

Aid Agencies Reassess Somali Operations

Difficulty:

DIFFICULT

Date of release:

Tuesday 06 December 2011

Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson

Today's report was about aid agencies in Africa. Why are they reassessing their operations in Somalia? Why are there so many refugees there? Which other African countries are mentioned in the report and why?

Extension discussion topics

A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text

Introduction = What is al Shabab? Why have they imposed a ban? Does the ban cover all aid agencies in Somalia? Does it cover the whole country?

1. What do we learn in the report about al Shabab and the ban that they have imposed?

- Al Shabab is a militant Islamic rebel group which effectively controls large parts of Somalia.
- It has banned the activities of 16 aid agencies in southern and central parts of Somalia (the parts under its control).
- It accuses these agencies of "bias and misconduct".
- Some aid agencies allowed to remain (Doctors Without Borders and the International Red Cross).

What do you think al Shabab means by "bias and misconduct". Why are two agencies allowed to stay?

2. Why are there so many refugees in Somalia? In what conditions do they live?

- The refugees are fleeing drought and famine, and also armed conflict in parts of the country.
- They are housed in overcrowded settlements or camps and live mostly in tents.
- Conditions in these camps are already difficult but have been made worse by recent heavy rains. Many refugees have been "washed out".
- Cold temperatures and the rain increase the risk of deaths from hypothermia.
- Outside Mogadishu, food distribution has been halted because of roads made impassable by the rains.
- Insecurity due to the fighting makes people fearful of traveling to buy food.

3. Which other African countries are mentioned in the report and why?

- Kenya, because "hundreds of thousands" of Somali refugees are in camps there. (Kenya has borders with Somalia). Registration of new arrivals halted because of insecurity.
- Ethiopia, because it also has refugee camps, where there is severe malnutrition.
- Can you situate these countries on a map of Africa?

B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Al Shabab and the political and social situation of Somalia.

1. Do some research on al Shabab and report back to a partner or your teacher.

- Full name: Harakat al-Shabaab Mujahideen, more commonly known as al-Shabaab ("The Youth", "The Boys").
- It is a terrorist group of militants fighting to overthrow the government of Somalia.
- Today it controls large parts of southern Somalia, where it is said to have imposed its own strict form of Sharia law.
- It is considered to have links to al Qaeda, and there have been reports that the movement contains jihadists from other Muslim countries (Egypt, Iran...) who train the troops in the use of sophisticated weapons.
- Al-Shabaab's troop strength is estimated at 14,500 militants.
- ...

2. Do some research on the recent history and political situation of Somalia and report back to a partner or your teacher.

- Since a civil war in 1991, there has been no central government in control of all the country, which has many armed factions in conflict with one another.
- In 1992 a multinational force backed by the UN and led by the US entered Somalia to ensure humanitarian aid distribution and restore peace. American forces left in 1994.
- Piracy is common in the seas off Somalia and the pirates are based along the Somalian coast.
- The northwest of the country is relatively stable under the self-declared, but unrecognized state of Somaliland.
- The northeast (Puntland) is also relatively stable - Puntland is a self-governing province.
- There is an internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which controls parts of the capital Mogadishu and surrounding areas.
- In October this year, troops from Kenya entered southern Somalia with the objective of defeating al Shabaab and restoring security within the country. Kenya is in a coalition with Uganda and the TFG. The advance of Kenyan troops has been halted by the rains.
- In Somalia today 250,000 face imminent starvation and 4 million people need humanitarian aid in order to survive.
- ...

C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Aid Agencies and International Aid.

1. In the report you heard the names of three International Aid Agencies (see §A.1 above). Working from memory, make a list of all the others that you can think of (making sure they are "international"). Compare your list with a partner or with your teacher. Discuss the specificities of each organization. Are there too many such organizations?
2. Where do these agencies get the money that they transform into aid?
 - Many are charities and rely on donations from the public.
 - Some, the larger ones, channel money which governments give as aid.
3. Do you give to charities that provide humanitarian aid? Regularly, occasionally, never? Are you often solicited by charities? In what form are the requests made (post, telephone, e-mail, face-to-face...)? Would you give, if you had more money? How do you / would you choose the organization, the cause?
4. It is quite common for governments to promise money for humanitarian aid and then not respect their promises. What do you think of this practice? Do rich countries give enough money in aid? Is it always well spent?
5. If possible, research your country's aid budget and where the money goes. Then, if possible, compare your findings with somebody from a different country.

Audioscript

Sixteen aid agencies say they face new challenges in Somalia, after the al Shabab militant group banned their activities in the southern and central parts of the country. Al Shabab accuses the agencies of bias and misconduct.

One of the organizations affected by the ban is the U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR. Andy Needham is spokesman for the Somalia office.

"Like a lot of the other agencies, we're assessing the situation both in terms of implications on the ground and the implications for our operations."

This year southern and central Somalia were hit hard by drought and famine, along with conflict. Now, there's another problem.

"There've been heavy rains of late, which is I guess ironic maybe for some people to comprehend in the wake of all this talk about drought and famine. But these are seasonal rains. So what this has done is it's compounded the difficulties for the IDPs living in settlements, say, for example, in Mogadishu. So what we've actually seen is that we have entire settlements, where people are in tents and shelters, have been kind of washed out. And the heavy rains are flowing through the places where people are living."

And Needham says there's not much that can be done about it.

"Because they're living cheek by jowl, so close that it's impossible even to dig channels so that the water can get out. So they're in pretty miserable conditions when the rains come. When the temperature drops and the rains come, we saw in previous years that that had a bad effect in terms of increased numbers of deaths through hypothermia, especially among children."

Even before al Shabab banned many aid groups, the rains had already brought their humanitarian efforts to a standstill. Many roads are impassable in southern and central Somalia.

"What we're hearing from people on the ground is that some certain towns and villages are actually effectively completely cut off for food deliveries. And even people, if they have means, if they have some small amounts of money, they actually can't buy anything because people cannot travel to these towns because of the roads and perhaps fear of being caught up in some sort of ongoing clash."

Al Shabab has allowed some aid groups to remain, namely Doctors Without Borders and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Meanwhile, in neighboring Kenya, insecurity continues to disrupt UNHCR operations at the Dadaab refugee camp. Hundreds of thousands of Somalis find shelter there. However, the insecurity has brought a halt to the registration and health check of new arrivals.

And in Ethiopia, at the Dollo Ado refugee camps, the U.N. agency reports high rates of severe acute malnutrition among children under age five.

Joe De Capua, VOA News, Washington.