food given to millions of recipients in Kenya, Ethiopia, and around the Democratic Republic of Congo, has been cut by at least 25%.

In Iraq, delivery of the food aid is going backwards. Whereas WFP said it had four "humanitarian corridors" open in April, as of May 10 its trucks were going only into Kurdish territory in the North. "Security is the main obstacle," a WFP release acknowledged on May 12, saying that now its aim was "to revive the food distribution system by June 1." But millions of Iraqi households' food stores, last replenished in early March, are running out. *Spiegel's* reporters observed that food trucks cannot enter the country from Jordan, for lack of coalition troops available to protect them; bakeries in Baghdad are closing for lack of wheat; and thousands of the "food agents" who distributed food for the Oil for Food Program—mostly shopkeepers—cannot keep their shops open because of chaotic conditions. Thus, the distribution of Iraq's own domestic harvest of Winter wheat and barley, is also being blocked.