



**Oxfam**

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## **Africa's forgotten crises: people in peril**

**Angola, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Congo**

### **Introduction**

**Right now in Africa, millions of lives are at risk, threatened by brutal wars which have driven people from their homes and land. Crops have been left untended, destined to fail.**

And yet remarkably, in many of these countries, there is a real opportunity to build a lasting peace if the international community acts swiftly and decisively. What's needed is simple: an immediate increase in humanitarian aid and genuine political commitment to peace.

The crisis in Kosovo has already shown that large-scale rapid response by the international community is both feasible and effective. Now it's time for us to show the same commitment to the millions of people at risk from war and famine in Africa.

Take an example: in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, protecting the fragile peace deal requires 25,000 UN troops by December. Providing those troops – and dealing with the present crisis in East Timor – will be

the acid test of the international community's commitment to human rights and to protecting the vulnerable from brutal violence.

This paper reviews the current emergencies, and the opportunities for peace, in five countries. Four of them fall within the fifteen poorest countries in the world<sup>1</sup>. These countries are so desperately poor that war – and in Ethiopia, drought too – means they can no longer cope without much more international help.

Despite their many contrasts, these five countries have four things in common:

1. They bear the scars of long-running wars
2. Their natural resources could have helped to reduce the poverty of their people, but instead they have been exploited to further the wars
3. There is now a real opportunity to build lasting peace
4. They all have massive, immediate humanitarian needs

This paper sets out the facts<sup>2</sup>, and what must be done to achieve peace.

## Angola

There are more landmines in Angola today, laid by both sides, than when they were 'banned' by the Ottawa treaty in 1997. Many people have fled their homes and are now living in towns, like Malange, Kuito and Huambo, under siege by UNITA rebels. The only route in for aid is by air, but flights are underfunded and dangerous. The result is that, in Malange alone, up to four people die of starvation every day. And in the last month, civilians who have left Malange in a desperate search for food have been ambushed and shot. Across the country, there are 200 daily deaths related to malnutrition<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> UN Development Programme's 1999 Human Development Index.

<sup>2</sup> See the end of this paper for a table with selected statistics for each country

<sup>3</sup> UN estimate (late August 1999)

The tragedy of Angola is that the international community had a chance to support peace when elections were held. But it chose a ‘peace on the cheap’ approach. An underfunded UN peace operation was unable to stop the country going back to war after the democratic elections. In short, the international community has failed Angola once; it must not do so again.

At present, neither the Government nor UNITA will have any serious interest in peace until either fighting gives one side an advantage, or international action cuts off the resources for waging war. In fact, profits from the ‘war economy’ provide ample incentives for the elite in both the Government and in UNITA to continue fighting. Meanwhile poverty and suffering continue to increase: for example, more than a quarter of Angola’s children die before the age of five.

At the end of August, 2 million people in Government-controlled Angola needed emergency aid. Some 400,000 were malnourished. Elsewhere, in UNITA-held land, access problems mean that relief agencies have little idea of the scale of suffering. On 23 August, the UN estimated that there were another 3,000,000 people there; right now their needs are largely unknown.

In February 1999 the UN Security Council imposed ‘targeted’ sanctions intending to put pressure on UNITA. It is hoped that these sanctions will lead to the resumption of peace talks. Effectively enforcing the sanctions is a real challenge for the Security Council, given that it is believed that since 1991 UNITA has earned \$3-4 billion from diamonds sold in breach of the sanctions which were previously in place.

In addition to the UN-imposed sanctions, companies that trade in oil and diamonds (on which the Angolan economy heavily relies) must make every effort to ensure that their activities contribute to peace, rather than fuelling the war.

In September, the Canadian chair of the Security Council’s Angola sanctions committee, Robert Fowler, will present the Council with his interim report. At the same time, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s new ‘Office for Angola’ may be able

to re-start communications, perhaps leading to new negotiations. However, to succeed, this will involve a renewed diplomatic commitment from the UN, and the finding of the right intermediaries acceptable to both UNITA and the Angolan government.

Although the main UN mission to Angola, MONUA, left earlier this year, the remaining UN Human Rights Division continues the vital job of documenting abuses by all warring parties. Sadly, its resources are desperately over-stretched; at present there are just 30 observers in a country which is about the size of France and Spain combined.

