ADRA continues famine relief in Somalia despite instability in region

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The Adventist Development and Relief Agency is continuing famine relief efforts in Somalia despite attempts by an insurgent group to ban Western aid organizations from the country and block starving Somalis from fleeing the country to neighboring Kenya and Ethiopia.

The agency's work in Somalia was first hampered last year when the group issued a declaration forbidding ADRA and two other international non-governmental organizations from operating within the country. The statement accused the organizations of "acting as missionaries under the guise of humanitarian work," ADRA said.

ADRA, which has pledged that its relief efforts "will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint," has since 1992 focused "solely" on emergency relief and development in Somalia, including water, sanitation and food security.

"ADRA remains committed to serving the people of Somalia, with the assistance and trust of the local communities, providing long-term, sustainable change," a July 29 press release from the agency stated.

The humanitarian agency has scaled up its initial response in the region in recent weeks. A newly appointed emergency coordinator based in Nairobi, Kenya is expected to oversee continued relief efforts alongside ADRA's Africa Regional Office, agency officials said.

The agency continues to administer a $4 million project in Somalia, maximizing access to clean drinking water, constructing latrines in refugee camps and distributing shelter supplies, ADRA said.

Low rainfall across much of the Horn of Africa, which includes Somalia, has contributed to the region's worst drought in 60 years.

Last week, the United Nations declared a famine in two locally-controlled parts of southern Somalia. The group's anti-Western policies are widely blamed for enabling the famine and frustrating relief efforts, the New York Times reported.

According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 11.5 million people in East Africa are currently in need of humanitarian assistance. One quarter of Somalia's population is now displaced, as they flee to neighboring countries in search of food and water, OCHA reported.