

Submission to the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade

Inquiry into Australia's trade and investment relationships with the countries of Africa

From: RESULTS International (Australia)

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We are pleased to be able to make this submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade for the inquiry into Australia's Trade and Investment Relationships with the Countries of Africa.

As background, RESULTS International Australia is part of an international, non-partisan and non-profit partnership of organisations that has been working in Australia for 30 years through a combination of staff-led and grassroots-driven advocacy. We work with federal parliamentarians and through the media to generate public and political will to end poverty. We focus our advocacy on global health issues such as tuberculosis (TB), HIV, malaria, polio, child health and nutrition, as well as education and microfinance.

In relation to the terms of reference for the inquiry into Australia's trade and investment relationships with countries of Africa, we would like to highlight the impacts of conflict, displacement and famine as an example of the problems of poverty and vulnerability, which are impediments to building a stronger trade and investment relationship and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. To address these problems, we also propose that Australia play an increased role in providing emergency assistance to end the famine and ensure resilience and stability for the continent. Contributing to future resilience and stability would be of benefit to Australia's current and future trade and investment ventures.

The current humanitarian situation in Africa, and the Australian and International response

Right now, more than 20 million people are at risk of death by starvation as a result of famine in Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen. For a country to be declared as in a famine state, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification needs to rate that country as having the most severe level of food insecurity, where at least 20 percent of the population in a specific area has extremely limited access to basic food; acute malnutrition exceeds 30 percent; and the death rate exceeds two per 10 000 people per day for the entire population. These current famines are the largest humanitarian crisis since the United Nations was founded in 1945, and the side-effects will be felt for decades.

We acknowledge the Australian Government has responded to calls to alleviate the famines in East Africa and Yemen, contributing a total of \$78 million from July 2016. This support has been considerable and is welcomed.

We know that more is needed to overcome this crisis - there is a gap between the amount of money Australia has provided so far, and the amount that would be Australia's fair share of the burden. According to Oxfam's most recent analysis Australia's burden share would now be approximately \$33 million (including \$27 million for Yemen). We also know that the 'lean season' or 'hungry season' is about to begin, with rains in some countries - and droughts in others - causing even more severe food shortages.

We also know that even when the severe stage of a famine has ended, many people would still be going hungry.

The long-term damage from famines

Countries tip into famine and dangerous levels of hunger when people are unable to find, grow, or pay for food. Chronic poverty is part of the cause, coupled with weak governance and conflict - especially when fighting displaces families, cuts them off from outside assistance and destroys markets while making it impossible for them to make a living or work in their fields.

There are numerous and long-term physical, social and economic impacts of famine:

- Once they are again able to access adequate nutrition, healthy adults can recover quite well from a period of reduced food intake.
- But when lack of food has led to an 18% loss of weight, the adult body begins to experience physiological disturbances: dysfunctional metabolism affects the brain and other vital organs, and therapeutic feeding is needed to save lives, as the body loses its ability to process food normally.
- Reduced caloric intake can result in reduced resistance to disease. Insufficient food over several weeks can lead to organ failure and eventually death.
- *Children subjected to severe caloric restriction during a famine are often permanently affected, both physically and mentally, even after adequate nutrition is restored. Child survivors of famine experience stunted growth, with an average reduction in adult height of nearly 3 cm.*
- *This damage to human bodies also erodes the physical well-being and development potential of an entire generation. On average famine survivors attain 6.8 fewer years of education and their ability to work as an adult is also reduced by an average of 12.6 hours a week.*
- Famine may lead to dramatic transformations in cultural practices, family structure and the workings of a nation's economy. For example, there was a famine in mainland China in 1959-61. One study of Chinese census data found that the children born in 1960 were, as adults in 2000:
 - more likely to be not working, supported by other family members and living in a smaller home (all substitute measures for level of household wealth),
 - less likely to be married (if men) and more likely to be married to partners with less education (if women) and
 - more likely to be parents of female children (maternal malnutrition has been observed to correlate with more female births).
- The study's authors concluded that *'damage to a broad spectrum of outcomes persists 40 years after the Famine's end'*.

The case for further action from Australia

In times of crisis, we demand strong, compassionate leadership. Australians believe that everyone deserves a fair go, and value freedom, dignity and equal opportunity. Australian Aid is an expression of those values, and an opportunity to promote the right to freedom, dignity, and equal opportunity for everyone, everywhere. Humanitarian crises like famines damage and all too often destroy these rights. As Australians, we expect our government to respond strongly to the current situation in South Sudan, Nigeria, Yemen and Somalia, we expect our efforts to match the challenges at hand, and we are watching our leaders closely to ensure these expectations are upheld.

In recent years, Australia's overseas aid has faced severe reductions (especially bilateral assistance to African countries). While humanitarian assistance has become an increased priority in a reduced aid program (and has increased in the 2017-18 financial year), Australia's ability to respond to emergency situations adequately in future, or build resilience to prevent emergencies like this happening again to such a shocking degree, has been limited.

Without immediate aid or services, malnutrition and death will increase in all four countries. The lives of millions of people are at risk, and the number of people currently facing severe food insecurity goes well beyond these four countries. Ethiopia and Kenya are affected by the same drought as Somalia, and additional aid for these countries is needed now to prevent the situation deteriorating further.

The problems are human-induced: conflict and insecurity have plagued Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen. In Somalia, drought and weak governance have followed years of fighting. But human problems thankfully have human solutions: the international community can help resolve these conflicts and send help to prevent the situation from getting worse.

Without immediate and appropriate action to avert the famines and build resilience, whole countries face disaster. The total loss of life stands to be in the tens of millions; children's physical and mental development will be stunted and therefore the economic potential of communities and countries is impacted for decades.

Therefore, we **recommend** that the Committee includes proposals for **additional emergency relief**, and **additional longer-term development assistance**, for the countries of Africa in its recommendations for Australia's future engagement with countries in Africa.

We thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and look forward to taking part in further consultations by the Committee.