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A CRITICAL REVIEW OF

OPERATION

LIFELINE SUDAN

A REPORT TO THE AID AGENCIES

TABIEGEN AGNES ABOUM

ESHETU CHOLE

KOSTE MANIBE

LARRY MINEAR

ABDUL MOHAMMED

JENNEFER SEBSTAD

THOMAS G. WEISS

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A CRITICAL REVIEW OF

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A REPORT TO THE AID AGENCIES

This report is a product of a case study on Operation Lifeline Sudan, conducted by an independent research team in 1990. The report elaborates on material presented in *Humanitarianism under Siege: A Critical Review of Operation Lifeline Sudan*, by Larry Minear (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1991).

Additional copies of this report, which has been privately printed, are available from the Refugee Policy Group 1424 16th St. N.W., Suite 401, Washington, DC 20036, at a cost, prepaid, of \$5.00, including postage and handling.

TABYIEGEN AGNES ABOUM
ESHETU CHOLE
KOSTE MANIBE
LARRY MINEAR
ABDUL MOHAMMED
JENNEFER SEBSTAD
THOMAS G. WEISS

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

This is a report on a case study of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), conducted by an independent research team (See Appendix I). It parallels a book entitled *Humanitarianism under Siege: A Critical Review of Operation Lifeline Sudan*, published by the Red Sea Press of Trenton, New Jersey, in September 1990. Copies of the book and of this report are being provided to the aid agencies interviewed by the team for their review and discussion.¹

The case study was carried out from mid-March through late June 1990. It was made possible by grants and in-kind contributions from the United Nations (UN) organizations, governments, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) listed in Appendix II. Based in Nairobi, the team held organizational meetings in mid-March to agree on a methodology and plan its work. It met again in late April for a preliminary discussion of findings, and then again in mid-June to finalize its recommendations.

Six issues emerged in initial meetings and formed the core of our research: OLS' historical significance, objectives, cost-effectiveness, political factors, connections with peace, and lessons for the future. We conducted interviews with more than two hundred persons throughout the Sudan, as well as in Addis Ababa, Geneva, Brussels, Rome, London,

1. The book is available at \$9.95 through bookstores, and, for \$9.95 plus postage, from the Red Sea Press (15 Industry Court, Trenton, NJ 08638), and from the Bread for the World Institute on Hunger and Development (802 Rhode Island Ave. N.E., Washington, DC 20018).

New York, Washington, and Ottawa. Our project was met with unusual interest; our questions received thoughtful and constructive responses. We were able to engage in discussion many who have played key roles in Operation Lifeline Sudan.

We met with General Bashir and high-level Sudanese government officials, persons in authority within the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A) and the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SRRRA), senior officials in the UN secretariat and UN organizations, and many members of NGOs and the media. The names of most of those interviewed, some of them on several occasions, are listed in Appendix C of the book; a number of others have requested that their names be withheld.

We describe our work as a "case study" to distinguish it from an "evaluation." We did not believe that it was possible to carry out a formal and quantitative analysis of the effectiveness of OLS—a Sisyphean task in light of the complexity of the issues, the intensity and diversity of views held, and the fragmentary and occasionally contradictory nature of the data available to us. Our purpose has been rather to review in a more general and less technical sense OLS accomplishments and the difficulties it encountered.

We have thus accepted the information provided by aid agencies at face value without attempting to generate our own raw data or independently to investigate what they have reported. For example, we have neither questioned the data provided concerning the number of beneficiaries reached nor sought to verify the stated costs of reaching them. We have, however, suggested the key questions in reaching ass-

essments of such matters as cost-effectiveness, which in our view should be the subject of follow-up studies.

Only one chapter of *Humanitarianism under Siege*, although by far the longest, is devoted to purely operational issues. The other chapters range into broader policy matters which, in our view, are of central interest to the international constituency supporting humanitarian assistance. Our book raises generic questions about coordination, mandates, and division of labor; we have saved a more technical discussion of institutional issues for the current report.

While the book and this report raise questions of a critical nature about OLS, our intent throughout has been constructive. We believe that the OLS achievements, as well as frustrations, deserve to be more widely known. Better understood, the OLS experience can help improve the future delivery of humanitarian aid in other countries torn by civil strife.

We are pleased that our preliminary findings and recommendations, shared with aid agencies during the course of our study, have proved helpful. We are also holding a series of debriefings with interested agencies to stimulate wider discussion of these issues. A summary of the debriefings to date is included as Section IV of this report.

Based on *Humanitarianism under Siege*, the current report does not recapitulate the details of the book. While the report is intended to be self-contained and may be read in its own right, readers are encouraged to read the report alongside the book, which is far more wide-ranging and engaging than

the report. In the findings section of the report, we have included page references to the book in parentheses.

The report's first section reviews our general findings. The second identifies the major institutional shortcomings. Both sections serve as background for the more detailed recommendations spelled out in the third section. The fourth section, as noted, summarizes the reactions elicited by our case study to date.

SECTION ONE: GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The team reached the following general conclusions:

1. OLS succeeded in affirming certain humanitarian principles for providing assistance in conflict situations. The key principles include the right of civilians in a situation of armed conflict to receive assistance and the right of neutral agencies providing humanitarian assistance to have access to them. Those principles were reaffirmed in Lifeline 2, in spite of the difficulties encountered in negotiations with the parties to the conflict, and in the subsequent carrying out of relief activities.
2. Lifeline embodied an energetic and good-faith effort by the international community to respond to the needs of people caught in civil strife. At the same time, it illustrated the need for institutional changes in the existing humanitarian and political apparatus of the UN system, governments, and NGOs, if human needs in other armed conflicts are to be addressed more effectively. The OLS experience suggests above all that the mandate and mechanisms for UN involvement in such arenas need to be further legitimized and strengthened.
3. A humanitarian intervention, OLS had a variety of political motivations and effects. It was yet another element of contention in the struggle between the warring parties, each of which saw relief in political as well as humanitarian terms. At the same time, Lifeline also, through the presence of international aid personnel and the assistance provided,

tempered the political abuse of food and other relief, and moderated the liberties taken by the protagonists with civilians. Political considerations within and among aid agencies also affected the shape and effectiveness of OLS activities.

4. While OLS 1 did not bring lasting peace and was not formally charged with doing so, it did contribute to an atmosphere, particularly during the days of Prime Minister Sadiq el Mahdi, in which negotiated solutions could be and indeed were pursued.

5. OLS was possible in part because it was tailored to the particular circumstances prevailing in the Sudan and, in the view of protagonists on both sides, built upon and elicited such special Sudanese qualities as tolerance, moderation, and hospitality. At the same time, the importance of OLS ranges well beyond the Sudan. Key lessons from the Sudan are not so idiosyncratic that they cannot be adapted to other circumstances, and strengthen the international community's ability to provide succor in other civil war settings. The lessons include the need for clarity regarding humanitarian principles, objectives, and strategies; for leadership, both within the UN system and outside; for partnership among the aid actors, both external and indigenous; for institutional flexibility; and for linkages between humanitarian assistance and related concerns, such as human rights, development, and peace.

6. Considerations of sovereignty are likely to circumscribe international relief in the future. Warring parties should be encouraged to use their authority to facilitate relief activities within their geographical jurisdictions. OLS demon-

strated that sovereignty needs to be more widely understood to confer specific responsibilities on political authorities to meet fully their humanitarian obligations to civilian populations bearing the brunt of such strife.

7. While OLS clearly played an indispensable role in saving lives, it neither fully utilized nor systematically enhanced the capacities of indigenous governmental and nongovernmental structures to assist local persons in need. Modest gains were made in strengthening the SRRRA.

8. While the principles of OLS 1 have been reaffirmed in OLS 2, there is a very real danger that a loss of momentum will erode the hard-won gains in principle and practice achieved in the six months of major activity in 1989. Continued steady progress is urgently needed to consolidate the practical and institutional gains realized under OLS 1 and to move beyond relief to reconstruction. The principles of OLS, although not necessarily the specific model, are already being reviewed by and for other countries in the region and beyond.

SECTION TWO: MAJOR INSTITUTIONAL PROBLEMS

This section identifies the major problems encountered by the principal actors in Lifeline: the government of the Sudan and the SPLMA, other governments, the United Nations, and NGOs. While observers may differ about the precise magnitude of the problems cited, most agree that each merits attention in the interest of improving future responses to humanitarian challenges in armed conflict settings. Our focus here on problem areas does not indicate a negative view about OLS overall. It reflects rather a concern to contribute to the ongoing policy process of improving institutional arrangements for humanitarian relief. Page references refer to the relevant analytical findings from *Humanitarianism under Siege*.

