

# State Department's freeze on food aid to Sudan will kill millions

by Mary Lalevée

The U.S. State Department and its Agency for International Development (AID) have frozen emergency food shipments to Sudan, citing the "logistical difficulties" that stand in the way of delivering the supplies to their destination. While Sudan's new military leader Gen. Siwar ad Dahab warned April 21 that one million children could die in the next weeks, of starvation and epidemic disease, stockpiles of U.S. grain are standing useless, behind barbed-wire fences in the city of Kosti. Only 5,000 tons of a scheduled 125,000-ton grain shipment, due to arrive between April 1 and May 18, actually made it to Kordofan province, for transshipment to the province of Darfur where the crisis is most acute.

The State Department, rather than applying American know-how to overcome the difficulties encountered, and running a Berlin-airlift-style operation, has chosen to let Sudan starve, blaming this on a five-week interruption in rail traffic to Darfur. The State Department is charging the new government in Sudan, which took power in April in a coup against former President Gaafar Numayri, with blocking the transport of U.S. grain.

But this is just an excuse; the State Department's genocide policy is deliberate. George Shultz's State Department is backing to the hilt the austerity "conditionalities" of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which ruined Sudan's agriculture in the first place. State Department policy is still governed by the Carter administration's *Global 2000* report, which insisted on eliminating half of the world's population by the year 2000.

We present here an outline of the process by which Sudan was transformed, in a few short years, from a potential breadbasket for the region, to an epicenter of ecological and biological holocaust.

## The end of the 'Great Projects'

**In the 1960s and 1970s, major irrigation schemes were begun, to extend Sudan's arable land.** The most important was the Jonglei Canal project, a 175-mile canal bypassing part of the Nile that winds through the Sudd, where huge

quantities of water evaporate. There was talk about the country becoming "the breadbasket of the Middle East," and it could have: Sudan has 40% of the potentially cultivable land of the Arab world, and is strategically situated to supply Africa with food. Projects were considered to double grain production, raise meat output by 140%, and raise sugar output still further to provide a large proportion of the imported food requirements of the Middle East.

**But in 1978, Sudan began to run into financial difficulties:** The increased price of oil, and falling exports of cotton due to reduced demand for textiles, meant that ever-increasing proportions of export revenues were being spent on oil. Debt service became a problem, and ever-increasing interest rates increased the debt.

**So, in 1978, Sudan went to the IMF for help.** The IMF laid down its conditions: First, the government had to cancel large-scale development projects. In 1979 a three-year "stabilization" program began, and the IMF called for cutting food subsidies, a ceiling on public-sector borrowing, and currency devaluations. Commercial banks waited for IMF approval before making any loans.

**In 1980, the World Bank moved in, with the following orders:**

- 1) Redirect priorities away from massive development projects in the south and west (the poorest areas).
- 2) Improve irrigation in the east, for example, the Jezira, to increase production of the cash crop, cotton.
- 3) Get back to cotton and stop diversifying (stop attempts to produce food for Sudan's population).
- 4) Improve management in marketing and pricing mechanisms of cotton.
- 5) Increase attention to irrigation for foreign exchange and exports.

It is the IMF and World Bank's concentration on cash-crop production (in this case, cotton), their refusal to finance desperately needed large-scale infrastructure projects, and insistence on debt repayment as a first priority, that created the present disaster.

**Then the environmentalists started a massive campaign against the Jonglei Canal.** The World Wildlife Fund and the Society for Endangered Peoples in West Germany, issued statements in October 1983 attacking the ambitious plans for the canal. The development scheme would destroy the swamp, they protested, where lots of wild animals lived!

**Rebels in the south attacked installations near the project,** and work on the almost completed canal ceased in December 1983.

**Implementation of further IMF demands in January 1982 led to widespread rioting and unrest.** Slogans on placards of demonstrators in Khartoum read, "We will not be governed by the IMF." Unfortunately, however, the government went ahead and cut subsidies, increasing the price of sugar by 62%, devaluing the currency, and cutting the budget.

