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*AFJN wishes all members a very merry Christmas! May this holiday season be blessed with gifts of peace and justice for all, especially our brothers and sisters in Africa.*



# A R O U N D Africa

November-December 2005

## “As the World Turns”

Sometimes, the state of current world events seems to resemble a soap opera going from one disastrous situation to another. That is, no doubt, why many people are tempted simply to tune out and give up hope in the role the U.S. government is playing on the world scene. To try to keep people tuned in and supportive, the government often attempts to put a positive spin on things. They would have us believe that many of the world's crises and conflicts have been addressed and resolved. Fortunately, at times that is the case. Progress is made and it needs to be reported. People are hungering for good news and they have a right to receive it, IF IT IS ACCURATE!

The difficulty is that all too frequently government reports are falsely up-beat. They are more a matter of wishful thinking or down right propaganda than a matter of good, hard news. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement for Sudan is a remarkable accomplishment. There is reason for rejoicing that it has even come about and we should rightly congratulate the Sudanese, the Americans and all the others who helped make it happen. But that is not to say that the crisis has passed and the conflicts have been resolved. We cannot let Sudan slip off the “radar screen” and triumphantly declare, “Mission accomplished!” A first important step has been made but there is still a long way to go before all the people of Sudan enjoy peace, justice and general well-being. Sudan must be kept on the radar screen and advocacy groups like AFJN must do what they can to help keep it there.



That is important for Sudan in general, but especially for Darfur, where suffering and death continue unabated, no matter what the claims of the government of Sudan and of some elements in our own US government. After the catastrophe of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, we, with the rest of the international community, said “Never again!” And yet we seem to be allowing the spin doctors, (both in government and in some parts of the media), to take over with the aim of letting Darfur fade into the background and then slip off the screen. Soon, it is thought, nobody will even notice that genocide was and is being carried out in Darfur! We can't and won't let that happen (see the AFJN resolution and the action alert on our website [www.afjn.org](http://www.afjn.org)). Moreover, we can find hope in the words Salva Kiir, First Vice-President of Sudan and President of the Government of Southern Sudan, pronounced recently at a conference in Washington: “The situation in Darfur is currently deteriorating, [if we consider it] in terms of secu-

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# Debt and AIDS Pandemic are Themes at AFJN Conference

By Michael Poffenberger

Targeting the interrelated nature of poverty and AIDS, Bishop Kevin Dowling of the diocese of Rustenberg, South Africa delivered the keynote address of AFJN's 2005 Annual Meeting in Tucson, Arizona, on October 16 and 17. Dowling argued that debt burden, trade imbalance, agricultural subsidies, and lack of sufficient foreign aid have contributed to a deadly climate in Africa that catalyzes the spread of HIV and AIDS. Bishop Dowling's lecture was followed by Marie Clarke-Brill of Africa Action, who addressed the consequences of international debt and developments from the recent G8 activity for debt relief. Below are summaries of their comments.

## **Bishop Dowling on the Connection of HIV/AIDS in Africa and Economic Justice**

The consequences of the AIDS pandemic in Africa are staggering. There are about 6.8 million people in South Africa who are HIV positive. Every year, 200,000 people in South Africa die from AIDS, and 400,000 are infected with HIV. Women and girls are the most vulnerable populations; many are forced into prostitution to survive. The disease has created over one million orphans in South Africa, expected to double by 2010, and exponentially more throughout the continent. In neighbors Swaziland and Botswana, 39% of the population carries the virus, the highest rate in the world.

The spread of the disease is made worse by interrelated international injustices. To develop the human capacity to combat HIV/AIDS, the international community must address four priority challenges, namely debt burden, trade imbalance, agricultural subsidies, and foreign assistance.

The recent activity regarding debt cancellation, while hailed by many as prophetic developments instigated by rich nations, represents only a fraction of the needed response. Only 18 total countries received debt cancellation,

14 of which were in Africa. Debt burden in Africa remains at over \$200 billion, and money used to pay these debts should be spent instead on developing health and educational infrastructure to deal with challenges such as the AIDS crisis.

Second, rules for global trade are tilted in favor of rich nations. Each country is treated as an "equal" in the rules of free trade, and yet different countries enter the trade playing field with varying degrees of development and capacity. Consequently, the benefits of global trade go largely to wealthier nations.

Moreover, Africa is most capable of producing agricultural goods. Yet even these commodities are prevented from access to Western markets due to agricultural subsidies. Western national governments pay their farmers such subsidies to keep them afloat and prevent competition from developing nations. The average farmer in the European Union, for instance, receives \$US 16,028 annually from their government. How can poor African farmers, many struggling on less than a dollar a day, compete with this?

