

24 Oct 2022

Senator Penny Wong
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Canberra

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you because I am deeply concerned about the dire situation in Somalia, a country facing the worst famine in half a century.

Since the end of 2020 Somalia has suffered four successive failures in its rainy seasons, and there are fears that a fifth failure is now under way. According to the latest UN figures, at least 41 percent of Somalia's population of nearly 16 million people will face acute food insecurity between now and December¹. Also, children are being admitted to health establishments with severe acute malnutrition – a condition that means a child is up to 11 times likelier to die from diarrhoea and measles than an adequately fed counterpart.

The numbers involved are staggering. In 2011 famine killed nearly 260,000 people in Somalia, and 100,000 of those people died before famine was officially declared. The same is happening again with predictions that this time it will be worse. The latest UN report confirms that as the present drought worsens in Somalia a child is being admitted for medical treatment for malnutrition every minute. Last week it was revealed that people left behind could be in even more desperate situations than those who have managed to reach camps for the internally displaced².

As a former minister of the Somali Government, and an Australian citizen for the last 40 years, I speak to you here as a representative of the Somali community in Australia. What can a country like Australia do to provide assistance? And is there anything our government can do about this situation in the longer term? I provide some suggestions below, but am sure there are more ideas and solutions from experts in this field that can help.

First, our community is asking for an immediate response, namely a generous allocation of the foreign aid budget to be assigned to food relief for Somalians. This can be done directly or using the UN and other agencies already on the ground.

¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2013/05/438682>

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-drought-response-and-famine-prevention-18-29-september-2022>enarso

Second, Australia has world renowned expertise in water management, and in desert and land management. We ask you as Foreign Minister with a strong voice in Cabinet if you could also initiate transfer of Australian expertise in solar and water management to enable Somalians to help themselves. The Somali government has asked governments worldwide to assist, but it has little influence in making things happen that will solve the long-term problems as well.

We have been impressed by the way your department, under your leadership, has responded to Pacific Islands with infrastructure deficits beyond their capacity to address, and affected by climate change. Present and future assistance has been achieved in the wake of Chinese moves to provide loans and construction help, often conditional upon undesirable concessions. For the past decade or more these same forces have been felt by the Somali government, a government that would welcome different approach to financial and project aid.

The situation is urgent. The worst hit are those who fled their homes recently. Families arriving at a makeshift camp on the southern coast lack even the most basic facilities for survival: water and healthcare. In Baidoa, some families are receiving support while newer arrivals have nothing. Some of the internally displaced want to return to their homes but fear recriminations from the Islamist insurgents al-Shabaab, who punish people for moving to government-controlled areas³.

I would be happy to meet with you, Minister Wong, to present a fuller picture. My family live in Melbourne, have been educated here. My Somali community members in Australia and I implore you to respond to this appeal with the urgency that it requires.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mohamed Ibrahim', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Mohamed Ibrahim

Email : mi@ayuub.org

0425 104 105

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/oct/11/somalia-drought-famine-displaced-people-alshabaab-militants-aid-agriculture>