A. Uneven observance of international law by the warring parties (pp. 93, 102-4, 119-20)

Preventing or impeding the delivery of food and other forms of relief have traditionally been part of the arsenals of war. At the same time, an international norm has been evolving since the last century that the use of such aid for political or military purposes is unacceptable. This consensus is reflected in international law, which seeks to protect both access to humanitarian assistance by civilians and access to civilians by relief agencies.

OLS succeeded in restraining the protagonists' use of food and other humanitarian relief as weapons in their conflict. By bringing the behavior of both parties more fully into the international spotlight, Lifeline encouraged greater respect

for civilians and for the international guarantees that protect their basic human rights.

While the belligerents' observance of international law during Lifeline left a great deal to be desired, the routine and widespread violations of humanitarian principles by both sides, which had characterized the years immediately preceding OLS, were essentially avoided. Although the SPLM/ A was not a signatory to the Geneva Conventions and Protocols, its professed willingness to abide by them and its acceptance of international relief aid subjected it to a certain international accountability.

A major commitment by the international community, OLS was nonetheless unable to marshal sufficient political weight to counteract the obstacles erected by the belligerents beginning late in 1989, when there was a temporary return to the *status quo ante*. The suspension of Lifeline activities during the period from November 1989 through April 1990 was a serious setback to humanitarian interests.

B. OLS' structural bias toward governments (pp. 48, 94-6, 108-10, 113-4)

An initiative orchestrated by the UN, OLS embodied a good-faith effort by member states to respond to a humanitarian emergency posed by civil war, within the limits of national sovereignty protected by the second article of the UN Charter. Other actors with whom Lifeline had to deal were an insurgent group challenging the political authority of a UN member state, and a host of NGOs for which respect for national sovereignty was not uniformly a guiding principle. "I recognize Khartoum as much as the SPLA does," said one NGO official.

OLS required, and in many respects reflected, a fair and equitable approach to both protagonists. In obtaining the agreements for OLS 1 and 2, the UN was able to satisfy them on many critical provisions. At a number of points, however, OLS was less than evenhanded, a situation mirroring the UN's nature as an *intergovernmental* institution. One was the shift of the coordinating locus from New York to Khartoum in October 1989; another, the negotiating of OLS 2 in early 1990 in Khartoum, only later in the process seeking out the SPLM/A, who understandably felt confronted with a *fait accompli*.

The structural bias of the UN system toward governments suggests that the system itself is not yet properly structured to respond to crises in which insurgents constitute a *de facto* authority in a position to challenge the authority of an internationally recognized government.

OLS' bias toward the political interests of sovereign states—and the foreign ministries of many donor governments—shared the UN's difficulties in dealing with an insurgent group—on occasion also impeded collegial relationships with NGOs. While OLS saw its efforts as reinforcing and facilitating NGO work, it in some respects also upstaged them and made NGOs more vulnerable to political pressures.

UN authorities and governments had great difficulty in appreciating the basic NGO concern: that to the extent OLS failed to deal evenhandedly with both protagonists and allowed humanitarian imperatives to become subservient to political concerns, the integrity and effectiveness of affiliated NGOs would be compromised. Such difficulties in UN/NGO relationships were highlighted by the UN initiative in 1990

by the UN initiative in 1990 to enter into a "Letter of Association" with NGOs, and the concomitant reservations among some NGOs.

The role of lead agency in OLS was played by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Its twin traditions of providing humanitarian assistance in civil strife settings and of closely cooperating with NGOs softened some of the UN's biases against insurgents and NGOs. However, UNICEF's operating style in turn created problems of relationships within the UN system.

C. Division of labor and coordination within the UN (pp. 45-51)

UNICEF is the only intergovernmental agency whose mandate has over the years come to include dealing with insurgent movements. Other major players among the UN organizations, including the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have no similar authority. The Secretary-General himself is severely restricted in humanitarian initiatives, requiring the specific request and consent of host and other governments.

By appointing James P. Grant as his Personal Representative, the Secretary-General assured that UNICEF would play a *lead role* in OLS. Grant's personal commitment to humanitarian concerns, in combination with UNICEF's traditions and aggressive organizational style, however, assured it the *lead role*, despite the fact that the major elements in OLS 1 were food and coordination, the special competence of WFP and UNDP respectively.

Under the pressure of the emergency situation, OLS developed unusual, and, in some instances, dysfunctional operational procedures. These have already been the subject of internal reviews by UNICEF and WFP, the details of which will not be repeated here. Areas in which particular frictions were evident included the absence of advance consultation regarding Grant's appointment, the lead role assigned to and assumed vigorously and publicly by UNICEF, and the management of information and of dealings with the media and nongovernmental organizations.

During OLS 1, organizational style was considerably different in Nairobi, where UNICEF staff took charge, from Khartoum, where WFP served as the nerve center. While the institutional challenges were different in each location, the southern sector appears to have set a faster pace. When the Sudan government imposed its flight ban in November 1989, for example, OLS activities managed from Khartoum were constrained more than those from Nairobi, reflecting, in part, differences in the two operations, unrelated to location.

During Michael J. Priestley's term as the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, UNDP in Khartoum has coordinated the northern and southern sectors, while UNDP in Nairobi has remained largely uninvolved. Lodging OLS responsibilities simultaneously with the same person, who was the UN Resident Coordinator and the UNDP Resident Representative, mixed very different roles and sets of relationships. The fact that staff seconded to OLS were still, first and foremost, accountable to their own agencies contributed to a lack of authority in OLS *qua* OLS.

Reflecting on the OLS experience, Priestley observed that "the mandate of the UN in dealing with humanitarian needs in armed conflict settings needs to be fully legitimized and further strengthened. We're pushing at the frontiers right now." WFP Executive-Director James C. Ingram has also expressed his view that the UNICEF mandate needs to be more broadly shared. "We feel that it ought to be possible for a UN intergovernmental humanitarian organization," he says, "to act in support of people who are suffering in areas beyond the control of the state in question. We can't really do that now."

The process of reviewing the mandates of various UN organizations is already underway with an exercise mounted by Under-Secretary-General Abdulrahim A. Farah. Even if other specialized agencies and the UN itself are given clearer authority in civil conflicts, the problems of inter-agency coordination within the UN will remain. The view expressed in a report commissioned by Denmark's aid agency (and still in draft form at this writing) seems accurate: "The UN system did not manage to implement OLS 1 as a system, even if it started out with a reasonable attempt to exploit the relative strengths of . . . UNICEF, UNDP, and WFP."

D. Weaknesses in the multilateral system (pp. 38-41, 106-10).

The OLS experience illuminated a number of basic structural problems impeding the ability of the present multilateral system to respond to humanitarian needs in civil wars.

One concerns the *difficulties of obtaining sound data* on which program and funding decisions can be made. In the period before Lifeline, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and NGOs had sounded the alarm about the worsening plight of civilians in the south. For the most part their appeals were not heeded, despite the fact that they were based on authoritative, firsthand experience.

The Plan of Action approved at the Khartoum Conference in March 1989, which became the basis for resource mobilization and emergency activities, was based on data hastily assembled by UN officials who had themselves been barred from many of the areas of need. Their figures, which drew largely on second hand information, were not totally accurate, particularly in assessing the needs in SPLA-controlled areas.

The UN *imprimatur* gave the figures a credibility with governments and the international public which NGO data did not have. Subsequent revisions, however, raised a host of problems in the donor community and thus highlighted the basic shortcoming of the UN's lack of access to all areas. In emergencies like the Sudan, time is too short and life too precious for involvement of the UN to be, as one senior UN official described it, "a voyage of discovery." If the UN is expected to provide comprehensive data, it needs uninhibited access to areas of need.

A second problem concerns the *limited capacity for autonomous action by the UN system*. During the period 1986-88, a number of attempts were made by UN personnel and agencies to respond to the ever-worsening crisis. UNICEF, for example, provided assistance through NGOs who arranged

safe passage for commodities into conflict areas—in effect, the forerunner of OLS itself. The expulsion of UNDP's Winston Pratley in late 1986 and the transfer of UNICEF's Cole Dodge in early 1989, both victims of efforts to assist in the south, met too little resistance from UN authorities. The UN's reaction demonstrated the severe constraints on independent UN action when an internationally recognized government insists on a restrictive approach.