Finally, the world's developed nations have agreed to give 0.7% of their gross national product (GNP) to foreign aid by the year 2015. This shift in resources would provide vital capacity in Africa and elsewhere to develop infrastructures and economies. Canada has refused to set a timetable, Italy and Germany now say they will give only according to how their economy is performing, and U.S. initiatives such as the Millennium Challenge Account and President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) have been under funded and fall far short of the 0.7% mark.

The global response specific to AIDS, primarily enacted through the United Nations Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, while laudable, needs additional funding. It has succeeded in providing anti-retroviral (ARV) drug therapy to a million people in Africa, who



Bishop Dowling in his home diocese of Rustenberg, South Africa



AIDS has created over one million orphans in South Africa, expected to double by 2010, and exponentially more throughout the continent.

would otherwise be dead. But many more remain without the drugs. Parallel efforts for the United States through PEPFAR have encountered serious problems in administration and funding. AIDS patients receiving ARVs are vulnerable to being cut off if the U.S. Congress slashes the budget or if its passage is behind schedule. PEPFAR is also administered according to the ideological agenda of the Bush Administration, instead of according to proven best practices.

### **Marie Clarke-Brill on Debt Relief**

Recent agreements from the Group of 8 nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the African Development Bank to relieve the debts of eighteen countries, fourteen of which are in Africa, are positive developments. But they are only the beginning of a much longer battle. There should be no letting up in the calls for 100% debt relief for the world's poorest nations.

Most debts were accrued by developing nations during the Cold War, when rich countries gave loans according to ideological agendas, often ignoring the despotic and corrupt nature of regimes receiving the money. As a result,

entire nations of people were saddled with debt payments while their leaders became rich from pocketing loans from wealthy countries. This has led to this form of debt being termed "odious."

More money is spent by African nations every year on servicing debts than is granted to Africa in the form of foreign aid. Having these loans in place, however, allows Western financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF to dictate economic reforms in indebted countries. The touted Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative, slated to help relieve debt for a portion of the poorest countries in Africa, maintains stringent standards for reform that indebted countries must meet before being granted debt relief. Only countries compliant with privatization policies of these institutions, often harmful to the poor, become eligible for relief. The fourteen countries that had their debts written off in September were not in fact those most in need of it, but instead those that had followed the dictates of the World Bank and IMF. Such a structure limits self-determination for developing countries and allows economic policies to be developed without consideration of the needs of the most vulnerable.

Civil society groups such as AFJN must continue their

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calls for 100% debt relief for all of Africa. Debt relief will empower national governments to direct needed resources toward saving lives in the battle against AIDS, toward developing hospitals and schools, and investing in the future of their countries instead of the coffers of rich nations and financial institutions.

*AFJN extends its gratitude to Bishop Dowling and Marie for their willingness to share their knowledge and experiences with conference participants. Thank you also to all who attended, and to the communities who donated to support this important event!*

### **AFJN to Consider Stance on Limited Condom Use**

Bishop Dowling, in the question and answer period, provided insight into his stance in favor of limited condom use in response to the AIDS pandemic. Dowling argued that such use is in line with the Church's culture of life, and is ethically justifiable according to the principle of double effect. AFJN will be considering adoption of his stance at next year's annual meeting.

## **AFJN happenings in brief...**

### **CONFERENCES:**

- Woodrow Wilson Center:  
Pierre Nkurunziza, the new President of Burundi  
Salva Kirr, First Vice President of Sudan, President of Southern Sudan
- Human Rights Watch:  
Human Rights in Darfur: a Personal Witness
- US Institute of Peace:  
Conflict Resolution/Management in the Niger Delta  
Taking Stock of Change in Post-genocide Rwanda
- Search for Common Ground:  
Self-determination/Autonomy in the Western Sahara
- Jubilee USA/Institute of Policy Studies:  
Global Debt Revisited: New approaches.
- Africa-Action:  
Biannual Baraza (2-day conf.): AIDS, Debt, Darfur
- USCMA Mission Congress
- Save Darfur:  
One day Darfur planning session

### **MEETINGS:**

- Preparing for the Ecumenical Advocacy Days-Africa Track
- Preparing for the Advocacy Network for Africa meeting with the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs
- Catholic Task Force on Africa
- Advocacy Network for Africa
- US-SACU Working Group
- InterAction working group on northern Uganda

### **SPECIAL EVENTS:**

- Annual Conference of AFJN, Tuscon, AZ
- Gulu Walk, Washington, DC and elsewhere
- Presentation to students at George Mason University on northern Uganda
- Catholic Relief Services reception with Catholic bishops from Africa

