

Christian Aid responds to claims about diverted aid in Ethiopia

Written by Administrator
Monday, 22 March 2010 00:00 -

In a documentary broadcasted on 4 March, the BBC World Service alleged that money intended to provide aid during the Ethiopian famine in 1985 was diverted to buy weapons.

Christian Aid is disappointed that a story from more than 25 years ago, based on the testimony of the former rebel leader Gebremedhin Araya has been published by the BBC. We have joined other leading agencies including Oxfam, Save the Children and CAFOD to refute the claims made by the BBC.

We are confident that aid reached millions of people who needed it. It would be wrong to claim that no money was ever diverted in such a situation of active conflict. However, the allegation that 95 percent of \$100 million aid for famine victims in Tigray in 1985 was misused is grossly inflated. There is no credible evidence that this figure – or any figure remotely close to it – is accurate.

We welcome public scrutiny of aid distribution and media investigations including those by the BBC. The public can and should always demand that aid reaches the people who need it, that responses are faster and more coordinated and ultimately that the international community puts maximum effort into preventing such emergencies from happening in the first place.

Christian Aid has robust systems in place to monitor all emergency relief donations and ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the most vulnerable, regardless of any political, ethnic or religious affiliations they may have.

We adhere to strict principles in terms of accounting for the money we spend and were named as the top non-governmental performer in the second Global Accountability Report produced by the One World Trust.

Max Peberdy who is quoted in the BBC article categorically denies being tricked: 'We routinely monitored the trucks shipping aid across the border. The claim made by Araya is frankly absurd. I was personally present at dozens of grain purchases and never once saw any sand in any grain bags.'

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'The implication that international aid agencies were aware that they had to 'grease the wheels' of power in order to get aid through to those in need is utter nonsense and there was absolutely no question of that happening at any of the grain purchases that I attended.

'Christian Aid's experienced emergency team on the ground imposed stringent assessment criteria and the use of all donated money was carefully monitored through progress reports and rigorous accounting.

'These claims are outrageous and very damaging and there is far more evidence that the money was channelled to where it should have been than there is for these inaccurate allegations.'

Penny Jenden, director of Band Aid at the time, agrees, 'If this money had been diverted to rebels and not used to buy food you would have had thousands of people lying dead at the side of the road. The fact that there was no major death toll or mass migration clearly demonstrates that the money was not diverted.'