

AFRICA

A CONTINENT FORGOTTEN

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The humanitarian crisis in Africa is reaching catastrophic proportions. Boutros Boutros - Ghali the former head of the U.N used to call this the 'orphan crisis' and they still are. The continent is plagued with long running wars combined with natural disasters.

In Somalia 300,000 people are facing starvation and another 1m are in a rapidly deteriorating condition. Angola affected by long running conflict, an estimated 600,000 Angolans live in fear for their safety and are in acute need of help as the civil war started since 1975 is taking its toll. In Sierra Leone children have lost hands and arms to the machetes of the rebel fighters who are torturing the country since 1991.

The situation in Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, Congo-Brazzaville the Democratic republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan, and Rwanda is one of the most serious humanitarian disaster. Shortage of food, scarcity of water, negligible access to health and education are threatening the survival of millions of people. In addition the population explosion in Africa (at present biggest fertility rates in the world) is adding to the problem of poverty, starvation and insecurity.

Describing the situation about the continent Kofi Annan the U.N secretary general said 'The victims of civil war seldom have any control of the political and military leaders who perpetuate the

violence and should not be penalised for the irresponsibility of their leaders'.

The world spends £5.5 bn a year on pet foods. Last year U.N appealed for \$796m for urgent help for the most dispossessed peoples in the African continent but only received a fraction of the aid asked for. The indifferent attitude of neglect is reflected in the fact that the world spends billions of dollars a year on pet foods but fails to provide much needed help to the poorest countries in the world.

Double standards and hypocrisy of the western nations is apparent in the fact that aid and donations are pouring into Kosovo to build hospitals, schools, and buildings after the end of the Balkans war but a trickle is being handed over to Africa. Is it because it is in Europe or it is more strategically situated?

The international community should initiate the following reforms to start a better future for Africa:

- 1) Write off all debts, which they cannot pay. During the cold war the rich nations sold arms and weapons indiscriminately to military regimes knowing well that there was no hope of getting paid. The money saved by not paying the debt should be spent on much needed food, health care and education in those countries.
- 2) To put infrastructure to run their countries in a democratic way based on equality, justice and freedom.
- 3) No more selling of arms and weapons to the continent. It results in killing and brutalising people. It inflicts suffering and encourages genocide.
- 4) Open markets for fair trade, giving poor countries the right price for their produce.

- 5) Give international funds, training and transfer of technology to strengthen their weaker economies.
- 6) Control the population explosion (at present fastest growing in Africa).
- 7) Promote a culture of peace and hope.

The richer nations have exploited the gold and diamonds in Africa. They have plundered its natural resources and destroyed its environment. The international community has a moral responsibility to intervene in the long running armed conflicts and civil wars in Africa. In collaboration with U.N it needs to provide peace and security to the continent.

Today the west has the means and technology to wipe out the hunger and starvation in the poorest countries. All it lacks is the political will. We need to act and now to ensure that there are no more landmine accidents and no more child soldiers killing other child soldiers.

For further information contact U.N development program.

- 1) E-mail www.undp.org.

Or U.N action for peace or U.N agenda for peace.

- 2) E-mail www.un.org.