While the UN system ultimately found ways of reaching people trapped within Sudanese territory but beyond the reach of the government, there was great and unnecessary loss of life during the period when the necessary arrangements were being worked out. In fact, there was a time in late 1988 when the UN actively discouraged NGOs from mounting their own programs in the south until the UN received the go-ahead for its own activities. It was not until member states insisted on UN involvement that the United Nations was able to move ahead to launch Lifeline. Urgent humanitarian need did not exercise a strong enough claim on the UN action independent of significant pressure from governments. A related problem involves the extent to which the UN system was subject, even once an intergovernmental decision had been made to launch a major relief initiative, to *micromanagement by donor governments*. "Food aid is supposedly put at the disposal of WFP," observes WFP Executive-Director Ingram, "but most donors are very specific about where they want their so-called multilateral food aid to go. Each donor government invariably has an agenda of its own."

While Ingram noted that country allocations average out to some extent, his basic point remains a telling one: "There's currently no such thing as truly multilateral aid. . . . Only

with a genuine multilateralism—that means the control of the resources in the hands of an agency like WFP—could you expect country allocations which would be more in line with the relative degree of suffering around the world." At stake is the more expeditious response of the UN system, not only to high-profile emergencies like the Sudan, but also to equally serious situations in other countries which are not the focus of special UN mobilization activities and high visibility international publicity.

Another problem of multilateral cooperation evidenced by OLS was its *predominantly western ownership and style*. The USSR and the countries of Eastern Europe were not involved, nor were Arab governments. African governments, apart from Kenya, did not play a major role, nor did the OAU, apart from sending an initial letter of good wishes. OLS would have been better able to counter the perception that it was a western intrusion had the UN system been more universal in ownership and support.

E. Division of labor and coordination problems among aid institutions (pp. 45-51, 89-92, 113-4)

As time pressures were extreme, there was neither careful planning nor detailed discussion of "who" would do "what" in OLS. In fact, the fallout from the absence of adequate consultations between the UN and NGOs that began at the Khartoum Conference has yet to be overcome. Far from new, this problem also characterized the conference that launched the UN's program to deal with the African food crisis of 1984-85. There, too, the UN "discovered" NGOs after most of the key decisions had been taken, showed a preference for expatriate over indigenous NGOs, and rarely achieved the desirable level of collegiality.

Donor governments also had their own agendas. They wanted to be identified with humanitarian activities in the Sudan which, because of the political and military situation, they themselves could not participate in directly. They used the UN and NGOs—sometimes in concert, sometimes playing them off one against the other—to accomplish their own objectives. "There's no question," said one bilateral aid agency representative, "that the UN agencies and NGOs, one or another or both of them, on different occasions fronted for us."

The lack of attention to the respective comparative advantages of the UN, NGOs, and governments was compounded by a basic lack of clarity regarding the nature of OLS itself. Some believed, with the WFP's Khartoum representative Peter Jobber, that OLS was an "international tool kit" from which a variety of resources were available. Others saw OLS as a set of specific operational activities, some carried out by the UN, others funded by it. "The UN is schizophrenic," observed one NGO. "Sometimes they think they are an umbrella organization, sometimes an implementing agency." More than a year into Lifeline, there remained confusion about the nature of Lifeline and how the center and periphery related.

Most NGOs and governments affirm the importance of UN roles in areas such as mobilizing world opinion, generating resources, demonstrating international presence, and ensuring liaison with governmental authorities. Most of those interviewed also agreed that some operational role for UN organizations was in order, given the extremity of the Sudan situation. However, there was considerable division of opinion about whether the UN should have been so extensively involved both on the ground and in overall coordination.

Issues related to the effective division of labor and coordination were further complicated by what can only be called organizational opportunism. UN organizations had their own agendas, which they sought to advance through OLS. When OLS itself fell on hard times, they reverted to the *status quo ante*. Seconded OLS staff working in SPLA-controlled areas resurfaced as UNICEF or WFP staff, planning the southern Sudan component of the next year's country program. Governments committed food aid to OLS through WFP and NGOs, but, when the OLS pace seemed slow, increased their allocations to NGOs.

Many NGOs welcomed resources, whether from the UN or governments, but not the coordination and accountability required in exchange. In fact, some NGOs created serious problems by taking a cavalier approach to reporting. The magnitude of the need in 1988-89 also led agencies, NGOs and UN organizations alike, to commit themselves to more than they could realistically deliver.

F. Uneven professionalism (pp. 18, 25-6, 40-1)

The unclear division of labor and lack of agreement on coordination issues reflected, and contributed to, a lack of collegiality among aid practitioners. The UN, for example, which had failed to involve NGOs adequately in the Khartoum Conference in March 1989, continued uncollegial patterns in its approach to NGOs more than a year later. For their part, NGOs used the send-off of the initial OLS relief convoys in early 1989 as an occasion to criticize the initiative in the media. More than a year later many NGOs still did not appreciate the OLS effort to establish humanitarian principle and to expand humanitarian space for all agencies.

In other respects, too, the professionalism of aid institutions and officials left much to be desired. Many remained preoccupied with their own programs and expressed little interest in or support for the work of others. Many agencies, given the risk and hardship involved in the Sudan and the desire to disburse funds quickly, relied on junior rather than more seasoned staff. The UN and NGOs alike were widely criticized for having turned excessively to expatriate staff without prior experience in the Sudan rather than utilizing more systematically the African expertise available closer at hand.

In the case of NGOs in particular, the Sudanese crisis brought out both strengths and weaknesses. Among the former were their high level of dedication and energy, their grassroots orientation, their relatively low-cost operations, and their willingness to take risks and launch initiatives. NGOs and the ICRC had already mounted programs well in advance of OLS, laying much of the groundwork on which OLS was built. At the same time, some NGOs exhibited a surprising lack of judgment in dealing with a delicate conflict situation, political naïvete, disregard of religious sensitivities, and the lack of a broader policy orientation.

G. Inadequate cultivation of the media (pp. 34-5, 38-9)

There was widespread feeling among media representatives that OLS officials viewed them frequently as instruments for promoting the relief initiative rather than as independent professionals in their own right. OLS officials gave priority attention to the western media, which they viewed as the gateway to European and North American publics and resources.

Too little effort was devoted to cultivating Sudanese, Kenyan, and other Arab and African media. The absence of an interpretative channel undercut the development of an African public knowledgeable about Lifeline. It also confirmed suspicions in some Sudanese minds that OLS was a foreign intervention with an alien agenda. In Namibia, by contrast, the UN actively sought out the African media, which played a major international role. For its part, the media in East Africa did not seize the opportunities available to report thoroughly on the civil war and famine, thereby not doing enough to inform and interest their audiences.

H. Missed opportunities for institution-building (pp. 56-62)

As with most emergencies, OLS confronted a tension between responding quickly and using the response itself to strengthen indigenous infrastructure. While most institutions affirmed the theoretical importance of capacitation, most also routinely gave higher priority to responding quickly, usually shouldering the work themselves rather than thinking creatively about local alternatives.

OLS counterparts were the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) on the government side and the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (SRRA) for the insurgents. Both had been established at mid-decade to handle international assistance, and during OLS received substantial resources from the UN, the European Community, governments, and NGOs.

Neither counterpart, however, was treated as a full partner. The external aid agencies sought to use the RRC and

SRRA as channels rather than as partners and, when the going got rough, worked around them rather than through them. Paradoxically, channelling international resources through the RRC made it a target for other ministries which felt they were being bypassed. The SRRA, which received management training, office supplies and machinery, vehicles and fuel, and some cash assistance from aid agencies, was strengthened as a result of such assistance. In its view, however, progress was made in spite of OLS rather than because of it.

OLS also too rarely strengthened the capacity of Sudanese NGOs. A number of them acting alone and in concert had, in fact, played a major role in 1986-88 before OLS was launched. They offered a bridge between a relief initiative largely western in conception and execution and a non-western government and population. The Muslim organizations among them also offered a means of counteracting the impression that the relief intervention was strongly Christian in character. Sudanese NGOs were, by and large, not sought out as full partners by the UN, governments, or other NGOs.

Indigenous NGOs could not have managed an operation of OLS' scale and complexity. Yet, as the Director General of the Islamic African Relief Agency, Dr. Abdalla Suliman El Awad, observed, "As an indigenous agency very much involved in humanitarian work, we should have been allowed a larger share in Lifeline's activities." The roles played by such groups in OLS have generally not strengthened them for future emergencies or for eventual challenges of reconstruction and development.

