

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
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Subject: Fw: NYT: UN Blames US For Critically Short Food Supplies In Somalia.

From: Cousin, Ertharin
To: Mills, Cheryl D
Sent: Sat Nov 07 07:15:15 2009
Subject: Fw: NYT: UN Blames US For Critically Short Food Supplies In Somalia.

Any movement on this issue?

From: deValcourt-Ayala, Lillian G
To: Astibia, Miren E; Clark, Jeanne L; Cousin, Ertharin; Glover, Michael P; Heffern, Keith L; Hegadorn, Chris S; Heinen, Suzanne E; Luedig, Erika A; Petrovski, Elizabeth A; Snow, Michelle S; Spanos, Harriet ; Tuminaro, John D; Wendell, George C
Sent: Sat Nov 07 07:04:46 2009
Subject: NYT: UN Blames US For Critically Short Food Supplies In Somalia.

UN Blames US For Critically Short Food Supplies In Somalia. The New York Times (11/7, A4, Gettleman, 1.09M) reports that the UN on Friday called "the food supply line to Somalia...broken," in part because the US delayed some 40 million pounds of food contributions in Kenyan warehouses "out of fears that they would be diverted" to the Shabab insurgents by Somali contractors. The US, however, "played down the impact of the delays" and said food would again be shipped when it was "assured that the United Nations was doing more to police the aid deliveries." The UN said Friday that food rations would need to be cut and "said the American government was insisting on guarantees that were unrealistic in Somalia." The Times adds that some Somalis whose "entire communities are on the brink of famine...said that many children who had been surviving off the American donations were now dying from hunger."

Full text:

U.N. Says U.S. Delays Led to Aid Cuts in Somalia

By JEFFREY GETTLEMAN
 Published: November 6, 2009

NAIROBI, Kenya — United Nations officials said Friday that the supply of critical food aid to Somalia had been interrupted and that rations to starving people needed to be cut, partly because the American government had delayed food contributions out of fears that they would be diverted to terrorists.

Last month, American officials said they had suspended millions of dollars of food aid because of concerns that Somali contractors working for the United Nations were

funneling food and money to the Shabab, an Islamist insurgent group with growing ties to Al Qaeda.

American officials played down the impact of the delays and said the food shipments would resume soon, once the United States government was assured that the United Nations was doing more to police the aid deliveries.

But on Friday, the World Food Program said, "The food supply line to Somalia is effectively broken."

United Nations officials said that around 40 million pounds of American-donated food was being held up in warehouses in Mombasa, in neighboring Kenya, because American officials were not allowing aid workers to distribute it until a new set of tighter regulations was ironed out.

United Nations officials said the American government was insisting on guarantees that were unrealistic in Somalia, like demanding that aid transporters not pay fees at roadblocks, which are ubiquitous and virtually unavoidable in a nation widely considered a case study in chaos.

American aid officials declined to comment on Friday.

In the drought-stricken regions of central Somalia, where entire communities are on the brink of famine, elders said that many children who had been surviving off the American donations were now dying from hunger.

"We are totally dependent on this food, and people are now suffering," said Ahmed Mahamoud Hassan, the chairman of the drought committee in Galcaio, central Somalia. "We have nothing else to eat."

Somalia is one of the neediest nations in the world — and one of the most complex environments to deliver aid. Ever since the central government imploded in 1991, the country has lurched from one crisis to the next, the latest being a vicious civil war between a weak government and an extremist Islamist insurgency during one of the worst droughts in years.

The United States has played a huge role in saving lives by supplying about 40 percent of the \$850 million annual aid budget for Somalia. But that aid is often only loosely monitored at best once it enters the country because of the dangers of working in Somalia and the fact that so much of it is a no-go zone for foreigners.

For months now, United Nations officials have been negotiating with their American counterparts, trying to agree on language for new rules that would ensure, as much as possible, that American donated food goes to needy people and not to the Shabab.

Last month, American officials said they were legally bound to do this, because the American government has listed the Shabab as a terrorist organization, a designation that means that aiding or abetting the Shabab is a serious crime.

There is increasing evidence, according to United Nations documents, that some of the United Nations contractors in Somalia have been stealing food and channeling the proceeds to the Shabab and other militant groups. United Nations officials are investigating some of their biggest contractors.

United Nations officials say that other donor nations have been skittish about contributing aid during these investigations, which is another reason for the aid shortages in Somalia. The global recession has also taken a toll on aid operations around the world.

That said, "the United States is traditionally W.F.P.'s largest single donor," said Peter Smerdon, a spokesman for the World Food Program, "and other donors cannot make up the difference."

He warned that the food supplies for Somalia were steadily dwindling each month and that by December, "we will completely run out."

Partly because of the standoff over the new rules and the ensuing interruption in the food pipeline, the World Food Program recently halved the emergency rations to the more than one million displaced Somalis.

United Nations officials said they had been urging the American government to release at least some of the food from the warehouses in Kenya while they worked out the new rules.

The officials said that even if they wanted to bypass the American government and ship in food from other countries, which would cost millions of dollars, it would be impossible to get it to Somalia in time and that the American sacks of grain sitting in Mombasa were the only solution to averting a widespread famine.

"The urgency of the situation has been communicated," said one United Nations official in Nairobi, who spoke on condition of anonymity because negotiations were continuing. "Basically, USAID," the United States Agency for International Development, "has to come through, one way or the other."