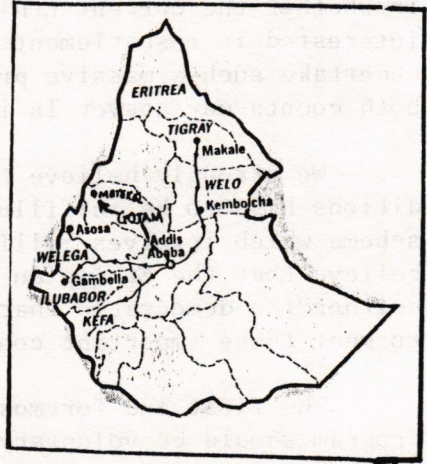


## Resettlement in Ethiopia: A Political Ploy

It has been more than a year now since the Ethiopian Military government embarked upon a scheme in which hundreds and thousands of the famine victims were resettled in different parts of Ethiopia. According to the government's projection a million and half people would be resettled in 1985 and a total of 3 millions in the next decade from the northern parts of the country to the South and South-western regions. In the first six weeks alone, 120,000 people were hastily moved out of Wollo, Tigray and Begemeder Administrative Regions to be resettled in the South. The resettlement scheme was and has still been hasty and perfunctory such that an average of 2,000 settlers were moved out of their localities everyday. The motive for the undertaking is simply political; given the severity of the famine, for which the Military Government bears a major responsibility, the resettlement scheme was prescribed by the government as a fast panacea to the problems. This was affirmed by one of the government officials, Colonel Berhanu Bayeh, at a meeting with representatives of donor countries and agencies on December 11, 1984. Colonel Berhanu stated that, "Large-scale resettlement is the only alternative to insure the continued survival of the northern people."



In spite of the military officials' contention of the scheme as "the only alternative" and despite Colonel Mengistu's high-sounding address concerning the project at the Central Committee of the so-called "Workers'" Party, the resettlement scheme has brought about a plethora of problems. These problems are complex and more intensified than that prevail in the relief camps of northern Ethiopia.



The question, here, is not whether a resettlement project is desirable. Rather the question at present is whether the current Ethiopian Government is genuinely interested in resettlement and whether it can actually undertake such a massive program of resettlement. On both counts our answer is in the negative.

We strongly believe that certain necessary conditions have to be fulfilled before embarking on such scheme which involves millions of people. We also believe that the Ethiopian Military Government has neither the democratic character nor the competence to meet these important conditions.\*

The first and foremost condition is that such program should be voluntary in nature; that is to say that the resettlers, through persuasion, must be willing and ready to participate in the resettlement project. By the same token, the people who inhabit in the areas where the resettlement centers are located have also to be aware of the project so that they can be cooperative and hospitable.

The Ethiopian Military Government has never pursued such policy of persuasion; instead, it resorted to a campaign of compulsion, either by conducting military-campaign-like-round-ups or by systematically reducing the amount of relief aid in the feeding centers so that the famine victims could be compelled to migrate to the resettlement areas.

Furthermore, since the Military Government's entire preoccupation is to retain its political power at a dear price of human suffering, its projects such as the resettlement scheme are geared in the interest of such politically parochial end. The cardinal political motive behind this scheme is simply to depopulate the regions where the Government is encountering stiff political and military resistance and eventually to relocate the people in barrack-like-villages, where it would be propitious for total control and strict surveillance by the Military Dictatorship. The Military

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\* The estimated annual cost of the scheme is \$1.5 billion, which is double that of the government's annual budget.



Government's political ploy becomes self-evident in its embarkation upon the scheme without ever designating the areas, regardless of the painstaking nature of the survey, in the northern region which are believed to be scorched and barren. Nonetheless, the Military Government's political stratagem is to deprive the national movements and the democratic struggle of any mass basis and to ultimately establish highly secluded and regimented "Strategic Vilages" in the resettlement locations.

One of the other aspects which the government, while hastily embarking on such project, totally overlooked was the logistical and organizational problems that should have been taken into serious account. Apart from Colonel Mengistu's project-mongering statement in September 1985, it was only after the implementation of the resettlement program commenced that some of the pressing needs of the resettlers were addressed; and it was only after the scheme became an accomplished fact that the government appealed to international donors for assistance. It was much later after when the resettlers were put in double-jeopardy that the Military Government came up with a list of basic and indispensable items for the project such as agricultural machinery, oxen, farming tools, seeds, fertilizers, well-drilling machinery, clothing, kitchen utensils, etc. etc. As a consequence of such gravely deficient undertaking, not only the famine and the epidemics persist in the resettlement centers, but between 50,000 to 100,000 people were also perished. And currently, according to the expelled witnesses of the "Medecins Sans Frontieres" (Doctors Without Borders), the rate of death in the resettlement centers is higher than in the feeding camps at the climax of the famine.

On September 2, 1985, while addressing the C.C. of the "Workers'" Party, Colonel Mengistu was forced to admit that the resettlement scheme was perfunctory; he stated the time constraints which render it difficult to collect sufficient data on harvesting and rainy seasons in the resettlement locations in South-Western



Ethiopia such as Metema, Gambela, and Metekel. As a result of which, the implementation of farming development program was randomly conducted and that the agricultural yield would show a decline to that of initially anticipated production.

Furthermore, a deeply entrenched problem for the resettlers would be the inadequacy of nourishment suitable for their cultural taste. First of all what is designed by the Military Government for the resettlers in the farming development scheme is not on the basis of their diet habit, but on the types of crops that the regional climate dictates. Secondly, at this initial phase, there is even a plan currently underway for planting industrial or cash crops such as oil seeds and peanuts. These are not definitely for the immediate consumption and therefore are non-beneficial for the recuperating resettlers.

Finally, according to the statement of Tamrat Kebede, who is the chief architect of such scheme, the resettlers are not entitled to any land ownership; the farming land on which they resettled is solely government property and that they eventually would be organized in collective farms. Thus it is glaringly evident that the ultimate destination of the resettlement scheme is collectivization. Nonetheless, the state-owned large farms and collective farms which have a one-tenth share of the country's agricultural production, are operating under stupendous diminishing returns or even at a loss. In spite of such misdirected and mismanaged undertakings, the Ethiopian Military Dictatorship, with an inertia of intrasigence, pursues an economic policy which still depletes the human and natural resources of the country.

To sum up, the Ethiopian Military Government's Resettlement Scheme is engraved with plethora of problems which account for an ever-escalating human suffering. Malnourished and sick people are involuntarily displaced, families are dismembered, thousands of people are dying as a result of inadequate food,

medical care, clothing, shelter, etc. . These factors compel us to question and oppose the parochial motive behind the government's so-called resettlement scheme.

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