In the current situation there are two priorities. Firstly, the international community must pull out all the stops to press the warring parties towards peace. There must be no illusion that the current sanctions, or other measures, will lead quickly to a lasting peace or an end to the humanitarian crisis. Hence, secondly, donor governments must renew their aid efforts to prevent thousands more deaths in the coming months.

The UN humanitarian appeal for \$106 million had still only received 54 per cent of its target by 23 August.

#### **WHAT THE WORLD MUST DO**

- Take every possible step, through diplomacy and economic pressure, to bring renewed peace talks
- Swiftly provide humanitarian relief, including the funds and aircraft to enable the UN World Food Programme to fly into the besieged towns
- Press all arms suppliers, including countries elsewhere in Africa and in Eastern Europe, to stop shipments
- Increase funding for the UN human rights operation and ensure the involvement of ordinary Angolan society in upholding those rights
- Create the conditions which will allow progress towards an accountable and inclusive democratic society

*Oxfam has substantially expanded its Angola programme to meet the increasing humanitarian needs of around 70,000 people in Kuito, and more in Huambo and elsewhere, including mobile drilling rigs to provide safe water to help avert the serious risk of disease epidemics.*

## Ethiopia and Eritrea

The good news is that since July 1999 the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and US mediators have managed to stop Ethiopia and Eritrea returning to war; a war which has cost tens of thousands of lives since May 1998. But tragically, parts of Ethiopia have been struck by a severe drought. At worst, 5 million people will face famine by October/November. At best, it will be an enormous challenge to provide sufficient food aid in time to save lives.

Donors are right to note that the Ethiopian government has chosen to spend money on arms, money which it could have used to fund humanitarian relief work instead. And the war has certainly made it far more difficult to respond to the drought; fighting has occurred in areas which are usually a source of food. Yet 90 per cent of those in danger of famine have not been directly affected by the war. The worst affected areas are northern Wollo and eastern Hararghe, where the early rains failed, and subsequent rains were a month late. This has caused the high-yielding maize and sorghum crops to fail, leaving people to rely on low-yielding crops – which are all that they can grow in the short time afforded by the late rains.

Elsewhere, there are still some 315,000 Ethiopians who have fled their homes in Tigray, and around half a million Eritreans displaced by the war.

The UN Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia says that donors, including the UK, have now *pledged* 95 per cent of the food aid needed to prevent mass death from starvation.

The UN World Food Programme is currently drawing on reserves; and with these, there appears to be enough food for the 5 million people it has assessed as being at

serious risk. All this aid must be delivered straight away to prevent 1999 ending with a terrible toll of avoidable deaths. According to the government of Eritrea, \$7.2 million in aid is needed from the international community.

Donors are right to place conditions on the provision of aid – it must reach the people it is intended to help. But it would be wrong to hold civilians to ransom by placing stringent conditions on humanitarian relief because of the way their government spends its money. Millions of people, none of whom started this futile war, depend on swift international action.

#### **WHAT THE WORLD MUST DO**

- *Deliver* all the necessary food aid to Ethiopia and Eritrea *without delay*
- Keep pressing both governments to implement a peace deal. This *may* include suspending some *development aid* but certainly *not* life-saving emergency relief
- Press both arms suppliers and their governments, including those in Eastern Europe, to stop all shipments to Ethiopia and Eritrea. The EU must make it an absolute rule that arms-supplying governments will receive no future assistance unless they comply

*In Ethiopia, Oxfam is providing food to 86,000 people in northern Wollo and 40,000 in eastern Hararghe. We are also digging boreholes, providing water tanks and latrines, and supplying shelter to around 150,000 people forced from their homes by the fighting. On the Eritrean side, Oxfam is providing clean water for four camps which are the home to 50,000 people.*

### Sierra Leone

The fragile and controversial peace deal of 7 July 1999 may have ended Sierra Leone's 8-year civil war, but for many of its people, survival – both short- and long-term – needs the international community to:

- provide emergency relief for up to 1.5 million people (a third of the population); and
- secure the peace with UN peacekeepers, long-term aid, and support for the demobilisation of fighters from the former warring parties.

