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OFDA  
**Disaster  
Case Reports**

Djibouti Train Wreck  
October 30, 1979

**Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance  
Agency for International Development  
Washington, D.C. 20523**

## DJIBOUTI - Train Wreck

### Data

Date: October 30, 1979 (FY 80)  
Location: 20 miles from Djibouti City  
No. Dead: 63  
No. Injured: 90  
Damage: Damage to cars and train track was estimated at \$750,000.

### The Disaster

On the afternoon of October 30, 1979, an "empty" freight train returning from Dire Dawa in Ethiopia derailed at Holl-Holl, about 20 miles from Djibouti City. It is common for people in the area to travel on the otherwise vacant freight cars. The train in question was unusually crowded with passengers travelling to Djibouti City to celebrate a Muslim holiday. The last half of the train was thrown off the tracks just before crossing the bridge into Holl-Holl station. The remaining cars managed to cross the bridge but slammed into the station terminal at high speed, resulting in death and injury to many of the passengers. Local authorities reported that the cause was a total failure of the braking system. The majority of the dead and injured were women and children. The accident was the most serious such disaster ever to occur in either the colony or the independent state of Djibouti.

### Action Taken by the Government of the Republic of Djibouti (GROD)

With support from French military units, the GROD provided immediate assistance. Victims were treated in military and civilian hospitals in Djibouti City. Members of the national army volunteered to be blood donors.

### Assistance Provided by the United States Government (USG)

In response to a request from the president of Djibouti for assistance with the purchase of medical equipment, the U.S. Charge made a disaster declaration on November 8, 1979. Funds from the Ambassador's discretionary fund were made available to cover the purchase of an ambulance with radio equipment. This was especially appropriate since an ambulance was wrecked during the relief operations. The total amount expended was.....\$18,500

TOTAL \$18,500

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Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

None reported.

Assistance Provided by the International Community

France -- French army units conducted rescue operations using helicopters. Members of the French military volunteered as blood donors.