

January 22 1985. AUSTRALIA-ETHIOPIA - SEIZURE OF AID*

The Australian Government has concluded that it is most unlikely that any of the aid items seized last week at Port Assab will be released for distribution in Eritrea and Tigray.

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Australia has lodged a strong protest with the Ethiopian Government over the seizure.

Firm representations to the Ethiopian Government are being continued in an effort to ensure that all seized emergency relief assistance is used for the people in needy regions according to the criteria by which aid is normally distributed in Ethiopia.

Australia's representative in Addis Ababa has been instructed to make clear to the Ethiopian Government that Australia's over-riding objective is to get food quickly to drought victims by the immediate release of the seized wheat.

I am advised that such items as a drilling rig and motor vehicles seized at Port Assab along with the food aid are covered by insurance and that the lodgement of claims for compensation is being considered.

Accordingly, the Australian Government is concentrating its efforts to get the food aid seized at Port Assab released for distribution as soon as possible in areas where it is desperately needed.

In the meantime, I have authorised the adjustment of funds within the total Ethiopian emergency relief budget so that the distribution of food aid by non-government organisations in Eritrea and Tigray will not be disadvantaged by the Ethiopian Government's action at Port Assab.

It is important that dispute over the seizure or its reasons does not deflect us from our over-riding aim of feeding people who are starving.

* (The text of the News Release dated 22 January 1985 of the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, the note to the Ethiopian Govt. dated 17 January 1985, and the Press Release dated 16 January 1985 of the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs were made available by the Dept. of Foreign Affairs, Canberra).
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I will discuss all these matters in Canberra this afternoon with representatives of non-government aid agencies and other organisations affected by the Ethiopian Government's action at Port Assab.

The seizure must not be allowed to discourage Australians from their magnificent response to appeals by various organisations to assist nearly eight million starving people in Ethiopia.

Note No. 2/85

The Australian Embassy presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia and has the honour to convey to the Ministry the text of a message, despatched on 16 January, from the Australian Government to the Government of Ethiopia:

" The Australian Government has received representations from members of the Australian public, the Australian Wheat Board and non-governmental relief associations concerned about humanitarian relief in Ethiopia about your Government's arbitrary confiscation of consignments aboard the ship R.V. Golden Venture, which was destined for Port Sudan. The Australian Government protests about the Ethiopian Government's action, which has caused great concern in Australia. The cargo consists only of humanitarian supplies which represent the response of the Australian people to the plight of needy drought victims throughout Ethiopia.

Accordingly, the Australian Government appeals to the Ethiopian Government to release the confiscated cargo and allow it to proceed unimpeded."

The Australian Embassy avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia the assurances of its highest consideration.

ADDIS ABABA

17 January 1985

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P R E S S S T A T E M E N T

The Charge d'Affaires of Australia was today summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and asked to transmit to the Australian Government Ethiopia's strong representation regarding the delivery of materials and equipment by Australia to armed bandits in Ethiopia.

The Charge d'Affaires was told that the action of the Australian Government constituted a flagrant violation of the most fundamental principles of international law, namely non-interference in the internal affairs of states and respect for their territorial integrity.

This move of the Australian Government in effect represented an unacceptable challenge to the sovereign authority of Ethiopia over its territory.

While Ethiopia has always been grateful for the international relief assistance to drought-stricken Ethiopians, it cannot, under any circumstances, compromise on its unity and territorial integrity.

Socialist Ethiopia is always ready and willing to develop and maintain friendly relations with all states,

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including Australia on the basis of accepted principles of international law. We, therefore, hope that in the interest of developing mutually advantageous relations between the two countries, Australia will desist from actions detrimental to the national unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia, as well as curb the activities of groups perpetrating such actions in its territory.

In this connection, the Ethiopian Government makes it clear, as it has made its position clear in the past, that it will take any steps it deems fit and proper to prevent the transfer of materials and equipment to armed rebels as well as stop any unauthorised activity by any group within Ethiopian territory.

Addis Ababa

January 16, 1985.