I. Inadequate linkages with human rights, development, and peace concerns (pp. 57-9, 122-3, 125-50)

The humanitarian needs to which OLS responded were generated, not by acts of nature, but rather by conscious decisions of the belligerents. Contributing to the suffering were human rights violations, the underlying poverty, and of course, the war itself. Despite the interconnections, OLS made at best only a limited contribution in addressing these related issues at the root of the conflict.

With respect to peace, for example, Grant indicated that there was "nothing in my mandate at all" concerning the resolution of the conflict. Under-Secretary-General Farah concurs that, in the absence of an invitation from the host government, a UN effort to achieve negotiated settlement to the conflict was not possible. At the same time, OLS through its relief assistance and personnel did contribute to reducing some aspects of the violence. The failure to exploit more fully the opening to advance the peace agenda, as was done in Afghanistan and Central America, represents a lost opportunity.

There are, of course, limits on humanitarian aid institutions' mandate to address the interconnected issues of human rights, development, and peace. There are also practical reasons why, for example, agencies providing humanitarian aid cannot at the same time publicly challenge the policies which create those very needs. Nevertheless, humanitarian concerns are ultimately indivisible and need to be treated as such by the community of agencies involved. Humanitarian action needs to be more inclusive in nature.

J. High costs of operations (pp. 34-6, 51-6)

OLS was expensive. Resources made available to and through the UN in 1989 were roughly \$205 million. Additional sums provided by governments and the general public to NGOs and the ICRC raised the total to some \$300 million.

The overarching question is not how much the international community should be prepared to pay in order to save human lives, but whether the resources committed were used with maximum effectiveness. Mounting an aid program in the Sudan necessarily entailed higher-than-average costs, given the geography and climate of the southern Sudan, the existence of the civil war, and the lateness of the hour.

The research team reached no definitive judgment about whether OLS resources were used to maximum effect. Part of the difficulty the case study faced was the absence of other relief programs of comparable levels of difficulty and of data from them for comparison. Part of the difficulty was also related to the lack of uniform approaches among bilateral, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental agencies to measuring costs (e.g., program versus administrative costs).

Thus while the study analyzed the major OLS expenditure categories (e.g., transport, and, within transport, air transport), it did not reach a firm conclusion about cost effectiveness. It does, however, suggest the kinds of questions which need to be asked of various expenditures. It notes that in certain circumstances, expenditures which are larger per ton or per beneficiary may be more justifiable than ones which are apparently a better bargain.

The priority accorded to the Sudan, due in large part to OLS mobilization of world opinion and resources, upstaged serious humanitarian crises in other countries of Africa and elsewhere. The issue is not that too much money was spent on the Sudan, but that inadequate resources were available for other countries in need.

K. Other special problems of armed conflicts (pp. 29, 86-109, 135)

The acrimony generated by the civil war led each of the belligerents at various points to accuse aid agencies of assisting the adversary. The government alleged that the UN, the ICRC, and other NGOs provided military along with humanitarian assistance to the SPLA. The SPLA criticized the UN, governments, and NGOs for giving disproportionate assistance to the government and for bypassing the SRRA.

Some such accusations may well be inevitable as part of the political and public relations battle, irrespective of the facts. Yet they underscore the need for aid agencies to function with total transparency so that their activities be, to the extent possible, beyond reproach. Agencies responded differently to the challenge of transparency. The UN and the ICRC shared detailed information about their activities with both sides. NGOs, many of them functioning on only one side of the battleground, felt less compelled to do so. Donor governments were, for the most part, somewhere in the middle.

A related issue was accountability. The government of the Sudan, the SPLA, the UN, donor governments, and aid agencies each in its own way sought accountability for the resources provided. However, providing such accounta-

bility proved elusive. Complicating factors included the need to make relief supplies available as quickly as possible, even before monitoring mechanisms could be set up; the difficulties, logistical and political, of assuring proper monitoring in a combat zone; and the number of agencies and intermediaries involved in such an extended relief effort.

A third problem concerned the physical safety of personnel. Providing assistance was hazardous, as indicated by the substantial number of casualties among aid personnel, local and expatriate. This made for increased costs of personnel, especially for insurance and frequent rotations, as well as the recruitment of a host of less experienced staff in a situation which would have tested the skills of even the most seasoned professionals.

SECTION THREE: RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings demonstrated that providing assistance to people in the Sudan confronted all actors with common challenges. The first set of recommendations is therefore addressed across-the-board to the government, the SPLA, the UN, other governments, NGOs, and the ICRC. Since different players had special difficulties in dealing with particular challenges, we have also included recommendations tailored to each set of actors. This discussion amplifies on the presentation made in pp. 151-60 of *Humanitarianism under Siege*.

A. To All Institutions

1. *Affirm humanitarian principles, objectives, and strategies*

The commitment to humanitarian principles by the government of the Sudan and the SPLA was clear in both OLS 1 and 2. The principles are central to the terms of reference of the UN and its agencies. They are clearly articulated in the Geneva Conventions of 1949, to which most governments are party, and in the Additional Protocols of 1977, to which many governments subscribe. Humanitarian principles are central to the purposes and activities of NGOs.

In addition to providing common ground, humanitarian principles impose obligations: for example, on political authorities to provide persons in need access to humanitarian assistance, and on aid agencies to provide such assistance devoid of political agendas or other extraneous considerations. Institutions have proved better at articulating the

principles than in putting them into practice. Since no institution—governmental, intergovernmental, or non-governmental—charts its course exclusively according to humanitarian considerations, each shares an urgent need to strengthen the priority of such concerns relative to competing institutional objectives and interests, such as organizational expansion, fundraising, or religious bias.

The operational implications of overarching humanitarian principles also require clearer definition. The principle that humanitarian assistance will be provided solely on the basis of need, for example, does not mean that aid will be divided equally between civilians on opposite sides of the struggle—unless the need itself is equal on both sides. Impartiality can be assured short of involvement by a given aid agency on both sides of a conflict situation.

2. *Establish a more effective division of labor and system of coordination*

Based on a common commitment to humanitarian principles, objectives, and strategies, there is need to develop a division of labor reflecting the distinctive contributions and comparative advantages of the institutions involved. There is virtual unanimity on the indispensable role of the United Nations, for example, in assessing human needs and publicizing them within the international community, in marshalling worldwide resources, and in seeking to bring about the negotiated end to conflicts. There is less agreement on the extent to which the UN should operate emergency aid programs or exercise overall coordination over aid activities by all agencies.

There is general agreement on the distinctive contribution which individual donor governments can make. Some have expertise in emergency food management, in logistics and transportation systems, in nutrition and water resources, or in the training of personnel. Whatever the contribution, there needs to be more clarity about the extent to which such assistance is provided through the UN, directly to the country, or through external NGO's. Greater clarity is also needed regarding the sort of reporting and accountability expected.

There is general agreement that external NGOs enjoy the best linkages to community organizations in developing countries. They thus have a comparative advantage in ensuring relief distribution and in some types of needs assessment and data gathering. This grass roots orientation should also be maximized to help build institutional capacities, heal rivalries, and begin reconstruction and development as conflict winds down. There is far less evidence of their ability to be self-critical, to understand the political consequences of their actions, and to appreciate the reasons behind many administrative and reporting requirements.

In a situation like the Sudan, special circumstances need to be taken into account and collaboration rather than competition emphasized. Given the limited access of most UN personnel to insurgent areas, the UN's needs assessment role should often be carried out in partnership with NGOs. Given historical ties with or geostrategic interests in the Sudan, governments may have special contributions to make in exerting pressure for peacemaking. The contribution which NGOs can make in bringing people together across political divides could help reinforce UN peacemaking efforts.

Based on a clearer appreciation of what each institution does best and a less defensive understanding of shortcomings, expertise should be strengthened accordingly. For example, if the UN is to be the source of the baseline assessments of human needs, the UN should develop a wider professional network than it used in the Sudan. Its staff must have continuing access to territory controlled by each side in order to apply a consistent methodology in surveys. The government should not deny UN personnel such access nor should the insurgents hamstring their movements. The UN's terms of reference should specify that data gathering or assistance in insurgent-controlled areas does not imply recognition of the legitimacy of the insurgency. If such ground rules prove impossible, attention should be given to strengthening the NGO role in data gathering.

A clearer division of labor, however desirable, will not resolve all OLS difficulties. Structural and philosophical problems will continue to make some NGOs reluctant to participate in an initiative coordinated by the UN. On the other hand, to the extent that future operations treat governments and insurgents in a more independent and even-handed fashion, even the most independent *nongovernmental* organizations may become more willing to be involved under an *intergovernmental* umbrella.