Peace will be meaningless unless people can survive the coming months. Although the precise scale of the desperate humanitarian needs is uncertain, it is unquestionably huge. The cause for uncertainty is the lack of access to the 70 per cent of Sierra Leone held by rebels, where UN initial assessments indicated serious malnutrition. Around 2.5 million people live in those areas. Health services are scarce, and reportedly only 20 per cent of pre-war rural water supplies remain intact. Kofi Annan warned on 30 July that, once this area is fully assessed, we will probably need to treble the estimate of 500,000 people in need of emergency relief. At the end of August, only 38 per cent of the UN's \$25 million humanitarian appeal had been funded.

UN peacekeepers are vital to security throughout the country. On 27 August, Nigeria stated that ECOMOG would withdraw all but 1,000 troops by the end of 1999. Two months after the Government and Revolutionary United Front agreed on peace, the UN Security Council has still not agreed on the deployment of peacekeepers. And in any case, there are real concerns that their numbers will be too few and their location (just outside the major towns) will reduce their effectiveness, given that the rebels and militia are based deep in the bush.

The UN Secretary-General also believes that 210 military observers are needed, and yet, so far, only a few have arrived to supplement the 64 observers currently in the country. The UK, the first Security Council member to commit troops to the UN's stand-by arrangements, must press hard to end the diplomatic impasse, and then swiftly deliver on the agreed peacekeeping deal.

Sierra Leone is the poorest country in the world<sup>4</sup>. Its spectacular natural wealth in minerals, mainly diamonds, provided the reason and the resources for much of the war. Sadly, this wealth has benefited very few over decades of inequality and corruption.

The UK has provided \$10 million to the UN programme for disarmament and demobilisation, which is likely to cost between \$33 and \$45 million depending on the numbers of fighters demobilised. The World Bank has given another \$9 million. The UK is also supporting the Sierra Leone government in bringing its army under effective civilian control; this is the first example of the UK's new policy on helping reform the so-called 'security sectors' of countries emerging from conflict. The UK's generosity must be matched by other donors and extended to provide the basic services needed to rebuild a functioning society.

#### **WHAT THE WORLD MUST DO**

- Send UN peacekeepers now to secure the fragile peace
- Send a team of international investigators to gather evidence on war crimes – to present to the Truth Commission – as proposed by UN Human Rights High Commissioner, Mary Robinson
- Swiftly provide humanitarian relief to meet the needs identified by the UN appeal
- Provide the long-term aid needed for stability, including health and education; donors will have to ensure that this aid is properly used

*Oxfam works with 55,000 people in Freetown, as well as Kenema in the east and Bo and Blama in the south of Sierra Leone. Outside the capital, we help to provide water supplies for 38,000 people, have provided seeds to 1,000 families, and are helping to repair wells and supply water tanks, tapstands and latrines to many areas where malnutrition has increased the threat of water-borne disease to dangerous levels.*

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<sup>4</sup> 174th out of 174 in the Human Development Index.

## Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Despite the peace deal signed in Lusaka on 31 August, there is still far to go to achieve real peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). There are still 750,000 people displaced from their homes, many of them without access to humanitarian aid because of the continuing violence. If the people who have endured the brutal war are to survive to see lasting peace, much higher levels of aid will be needed.

If the Lusaka deal is successful, it will see the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the UN working together to oversee the peace. Ninety OAU observers are due to arrive by the end of September, followed by 25,000 UN soldiers by the end of the year to ensure compliance with the deal and to supervise the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the country, to disarm the militia, to protect ordinary citizens, and to ensure access for humanitarian relief. The challenge is for countries committed to peace in Africa to find the extra soldiers who are required, beyond the 800 already offered by South Africa. Then the challenge is to encourage the DRC's splintered political factions to work together in a planned 'national dialogue' to move towards democratic elections. That 50 rebel leaders signed the peace deal is an achievement for South African and other diplomacy. But it is also a sign of how many armed forces (and factions) have to be kept on board the peace process.

Some commentators have expressed regret that accountability for human rights abuses is omitted from the peace deal. The African Association for the Defence of Human Rights has called for a truth commission to be established, at the very least.

