



REUTERS PHOTO/THOMAS MUKOYA

A child sits on food rations as he waits for his sick mother last month at a food distribution center by the U.N. World Food Program in Raddure district in Somalia. Hundreds of people and thousands of livestock have died from hunger and thirst across east Africa in the region's worst drought in years. Aid workers say Somalia is particularly vulnerable as the nation of 10 million is carved into fiefdoms run by rival warlords.

Clashes worsen Somalia food crisis

By Edward Girardet

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

NAIROBI, Kenya — Despite ongoing and often tricky efforts to end the civil war that since 1991 has turned Somalia into a worn-out and destitute failed state, heavy clashes have recently erupted between warlords and Islamist extremists in the capital, Mogadishu.

The fighting, which has involved indiscriminate barages of mortar and anti-aircraft fire leveled point blank across the city, represents the worst violence in almost a decade and is bad news for a region already suffering from the ravages of acute drought. Clans traditionally at war with one another are uniting to fight the Islamists, whom they call terrorists, but the Islamists say they can bring order to a lawless state that has not had a central government for 16 years.

And while the renewed conflict has been restricted largely to Mogadishu, it is proving detrimental to the overall peace process, the political survival of the country's fragile United Nations-backed transitional government, and critical humanitarian operations.

"You feel that one is just beginning to make some good progress against all odds, when something like this happens," observed one Nairobi-based official with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Much like the Taliban in Afghanistan during the mid-90s, the Islamists have declared that they are determined to end the current lawlessness but also place Somalia under strict sharia or Islamic law. They have accused the warlords of being supported by "non-Muslim foreigners," implying the US anti-terrorist task force stationed in neighboring Djibouti.

The warlords, who have formed a coalition called the "Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism," claim that the Islamists are behind many

recent targeted assassinations of prominent figures, particularly those who have argued in favor of an international peacekeeping force, which the fundamentalists are dead-set against.

Last year, a country director of the Geneva-based War-Torn Societies Project, who was heavily involved in promoting peace-building initiatives between the different rival groups, was assassinated in what international aid workers and diplomats maintain was clearly because of his links with outside organizations.

The warlords also accuse the Islamists of cultivating close links to Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. According to the Brussels-based International Crisis Group, terror-related groups have taken advantage of Somalia's collapse to attack neighboring countries as well as transit agents and material.

"The country is a refuge for the Al Qaeda team that bombed a Kenyan resort in 2002 and tried to down an Israeli aircraft in 2003," according to a December 2005 ICG report. The organization further asserts that the Islamists have been behind the murders of Somalis and foreigners alike since 2003.

The fighting has raised considerable international concern about the protection of civilians and the ability of aid agencies to continue providing key humanitarian relief. Compounded by the drought, which is beginning to create dire famine conditions, including the loss of more than half the country's cattle and sheep, current insecurity is causing people to flee to safer areas, including northern Kenya, where the UN says more than 100,000 Somali refugees are living.

According to international aid groups, most of which operate out of neighboring Kenya because they consider it too dangerous to work full time inside Somalia, at least 70 people, mainly civilians, have been killed with hun-

dreds more injured over the past two months.

"They don't call the Somali situation a complex emergency for nothing," notes Robert Malletta, a veteran American aid consultant based in the region. "There are areas of southern Somalia which are very insecure. You have to know whom to trust. Effective aid depends very much on working with good local NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) and civil society groups."

Particularly critical has been the situation in Baidoa, where Somalia's Transitional Federal Parliament has been sitting since February in a bid to reconcile differences

Please see CLASHES/7A

CMS offers bonuses to close teacher gap in low-performing schools

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gap is a teacher gap that must be addressed if we truly want all children to learn at high levels."

The district will pay:

- \$5,000 for EOC teachers already at the schools whose students achieved "high academic change" on state exams this year.

- \$5,000 "challenge bonus" for teachers whose students score high academic change next year.

Dot Cromwell, president of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Association of Educators, the county's largest teacher organization, said the bonuses are a step in the right direction, but more is needed.