While all aid actors have contributions to make, none possesses the inherent virtue or organizational capacity necessary to do the total job single-handed. The ICRC has extensive experience in dealing with internal armed conflicts, but was unable to mount an effort on a scale commensurate with Sudan's geography and needs. NGOs, better informed about the severity of the suffering in the early phases, were dismissed by governments. Many govern-

ments with access to substantial resources were guided more by their own diplomatic agendas than by humanitarian concern. The UN, with a humanitarian mandate and the capacity to mount a joint international effort, had its own peculiar political, administrative, and operational constraints.

Each of the respective organizational actors was created at a given historical moment for specific purposes. Over time, all have assumed other tasks and expanded their mandates. The moment may be propitious to reexamine the most appropriate international division of humanitarian labor in order to maximize respective strengths and offset particular weaknesses.

3. *Develop greater professionalism and more collegiality*

Sober reflection about the difficulties experienced on the ground by aid institutions in the Sudan situation should lead agencies to take steps to strengthen their operational effectiveness. These should include:

- the development of a cadre of experienced staff available for rapid deployment and a career development system that makes such deployments feasible in human terms;

- the development of greater familiarity with the contextual—political and economic, religious and cultural—of a given emergency;

- the exercise of greater restraint in becoming involved in complex emergency situations. Many agencies feel that they have a contribution to make, but some under-

estimate the amount of time and resources needed to protect the space in which to work. For smaller aid agencies, the benefits may not offset the substantial costs of the setting-up operations. Some specialization by region may be in order;

- more training in humanitarian law. While the SPLM/A confessed to having no copy of the Geneva Conventions and Protocols, other actors with fewer grounds for being uninformed were also unfamiliar with applicable international ground rules and their specific rights and responsibilities. One NGO has indicated that it acts "without conscious reference to international humanitarian law." Others who profess respect for such law fail to meet their obligations under it.

Whatever frictions among aid agencies and officials develop, a common commitment to humanitarian values should lead to greater willingness to treat one another with mutual respect. A later recommendation to NGOs encourages them to codify personnel standards and statutes to assure higher levels of professionalism.

4. *Improve the capacity of multilateral mechanisms*

An internal armed conflict like the Sudan's illuminates the need for improved multilateral mechanisms. Humanitarian action suffers because governments are frequently inhibited by their relationships to one of the warring parties or feel compelled to respect national sovereignty.

While the international community has an obvious stake in fulfilling its obligations, the Sudan experience demon-

strates that UN efforts to respond were ineffective until openly and vigorously supported and undergirded by donor governments, whose previous lack of interest had been a deterrent to effective UN action. Moreover, governments which encouraged UN action in early 1989 had at critical points in the years 1986-88 discouraged it.

The UN needs to be in a better position to undertake humanitarian initiatives. Donor governments, for their part, need to make their own participation in UN humanitarian efforts less tentative and conditional, more predictably multilateral, and less bilateral. UN organizations need stand-by resources for deployment within agreed-upon parameters rather than requiring special appeals to governments with proceeds earmarked for a particular country within a specified time frame.

5. Invest substantial resources and resourcefulness into capacity-building

There needs to be a more explicit and genuine commitment to carrying out relief programs in partnership with local authorities and institutions. To be sure, there were factors beyond the control of the external aid partners which inhibited the implementation of programs by the RRC, the SRRA, and indigenous NGOs. As *Humanitarianism under Siege* indicates, the RRC and SRRA themselves lacked the political space necessary to carry out their humanitarian mandates.

Nevertheless, had capacitation been a major OLS objective, it is likely that indigenous institutions could have been strengthened without slowing unduly the pace of relief activities. Such an approach would have left the Sudan

better positioned to meet future emergencies, as well as to undertake reconstruction and development challenges. Earlier criticism of the weaknesses of the UN's 1984-85 famine response in sub-Saharan Africa, cited in *Humanitarianism under Siege*, should have led to greater OLS attention to this area.

6. Affirm the linkages between humanitarian assistance and respect for human rights, participatory development and durable peace

The Sudan experience illuminated some of the connections between humanitarian assistance on the one hand, and human rights, development, and peace on the other. "There is a sort of circle here," we note in our book. "Development cannot be achieved without peace; without development, human rights are illusory; and peace without human rights is violence." (P. 139) Yet each of the various aid actors in the Sudan was preoccupied with its own set of activities and did not take great interest in the wider range of issues.

The linkages suggest that agencies specializing in one particular area need to become more catholic in their concerns, even if their own projects and programs retain a more specialized focus. For example, the mere presence of external organizations provides a protection as well as an assistance function. The eyes and ears of emergency aid personnel can be helpful in reporting infringements on human rights, as well as in suggesting ideas for future reconstruction and development projects. The provision of emergency assistance can, and in the Sudan case did, lay the groundwork for reconstruction and development activities. The collaboration of the warring parties on relief opens up the possibility of movement toward peace as well.

7. Nurture an informed and active public constituency for humanitarian concerns.

Lifeline and its associated activities depended for financial, moral, and political support on governments and publics which responded generously to appeals. Public confidence in OLS was not well served by unsavory recriminations among OLS-related agencies about who should be given credit for what or what particular programs and strategies should be adopted. More dispassionate attention to the obstacles to be overcome and their underlying causes would have been a more fruitful approach than self-promotion and concern about "turf."

The importance of sustaining international support for ongoing activities in the Sudan as the immediate crisis passes but continuing difficulties are encountered dictates a more thoughtful approach to the task of development education. The research team envisions *Humanitarianism under Siege* as a contribution to developing a more informed and supportive constituency for humanitarian action. Certainly, agencies which provided cash and in-kind contributions to the case study have done so as an expression of a similar commitment to the education function.

8. Seek to attain maximum cost-effectiveness, broadly understood

Providing assistance in conflict settings can be expected to be more expensive than elsewhere. It may also be more essential. Given the growing competition for humanitarian resources and the fatigue that appears to have set in among publics and parliaments in some donor countries, it is important that resources be used as effectively as possible.

Effectiveness, however, needs to be judged not only in terms of the actual delivery of relief supplies, but also their larger utility. While admittedly difficult to gauge, efforts are required to include the contribution of relief programs to the general sense of community well-being, to the development of local capacity, and to easing tensions and the advent of a durable resolution of the underlying roots of conflict.

Thus, in evaluating how costs compare with accomplishments, the question is not whether the average transport cost of food was high but whether it was justified by the benefits achieved. Items transported may have brought gains well beyond the nutritional, medical, or agricultural value of the goods themselves. If Lifeline strengthened the capacity of local institutions to deal with present and future challenges, or represented an investment in peace, these accomplishments, should also be factored into cost-benefit calculations.

9. Promote a more universal humanitarian ethic

Lifeline was perceived in some quarters as a western, Christian intervention into a Muslim nation and society. This reality contributed to the atmosphere surrounding the coup d'état in June 1989, and to the eventual breakdown in the first phase of Lifeline. The new government, as well as critics of the previous one, viewed the humanitarian activities of OLS as masking a political and religious agenda.

At the same time, they acknowledged that Islam shares with other religions a value on the human being and a concern to alleviate suffering. "If you take a committed Muslim, a committed Christian, a committed Jew, a committed Hindu," observed RRC Commissioner Abu Ouf, "each is

committed to the welfare of the larger community." International humanitarian interventions need to tap non-western religious and cultural traditions in order to generate the necessary local and regional support.

B. To the Sudan Government and the SPLM/A

1. Accord higher priority to discharging the humanitarian responsibilities each has accepted

In agreeing to OLS 1 and 2, the warring parties committed themselves to facilitate humanitarian assistance to civilians throughout the South and to assure access by impartial aid agencies to such persons. While both made good faith efforts to honor these commitments, there were numerous occasions when humanitarian access was impeded or prohibited.

There may be an understandable political or security logic behind a decision to limit such access in certain times and under certain circumstances. Yet the protagonists have in the long run more to gain from honoring their commitments than they do in the short run from retrenching on them.

2. Facilitate humanitarian action through improved bureaucratic procedures

Aid activities during OLS 1 and 2 were sometimes frustrated because they lacked strong support from the political authorities. A host of administrative procedures and practices regulating such matters as visas, foreign exchange, travel and transport impeded aid operations and contributed to major frustrations. While some delays were understandable, others might well have been avoided given a

stronger political commitment to speed assistance to those in need.

