

40 Days of Prayer—Lenten Focus on Refugees

Week 3: Somalia

The current situation: After more than 25 years of civil war, as well as devastating droughts in 2011 and 2016-2017, the Somali refugee crisis is now in its third decade. According to the UN Refugee Agency, Somalis make up the third-largest refugee population in the world, with 2 million total displaced persons as of Feb. 1, 2017—including 1.1 million internally displaced persons and almost 900,000 refugees and asylum seekers elsewhere. Most of the latter (324,883) are in Kenya—home to Dadaab, the largest refugee camp in the world, with an official population of 270,000 but likely higher—followed by Yemen (255,399) and Ethiopia (245,272). Somali refugees are among the top five refugee groups admitted to the US, accounting for 7 percent (140,000) of the total Somali refugee population. Current and future applications are in limbo, as Somalia is one of the countries included in President Donald Trump’s travel ban.

Since 2012, when a new internationally backed government was installed, Somalia has made modest gains in stability, but government security forces and UN-supported African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeepers continue to battle the al-Qaeda-linked militant extremist Islamist group al-Shabaab. According to Amnesty International, al-Shabaab militants forcibly conscript children and abduct, rape, torture, and kill civilians. Unfortunately, government security forces and allied militias also commit abuses, including arbitrary detention and recruitment of children, sexual violence and exploitation, and forcible eviction of internally displaced persons.

The current drought is putting additional pressure on the government and forcing many Somalis to move in search of food and water. Drought means poor agricultural production, which leads to a collapse in wages or loss of livelihood and a simultaneous increase in food and water prices. Relief agencies estimate that 6.2 million Somalis—more than half the country’s population—are in need of food, water, sanitation, shelter, and protection.

What caused the refugee crisis?

In 1991, long-time Somalia dictator Siad Barre was ousted by warlords who then turned on each other. Until recently, the country was considered a “failed state” with no functioning government, its populace at the mercy of pirates, kidnappers, and al-Shabaab. Disruption of agriculture and food production because of the conflicts, poor governance, and denial of access to international aid agencies largely contributed to the 2011 famine, in which over a quarter of a million people died.

What to pray for:

- Rain: drought-related famine threatens Somalia, Yemen, South Sudan, and Kenya.
- Adequate humanitarian assistance to prevent drought-related malnutrition, disease, and death.

- Protection for civilians against abduction, conscription, rape, torture, and execution.
- Wisdom for Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo, a US-Somali dual citizen elected president by the Somali parliament last month, in rooting out corruption within the government and rebuilding structures and institutions adequate to address the needs of the people, including refugees.
- Compassion in repatriation: The Kenyan government wants to close Dadaab refugee camp and repatriate its residents, claiming the camp is a recruiting ground for terrorists, while residents claim they came to Dadaab to *escape* terrorists.
- Welcome and support for Somali refugees transitioning to new homes and cultures.
- Peace.

For more information on the Somali refugee crisis, see the UN Refugee Agency (<http://www.refworld.org/country,COI,,,SOM,,58b033b313,0.html>), the UN Migration Agency (<http://www.iom.int/news/iom-launches-usd-246-million-drought-appeal-somalia>), UNICEF (<https://www.unicef.org/somalia/children.html>), International Rescue Committee (www.rescue.org/country/somalia), and Human Rights Watch (<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/somalia#17c249>).