



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

June 1, 1973

UNCLASSIFIEDMEMORANDUM FOR MR. HENRY A. KISSINGER
THE WHITE HOUSE

Subject: West Africa Drought Disaster

Immediately south of the Sahara, a zone stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to Chad is suffering the consequences of a disastrous drought, the cumulative effect of a series of very dry years. Crops have failed and livestock is sustaining catastrophic losses. An international relief effort is trying to prevent widespread starvation and save the surviving livestock. Whatever the success of relief operations, the disaster is a severe setback to development prospects in the region.

The afflicted area has a population of more than 24 million; their main economic activities are raising livestock and subsistence farming. A severe drought during the 1972 growing season capped several bad crop years. Scattered starvation deaths are already being reported, malnutrition is widespread, and many villages have been deserted. An upsurge in measles causing hundreds of deaths has been reported in Upper Volta; other epidemics may occur. The worst is yet to come: impassable roads during the June-September rainy season will disrupt the distribution of relief supplies, and the next harvest is not due until fall.

Cattle herds have nearly been wiped out in some regions, and have been hard hit everywhere. Surviving cattle have been herded far south of their normal range into areas where they are exposed to the tsetse fly disease, trypanosomiasis.

UNCLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED
PA/HO Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
May 4, 2006

DECLASSIFIED
Authority E.O. 12958
By JANARA Date 10-21-02

Donors have pledged almost 600,000 tons of grain to the most severely affected countries. The US has committed 156,000 tons of grain (worth \$18 million) and has made \$2 million available to finance non-food aid, mostly to cover the operating costs of three Air Force C-130's being used to distribute relief supplies internally in Mali and Chad, and to purchase livestock vaccines and feedstuffs. France has provided special grant assistance to Mali, Niger, and Chad. The USSR, France, and Germany also have lent aircraft for internal distribution. The largest cash contribution - \$24 million - has been made by the European Development Fund. Secretary General Waldheim has named Director General Boerma of the FAO as the senior UN coordinator of the multi-donor effort. Boerma has called on donors to contribute another \$15 million. Another FAO official will head a secretariat in Ouagadougou where the six most severely affected countries have named their own coordinator.

Generous as this is, it falls short of covering the estimated food grain deficit of more than one million tons. Whatever the success of the international effort to prevent mass starvation, malnutrition will further reduce disease resistance and physical stamina of the people. Specialists fear that the drought will permanently destroy pasturage and speed the encroachment of the desert. It will be many years before livestock herds recover. US programs aimed at improved livestock production and grain stockpiling for price stabilization have been set back. The drought will spur migration to urban centers. Even with good growing seasons in the coming years, the effects of the drought -- the worst in 50 years -- will be felt for a long time. To restore the viability of these lands, State and A.I.D. are working to promote a multi-donor effort to reestablish ecological balance and increase crop and livestock production.

Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.

Theodore L. Eliot, Jr.
Executive Secretary