It is recommended that, drawing on the resources of the international community where appropriate, the government of the Sudan and the SPLM/A streamline procedures so that humanitarian efforts may move forward with greater dispatch. What is needed are not new pronouncements of intent, but rather improvements at the operational level to reflect commitments already made.

C. To the United Nations System

1. Establish a new and more appropriate focal point for responding to humanitarian needs in civil strife settings

The OLS experience suggests that UNICEF's mandate to provide humanitarian leadership in civil war settings should be more widely shared with other UN organizations and perhaps even transferred to a new Under-Secretary-General for Special Humanitarian Affairs. Other proposals meriting review include the creation of a small unit in the office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, or the transfer of the UN Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) to UNDP. The highly political nature of negotiating with a government and a *de facto* political authority suggests a potential role for the Secretary-General.

Changes in basic UN structure entail dangers, and a case can be made for continuing to improvise. Yet placing UN emergency operations directly in the Secretary-General's

cabinet would have advantages. It would help permit specialized bodies and agencies like UNICEF and WFP to concentrate on their specific areas of interest while the highly political task of moving beyond relief to a cease-fire and peace would be lodged in the hands of the UN's highest political official.

The new unit could advise the Secretary-General, direct umbrella relief operations, secure and coordinate pledges, and mobilize international staff, data, and logistics. The latter function could continue after the completion of a particular operation like OLS as part of an ongoing effort to compile a roster of highly qualified emergency technicians and managers, and to train permanent field staff from the UN system.

This recommendation calls for institutionalizing the type of informal arrangement created during the 1984-1986 operations of the Office of Emergency Operations in Africa (OEOA). The OEOA consisted of an interagency emergency task force and a small secretariat that was able to mobilize seasoned staff seconded from the UN system and provided from outside. It is generally recognized that this arrangement promoted cooperation of the UN system and NGOs, facilitated the gathering and dissemination of information, supported the mobilization of extraordinary resources, and helped expedite aid delivery, all areas in which OLS experienced some difficulty.

A General Assembly resolution would probably be required to create an ongoing high-level "focal point" for civil war emergencies. It could stipulate that the Secretary-General's direct involvement with an insurgent group, with the acquiescence of the internationally recognized govern-

ment, would not imply international legal recognition, but would reflect the utmost humanitarian need to protect the lives of civilians and foster negotiations to the end of the conflict.

2. Devise and implement a humanitarian "trigger" mechanism

There is also a contribution for an independent monitoring body which could trigger a response despite the reluctance of the UN secretariat or particularly member states to act. This trigger could automatically bring an acute civil war situation to the attention of the Security Council through the Secretary-General under article 99 of the Charter. It could help isolate a government or insurgent group that was unwilling to cooperate with the Under-Secretary-General for Special Humanitarian Affairs. The members of this monitoring body would necessarily include members of the UN secretariat and nongovernmental actors in addition to governments.

3. Improve operational responses

Greater thought needs to be given to the comparative advantages of each multilateral institution. There is no substitute for the UN as a global broker for negotiations and as a mobilizer of resources. It also has a critical role to play in collecting, assessing, and disseminating data, as well as in contributing to international consciousness-raising. But NGOs with a history of involvement on the ground may have superior capacities to deliver relief, as well as to carry out certain types of rehabilitation and development work.

Expert groups and analysts have suggested increased decentralization of responsibilities to the field. Yet there is little advantage to this approach in the case of man-made emergencies like the Sudan's. In an age of increasingly complex crises, as well as faster and more effective telecommunications, the movement from New York to a crisis point can be as quick and sometimes quicker than from a regional office.

What is true for logistics is even more applicable to high-level political negotiations. The recommendation to centralize emergency operations in a civil war does not contradict the tendency to augment the authority of the UN Resident Coordinator for development purposes. In fact, the desirability of coordinating activities from a location removed from each party in a civil war may itself recommend against decentralization.

4. Establish a system for ensuring greater evenhandedness

Broader guarantees are required to ensure evenhanded coordination when insurgents are involved. It may be useful to create an "ombudsman" who would perform troubleshooting functions on behalf of all actors and be institutionally tied to no particular organization. One concrete step would be to develop a capacity to ensure adequate data collection from insurgent-controlled areas, which would necessarily involve linkages with external and local nongovernmental organizations.

5. Explore the development of improved military security arrangements in support of humanitarian operations

The time has come to explore a third type of UN peacekeeping operation—in addition to unarmed observers and lightly-armed buffer and monitoring forces—to support humanitarian operations in civil war situations. It is impractical at this stage—and, in the view of some, inappropriate—to create an international military capacity to deliver food and medicine when belligerents do not agree. But it might be feasible to provide a sharper military instrument in the form of armed UN soldiers to help achieve safe passage when a government and insurgents have agreed to corridors of tranquility, but bandits and marginal dissenters have not.

This eventuality should be considered by the UN's Special Committee on Peacekeeping. Because of the dangers involved, this possibility might provide an opportunity for troop contributions from the major powers that are normally precluded from UN peacekeeping operations.

6. Stimulate broader "ownership" of UN humanitarian activities

There is an inherent contradiction between the UN's commitment to the principles of universal human rights and its role as a servant of governments. Yet the international political context has changed considerably in the last three years, with greater vision and more forthright actions now less unthinkable than in the past.

Led by policy changes first in Moscow and more recently in Washington, the UN system is functioning more like the institution envisaged in the Charter than at any time since the Second World War. The change in climate is such that the members of the Security Council, in electing the next Secretary-General in the fall 1991, might consider a candidate's willingness to take tougher stances in relation to the flagrant violations of the human rights of civilians whose access to succor is prevented by governments or insurgents.

The UN system should also devote more creative energy and resources to developing new means of involving local individuals and groups in the administration of emergency efforts. Indigenous managerial and institutional resources would then be more available to shoulder rehabilitation and development responsibilities in due course.

D. To Donor Governments

1. Employ greater consistency in dealing with various aid actors

The perceived interests of donor countries sometimes conflict with the imperatives of humanitarian relief. In such circumstances, donors should not play off humanitarian organizations against one another in order to keep future diplomatic options open. Moreover, the same reporting and administrative standards should be applied by donor governments to all aid institutions. While allowances may be necessary for indigenous groups, external NGOs and UN organizations should be held to the same standards.

2. Revise policy and procedures regarding humanitarian assistance in civil wars

Governments should resist the temptation to micromanage multilateral contributions, relying instead on the judgments by UN organizations regarding how, within agreed-upon guidelines, resources should be apportioned. Longer-term and larger commitments to multilateral institutions are also required from member states. Humanitarian needs would then be more easily and quickly met with less dependence on parliamentary action and public mobilization.

3. Fulfill responsibilities under international humanitarian law

Considerable attention was focussed during OLS 1 on the obligation of the government of the Sudan to meet certain stated responsibilities, such as allowing access to people in need. However, donor governments have companion responsibilities. They have committed themselves to work to ensure the effective implementation of existing international guarantees: for example, to see that the protections specified for civilians (e.g., those in Juba) under the Geneva Conventions and Protocols are assured. They are also committed to provide the necessary financial and political support so that aid agencies can do their jobs.

E. To the Organization of African Unity

1. Reevaluate the evolving definition of sovereignty

There is an important role for the OAU in helping countries on the continent face squarely the issue of meaningful sovereignty in relation to colonial borders. At present, the

OAU Charter accepts unequivocally such boundaries, and is thereby paralyzed vis-à-vis most conflicts. The OAU was totally absent from Lifeline, as it has been from assisting in other civil war contexts.

If borders are no longer sacrosanct in other parts of the world (e.g., in the Baltic states) or elsewhere in Africa (e.g., the homelands in a majority-ruled South Africa), it is incumbent upon the OAU to help governments discharge their responsibilities in keeping with the obligations inherent in sovereignty. Recent expressions by the OAU quoted in *Humanitarianism under Siege* suggest promising developments in this direction (pp. 82, 138).

In the meantime, the OAU should consider establishing within its secretariat an "African ICRC." This entity would help monitor internal conflicts and provide the OAU Secretary-General with information necessary to make the regional body more actively involved in responding to the growing number of civil wars on the continent.

F. To Nongovernmental Organizations

1. Coordinate better with other aid actors in the field

Many NGO aid practitioners are loathe to engage in the kind of consultations which are now routine in the corporate, governmental, and intergovernmental worlds. Yet there is growing need for developing further the machinery for such interaction, not only with non-NGO institutions, but also among NGOs. NGOs need to exhibit greater collegiality and more willingness to build upon the relevant experiences of non-NGO actors is required.