Behind the diplomacy, a serious shortage of food is a problem throughout the country. In the eastern area of Kivu, the war has stopped almost all economic activity. And the insecurity caused by increasing inter-ethnic violence has hindered farming. Where people cannot safely reach their fields, no crops are grown. In the capital Kinshasa,

the war has intensified the economic crisis and its terrible social consequences: inflation is rampant and the many poor people in the city can hardly afford to eat<sup>5</sup>.

Nine other African countries have become involved in the war including, for the Government of Laurent Kabila, Sudan, Chad, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, and against him, Uganda and Rwanda. And beyond the DRC, conflicts in Burundi, Uganda and the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) make the whole Great Lakes region a vast area of political instability and humanitarian need. In Burundi the peace process continues with support from neighbouring states. But there are many threats, including increasing violence, worsening economic problems and, from some quarters, determined opposition to peace. Across the region, the UN estimates that 3.9 million people are affected by humanitarian emergencies<sup>6</sup>. And yet the UN's emergency appeals have solicited relatively few funds from donor governments.

#### **WHAT THE WORLD MUST DO**

- Urgently deploy the full 25,000 UN troops needed in the DRC by December
- Swiftly provide sufficient humanitarian relief for DRC and the rest of the Great Lakes region
- Urgently review diplomatic and aid policies to Burundi in an attempt to help keep its peace process on track
- Ensure the complete disarming of all militia groups

*Oxfam works in the east of the country in the extremely insecure environment of south Kivu, where many people have to take refuge in the forest whenever fighting comes too close. We are improving wells and springs against the threat of repeated outbreaks of cholera, and in the town of Goma we are rehabilitating the water supply systems. Across the country, in Kinshasa, Oxfam works in the poorest areas, providing safe water and sanitation in a cramped urban environment where the conditions already exist for another major public health emergency.*

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<sup>5</sup> Inflation is being fed by a steadily depreciating Congolese Franc: it lost one-third of its value in July-August 1999. (UNDP/OCHA )

<sup>6</sup> 19 August 1999

## Conclusion

The many wars and fragile peace accords in Africa today present a real test of the international community's commitment to peace and human rights for all people in all places.

The response to the needs of Kosovo has been remarkable, and has shown the possibilities created when international generosity is coupled with a political determination to bring about lasting peace.

As well as a moral duty to act, the UK, like its allies, can only benefit from increased international peace and stability. The people of Africa are depending on us. We cannot in all conscience fail them.

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## TABLE OF SELECTED STATISTICS

Below is a summary of Oxfam's estimates of key data on Africa's forgotten crises compared to the response to Kosovo:

Country	Numbers at risk	Numbers displaced	Death rates per 1,000 for under 5s (1997)	Humanitarian aid appeals	Amount pledged by donors	Notes
<b>Angola</b>	2,000,000	1,700,000	292 per 1,000 (UK figure is 7 per 1,000)	\$106 million	\$57 million	3,000,000 people live in rebel held areas. These areas are inaccessible. No data exists about their conditions.
<b>Ethiopia</b>	5,000,000	315,000	175 per 1,000	\$28 million	\$26.6 million	
<b>Eritrea</b>	Up to 500,000	Up to 500,000	116 per 1,000	\$7.2 million (Eritrean gov. appeal)	n/a	
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	1,500,000	1,000,000	316 per 1,000	\$25 million	\$9.5 million	Since the peace deal 70 per cent of the country has been open to humanitarian aid. Little is known about the condition of people living in these areas.
<b>D. R. Congo</b>	500,000 to 1,500,000	750,000	207 per 1,000	\$38.8 million	\$4.3 million	Aid agencies have been restricted to major towns. Little is known about conditions in the interior.
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,000,000 approx.</b>	<b>4,265,000</b>		<b>\$205 million</b>	<b>\$97.4 million</b>	
<b>Kosovo</b>	<b>815,500</b> (this figure refers to the number of refugees who fled the country during the crisis)	43,200 (number of Kosovar refugees in the region)	21 per 1,000 (figure for Yugoslavia)	\$690 million	\$471 million	At a recent conference donors pledged \$2 billion for reconstruction of the Balkans region.

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