

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

NewsNotes

*a bimonthly newsletter on information on
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Africa's food crisis: Another double standard

On April 7, 2003, James T. Morris, the executive director of the World Food Program (WFP), informed the UN Security Council of the \$1.3 billion humanitarian operation to feed Iraq's 27 million people. At the same time Morris pointed out that "there are nearly 40 million Africans in greater peril... [and] I cannot escape the thought that we have a double standard." As he continued, he questioned the Security Council "How is it we routinely accept a level of suffering and hopelessness in Africa we would never accept in any other part of the world?"

A lethal combination of recurring droughts, failed economic policies, violent conflict and the expanding impact of the AIDS epidemic were cited as the causes for the African food crisis in Morris's speech to the Security Council. "The scale of the suffering is unprecedented," said Morris, adding that what is currently needed, \$1.8 billion, is equal to all the resources the WFP collected last year for worldwide projects.

Morris asked the Security Council to take immediate responsibility for the current crisis so as not to repeat the slow response to the 1984-85 famine in Ethiopia. At that time, up to one million people died and the assistance that might have saved them simply arrived too late.

In southern Africa the impact of the AIDS pandemic, the peak of which is not expected until 2005-2007, is a major cause of food shortages. Morris reported that "[m]uch of Africa's political and technical talent is dying or emigrating," hugely depleting Africa's human resources." Although crop prospects are already better in southern Africa, more droughts are forecast and a permanent, low-grade food crisis could be the result of farmers dying of AIDS.

In Ethiopia and Eritrea drought contributed to the food shortages but conflict was another factor. During their recent war against each other, both governments were spending about \$1 million a day on the fighting. For Eritrea this added 900,000 displaced and economically vulnerable people to a caseload of 1.4 million who are now drought-affected. Two of three Eritreans are short of food and Ethiopia has the highest amount of people in need of food on the continent.

Angola also illustrates how violent conflict impacts food shortages. After the peace agreement was signed a year ago, the WFP could successfully reach almost double the amount of people it had during the war but "much of the country is littered with land mines [and this] makes access difficult and undercuts food production as vast stretches of

land are not yet safe for cultivation," said Morris.

Of course wars create refugees. The WFP joined the UN High Commission for Refugees in its concern that funding for food aid is insufficient for the more than 1.2 million refugees in Africa. Morris told the Security Council, "We urgently need more funds in the next several months to avert severe hunger among refugees."

Several countries that have housed refugees are having difficulties. The government of Tanzania warned that it may compel refugees to return home for fear that food shortages in camps will spark banditry and insecurity in refugee-hosting areas. In Kenya, a lack of funds has already forced WFP to reduce food rations by 25 percent with more cuts expected.



Among other things, Morris called for 1) a substantial increase in financial support for investment in basic agricultural infrastructure, both micro and macro; 2) Funding of an African Food Emergency Fund - an immediate response account to be used at the very outset of food crises; 3) The donor community (especially the G8 countries) to make a major investment in Africa's children citing that the long-term future of Africa will depend greatly on a well-nourished, educated and skilled workforce.

Morris concluded his remarks by stating that war and conflict increase hunger, but they create situations that contribute to increasing hunger in the long term. War and conflict decrease productivity, increase HIV/AIDS, add to refugee and IDP movements and negatively impact Africa's children. "Their suffering cannot be any less to us than the suffering we see elsewhere in the world today. We must all do more to help."

To see Morris's statement, "Double Standards: Africa and the War on Iraq," go to: <http://www.wfp.org/index.asp?section=2>

Zimbabwe: Pray for peace

In their Easter 2003 pastoral letter, Zimbabwe's Catholic bishops critiqued President Robert Mugabe's government. The letter, representing the most critical stance that the Catholic Church has taken to date, directly accused the government of deliberately withholding food for political reasons "while people are starving." The bishops went on to say that the "government has failed to provide leadership that enables the creation of an environment that enhances truth, justice, love and freedom...Economic inequalities have become worse, the gap between the rich and the poor has continued to widen."

Although their country does not often make U.S. media reports, Zimbabweans continue to hope in spite of massive challenges such as the AIDS pandemic, hunger, poverty and violence. The following request to join Zimbabweans in prayer comes to us from missionaries living and working in the country.