Existing efforts at coordination need to be strengthened. These include InterAction in the United States, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, the Disasters Emergency Committee of the European Economic Community, the Licross/Volags Disaster Steering Committee, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies in Geneva, and the Forum of African Voluntary Development Organizations (FAVDO).

In addition to greater cooperation among NGOs, greater collegiality with members of the UN system should be a priority. Agreeing to use the OLS "umbrella" entails responsibilities to act according to UN guidelines and procedures. There are costs and benefits inherent in all cooperative ventures. NGOs which opt for working with the UN should stay the course and accept reasonable reporting requirements.

2. Develop a professional code of conduct

The need for agreed-upon standards of professional behavior should be squarely addressed by the NGO community. The OLS experience is the latest to confirm the need to develop a code of ethics for NGO managers of humanitarian emergencies. The task of dispersing funds, delivering assistance, and ultimately saving lives must also take into consideration the need to staff projects not only with humanitarians of unquestionable character, but also with trained professionals of the highest order.

Several concrete suggestions deserve to be implemented immediately:

-pool the best staff and send joint survey teams to affected areas in liaison with the UN system, where appropriate;

-agree on criteria and procedures to identify NGOs whose narrow religious motivations lead them to use emergencies for proselytizing or whose political ideology contravenes humanitarian principles;

-take measures to develop career prospects for professionals in order to avoid the shortage of needed expertise; and

-help establish an international personnel data bank and recruitment network for the identification of capable staff with disaster management or relief assistance experience.

3. *Affirm responsibilities to monitor human rights issues*

Humanitarian activities place NGOs in the position of serving as the eyes and ears of the international community. In providing emergency humanitarian assistance, they are also confronted by human rights abuses. Over the years, distinctions have grown up between humanitarian aid agencies and those which focus on human rights, or for that matter, on development or conflict resolution.

The interconnections between the need for food, medicine, and shelter, on the one hand, and for the protection of human rights and the advancement of development and peace, on the other, are such that NGOs involved primarily in humanitarian assistance need to take a broader view of the issues, even if their own programs themselves retain a more

narrow focus. Creative strategies need to be developed so that the interconnected needs of persons in situations such as the Sudan's are more effectively addressed.

4. *Maintain a critical perspective about operations*

The concern to protect the size of NGO budgets and operations can override the need for NGOs to ask fundamental questions about what they, individually and as a community, do best. The tendency of some agencies to become, first and foremost, implementers of major projects for bilateral aid agencies and the UN system may erode their essential character and comparative advantages, and may create dependency. This danger deserves greater attention and continuing review by NGO staffs and governing bodies than it is currently receiving.

Further, the typical overriding interest among NGOs in operational matters has occasioned an inattentiveness to evaluation. The OLS experience highlights the reality, however, that decisions taken in national capitals and at the United Nations, reflecting complex factors of domestic and international politics, have a direct bearing on operational activities and the space in which they are carried out. NGOs should devote more resources to, and develop more expertise in, such policy issues and analysis.

G. To the Media

1. *Cultivate nonwestern and local media*

The recent burgeoning of democracy has illustrated the power of informed populations. No opportunities should be lost, even those afforded by humanitarian emergencies in

civil wars, to help nurture an independent and well-informed media in Africa. The African media should itself devote greater attention to humanitarian challenges. There should be more energetic efforts by western media to utilize the insights of indigenous media in reporting on African crises.

2. Use media more for information and less for public relations

The challenging task of development education, particularly in the industrialized world, requires accurate attention by the media to the complexities and intricacies of conflict, poverty, and underdevelopment. Dwelling simply upon the relief of starvation is inadequate. Both the print and the visual media should work to counteract the fatigue and despair that sometimes characterizes the reactions of the general public. They should provide more thoughtful analyses of the problems of civil war and the needs for reconstruction and development.

H. Areas for Research and Public Mobilization

The case study's research suggests that the international community needs to learn much more about the special problems of providing humanitarian assistance in civil war settings. The following four areas have a special claim on serving as the subject of future investigation by practitioners, academics, and activists.

1. Continuing the evolution of a more comprehensive international understanding of humanitarian rights and important issues of humanitarian assistance policy and responsibilities

OLS represented an important stage in the evolution of humanitarian principle and practice. The international community affirmed and acted upon the right of civilians to assistance and of impartial aid agencies to provide it. At the same time, OLS dramatized a lack of understanding among major players about those rights and responsibilities, some of which were ignored or violated as a result. Clearly there is need for greater understanding of and fidelity to international humanitarian law.

To address the situation, a number of suggestions have been advanced. One is to develop a new Convention on Humanitarian Rights and Responsibilities, an initiative proposed by the French government before the General Assembly in 1988. Another alternative approach would promote wider dissemination of, and generate additional political will in support of, existing humanitarian and human rights law, a strategy favored by the ICRC and some NGOs.

Clearly, the continued evolution of more effective humanitarian safeguards to protect those caught in civil war situations should be a priority for the international community. It should also be the subject of research additional to what the case study team was able to carry out, of widespread discussion, and of public mobilization.

2. Guidelines for practitioners in armed conflict settings

A number of organizations are pursuing a Convention on Safe Passage, among them the WFP and UNDR0. It would be useful to have in place a type of "pre-nuptial" agreement so that when an emergency develops the international community can act immediately instead of having to negotiate basic arrangements and details. It would be desirable to formulate and discuss internationally a protocol or checklist of essential components of successful relief or development activities in a zone of conflict. This listing should reflect the lessons learned from OLS and other relief efforts.

3. Other case studies of aid in civil strife settings

It is necessary to overcome the extreme paucity of comparative data about the provision of humanitarian assistance in civil war settings. The same policy issues raised in the OLS case study could be asked in other conflict settings where the dynamics and outcomes were different.

The provision of troops by the Front Line States contributed to creating a secure corridor for transport in northern Mozambique, but can this approach be replicated? What has been the impact of confidence-building measures in civil wars on the willingness of the parties to negotiate (e.g., periods of tranquility for inoculations in El Salvador, Lebanon, and Cambodia)? What can be learned from the 1990 effort in Ethiopia to provide assistance using primarily indigenous rather than UN resources?

Research is also necessary on the limits of third-party involvement in matters considered domestic. Perhaps Life-line's most essential contribution was to furnish a face-

saving way for belligerents to be seen as exercising sovereign rights by facilitating relief activities within their geographic jurisdictions.

"Expanding humanitarian space" is an approach that should increasingly characterize the debate in various international fora when humanitarian imperatives and the rights of governments are seemingly at loggerheads. Governments and insurgents should be encouraged to exercise sovereignty by providing access to food and medicine for the residents of territory under their control. There is increasing support for the view that sovereignty is only valid to the extent that it is used responsibly.

4. Develop a method for evaluating the comparative cost effectiveness of humanitarian aid deliveries

Reliable data about the actual costs of delivery (value of goods and particularly of various transport modes) is sketchy and often not comparable among sources. Further case studies should provide tentative answers to questions of comparative cost-effectiveness framed in *Humanitarianism under Siege* (pp. 51-56).

Thought should also be given to the development of a common methodology for reporting. Consideration might be given to convening an expert group or an interagency task force, perhaps under the auspices of UNDR0, to help formulate a suggested standard reporting procedure.

SECTION FOUR: EARLY REACTIONS

The case study was conceived as policy research with an action orientation. That is, the research was designed to produce findings and recommendations for review and implementation by the aid agencies. A series of debriefings was therefore built into the work plan of the research team.

The first debriefings took place in June, after the team had finalized its conclusions, but before its book and report had been published. These included discussions in June with NGOs in Nairobi and Geneva, and with the ICRC in Geneva. Following the publication of the book and the circulation of the report, debriefing sessions were held in mid-October in New York with senior UN officials, and in Ottawa with Canadian NGOs and the Canadian government.

Additional debriefings may include the Sudan government and the SPLM, the U.S. government and U.S. NGOs, and individual UN agencies. This concluding section of the report describes the responses elicited by the book and the report to date.

Both documents have been well received. The book has been complimented on its readable presentation of complex issues, the report on its thought-provoking analysis and focused recommendations. Readers have found the approach taken by the research team to be fair-minded, balanced, and constructive. On occasion, differences in data, analysis, or recommendations have been suggested.

