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MailOnline

‘Food handouts are the not long-term answer for Ethiopia’, says famine survivor as 23m are pushed to the brink

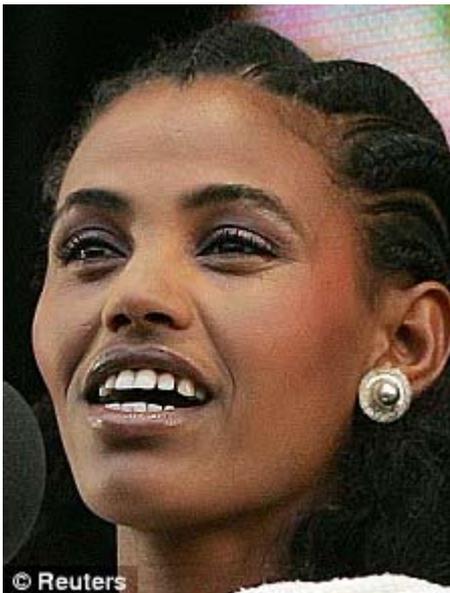
By [Sara Nelson](#)

Last updated at 12:41 PM on 23rd October 2009

An Ethiopian charity worker says food handouts are not a long-term solution to the threat of starvation faced by 23 million east Africans.

Birhan Woldu, whose emaciated appearance moved the world during the Band Aid campaign 25 years ago, says the charity which saved her own life is now failing Africa's poorest.

Her comments came as Ethiopia appealed for 59,410 tons of emergency aid to feed 6.2 million people, on the anniversary of the notorious famine which saw more than a million perish.





Give us our dignity: Famine survivor Birhan Woldu says Ethiopians must be given help to prepare for future droughts, instead of relying exclusively on handouts. She is pictured on the left at the Live8 concert in London in 2005, the right image shows her in the grip of the famine 25 years ago

Mitiku Kassa, the country's State Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development said that due to a five-year drought, the number of people needing emergency assistance between October to December 2009 had risen to 6.2 million from 4.9 million.

But Ms Woldu, who composed a foreword to an Oxfam report released yesterday, says handouts encourage dependency and are uneconomic.

She said: 'Twenty-five years ago, my life was saved by Irish nursing sisters who gave me an injection and food from organisations like Band Aid.

'So it may seem strange for me to say now that to get food aid from overseas is not the best way.

'As well as being demeaning to our dignity, my education has taught me that constantly shipping food is costly, uneconomic and can encourage dependency.'

The report calls for an end to what it calls 'knee-jerk' reactions to food crises that focused on sending food aid and appealed for longer-term solutions.



Maso Aliyi mourns the loss of his son Shibre Aliyi at his home in the village of Kararo, 175 miles south of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

According to Oxfam, 91 per cent of humanitarian aid given to Ethiopia so far this year has been food. Only 0.14 per cent of the aid was spent on preparing the people for future droughts.

Ms Woldu said: 'Let us grow our own food and help manage our own systems so we are not hit so hard when the next drought or flood comes.'

'We need to approach disasters in a different way that is more dignified and more sustainable than imported food aid.'

Aid workers say the prolonged drought has affected much of the Horn of Africa, including Kenya and Somalia.

Drought is especially disastrous in Ethiopia because more than 80 percent of people live off the land.

The cycle of drought used to come around every ten years but now it is almost constant. Many attribute the changing patterns to climate change.

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The West are subsidising a people mountain in these areas, its obvious these zones cant support the numbers that they are trying to keep. the simple solution is to sterilize 50% of the female population

- peter, LONDON UK, 26/10/2009 11:00

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in drought effected areas a forced sterilization programme instead might have longer term benefits

- peter, LONDON UK, 26/10/2009 10:57

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Here we go again with the bottomless begging bowl. When wil Western governments wake up to the fact that allowing tinpot little fascists to run African countries is as great an abuse of human rights as the effects of famine? It would be interesting to hear how much money has been spent by Ethiopia on weapons in the last 25 years, compared with investment in agriculture, irrigation and population control.

- Winston Waterloo, Ashby, England, 23/10/2009 09:07

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Climate change gets used again. Not the fact that they are engaged in wars and spend money on guns and weapons

then, while the rest of us feed them. No, that must be the other ethiopia and somalia we are talking about not this one.

- a.langley, sitts, kent, 23/10/2009 08:20

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Perhaps if they hadn't reproduced so prolifically they wouldn't be in quite the dire straights they are in, the population of Ethiopia has doubled since the last famine in 1984. It doesn't matter how fast the West improves food production techniques, in the end the crunch will come because there is only so much fresh water available to grow crops and only so much land to grow them on. The simple, but hard truth is there are too many humans on the planet and the main problem is in Africa and Asia elsewhere apart from migration the population is static or reducing.

- Stephen, St. Ives, England, 23/10/2009 06:09

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I saw that story twenty years ago, same pic I think. Didn't care then and don't care now.

- john, bristol england, 23/10/2009 05:06

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