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TYLER HICKS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

A woman caring for her malnourished child in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, where Somalis have fled to escape drought.

Misery Follows as Somalis Try to Flee Hunger

by Jeffrey Gettleman

DADAAB, Kenya — The people start trudging in at dawn, more than a thousand every day, exhausted, sick and starving, materializing out of the thin desert air to take their places at the gates of the world's largest refugee camp, here in northern Kenya.

They are fleeing one of the worst droughts in Somalia in 60 years and many have walked for weeks through an anarchic landscape replete with bandits and militants but little food. By the time they get here, many can barely stand or talk or swallow. Some mothers have even shown up with the bodies of shriveled babies strapped to their backs.

Abdio Ali Elmoi clutches her son, Mustapha, whose eyes are dimming. Her face is grooved with grief. She has already lost three children to gaajo, or hunger, a common word around here.

“I walked all day and all night,” she whispered, barely able to speak. “Where I come from, there is no food.”

Somalia is once again spewing misery across its borders, and once again man-made dimensions are making this natural disaster more acute.

The Islamist militants controlling southern Somalia forced out Western aid organizations last year, yanking away the only safety net just when the soil was drying up and the drought was coming. Only now, when the scale of the catastrophe is becoming clear, with nearly three million Somalis in urgent need and



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TYLER HICKS /THE NEW YORK TIMES



Clockwise from top: at the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, a 4-year-old Somali girl who fell ill and died was buried; a malnourished child; people waiting for rations during food distribution.

more than 10 million at risk across the parched Horn of Africa, have the militants relented and invited aid groups back. But few are rushing in because of the complications and dangers of dealing with a brutal group that is aligned with Al Qaeda and has turned Somalia into a focal point of American concerns on terrorism.

The Somalis are not waiting. Tens of thousands, possibly even hundreds of thousands, are now fleeing to Kenya and Ethiopia for help, but the Kenyan government says it is overwhelmed and has been blocking the United Nations from opening a new \$15 million camp here in Dadaab that could help absorb the influx.



As drought grips Somalia, refugees are filling Dadaab.

Everything is in place to house 40,000 more refugees — new water towers, new latrines, new office blocks and perfectly straight rows of new mud-brick houses that look sturdy enough to live in for years. But that is precisely what the Kenyans fear.

As many as 380,000 people already live in the amalgam of camps that make up Dadaab (it was intended to hold 90,000), and the Kenyans worry that Somalis will continue flocking here and never go home, given the perennial turmoil in their country since the central government collapsed in 1991.

“Personally, I’ve done what I could,” said Gerald Otieno Kajwang, Kenya’s immigration minister. “But the numbers coming in are too large that they threaten our security.”

The Kenyan government has been facing intense pressure to open the new camp, and several Western aid officials contended that the Kenyans were simply trying to extract more money from Western allies before relenting. On Friday, Kenyan officials indicated that the camp would open soon, but the delay has stranded thousands of refugees on the outskirts of Dadaab in the desert, increasingly far from hospitals, clean water or latrines, many with sick children curled up under trees.

“It’s shocking,” said Alexandra Lopoukhine, a spokeswoman for CARE, an aid group working in Dadaab.

Those who make it to one of the few hospitals in the camps might have a chance. The pediatric ward in the Dagahaley section is a fluorescent-lighted purgatory. Dozens of wizened children lie on rough wool blankets — nurses say probably fewer than half will make it — their skin slack, their eyes glassy, their heads far too big for their bodies. Many have IVs taped to the sides of their skulls.

“Vascular collapse,” explained a Kenyan doctor. “We couldn’t find a vein anywhere else.”

Isak Abdi Saney, a destitute farmer, is on a death watch. He gently lifts up the shirt on his 6-month-old son. Every rib shows, beneath skin as translucent as rice paper. Every breath looks as if it could be his last.

“We don’t know if he is dead or alive, so we just keep watching him here,” Mr. Isak says, tapping his son’s tiny chest.

Mr. Isak walked for 20 days from Somalia to get here. What he encountered was what so many other refugees described: piles of dead animals, empty villages, people dying of starvation, an unbroken trail of bodies from his village to the camp.

“There is nothing left back there,” he said.

Another refugee spoke of his village in similar terms: “There is nothing alive.”

Because it is so difficult and dangerous for outsiders to even visit areas controlled by the Shabab militant group, it is hard to gauge the full depth of this drought. Somalia seems to be perpetually on the brink. With a shattered economy, no functioning central government and aid flows blocked, countless Somalis starve every year.



One of the Somalis who are swelling the refugee camp in Dadaab, the world’s largest.

But according to a famine monitoring program financed by the United States, “over the past year, the eastern Horn of Africa has experienced consecutive poor rainy seasons, resulting in one of the driest years since 1950-1951 in many pastoral zones.”

The years of conflict — and recent increases in food prices — have depleted Somalia’s ability to withstand it. Thousands of people are leaving relatively uneventful rural areas to seek refuge even in Mogadishu, Somalia’s bullet-riddled capital, which has experienced a mass exodus for years because of fighting between the shaky government and Islamist militants.

The route to Dadaab, which lies about 50 miles inside Kenya’s border, is especially perilous, winding through one of the most unforgiving environments in the world. Refugees have been marauded, raped and killed by the various armed groups that haunt the land. Most arrive here penniless and demoralized. Many parents said they buried children along the way.

Some die just within reach of finally getting help. Right in front of a reception area at the camp are dozens of freshly dug graves.