## **Darfur Peace and Accountability Act Passes Senate, Awaits Action in House**

The Darfur Peace and Accountability Act (S.1462 & H.R. 3127), while only a piece of a much larger puzzle, nonetheless is a substantive step for the U.S. Congress to take in helping to end the ongoing genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan. The bill will contribute to expanding and strengthening the African Union mission to better protect civilians, to imposing focused sanctions on individuals responsible for atrocities in Darfur, and to supporting peace negotiations to resolve the conflict. The bill passed the Senate on Friday, November 18th, and now awaits markup in the House Committee on International Relations. **Phone calls to your elected representatives in the House are urgently needed** to ensure that "Never Again!" takes on genuine meaning today.

# Now is Time for UN to Engage Ugandan War

Peter J. Quaranto and Michael Poffenberger

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), with its recent crossing into the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and its continued activities in southern Sudan, now operates in three countries. LRA rebels have killed game rangers in DRC, attacked aid convoys and returning refugees in southern Sudan, and continue to cause emergency mortality rates and the displacement of more than 1.5 million people in Uganda. This conflict, Africa's longest-running, disrupts prospects for peace and security throughout the region. Attempts to protect civilians, negotiate peace, and defeat the LRA militarily have failed for nearly two decades. The severity of the crisis and its transnational nature call for urgent action from the United Nations Security Council.

It would open the door to the possibilities of increasing pressure on the Governments of Sudan and Uganda to engage the crisis responsibly, of facilitating a political resolution, and of encouraging an eventual UN intervention. UN leadership has, however, demonstrated little understanding of these dynamics. During the recent Security Council visit to Uganda, delegation leader and French Ambassador Jean-Marc de la Sabliere, said that "strong progress has been made" in northern Uganda. This justification of inaction is appalling when seen in light of recent killings of aid workers and the reported 1,000 war-related deaths that take place every week.

Reluctance on the part of the UN to address the LRA crisis has been largely due to resistance from the government of Uganda, which has consistently decried efforts to raise the visibility of the situation. President Museveni has depicted the war as an internal problem that should be solved domestically, even going so far as to blame the conflict on donor countries for their limitations on his military spending. When the Ugandan Parliament voted last year to declare northern Uganda a crisis zone, Museveni overruled them. The government of Uganda has demonstrated that it lacks the will or capacity to protect its civilians. It should invite the international community to participate more fully in addressing the crisis.

Placing this emergency on the Security Council agenda—the first time such action would be taken—would expedite the search for solutions.

Security Council action in Uganda can take a number of forms. The Council should condemn the violence of the LRA and call for an immediate cessation of hostilities. If the government of Uganda continues to fail its responsibility to protect civilians, a UN force should be authorized to supplement the Ugandan military. To expedite a political resolution to the conflict, a senior envoy, able to coordinate between the governments of Sudan, Uganda, and DRC, should be appointed along with a secretariat to assist Chief Peace Mediator Betty Bigombe. The UN should further create a commission to coordinate efforts to reintegrate ex-combatants and to reconcile them with their home communities, thus providing incentives for combatants to stop fighting.

With the issuing of the International Criminal Court indictments, the UN can play a critical role in increasing pressure on Sudan and DRC to work with the government of Uganda to disarm and arrest LRA commanders. The UN can authorize its armed missions in Sudan and DRC to expand their mandates to this end.

Finally, the UN should raise the visibility of the humanitarian crisis in Uganda, working with various involved agencies to strengthen humanitarian relief efforts. The UN can work with the government of Uganda to ensure that the national Internally Displaced Person Policy is implemented to improve conditions in the camps. Through the Security Council, the UN can call upon member states to increase contributions for the critical needs of northern Uganda.

There is significant potential for international action to begin to meet the needs of more than two million people suffering in war-torn northern Uganda, southern Sudan and northeastern DRC. Yet, such action will only come when international bodies prioritize their collective responsibility to protect innocent life. Such a responsibility is called for not just by words in legal documents in New York, but also by the cries of suffering people awaiting hope and liberation from their struggle.

# GuluWalk Event Generates Hope for Change in LRA Crisis

by Michael Poffenberger

The two-decade old war in northern Uganda and southern Sudan, fought by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) against the Government of Uganda, has been marked by devastating neglect from the international community. Africa's longest running conflict, the situation now causes an estimated 1000 war-related deaths every week, and at least 30,000 children have been abducted by the LRA and forced to fight.



On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, AFJN was central in coordinating a global response to this forgotten crisis. In partnership with several other organizations, AFJN launched global GuluWalk day, when over 15,000 people in 42 cities on five continents emulated the actions of northern Uganda's night commuter children, who walk every night from their homes to town centers where they sleep on streets and in tents to avoid abduction. Through its Uganda-



CAN campaign, AFJN organized seven of the walks.

