

## **CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT: BREAKING THE CYCLE - AN ADDRESS AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY <sup>c</sup>**

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*More than 25 million people displaced by violence and persecution remain within their own countries. The plight of the 'internally displaced' is a human tragedy of immense proportions. Caught in a no-man's land between war and sovereign impunity their fate attracts little international attention and remains largely unreported. Dennis McNamara considers the consequences of mass displacement in contemporary conflicts. Introduction given by Jennifer Leaning<sup>b</sup>.*

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I want to speak to you today about one of the biggest, under-addressed challenges facing Africa, that of uprooted and homeless civilian populations from the numerous conflicts currently on the continent. Internally displaced people, (as they are called) today number over 23.5 million globally, more than 12 million in Africa- three times the number of refugees. They are Africa's new neglected internal refugees, who have not crossed an international border. They have no dedicated UN agency or convention to protect them.

At the core of this group – which encompasses the enslaved, the wounded, the raped, the traumatised – are the poorest of the poor, often superimposed on top of already impoverished local populations, without basic rights or protection.

Of course, Africa faces many major challenges, sometimes too easily labelled crises. But simplistic slogans are not going to solve, or start to solve, these challenges. Publicised palliatives and graffiti responses (like bumper stickers) may raise short-term awareness and public funds, but do not necessarily address the very key, underlying issues and causes. Without this, problems may be contained, but cannot be resolved.

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Structural adjustment, agricultural subsidies, trade imbalances, de-ruralisation, mineral exploitation, arms sales, land pressures, massive youth unemployment, widespread government corruption, under-analysed prolonged conflicts: these are some of the essential issues Africa still faces today. For example, today there are a record number of Africans- 25% of its population, some 200 million- who are chronically malnourished, mainly through decades of failure to invest in essential agriculture.

Of course we need to raise world concern and increase humanitarian aid- regrettably it often takes dying babies on CNN or BBC to do so. And the charity trap in this response is that in doing so we satisfy ourselves that the real problems have been addressed.

Even African debt relief, worthy as it objectively may be, makes little sense while donor governments remain unwilling to seriously address the widespread corruption of local politicians and officials who openly- and historically- misuse the benefits for personal gain. Kenya has seen decades of this- so too Uganda- and it is not over. Is the poverty gap being reduced? Will new debt relief translate into real poverty relief? I think Paul Theroux goes too far in blaming it all on host governments, but governments in Africa- (and in the West)- remain fundamentally responsible for the chaos and impoverishment of much of Africa today.

This situation cries out for a comprehensive, integrated, holistic long-term response- not dealing only with the symptoms, but seriously addressing the key causative factors. Debt relief and continued arms sales don't fit together: is the West prepared to stop all arms sales to Africa in 2006, for example? If not, why not? The continent is awash with arms- kids with guns are on the streets of Nairobi, Khartoum, Abidjan, and Monrovia. This is a major obstacle to good governance and development. In this age of slogans a more useful one would be, I suggest, "No more arms for Africa in 2006!" Why can't we try that? Perhaps the G8 and the Security Council could be formally tested.

The "humanitarians,"- those of us who work in so-called humanitarian organizations- face a similar dilemma. We work with the consequences, but seldom address the causes. We talk too much to and amongst ourselves (like my human rights friends do). We reinforce each others' views on a regular basis! But we usually have a major and fundamental disconnect with the political, economic, and security arms of the international system. This is also reflected within the UN system, especially in New York.

The result is that humanitarian aid (a little like UN peacekeeping) often becomes a convenient and comforting substitute for even harder and longer-term political, economic and security action. As in Sarajevo, where we fed Bosnians for four years under the Serb guns on surrounding hills, today we feed millions of starving Africans for decades, without seriously attempting to address the reasons for their prolonged starvation. For example, twenty-five years of massive food aid, often by dropping bags of US surplus food from the air, in South Sudan. Fifteen years in Uganda, currently worth nearly \$100 million in food aid a year, to one of the traditional breadbaskets of Africa. And most recently in Kenya: what a shame that this rich, fertile, favored son of the West should have allowed at least 2.5 million Kenyans to become extremely hungry in 2006. Food aid is the immediate (and needed response), but it is no answer. The answer to why and how this came about, and why it wasn't prevented, is for the host government.

