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ETHIOPIA HAS BEEN FOLLOWING WITH CONCERN CERTAIN WESTERN MEDIA ALLEGATIONS THAT IT IS PURSUING A POLICY OF FORCEFUL EVICTION OF PEOPLE FROM THE NORTH TO BE SETTLED IN THE NORTH-WEST, WEST AND SOUTH-WESTERN PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. SUCH ALLEGATIONS AND UNFOUNDED CHARGES WOULD ONLY HELP PROLONG THE AGONY OF VICTIMS OF NATURAL DISASTER AND UNDERMINE THE COLLECTIVE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ENDEAVOURS AS WELL AS THE GOVERNMENT'S GENUINE EFFORTS TO MAKE THEM NOT ONLY SELF-SUFFICIENT BUT ALSO BE PART OF THE PRODUCTIVE FORCE OF THE NATION.

CONSIDERING THE PERSISTENT NATURE OF THESE ALLEGATIONS AND THE ORCHESTRATED POLITICAL MOTIVES BEHIND THEM, IT HAS BECOME NECESSARY TO ONCE AGAIN REITERATE THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY OF RESETTLEMENT.

ONE HAS TO NOTE THAT THE RECENT ACCELERATED RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM WAS INITIATED ON ACCOUNT OF THE AFTERMATH OF THE CURRENT SEVERE DROUGHT AS A CONSEQUENCE OF WHICH THOUSANDS OF VICTIMS FROM WELLO, TIGRAI AND NORTHERN SHOA HAD STARTED TO MIGRATE SPONTANEOUSLY ON FOOT TO THE DISTANT SOUTH-WESTERN PARTS OF THE COUNTRY WITH NO SPECIFIC DESTINATION, IN SEARCH OF RELIABLE CLIMATE AND FERTILE LAND.

ONE SHOULD ALSO NOTE THAT A STUDY CARRIED OUT BY WORLD BANK EXPERTS LED BY DR. L. BROWN AS EARLY AS 1973 HAS CONCLUDED THAT THE OVER-UTILIZED AND OVER-POPULATED AREAS OF TIGRAI AND WELLO CANNOT SUSTAIN THE POPULATION AND THAT A MASSIVE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME OUTSIDE OF THESE AREAS WAS IMPERATIVE. HIS STUDY WAS SUBSTANTIATED BY THE CONTINUOUS DROUGHT THAT TOOK PLACE IN THE NORTH SINCE 1973, CONSECUTIVELY IN THE LAST

ELEVEN YEARS WHICH RESULTED IN THE RECENT SPONTANEOUS MIGRATION OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WHICH IN TURN MADE MANDATORY THE PRESENT ORGANIZED RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME. FOLLOWING THE RESULT OF THIS STUDY AND ITS RECOMMENDATION, FAO HAS CARRIED OUT A LAND USE STUDY FOR SETTLEMENT IN THE SOUTH-WESTERN PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. ASSOSSA, ONE OF THE LARGE AREAS BEING USED PRESENTLY FOR SETTLEMENT IN WELLEGA, IS AN AREA SELECTED ON THE BASIS OF THE FAO STUDY.

CONSISTANT WITH THE PREVIOUS FAO LAND USE CRITERIA, THE NEW AREAS IDENTIFIED BY A MULTI-DECIPLINARY TEAM ARE SELECTED ON THE BASIS OF THE FOLLOWING:-

1. SUITABILITY FOR HUMAN AND ANIMAL HABITATION
2. ADEQUATE AND RELIABLE RAINFALL
3. FERTILE SOIL FOR PRODUCTION PURPOSES
4. SUFFICIENT WATER FOR HUMAN AND ANIMAL CONSUMPTION
5. ACCESSABILITY
6. AVAILABILITY OF SUFFICIENT UNSCATTERED AND UNOCCUPIED LAND

AS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME, IT HAS BEEN AWARDED THE HIGHEST NATIONAL PRIORITY AND UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE POLIT BUREAU OF THE WORKERS PARTY OF ETHIOPIA SEVERAL MINISTRIES AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES ARE JOINTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION. THE MAJOR MINISTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING DIRECTLY IN THESE PROGRAMMES ARE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH, MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, MINISTRY OF STATE FARMS, MINISTRY OF CONSTRUCTION, WATER RESOURCES COMMISSION, AND THE RRC. THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR CENTRAL PLANNING CLOSELY FOLLOWS THE PLANNING AND THE COORDINATION OF THE ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY THE DIFFERENT MINISTRIES AND AGENCIES.

