

## Ecumenical and Interfaith Appeal "Pray, Give, Speak Out"

The Christians of every level of society in the early Church were charged to be "lovers of the poor." Judaism has a tradition of giving that stretches back millennia: "do not be hard-hearted towards your needy neighbour." (Deuteronomy 15:7) Everyone is becoming our neighbour in a shrinking world. Distance no longer mutes their cry. The cry of 20 million of our neighbours threatened by famine is rising in four countries. This has prompted a concerted emergency response from several faith groups and the Canadian government. This weekend, we are asking you to respond generously to their desperate plea in an appeal called Pray–Give–Speak Out.

Multiple famines are occurring simultaneously in South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, and Yemen. This constitutes one of the world's largest humanitarian crises since the Second World War. The statistics are staggering. They are all the more tragic because the most vulnerable to death by starvation are young children and women.

Civil unrest and war are the principal causes of this crisis. A protracted civil war in South Sudan is profoundly disrupting agriculture and the general economy. The United Nations Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide reported in November 2016 that, "there is a strong risk of violence escalating along ethnic lines, with the potential for genocide." Violence is a daily occurrence. All too frequently, armed militias have driven farmers from their homes, their land, and their livelihood.

Conflicts are similarly the main causes of the severe food shortages in Somalia, Yemen and northeast Nigeria. Although Somalia has made slow progress toward stability since a UN-backed government was installed five years ago, supply lines remain fragile. The current drought is worse than the one of 2011 when a quarter of a million people died. In Yemen, 70% of the population are in need of aid after three years of civil war. For the fourth year in a row, farmers in north-eastern Nigeria have been unable to return to their land for planting season. Boko Haram insurgents have displaced nearly two million people.

I have seen first hand the need, but also the great good that your generosity makes possible. In 2013, I visited Ethiopia, which is located roughly between South Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen. I witnessed the fruit of the wonderful work of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) to make potable water more accessible and to manage rainwater for cattle and crops. Our development funding also improved agricultural techniques to mitigate crop failure and provide nutrition counselling. The CCODP provided emergency aid when the Horn of Africa struggled with a drought in 2011.

In addition to the CCODP, please consider a gift to Aid to the Church in Need Canada and Canadian Jesuits International. Emergency assistance through all

three charities will go to the most needy and will not show favouritism on the basis of religion or ethnicity. They are all our neighbours.

Our federal government has created a Famine Relief Fund to match your donations until June 30. Please give generously before then, especially today, when faith leaders will announce the appeal in churches, synagogues, mosques, and gurdwaras! We are speaking out and calling for personal and corporate prayer for peace, security, and provision.

Saint Jerome, the great translator of the Bible, was moved by the words “(The Lord) expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!” (Isaiah 5:7) The words *justice* and *cry* compelled the Church of his day to respond to poverty with paternal compassion. I hope that the cries we hear from these four countries will move you to give and pray today.