In Washington, DC, participants walked more than four miles from the Embassy of Uganda to Lafayette Park, across from the White House, where a vigil featured Chief Peace Mediator Betty Bigombe, as well as the Ambassador of Uganda, a former child soldier, and AFJN staff. The event was covered by BBC World TV News. The campaign now hopes to translate this participation into direct advocacy by coordinating letter-writing and call-in days to see that northern Uganda becomes a priority issue for U.S. and U.N. policymakers.

For staff, some of whom spent the night in the rain outside in the park and walked back in the morning as the children do, the event was humbling. The tired walking was much less than what is demanded of children in Uganda every day, who walk further, with no shoes or food, fleeing from terror and awaiting our response.



PHOTOS on these two pages were taken from GuluWalk events around the world. On page 7, photos are from GuluWalk in Gulu, Uganda. On this page: clockwise from top, photos are from Washington, DC; South Bend, Indiana; Grand Rapids, Michigan; and Seattle, Washington.





## GuluWalk in Gulu: An On-Site Report

*The following is an excerpt from reflections of Sr. Fernanda Pellizer, a Comboni missionary in Uganda, on GuluWalk in Gulu, Uganda, where the night commuting of children escaping from war first began. Whereas GuluWalks around the world were solemn occasions, in Gulu town itself, the children took the chance to celebrate their moment of recognition –*

“...the crowd gathered at a park just outside the city. The children, boys and girls, were the participants. With songs, poems, skits, and dances they narrated their woeful, painful, fearful and yet hopeful stories. One group voiced in song some challenging questions.

‘Have you ever known the hunger pangs? Have you ever spent a night in the rain, on cold or wet stone without a blanket? Did you ever try to squeeze some inches in an overcrowded place, or try to sleep standing because of the mud on the ground? Have you ever spent the night shuddering with bouts of malaria with no medicine available, not knowing where to go for help, thinking that maybe

you would not see the next day?’

No one listening to them could hide tears of anguish and compassion... For one day, people in Gulu were a family. Emotions ran high as participants heard stories, shared pains, prayed and dreamed together that peace will come, that the situation will change, that justice will be flowing in this tortured land of the Acholi, that the land may know a future of joy where all can live and be loved as God’s children.



But there were also more than dreams. Then and there, participants decided to ACT, to WALK, to TELL OTHERS, to LET THE WORLD KNOW about this, to ask for the SOLIDARITY of the human family so

that these dreams may become true.

Toward evening everyone went home. The ‘night commuters’ went to their safe shelters for another night under the sky. And you, reading this story, what are you going to do?”

**Africa Faith and Justice Network** is a Catholic network of individual and group members focused on Africa and the experience of its people. AFJN is committed in faith to collaborate in the task of transforming United States mentality and policy on Africa. It seeks to be an instrument of education and advocacy on behalf of justice for Africa.

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*AFJN is grateful to the Catholic University of America for hosting its web site and List-Servs*

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...On the initiative of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, a national committee [has been set up] to develop a common position of the Government of National Unity and to [create favorable conditions for] negotiations with the Darfur rebels." Clearly Vice-President Kiir has not forgotten and is not ignoring the on-going tragedy in Darfur, and neither should the international community.

What makes the world situation more alarming is that Darfur and the whole of Sudan are but one example of disasters, which are allowed to fade into the background and eventually slip off the screen. There is also the plight of the child soldiers and the local population of northern Uganda (see article on p. 6 of this newsletter). And what about the Democratic Republic of Congo? Once the sensation of widespread, violent conflict is reported, we quickly get used to it and soon we think no more about it. Time, governments and the media manage to gloss over things and turn our attention elsewhere.

Flitting from one catastrophe to another may be the accepted way of producing a successful soap opera, but it is certainly not an acceptable way to deal with the lives of real people and real nations. The real world cannot be allowed to turn from one "hot spot" to another, as if it were a pass time for spectators. Those disastrous humanitarian crises call for reflection, concern, commitment and action. Governments will get involved only if we get involved and show that such crises are important to us, because they touch the lives of our sisters and brothers in Africa. Our faith tells us that we are all one and these world events help us see the truth of that belief. Indeed, we know that we must all turn together, if the world is to turn as it is meant to turn. That is no soap opera ending. That is simply the way it is!

Bill Dyer  
AFJN Executive Director



**Advocacy** for justice and peace in Africa doesn't just happen; it has to be **done!**  
**AFJN** can continue to **do it** only with your continued financial support.

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