Once proud young men find themselves sitting in the dirt, waiting to be registered. Life as a refugee is humiliating, especially in a culture that prizes independence. The first step is clawing through a crowd to get a cup of flour and some glucose biscuits. Then comes registration, getting fingerprinted twice, photographed, logged in, cataloged. Kenyan government workers scurry around, wearing blue surgical masks and polo shirts that say “Refugees Are Real People.”

Somali refugees are typically not allowed to work in Kenya, and without special permission they are not supposed to leave the camp. Dadaab is a place to warehouse people, often for years. Aid workers predict the numbers here could soon swell to half a million, sprawled across miles of scrub brush.

“I never thought I’d lose all my cattle,” said Abdi Farah Hassan, who looked visibly uncomfortable in line to be photographed. “I never thought I’d be a refugee.”

*Reuben Kyama contributed reporting from Nairobi, Kenya,
and Mohamed Ibrahim from Mogadishu, Somalia.*

ROLLBACK MOVING TO FORE AS TALKS ON BUDGET STALL

GRANDS SIGNALS SUPPORT

Claiming Public as His Side, President Still Opposes Wall Deal

WASHINGTON — President Obama's support for a rollback of the 2011 budget cuts is a sign that he is moving away from his previous position of opposing the cuts. The president's shift in stance comes as talks between the House and Senate on a budget deal have stalled. Obama's support for the rollback is seen as a signal that he is siding with the public against the cuts. The president's support for the rollback is a departure from his previous position of opposing the cuts. Obama's support for the rollback is a sign that he is moving away from his previous position of opposing the cuts. The president's shift in stance comes as talks between the House and Senate on a budget deal have stalled. Obama's support for the rollback is seen as a signal that he is siding with the public against the cuts.



A woman sought refuge for an abandoned child in the Dutch-occupied zone in Libya, where Somalia-born fighters fought.

Libya Rebels Get Formal Backing, and \$30 Billion

WASHINGTON — The United States and other Western nations have formally backed the rebels in Libya, providing them with \$30 billion in military aid. The aid is intended to help the rebels fight against the forces of Muammar Gaddafi. The aid includes weapons, ammunition, and other military supplies. The aid is a significant increase from the previous level of support. The aid is intended to help the rebels fight against the forces of Muammar Gaddafi. The aid includes weapons, ammunition, and other military supplies. The aid is a significant increase from the previous level of support.

2 TOP OFFICIALS LEAVE NEWS CORP. IN PRESS SCANDAL

APLOGUES BY MURDOCH

Circle Chain a British Executive and a Key U.S. Publisher

NEW YORK — News Corp. executives have apologized for a press scandal involving two top officials who have left the company. The scandal involved the release of confidential information to a British executive and a key U.S. publisher. News Corp. executives have apologized for the scandal. The scandal involved the release of confidential information to a British executive and a key U.S. publisher. News Corp. executives have apologized for the scandal.

As a Watching Skirmish, Wall St. Is Tossed to Bone



President Obama had his first White House news conference since he took office.

WASHINGTON — Wall Street is being tossed to the bone as the market watches a skirmish between the House and Senate over a budget deal. The market is reacting negatively to the news that the House and Senate have failed to reach an agreement on a budget deal. The market is reacting negatively to the news that the House and Senate have failed to reach an agreement on a budget deal.

Castel With Sand, Not Oil



Oil is not the only resource that is being fought over in the Middle East. In the region of Castel, the people are fighting over sand. The sand is used for building and other purposes. The people of Castel are fighting over the sand because it is a valuable resource. The sand is used for building and other purposes. The people of Castel are fighting over the sand because it is a valuable resource.

5 New Books Fall Empire's Taste

Five new books have been published by Empire, showcasing a diverse range of authors and genres. The books include fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. The books are available in both print and digital formats. The books are available in both print and digital formats.

New Rules for the Cities

As cities around the world face new challenges, they are implementing new rules to address these challenges. The rules cover areas such as urban planning, transportation, and environmental protection. The rules are intended to improve the quality of life in cities. The rules cover areas such as urban planning, transportation, and environmental protection.

80th Floor's New View

The 80th floor of a skyscraper offers a new and breathtaking view of the city. The view is a mix of urban landscape and natural beauty. The view is a mix of urban landscape and natural beauty. The view is a mix of urban landscape and natural beauty.

A No-Fills Art Thief

An art thief has been caught stealing a valuable piece of art. The thief was caught in the act of stealing the art. The thief was caught in the act of stealing the art. The thief was caught in the act of stealing the art.

The Market Anxiously

The market is showing signs of anxiety as investors react to the news of the budget deal. The market is showing signs of anxiety as investors react to the news of the budget deal. The market is showing signs of anxiety as investors react to the news of the budget deal.

Misery Follows As Somalis Try To Flee Hunger

To Flee Hunger

As the famine in Somalia worsens, thousands of people are trying to flee the country. The people are suffering from lack of food and shelter. The people are suffering from lack of food and shelter. The people are suffering from lack of food and shelter.



As drought grips Somalia, refugees seek safety in Kenya.

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Hot Nights, Cool Rates

Hot nights and cool rates are the theme of the weekend at the hotel. The hotel is offering special rates for the weekend. The hotel is offering special rates for the weekend. The hotel is offering special rates for the weekend.

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Children search for food in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, a town of 100,000 people who have fled a humanitarian crisis in Somalia.

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