The value of the case study approach has been affirmed, particularly its review of the data, framing of broad policy questions, and attention to issues of replicability. Special appreciation has been expressed for the distillation of lessons to be learned from the Lifeline experience. The case study fills a need expressed by many aid practitioners, who see themselves moving from one compelling emergency to the next without time for reflection. The completion of the case study within six months of its launching was especially appreciated.

Since the report raises questions of a critical nature about the performance of each of the sets of aid agencies involved in Lifeline, the debriefings have tended to focus on the findings and recommendations relevant to the group in question. For example, discussion among NGOs, particularly in Nairobi and Geneva, dwelt on problems related to the absence of a clear division of labor between NGOs and the UN, the continuing lack of collegiality among aid professionals, and the desirability of a code of conduct establishing standards among private voluntary groups.

Conceding the problems identified, NGOs noted that in the past, their attempts to develop such standards have not proved successful, given the heterogeneity of the nongovernmental agencies involved. A more practical means to the same end, some suggested, was the establishment of associations of NGOs in various countries (such as the Agency Coordination Body for Afghan Relief [ACBAR]), which had given NGOs more power as a community and had helped avoid or resolve problems that arose in the Sudan.

There was considerable support among NGOs for the view of the case study team that, in situations in which governments and UN agencies were unable or unwilling to carry out humanitarian assistance activities, NGOs should exercise more restraint in assuming roles on their behalf. While there was general affirmation among NGOs for the humanitarian principles embodied in OLS, some felt that the close identification of Lifeline with the UN was not satisfactory. They preferred an international initiative in which the UN played indispensable but more clearly delimited roles. They also stressed that while Lifeline had opened up more humanitarian space in which they could operate, formal identification with the UN could subject NGOs to buffeting by whatever political pressures the UN itself encountered.

ICRC officials underscored the importance of their December 1988 agreement in enabling the Red Cross relief flights to reach civilians in areas controlled by both the government and the SPLA. They cautioned against simplistic cost comparisons for transporting relief supplies and urged that cost-effectiveness issues be broadly framed. Officials stressed, within the framework of shared goals, the ICRC's independence of both OLS and NGO activities.

The debriefing session with UN officials, which allowed for a lengthier discussion of the issues, benefitted as well from the circulation of the documents in advance. Senior officials from the office of the Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Questions, UNICEF, WFP, and UNDP came prepared to present their detailed views on selected findings and recommendations.

They shared the team's sense of the historic importance of Operation Lifeline Sudan, and its view that the time is ripe to assess the Lifeline experience and to modify UN structures and practices where appropriate. There was general support for broadening UNICEF's current mandate to include other UN agencies whose humanitarian contributions are essential in situations of civil strife. At the same time, reservations were expressed about creating a higher level "focal point" which would assume the functions suggested in Recommendation 1 to the UN system.

UN officials noted that in fact a number of steps had already been taken to address problems identified in the report. Interagency discussions coordinated by the Under-Secretary-General are reviewing the respective mandates of UN agencies (cf. the report's third finding above). The UN is now seeking to maintain, beyond the agency-specific data already available, system-wide data on expenditures and achievements in given emergencies. The UN secretariat is aware of the need to invest resources to ensure that accurate, complete and consistent information becomes standard in major emergencies. UNDP is reviewing its policies and procedures for dealing with civil war settings and clarifying and strengthening relationships with UNHCR and UNDRO. UNICEF and WFP are in the process of sharing the lessons of OLS with their headquarters and field staffs. The agencies plan to use the case itself to assist in this regard.

During the discussion, UN officials called attention to items which in their view were given short shrift by the team. Greater efforts had been made by the UN system than the case study acknowledged to strengthen the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, some of them well in advance of

OLS. One agency thought that operational matters should have received more attention; another expressed interest in a more detailed comparison between OLS and the Office of Emergency Operations in Africa (OEOA). While officials conceded that OLS may not have adequately cultivated the local media, they noted that some of the media events about which criticisms had been raised did indeed have a purpose: to focus international attention and protection on relief activities in the Sudan.

In sum, the initial round of debriefings highlighted issues which deserve further discussion, not only within the ranks of the various aid institutions, but between and among them. The research team hopes that future reviews of the case study's findings and recommendations will draw together around a common table various practitioners, such as the UN, governments, and NGOs. The team also hopes to engage authorities from the Sudan government and the insurgents in a common discussion of these matters.

As indicated in a number of the discussions, the difficulties which OLS 2 is continuing to experience are grounds for great concern. They suggest that the improved functioning of the international humanitarian machinery in situations of civil strife is not an academic matter. It is of life and death consequence for many in the Sudan, and elsewhere.

APPENDIX I:
MEMBERS OF THE
OPERATIONAL LIFELINE SUDAN
CASE STUDY TEAM

Tabyiagen Agnes Aboum (Kenya) is a senior research fellow of the University of Uppsala, Sweden. Her training includes college and post-graduate degrees from Uppsala, with advanced work in development economics and history. Currently based in Nairobi, her work experience has involved assignments with the World Council of Churches, the Sudan Council of Churches, and the Swedish International Development Authority. She has served as a research fellow at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare, and is currently a facilitator for East Africa in the Southern Networks for Development.

Eshetu Chole (Ethiopia) teaches in the Department of Economics at Addis Ababa University. Following undergraduate work there, he received advanced economics degrees from the University of Illinois and Syracuse. He is active in numerous professional associations, and serves as executive secretary of the Organization for Social Science Research in East Africa and as editor of the *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review*. He has written extensively on issues of economics and development in Ethiopia and Africa, and has served as a consultant to UN agencies, nongovernmental groups, and research institutions.

Kosti Manibe (Sudan) is currently on leave from duties as Deputy General Secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches, based in Khartoum. He has worked with the Council in a variety of capacities since 1978. He is a graduate in the arts

from Makerere University in Kampala, and has a diploma from the Khartoum School of Mass Communication. Following employment with the Sudan Government's Ministry of Information and Culture in Khartoum, he served for three years as editor of the *Nile Mirror* newspaper. He contributed a chapter on "The Agony of the Family" to *War Wounds*, listed in the bibliography.

Larry Minear (US) is representative for development policy of Church World Service and Lutheran World Relief, based in Washington, DC. Trained in literature, history, and ethics at Yale and Harvard Universities, he assisted in post-civil war resettlement activities in the Sudan in 1972-73. He has served as a consultant to various UN agencies and US government task forces. During the years 1985-87 he assisted US private aid groups in reviewing problems of providing humanitarian assistance in situations of armed conflict. He has written extensively on humanitarian and development issues, and served as team leader for the case study.

Abdul Mohammed (Ethiopia) is a peace activist based in Nairobi. With undergraduate and graduate economics degrees from Queens College and the New School for Social Research of New York, he has worked in refugee resettlement for Church World Service and served as director of relief and emergencies for the Sudan Council of Churches (1985-89). He has been a consultant on emergency programs, refugees, capacity building, and food security to UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, nongovernmental groups, and the Ford Foundation. He is currently establishing the Inter-Africa Group to promote humanitarian assistance, development, and peace in the Horn of Africa. Originator of the idea of the Operation

Lifeline Sudan case study, he played the lead role in assembling the research team.

Jennifer Sebstad (US) is a Nairobi-based independent consultant working with nongovernmental groups on enterprise development and women's programs. Her academic training includes undergraduate studies in geography at the University of Michigan, and graduate work in urban and regional planning at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her work experience includes assignments with the Ford Foundation, the US Agency for International Development, the World Bank, the International Center for Research on Women (Washington, DC), and the Self-Employed Women's Association (Ahmedabad, India).

Thomas G. Weiss (US) is associate director of the Institute for International Studies at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. With undergraduate work in economics at Harvard University and advanced degrees in public affairs at Princeton University, he has served with the UN Conference on Trade and Development, the UN Commissioner for Namibia, the UN Institute for Training and Research, and the International Labor Organization. For a number of years he was executive director of the International Peace Academy in New York City, and has worked as a consultant for a number of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations active in the international arena. He has taught and written extensively in the fields of international conflict management, negotiations, development, peacekeeping, organization, and political economy.

APPENDIX II:
CONTRIBUTING AGENCIES

The following agencies have supported the Operation Lifeline Sudan Case Study with cash and/or in-kind contributions:

Church World Service

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The Netherlands International Development Agency

The Refugee Policy Group

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The Swedish International Development Authority

The United Nations Children's Fund

The United Nations Development Programme

The United Nations World Food Programme