These days the news about Zimbabwe continues to be depressing as it describes an ongoing, increasing spiral of hunger, economic crisis, violence and repression. What we need to remember about this news is that it is not new. Violence and repression of black Africans by others and by each other is an old pattern seen in: slave raids, colonialism, apartheid, wars of liberation, and political and economic exploitation. The only major differences throughout this pattern have been the degrees of violence and repression and who is repressing and violating whom.

What the news does not tell us is that throughout all of this violent history there has been a continuous strong thread of hope. This thread of hope is God's story where local, ordinary people have stepped into the breach at critical moments to ensure that the march toward freedom continues. These ordinary people have, time and again, chosen to ignore threats of violence, and even death, to resist complete submission non-violently. This has always been accomplished without any continuous structure, specific organization, or centralized leadership! By focusing on the drama of violence, corruption and hardships we have missed the greatest story, the tremendous unspoken, unorganized commitment of the ordinary people of Zimbabwe to a non-violent resolution of their difficulties. This is a remarkable sign of hope for all of us, something to be truly grateful for.

It is gratitude to God for his hand in all of this and the great inspiration that these people provide for all of us in these troubled times, that prompts us to request that you pray regularly for these people.

- Pray that their quiet voices will be heard and that non-



violent solutions will be sought and implemented. Solutions that will bring peace and renewed prosperity to this beautiful land and people. Solutions that will inspire the rest of Africa and the world to also seek non-violent solutions to their problems.

- Pray that all the leaders in this country and in all of Africa will be blessed with compassion and understanding for each other and work towards restorative justice.
- Pray that the world will help to end the economic injustices that are bringing people to the brink of starvation.
- Pray for Christ's victory over evil.
- Pray that there is rain for the next crop.
- Pray that the HIV/AIDS epidemic comes to an end.
- Pray for people and resources to help the million plus orphans in this country.
- Pray for African solutions implemented by Africans so that they can reclaim their birthright.

Faith in action:

Please pray and pass this message on through your existing prayer networks, establish new networks and let us know your thoughts and prayers. Perhaps, by praying and working together, we can help the people of Zimbabwe repeat the miracle of South Africa where prayer and hard work brought about the peaceful end to apartheid.

Sudan: Growing hope for peace

“Our future is dying in front of our eyes - as we look at the children dying of hunger, disease and war,” laments Kuol Beliew, a Southern Sudanese elder. This cry of despair, heard throughout much of southern Sudan, may turn to expectations for new life if mediation for peace succeeds. The following is an update on the slowly progressing comprehensive peace agreement.

The leaders of the two main warring parties, Sudan's President El Bashir and Dr. John Garang of the Sudan People Liberation Army (SPLA), met in Nairobi on April 2, 2003. Bashir and Garang reviewed the peace process and reiterated their confidence in the mediation taking place, reaffirmed their commitment to the cessation of hostilities and the facilitation of humanitarian assistance to needy areas. Both agreed to open better channels of communication. President Mwai Kibaki of Kenya, who initiated the meeting, urged them to accelerate the pace of negotiations so that their agreed upon goal, June 2003, could be reached.

Sudan's 20-year war has killed over two million southern Sudanese through armed conflict and in war-induced famine and disease. Throughout the war, Sudan acquired the dubious distinctions of having the largest displaced population in the world (4.5 million people), and of being the first and only African country on the U.S. Holocaust Museum's Committee of Conscience watch-list. Last July both Beshir and Garang signed the Machakos Protocol which called for religious freedom (freeing southerners from Shari'a or Islamic law) and an eventual referendum on self-determination, giving southerners the option of forming an autonomous state.

In early April, while Bashir and Garang were smiling and shaking hands, reports revealed that since January 2002, 550,000 Sudanese fled Government of Sudan attacks in southern oil-rich regions and that Khartoum continued to hinder humanitarian access to these displaced people. No matter how quickly the pace of the peace agreement proceeds, it is only the first step to peace. Oil has literally fueled the war. The government has depopulated oil-rich areas so to expand oil exploitation, while using oil revenues to support the war against the south. Currently displaced people are suffering hunger and malnutrition, not because they are poor, but because they were living on top of rich oil fields.

Resource and wealth sharing, is only one of the many contentious issues to be resolved before the peace agreement is final. There are major disagreements over political power-sharing during the six-year period before the refer-

endum. While the SPLA seems to have backed away from a rotating presidency, it demands the first vice-presidency with substantial powers. One of the most acrimonious points has been how to unify the national army. Khartoum has insisted on having one national army, according to Nhial Deng, leader of the SPLA delegation, while the South wants two during the interim period. Some feel that this dispute could stalemate the peace talks. How the agreement pertains to border areas like the Nuba Mountains, Southern Blue Nile and especially Abyei is also unsettled.

Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Sudan Gerhart Baum reported that, regardless of further commitments by the government of Sudan, there have been no improvements in human rights conditions this year. Despite this report, a recent resolution renewing the presence of this Special Rapporteur was defeated with a vote of 24 in favor, 26 against, and three abstentions at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Now there will be no official international observer for human rights in the oil-rich areas of Sudan during this difficult time as the peace process moves forward.

Blatant human rights violations galvanized churches and human rights groups around the world to demand that the UN Special Rapporteur on Sudan be renewed. Besides the killings and displacement of people in the oil-rich areas, plus the denial of international aid groups to needy people in parts of the Sudan, there are alarming reports of massacres and displacement of people by government backed forces in the western province of Darfur. People of faith and other groups around the world, concerned about the long-suffering people of the Sudan, have worked tirelessly to encourage a just peace with true security and development to the Sudan. They will now have to renew their efforts to get human rights monitors to Darfur and Southern Sudan so that the peace agreement brings about a peace that can be felt by the people who have already suffered enough.

For more information see the following web sites:
www.sudancare.org; www.db.idpproject.org;
www.sudan.net. www.darfurinfo.org

Tanzania: Anger mounts over selloffs

As privatization of state owned industry becomes a common occurrence throughout Africa, so too is the cry of opposition. Many Africans fear that economically dominant South Africa will monopolize businesses throughout the continent while crushing production and business development in host countries. Catholic Information Service for Africa (CISA) reports on a Tanzanian opposition party that attacked the wave of new investment from South Africa.

“...Criticism from the Tanzania Labour Party follows a number of high profile sales of former stateowned companies to South African investors. The latest is the sale of a 49 percent stake [of] Air Tanzania to South African Airways. Others include the National Bank of Commerce, Tanzania Breweries and Kilombero Sugar Limited.

“Opposition Member of Parliament Thomas

Ngawaiya, an outspoken critic of the influx of South African companies, said the tendency for some companies to import their raw materials is harming the economy. ‘If South Africans make business in Tanzania and they start exporting, I think our economy will grow, then our country will become rich,’ he said. ‘But if they bring in all the materials from South Africa our farmers will not earn anything from that end. At the end of the day maybe we are going to be another slave to South Africa.’

“...South Africa is not only making its presence felt in the newly privatized sector. It has opened the most successful mobile telephone operation in Vodacom. South African companies have also moved into tourism, health care and the supermarket business. South Africa’s economic presence in neighboring Kenya has also raised concerns.” (Source: ANBBIA, CISA)

Kenya: Inquest into Kaiser’s death opened

“Arise for it’s a new day” boasts the Lenten campaign sponsored by the Kenyan Episcopal Conference’s Justice and Peace Commission, and winds of change are certainly blowing. On April 2 Kenyan Church leaders welcomed Attorney General Amos Wako’s announcement to open a public inquest into the death of human rights activist Fr. John Kaiser.

On August 24, 2000 John Kaiser, a Mill Hill priest, was shot and killed in western Kenya. Since Kaiser was a U.S. citizen who died under suspicious circumstances, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) became involved. But concerns were raised as the investigation continued because FBI agents collaborated so closely with KANU government officials who bore much of the responsibility for the very human rights abuses that Kaiser highlighted in his work.

Although in its April 2001 report the FBI preceded its conclusions with the comment “this analysis is not a substitute for a thorough, well-planned investigation and should not be considered all inclusive...” it opined that the manner of death of Fr. Kaiser was “more consistent with a suicide than a homicide...” The immediate response of church leaders and human rights groups was to reject these findings and petition the attorney general for an official inquest. These appeals were ignored until now.

Under the new government led by the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) Attorney General Amos Wako agreed to open the inquest, but expressed doubts that any new conclusion will be found. But human rights leaders are

hopeful that as the winds of change blow through Kenya and as the NARC government investigates other cases of national importance, that witnesses who were previously afraid to testify will come forward to speak against former KANU officials.