THIS IS NOT TO MENTION THAT MASS ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR RESOURCES HAVE BEEN MOBILIZED TO AUGMENT THE GOVERNMENT'S ALL-OUT EFFORT, A CLASSICAL EXAMPLE OF WHICH IS THE CONSTRUCTION OF OVER 70,000 DWELLING UNITS BUILT BY PEASANT ASSOCIATIONS FOR SETTLERS. UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FROM DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES AND THEIR LECTURERS HAVE ALSO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATED IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL SERVICES SUCH AS STORES, HEALTH FACILITIES, SCHOOLS AND WATERING POINTS. THEY HAVE ALSO ASSISTED IN TEACHING THE SETTLERS BASIC EDUCATION AND HYGENE. IN THIS MANNER TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE, THE GOVERNMENT HAS MOBILIZED ALL ITS AVAILABLE MATERIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES FOR THE SETTLEMENT PROGRAMME.

CONCERNING THE SELECTION METHOD OF SETTLERS THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA HAVE BEEN STRICTLY ADHERED TO:-

- A. WILLINGNESS OF HEADS OF FAMILIES TO BE RESETTLED
- B. WILLINGNESS OF HEADS OF FAMILIES TO BRING ALONG THEIR DEPENDENTS
- C. WILLINGNESS OF HEADS OF FAMILIES TO BE ENGAGED IN AGRICULTURE
- D. PHYSICAL FITNESS, E.G. AGE, HEALTH STATUS

A COMMITTEE COMPRISING OF LEADERS OF PEASANT ASSOCIATIONS, LOCAL ADMINISTRATORS AND RRC STAFF HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED AT SUB-DISTRICT LEVELS TO ASSES AND ACERTAIN THAT THE REGISTERED SETTLERS COMPLY TO THE OUTLINED CRITERIA.

AFTER REGISTRATION, THE SETTLERS ARE TRANSPORTED TO FOCAL DISPATCHING POINTS WHERE RESCREENING IS CARRIED OUT BY THE JOINT STAFF OF THE RRC, PUBLIC HEALTH AND THE RED CROSS TO ENSURE THAT THE SELECTION HAS BEEN CARRIED OUT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SET CRITERIA. THOSE THAT HAVE

PASSED THE SCREENING PROCESS ARE TRANSPORTED BY BUS AND AIR TO THEIR RESPECTIVE SETTLEMENT AREAS AND TRANSIT STATIONS ARE ESTABLISHED AT SEVERAL POINTS TO PROVIDE SETTLERS WITH SHELTER, FOOD, MEDICAL AND SANITARY SERVICES AND OTHER NECESSITIES DURING THEIR TRAVEL.

WHEN THE SETTLERS ARRIVE AT SETTLEMENT SITES, BY ENLARGE THEY ARE PROVIDED WITH READY-MADE DWELLING UNITS BUILT BY COMMUNITY EFFORT WHICH THEY IMPROVE AS THEY SEE FIT IN TIME. THE FEW WHO ARE NOT PROVIDED WITH READY-MADE DWELLING UNITS ARE TEMPORARLLY ACCOMMODATED IN SHELTERS FOR A MAXIMUM OF TWO WEEKS DURING WHICH TIME THEY ARE ASSISTED TO BUILD THEIR OWN DWELLING UNITS. THEY ARE ALSO PROVIDED WITH GRAIN AND SUPPLEMENTARY FOOD, CLOTHING, BLANKETS AND UTENSILS BY THE RRC UNTIL THEIR FIRST HARVEST. SIMILARLY THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH HAS MOBILIZED AND DEPLOYED ITS STAFF TO PROVIDE HEALTH SERVICES AT THE VARIOUS SETTLEMENT SITES. THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION HAS ALSO ASSIGNED ITS TEACHERS TO CONDUCT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN ALL THE SITES.

WHILE THE SETTLERS ARE ALLOTED TWO HECTARES OF AGRICULTURAL LAND DURING THE FIRST YEAR, THE MINISTRIES OF AGRICULTURE AND STATE FARMS HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CLEARING AND PLOUGHING ONE HECTARE PER HOUSEHOLD. DURING THE SECOND YEAR THE SETTLER IS EXPECTED TO WORK ON THIS CLEARED AND PLOUGHED HECTARE OF LAND WITH HIS OWN MEANS OF PRODUCTION WHILE THE TWO MINISTRIES WILL CLEAR AND PLOUGH THE REMAINING HECTARE FOR THE HOUSEHOLD. BY THE END OF THE SECOND YEAR THE SETTLER IS EXPECTED TO OPERATE THE ENTIRE TWO HECTARES ON HIS OWN. IN ADDITION, EACH HOUSEHOLD IS ALLOTED 2,000 SQ. M. OF LAND FOR HOME GARDENING. TO ENSURE THE IMMEDIATE UTILIZATION OF THE 2,000SQ.M., EACH SETTLER IS PROVIDED WITH THE NECESSARY HAND TOOLS AND SEEDS UPON ARRIVAL. TO THIS EFFECT OVER 1.4 MILLION DIFFERENT PIECES OF HAND TOOLS SUCH AS HOES, SHOVELS,

SICLES, AXES, ETC HAVE ALREADY BEEN DISTRIBUTED TO THE SETTLERS. THE SETTLERS THAT WERE SETTLED LAST YEAR WILL MEET HALF OF THEIR FOOD REQUIREMENTS FROM THEIR HOME GARDENS ALREADY CULTIVATED. OTHER SERVICES PROVIDED TO THE SETTLERS INCLUDE WAREHOUSES, FLOUR MILLS AND POTABLE WATER.