But we can no longer just shrug in despair and turn off the horrible TV images. Instead we need to examine honestly and transparently what the real problems are, who is responsible for them, and what we can reasonably do about them- not for a week or a month- but through long-term, sustainable, culturally sensitive and carefully planned support programs.

It may be "nation building" in some cases. But nation building is a job for nationals: internationals can support this, help pay for it, but cannot (and should not) try to substitute for it. Like "peacekeeping" in post-conflict societies, whose objective is to keep the fighters apart, not to build the peace. Unless we start to invest more seriously and long-term in the latter, the vicious cycle of conflict, upheaval, and displacement will continue. We need to face this reality, which surely Iraq at least has definitively proven.

This remains one of Africa's major challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Man-made wars, where women and children are always the main victims, tragically are today mostly in Africa. Africa needs, *inter alia*, a continent-wide peace initiative or movement, (probably led by women) which clearly tells the politicians, generals, militias and gangsters that their African populations are fed up with the fighting. Western donors also need to be told more loudly by Africans to stop fueling and funding the conflicts and responding to them mainly by aiding the victims. Governmental accountability and responsibility for not stopping these devastating wars must be seriously and systematically addressed, if Africa is to move out of the conflict abyss and move forward with the rest of the world.

And unless it does, all of us will pay the price. We cannot allow Africa to continue on the dangerous path of uncontrolled violence, corruption, abuse of human rights, and displacement of populations if we are really to make global progress. The investment is humanitarian and developmental, but it is also in our collective self-interest, which goes much wider.

So where does displacement of civilian populations from these conflicts fit in all of this? And how do we break this seemingly endless cycle of conflict, upheaval and displacement which has burdened Africa for decades?

Internal displacement is a problem which requires a much more vigorous and strategic response, by both national governments and civil society, (including the media), as well as by the international community. Without this concerted effort, how can we start to address the appalling mortality rate in northern Uganda today, where in the desperately over-crowded, squalid camps 1000 people are dying a week over and above the normal mortality rate? One thousand a week! How can we hope to provide some meaningful future to the Sudanese children who have followed their parents for months on the long road south back to their devastated ancestral lands, where all essential services are lacking?

Displacement is not caused simply by fear. It is the humanitarian symptom of deep, underlying political and security problems, such as land and property distribution (in Darfur, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe) and competition for natural resource benefits (in the DRC). Emergency life-saving aid is a necessary response to forced displacement but risks – as ever – substituting for proper political action. We should have learned by now how limited and even damaging a conception of humanitarian action that focuses only on material assistance can be. Indeed, there is widespread awareness - not always acted upon - that the prolonged provision of humanitarian assistance can upset local economies, undermine aspirations towards self-sufficiency and fuel protracted dependency. Many young, displaced Sudanese, after decades of food aid, do not know how to farm, but are all too familiar with the sight of WFP food drops.

The need for a 'joined up' approach to displacement, peace, security and development is all the more pressing where peace is breaking out. It is vital to reap a peace dividend for the war-ravaged societies of Angola, Liberia, Burundi, South Sudan, even DRC, where peace initiatives have brought some hope of returning home to the millions of displaced.

And millions are on the long march home even as we speak: up to two million in Sudan, more in Angola, one million in Burundi, half a million in Liberia. All are returning to virtually nothing: no schools, health clinics, clean water, agricultural support, livelihood prospects or rule of law. Without an integrated strategy aiming to stabilise these populations through provision of access to livelihoods, water, health, schools and rule of law, these returnees are likely to recycle as displaced, (Sudan), refugees (Somalia), fighters (Liberia) or gangsters (as they did in Cambodia and Afghanistan.) We may yet see the two million inhabitants of the slums of Khartoum (forcibly uprooted decades ago from their homes in the south) return to become the new slum-dwellers of Juba. And those who have been to Juba will believe me when I say that the slums of Juba will be far more desperate.

It is a truism that bears repeating: too often a huge investment in humanitarian aid, peace enforcement and peacekeeping is completely unmatched by effective and sustained support for peace building and recovery. (In 2005 alone, UN Member States committed 88,000 troops to UN peacekeeping at a cost of some \$3.2 billion and provided \$11.6 billion in humanitarian assistance.) Without a realistic peacebuilding investment, much of this risks being wasted, as we have seen time and again in Haiti, Somalia and parts of West Africa.

As an aside, I should note that in 2004, globally \$1 trillion was spent on defence, with western countries spending up to 25 times as much on defence as they do on overseas aid. Every country in western Europe and North America has a much bigger military budget than overseas development budget, with the largest disparities in the United States and Britain.