"I think \$10,000 paid as salary would be enough to attract high-quality teachers," she said. "But working

conditions have to be just as attractive."

The new program is being added to CMS's bonus system and the state bonus program. Teachers at high-poverty schools can also qualify for graduate school tuition reimbursement if they pursue a master's degree in education.

Bonus candidates must exceed the state's high growth standard of 103 percent on End of Course tests in their classroom, said CMS spokesman Damon Ford.

The bonuses apply to teachers at Garinger, West Charlotte and West Mecklenburg, the three campuses where racial minorities make up the majority of enrollment.

All three campuses have lagged in student achievement and high teacher and

administrator turnover in recent years. Poverty is also a common factor, where free and reduced lunch rates range from 63.9 percent at West Mecklenburg to 76.5 percent at Garinger.

Money alone won't ease the teacher gap at low-performing schools, said Cromwell, a 33-year classroom veteran. The district needs to boost its commitment to staff and teacher development and apply rigorous enforcement of discipline to attract and keep good teachers.

"It's a first step, and it's a good thing," said Cromwell, who is on leave from E.E. Waddell High. "Traditionally, these are schools where working conditions are not as good as the high-performing schools. Your discipline problems are compounded there."

NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETINGS REGARDING SECTION A OF THE PROPOSED MONROE BYPASS FROM US 74 WEST OF ROCKY RIVER ROAD TO US 601 SOUTH OF RIDGE ROAD

Project 8.T690401 • R-2559A • Union County

The North Carolina Department of Transportation will hold the above informal public meetings on:
April 27, 2006 from 4PM to 8PM at the Monroe Country Club,
1680 Pageland Highway, Monroe.

May 3, 2006 from 4PM to 8PM at the South Piedmont Community College,
Building A, 4209 Old Charlotte Highway, Monroe.

NCDOT is requesting that MUMPO (Mecklenburg Union Metropolitan Planning Organization) add Section A of the Monroe Bypass to its Long-Range Transportation Plan and its Thoroughfare Plan. The Department's current Transportation Improvement Program includes funding for construction of Sections B and C of the Bypass (US 601 east to US 74 near Marshallville). Section A is currently scheduled for post years (after 2012) in the Transportation Improvement Program. The three Sections provide logical termini or endpoints for the Bypass, enable the Bypass to provide independent utility, and were studied within the original NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) environmental document that was prepared for the project.

Because of the age of the NEPA environmental document (1997) for the Monroe Bypass, the Department is preparing a reevaluation of the original document. The completion of the NEPA document reevaluation is needed before any portion of the Bypass can be let to contract. During the course of the reevaluation study, it was discovered that MUMPO's Long-Range Transportation Plan did not include Section A of the Bypass. The project must be on the Long-Range Transportation Plan and the at conformity analysis must include Section A of the Bypass in order for the Department to be able to complete the NEPA document reevaluation for the Monroe Bypass.

Again, the completion of the reevaluation of the NEPA document as well as receipt of the environmental permits will enable the Department to move forward to construction on the funded portions of the Bypass. It will also better enable the Department to advance Section A of the Bypass when funding becomes available.

Three alternative alignments for Section A will be presented for public comments at these meetings. Interested individuals may attend these sessions at their convenience between the above stated times and locations. Department of Transportation representatives will be available to supply information and answer questions on an individual basis in an informal setting.

Anyone desiring additional information may contact Mr. John Conforti at 919-733-3141 or 1548 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1548. Written comments will be received for a period of 15 days following the meetings. They should be sent to Mr. Conforti at the above address.

A map showing the potential impact area is available for review at the NCDOT District Office, 130 S. Southerland Avenue, Monroe and at the City of Monroe Planning Office - 1st Floor, 300 West Crowell Street, Monroe. More detailed maps will be shown at the meetings.

NCDOT will provide auxiliary aids and services for disabled persons who wish to participate in the meeting to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. To receive special services, please contact Mr. Conforti at the above address or phone number or fax 919-733-9794 to provide adequate notice prior to the date of the meetings so that arrangements can be made.

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