**In 1983, the price of gasoline was increased 70%.** Exports in 1983 were \$670 million, all of which would be consumed by imported oil, wheat, sugar, and medicine, leaving a balance of payments deficit of \$1 billion. The budget planned \$382 million in debt service payments in 1983, more than half of the export revenue.

**The 1984 budget was another IMF budget,** cutting expenditure and staffing in the health and education ministries. In October, the currency was devalued by 14.4%. Debt service was now equal to all export earnings.

**In 1984, Sudan was in arrears on repayments of debts, and so the IMF suspended its standby arrangement, whereby Sudan would have been able to draw \$90 million.** The IMF action set off a chain reaction against Sudan, that one banker said would "doom" talks about rescheduling Sudan's foreign debt, now, one year later, at \$9 billion. "The so-called Paris Club of creditor nations won't meet without an IMF plan in place; nor will private creditors renegotiate without the IMF plan."

What was the United States doing? **George Shultz's State Department also froze aid,** only delivering \$44 million of the promised \$225 million in 1984, pressed Sudan to implement further IMF austerity measures, and additionally to sell off state-run industries to the private sector.

Famine was spreading throughout East and Central Africa, due to drought and lack of development, especially lack of irrigation; secessionist movements in Ethiopia were fighting government troops; in Chad, Libyan-backed rebels were fighting the government in a civil war. The result: 1.5 million refugees fled into Sudan, homeless, starving, suffering from all kinds of diseases. A sleeping sickness epidemic began to ravage the south of the country, with high fatality rates. Cholera and other diarrheal diseases were reported to be reaching epidemic levels.

**In December 1984, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization included Sudan for the first time on its list of African countries facing "food emergencies."** According to their figures, the production of the staple crop, sorghum, fell 39% in 1984. The FAO calculated that Sudan would need 650,000 tons of emergency food aid. United Nations

officials estimated at the beginning of March that "5 to 7 million people risk starvation." Grain stocks were dwindling, and the prices of sorghum and millet had soared.

The effect of the cuts in economic aid was immediate: Fuel supplies could not be imported, food and other goods could not be transported. Factories were closed for lack of fuel, raw materials, and spare parts. The gasoline ration was cut from four to two gallons a week, while the lack of diesel fuel immobilized all public transport in February. Residents had to line up for more than four hours for bread.

**The introduction of Islamic law into Sudan in September 1983,** with its brutal penalties not only for crime but for opposition to the Numayri regime, kept protest muted at first. The IMF and World Bank certainly approved the introduction of Islamic law; it would make it easier to implement austerity. The application of the law was ruthless: More hands and feet were cut off in the 18 months of Islamic law in Sudan than have been cut off in 50 years of Islamic law in Saudi Arabia, the heart of Islam!

### **The IMF turns the screws**

**In February and March 1985, pressure mounted on President Numayri to introduce even more savage IMF measures.** There was a 48% devaluation of the currency in February, to meet IMF demands. Arrears of debt repayment to the IMF were then \$110 million and were increasing at \$10 million a week.

**On March 3, Vice-President George Bush visited Sudan,** and reportedly ordered President Numayri to implement the remaining IMF austerity measures, cutting subsidies on essential items like gasoline and bread. \$114 million in aid to Sudan was frozen by the United States, until Numayri gave in to IMF demands.

**Numayri acceded:** shortly before his departure on an official visit to the United States on March 27, the price of gasoline and diesel fuel was increased between 60% and 70%, and the price of bread went up 33%. Demonstrations erupted on March 27, with slogans such as "Down with the IMF, Down with the World Bank." Later, the chants turned to "Down with America," as the United States was seen supporting the austerity policies of the IMF.

Still, the State Department was not satisfied. After Numayri met with President Reagan on April 2, the United States released only \$67 million, two-thirds earmarked for oil payments; the \$114 million in FY 1985 aid remained frozen.

**A general strike was called on April 3.**

**On April 6, following days of violent demonstrations, the army took power, and General al Dahab became the new ruler of the country.** His first action was to repeal the price rises. In his first press conference, he said that the new government had two crucial tasks: to reconcile north and south, and to remedy the situation in which between 4 and 7 million Sudanese were in danger of starvation.

For this, international assistance, particularly from the United States, will be indispensable.