TO DATE OVER 185,000 HEADS OF FAMILIES TOTALING WITH THEIR DEPENDENTS, 555,000 INDIVIDUALS HAVE BEEN MOVED AND RE-SETTLED IN ILLUBABOR, WELLEGA, GOJJAM, KEFFA, AND GONDER ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS. CONTRARY TO THE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED REPORTS THAT HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING IN SOME WESTERN CAPITALS, NO INDIVIDUAL HAS BEEN MOVED FROM ERITERA FOR SETTLEMENT. AS FOR TIGRAI, THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE THAT ARE SETTLED COMPRISE ONLY 21% OF THE TOTAL SETTLEMENT POPULATION WHILE IN COMPARISION 64% ARE FROM WELLO, 14% FROM SHOA AND 1% from Gonder.

TO SUM UP, AS POINTED OUT, THE SETTLEMENT PROGRAMME WAS LAUNCHED ON ACCOUNT OF THE PRESSING NEED FOR A DURABLE SOLUTION TO THE PLIGHT OF DROUGHT VICTIMS OF THE NORTH IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY OTHER VIABLE ALERNATIVE. IN SPITE OF THEIR CONSTANT CRITCISM, THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN OPPOSING THE GOVERNMENT'S SETTLEMENT PROGRAMMES HAVE NOT COME UP TODATE WITH ANY VIABLE ALTERNATIVE.

IN LIGHT OF THIS REALITY, THE GOVERNMENT IS DETERMINED TO CONTINUE IMPLIMENTING ITS SETTLEMENT POLICY, MOBILIZING ALL THE MATERIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES AT ITS DISPOSAL. THE FACT THAT ETHIOPIA IS AMONG THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND THAT IT HAS LIMITED RESOURCES IS OBVIOUS. INTERNATIONAL DONOR COMMUNITY, WESTERN GOVERNMENTS AND UN SPECIALIZED AGENCIES HAVE BEEN INVITED TO OBSERVE THE PROCESS AND

ASSES THE NEED OF THE SETTLEMENT PROGRAMMES AND THOSE THAT HAVE VISITED THE SETTLEMENT SITES SUCH AS EEC PARLIAMENTARIANS, FAO, WFP REPRESENTATIVES AND THE LIKE HAVE REALIZED THE OBJECTIVE NECESSITY OF THE PROGRAMME.

WHILE EXTREME CARE HAS BEEN TAKEN TO ENSURE THE UNITY OF FAMILIES DURING THE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS, THE RRC, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE ETHIOPIAN RED CROSS, HAS LAUNCHED A FAMILY TRACING AND REUNIFICATION PROGRAMME IN CASES WHERE INADVERTANT SEPARATION OF FAMILIES COULD HAVE OCCURED.

IT IS OVBIOUS THAT IN A DROUGHT SITUATION WHERE CLOSE TO 10 MILLION PEOPLE HAVE BEEN AFFECTED THAT THOUSANDS OF UNTIMELY DEATH TAKE PLACE. NO ONE CAN DENY THE TOLL ON HUMAN LIFE CAUSED BY THE RECENT NATURAL CALAMITY. IT IS ACKNOWLEDGED WORLD-WIDE THAT ETHIOPIA'S CURRENT DROUGHT HAS BEEN ONE OF THE WORST IN RECENT HISTORY.

AS IT STANDS LIFE EXPECTANCY IN ETHIOPIA LIKE IN ALL OTHER LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES IS LOW. THE HIGH MORTALITY RATE IN GENERAL, AND PARTICULARLY THAT OF CHILDREN IS WELL KNOWN. NEEDLESS TO POINT OUT THE HUMAN LIVES THE SEVERE FAMINE HAS ALREADY CLAIMED AND ITS RESIDUAL IMPACT ARE TRAGIC REALITIES BEING DEALT WITH. TO RELATE THE DEATH TOLL OF THE DROUGHT AND NORMAL MORTALITY TO THE SETTLEMENT PROGRAMME IS A DELIBERATE DISTORTION OF FACTS DESIGNED TO UNDERMINE THE GROWING SUPPORT THE SETTLEMENT PROGRAMME IS GAINING FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

POSITIVE SUPPORT FOR THE SETTLEMENT PROGRAMME HAS COME FROM MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY INCLUDING THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT, THE IRISH CONCERN, THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION, MENSCHEN FUR MENSCHEN AND OTHERS WHO ARE ACTIVELY SUPPORTING THESE SCHEMES.

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