

Banishing the Scourge of War

Sudanese refugee in Chad/UNHCR/H.Caux

Tens of Millions of People Are Trapped in Conflict and Need Help to Restart Their Lives

It has various names: The Forgotten Crisis, The Worst Conflict since World War II and Africa's World War.

Whatever name it goes by, however, the devastation in the Democratic Republic of Congo is indisputable. An estimated 5.4 million persons have perished in 10 years, many of them not via the bullet but, because of the widespread chaos, by easily preventable diseases such as malaria or malnourishment. Some 45,000 people continue to die each month. The rape of young girls, mothers and older women has become a daily tactic of war. At least nine surrounding countries have been embroiled in the conflict yet most of the world ignores or is ignorant of the war.

To the north, in Sudan's Darfur region at least 200,000 persons have been killed and two million displaced in ethnic conflict there in the last few years. Since the end of the Cold War, conflict has cost the continent \$300 billion, the equivalent of all foreign aid it has received during the same period, according to Oxfam. Infant death, life expectancy and illiteracy are all sharply worse in these regions compared with peaceful areas.

The scourge of current conflict is not confined to Africa but remains widespread across the world. In the Middle

East, at least half of the nearly 10 million Palestinian population live in a global diaspora. Some 4.7 million Iraqis fled their homes during the ongoing conflict there.

At the height of problems in Afghanistan 6.2 million refugees fled to countries as far afield as Iceland and Chile. Despite the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, hundreds of thousands of Afghans remain refugees and even those who returned home continue to face a precarious future because of ongoing widespread unrest and treacherous social and economic conditions.

The situation in Colombia is described as the 'worst humanitarian crisis in the Western hemisphere.' At least 40,000 persons have been killed since 1990 in a tangled web of fighting involving the government and various factions and anywhere up to three million people have been forced to leave their homes.

In Europe, the Balkan region is still trying to pick up the pieces from the 1990s conflict there which caused at least 100,000 deaths, the infamous massacre at Srebrenica and a chilling new phrase to describe a deliberate war aim of widespread civilian terror and displacement: 'ethnic cleansing.'

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the United States 'the global war on terror' became a daily buzz phrase. That term has largely been discredited recently though at any one time there are currently between 30–40 situations which can be described as civil turmoil or war.

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These are radically different to 'traditional' conflicts between opposing national armies and are often nasty ethnic, religious or economically inspired wars which may involve governments and/or disparate armed groups whose main victims increasingly are innocent civilians. In World War I, for instance, 5% of casualties were non-combatants but in today's wars that figure has ballooned to 75%.

Each war often needs a different solution and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has developed a series of initiatives to address three major phases in any troubled region: strengthening social, economic and political

systems to help prevent conflict; providing emergency assistance wherever applicable if war does break out; and providing both medium and long-term aid once an initial peace agreement is reached.

The latter is particularly important because studies of recent conflicts have shown that 44% of the time fighting resumed within five years of any initial peace accord, often because of a breakdown in the chain of donor help—the so-called 'gap' in development parlance.

The JICA approach is a mix of traditional projects, new innovations, practical field programs including strengthening human resource capabilities and intellectual initiatives. In the latter field, for instance, since 2007 Japan has been the second chair of the U.N. Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), helping to formulate new strategies for peace.

In the Mindanao region of the Philippines the agency has been involved in an innovative program. In 2003 the government signed an initial ceasefire agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to end more than 40 years of civil war, but ongoing low-scale fighting has continued to produce hundreds of thousands of new refugees.

For the first time, however, JICA has sent development experts to a region before a final peace agreement was initiated and, in another breakthrough, the Japanese civilians were part of a team made up of mostly military personnel on the International Monitoring Team (IMT) which is responsible for overseeing the ceasefire agreement.