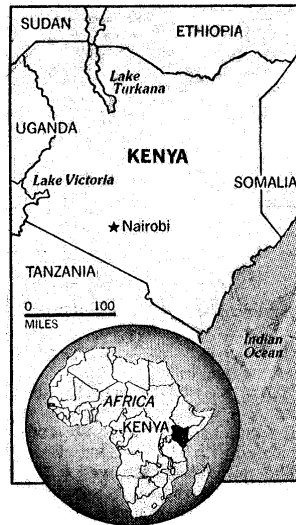
In the U.S. similar requests to review the FBI investigation were denied. The U.S. Department of Justice refused to review the FBI’s findings, saying that it stood by the conclusion of the FBI report. Fr. Kaiser’s niece has filed a Freedom of Information Request asking the FBI to hand over all documents relating to her uncle’s death. Sen. Mark Dayton, of Kaiser’s home state of Minnesota, sent a letter to the director of the FBI asking for prompt action on this request. Previously the investigation into Fr. Kaiser’s death was closely monitored by another Minnesota senator, Paul Wellstone, who was killed in a plane accident last October.

For more information see previous *NewsNotes* articles: March/April 2002, May/June 2001, January/February 2001, November/December 2000, September/October 2000.

Kenya: Reconciliation debate begins

What will bring justice, healing and unity to a country that seeks the truth about the mysterious deaths of political leaders, about the politically sponsored clashes that killed thousands and displaced tens of thousands, and about the economic crimes and public corruption carried out by the former Kenya African National Union (KANU) government? On the streets, in public fora and in the media, Kenyans are now debating the value and appropriateness of a truth and reconciliation commission. While few Kenyans want the extremes of blanket amnesties or only criminal prosecutions, there is still little consensus on the topic. The following article explores some of the elements of the debate as well as its emotional charge.

Central to the debate is the question of how truth is defined. Rev. Timothy Njoya speaks of a "truth and justice commission," quoting the Gospel of John (8:32), "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Although some would argue that Jesus referred to freedom from sin, the understanding of truth gleaned from Njoya's remarks seems closer to the Western idea of truth — the need to establish the crime and the appropriate punishment. Many Kenyans, however, would see truth as Kenyan philosopher, Phillip Mbiti, sees it: Truth builds better relationships, while falsehood destroys relationships.



Certainly human rights have become central to the thinking of many Kenyans. How to include them in the healing process in a manner which is culturally appropriate is still a challenge, especially when emotions are extreme. In early February a number of former detainees and victims visited the torture chambers of Nyayo House in Nairobi, Kenya, and relived the memories of the horror they endured. Some broke down in tears, remembering the beatings and humiliations, while others sang and chanted about their ordeal. Wanyiri Kihoro, spoke of how in 1986, for 24 of his 74 days in prison, he was kept without food or water and stark naked in the water-logged cells. The minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs pledged that the government would preserve the torture chambers as a monument of shame. Some question whether this is sufficient.

A number of Kenyans emphasize the concept of reconciliation as the key element, since it resonates with the culture. In a public debate for a truth and reconciliation commission, the human rights NGO Chemchemi Ya Ukweli reported that participants agreed that "reconciliation equals truth, justice, peace and mercy," and that reconciliation is the best way to heal and touch the hearts of all to overcome Kenya's culture of violence.

Amnesty remains a huge question for Kenyans. The

South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission had the power to grant amnesty, and of course this experience is looked to as an example. But the reality of South Africa was distinct from that of Kenya. While South Africa had two major antagonistic parties to reconcile, the white oppressors and the black oppressed, Kenyans have had years of hostilities created for political reasons. Some would argue that it is necessary to go back and reconcile the differences created through the favoritism shown by President Jomo Kenyatta (1964-1978). Others claim that all the focus should be on the rivalries created through the same process in President Daniel arap Moi's rule (1978-2002). Also questioned is whether it is right to take property and wealth from people who benefited from favoritism, as well as what would be appropriate compensation for the victims. Another difference between South Africa and Kenya is that in spite of the fact that Kenya does have many good, intelligent, dedicated church leaders and others who would do a good job, it does not have one outstanding individual like Desmond Tutu to lead the reconciliation process.

The people, on all levels, seem to have agreed upon three things. First, a truth and reconciliation commission should address the variety of crimes, brutalities, and violations of human rights which have taken place, at least since independence in 1964 (although some favor going back to colonial times as well), and that resources must be found to compensate the victims. Secondly, a new constitution must be put in place before such a commission is formed. The establishment of a new constitution will give the proper authority to the commission, set the parameters, and be a step to building trust in its execution. Thirdly, a truth and reconciliation commission is only part of a larger process of bringing justice, peace and unity to the country. It does not take away from the absolute necessity of setting up proper legal systems, honorable and accountable courts.