Humanitarian aid and peacekeeping operations should be seen as only the early (and easier) aspects of much more important, long-term recovery and stabilisation – or rebuilding – package. Instead, all over Africa, peace dividends are being squandered by the unwillingness or inability of governments (both local and donor) to invest in post-conflict population stabilisation and development, coupled with sustained and effective political support; conflict mediation efforts and a focus on recovery support; particularly in the areas of sustainable livelihoods and rule of law.

This major issue is touched upon by the latest UN reform efforts, including in particular through the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, whose role will be to advise and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict recovery, focusing attention on reconstruction, institution-building and sustainable development in countries emerging from conflict. But vulnerable as it is to the politics of the Security Council and the General Assembly, the

Commission may yet fall foul of the traditional tensions among member states. For who is it that funds these wars? And who is it that profits from them? Not just local warlords, but also the arms dealers (including major governments), the gem merchants, the people-traffickers, and the oil magnates. Many of whom- probably most- are based in the developed world and affiliated to donor governments.

The failure- and the potential- to break the displacement cycle lies not with the humanitarians, but rather with host States (too often complicit in displacement) and donor governments (who fail to use political and financial leverage to address it in a sustainable manner). State abdication of responsibility and double standards remain a major impediment to breaking the cycle. (Security Council equivocation on Darfur, despite allegations of genocide, and unhelpful recent visits by Security Council Ambassadors to conflict areas such as Uganda, are effective illustrations of this). Indeed, the lack of consistent political support by the Security Council for key humanitarian and human rights efforts of agencies are counter productive and sometimes downright dangerous.

And there is self-interest in breaking the cycle of displacement: the repeated failures to bring peace in Horn of Africa (among others) over the past twenty years should have taught us that perpetuating the cycle breeds more violence, including terrorism, human trafficking and state collapse.

So what is to be done? Very briefly, a few summarized suggestions:

- Proper financial and political support for essential humanitarian and human rights programs in conflict and post-conflict areas (most get less than 50% funded each year)
- Constant pressure (including by media and other governments) to keep primary responsibility on host state/authorities for their own citizens, including those displaced
- More consistent, ethical (and tangible) Security Council support for key initiatives against violating states (including naming and shaming).
- Long term commitment by donors to essential UN peacekeeping and peace building operations – in contrast to the awful lack support for AU in Darfur – including key rule of law/governance rebuilding efforts, so often neglected, (despite the overwhelming lessons of Iraq).

- Civilian rule of law experts to be in the front-line of major conflict response, as early restoration of law and order must be civilian-led and backed up by adequate funding, if any stability is to be established.
- Active support by donors and other states for safe and sustainable return of uprooted populations to home areas, as key to stabilization for long term development and predictability.
- Investment in recovery/development activities, (for as long and at least as much as the massive investment in the conflicts).
- More serious and systematic media attention to this long neglected issue. (Would a thousand deaths a week in Sarajevo have received such scant media coverage?)

This last point is critical. The media momentum around the issue of debt relief translated into some policy change at the G8 summit. But if you ask a young mother returning to southern Sudan whether debt relief would make a difference to her and her children, she will likely be more interested in measures to stop the flow of guns, how to get her land back, and the possibility of selling her crops on the local market. These are the essentials that will make her return safe and sustainable.

We need to raise our voices on these issues, as loudly as some have raised their voices on debt relief. We need to name and shame those who are arming both the rebels and the governments who are causing displacement, and those who stand to profit from the displacement through plundering gems, minerals and oil from displaced peoples' lands. We need to break this cycle of conflict and displacement and provide hope to the millions of traumatized African women and children who bear the brunt of this tragic phenomenon.

We must seriously deal with causes, and we must be more strategic, coherent and comprehensive, across both our political and humanitarian work. Without this, humanitarian aid and peacekeeping will remain a necessary but inadequate salve on the world's collective conscience, while the shocking cycle of conflict and displacement continues unabated.

At present, Africa runs the risk of remaining the world leader in this tragic cycle, to the massive detriment of its people and its progress. We can continue business as usual, and watch this cycle go on, as we have done. Or we can try and act along some of the lines I have suggested, among others. Let us make 2006 Africa's year of progress- not of more poverty, upheaval and suffering. And let us start on this new path by stopping any more arms sales to this damaged continent. And other steps will follow.