

Sept.-Oct. 2006

AFJN Conference to Explore Future for African Children

By Phil Reed

“But Jesus called the children to him and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’” Luke 18:16

In this Gospel passage, followers of Jesus were brought to a new awareness about the importance of children and their connection to Him. Jesus desired to be with the children and all who resembled them because he felt at home. He recognized in them the presence of the reign of God.

Africa’s children must be precious in His sight, challenged as many of them are by poverty, HIV/AIDS and war. That is why AFJN has prepared an outstanding conference this year with the theme, “Africa’s Children: Peril and Promise.” On October 3 and 4, members of AFJN will gather in South Bend, Indiana to pray, to listen, to reflect and to commit once again to transform American mentality and policy on African issues.

We are being welcomed by the University of Notre Dame, which is supporting our conference through its various Institutes and educational departments. Members can still register for the conference through the website set up by Notre Dame and accessed through www.afjn.org.



Children in traditional dance costumes prepare for a performance in war-torn northern Uganda.

What can members expect? The days will be divided into times of prayer, workshops, discussions, Africa-themed receptions and meals and a keynote speech by the 2006 recipient of the Faith and Justice Award, Archbishop John Baptist Odama of Gulu, Uganda.

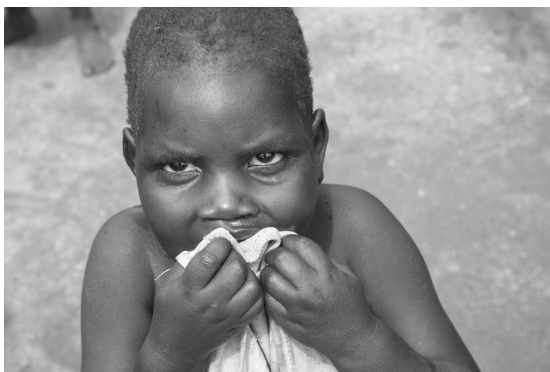
We all know that Sub-Saharan Africa is home to the world’s youngest population, with nearly half of those who live there 16 or younger. It is also the most dangerous region in the world, due in large part to widespread poverty, HIV/AIDS and war. Our confer-

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ence will focus on these three factors and the dire circumstances they impose on sub-Saharan Africa's young people. More than forty percent of the sub-Saharan African population lives on less than one dollar a day (UNDP). There is more child labor than in any other region of the world (UNICEF), and parents who cannot afford school fees or food often send their children away from home, believing they may have a better chance of surviving on their own. As a consequence, the number of homeless children in African cities has been growing exponentially. Estimates indicate that there are between 15,000 and 25,000 "street children" in Nairobi alone.



Children in situations of displacement, like this young girl in a camp in northern Uganda, face extreme challenges.

AIDS continues to rob children in sub-Saharan Africa of their parents and all too often leaves the children themselves with HIV. Every day, approximately 6,300 people in the region die of AIDS and, of the 15 million children in the world orphaned by the disease, 12.3 million live in sub-Saharan Africa [Source: UNAIDS].

African children also continue to be victimized by war. In

the absence of parents, they are easily recruited or abducted to fight and/or serve as sex slaves in places like eastern Congo, northern Uganda, and Sudan.

Unless something is done soon, sub-Saharan Africa faces a future of deeper poverty, more disease and more deadly conflict, plights that will prevent its children from realizing their God-given potential. The situation, which many think cannot get much worse, will in fact deteriorate if people of faith and good will in the world's wealthiest countries do not wrap their minds and hearts around these problems.

The upcoming annual conference will be invaluable in helping us to educate ourselves and begin to take effective action. The conference will explore possible solutions that non-governmental agencies can pursue together, including poverty alleviation, disease eradication, and access to education. With the help of Rev. Donald Dunson, Sr. Connie Gemme, Vicki Simon, Prof. Todd Whitmore, Dr. Daniel Towle and our own Rev. Bob Dowd and Michael Poffenberger we should be well-versed in the peril and better prepared for the promises that face the children of Africa.

New Perspectives on Delivery of Food Aid Needed to Decrease Hunger in Africa

By Beth Tuckey

The food crisis in Niger has persisted for nearly two years, causing malnutrition and death in certain affected areas of the country. Inadequate rainfall and swarms of locusts instigated the emergency in 2004, prompting tremendous crop devastation and high grain prices in certain parts of Niger. Aid agencies arrived far too late and with too few supplies to stop the crisis. The result has been a two-year hunger catastrophe that is only now seeing improvement. On a continent blessed with abundant land and natural resources, why do many countries in Africa continue to experience food insecurity?

Despite the decades-long interest in food security, hunger emergencies in Africa are occurring three times more often today than in the 1980's. A staggering 852 million people across the world live in chronic hunger due to extreme poverty and an additional 2 billion are plagued by intermittent food insecurity.

Yet, there have been drastic improvements in food delivery models since Western powers began the battle against world hunger in the 1950's. So why have things not changed? Why are people in Niger forced to suffer? Unfortunately, entangled in the dialogue about food aid are an array of definitions for and approaches to tackling food insecurity. There is no simple solution, but there is an incentive in the recognition that for the past fifty years humanity has failed in its efforts to relieve the hunger burden of impoverished people worldwide. The international community and local actors can do better – they can deliver food aid with sufficient forethought, with efficiency, and without corruption or ulterior motives. Efforts are improving and aid agencies are beginning to focus on the root causes of hunger as well as the link between chronic and periodic food insecurity.

The classic method of food delivery in emergency situations has tended to undermine local economies, encourage

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Senate Urges US Leadership in Uganda Peace Process as Ceasefire Takes Hold

By Michael Poffenberger

In a historic breakthrough one week ago, the government of Uganda and rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) delegations at peace talks in Juba, South Sudan agreed to a cessation of hostilities. The terms of the truce include the LRA rebels assembling at two points in southern Sudan, where they will be monitored by the Sudan People's Liberation Army. The rebels have three weeks to travel to the assembly points. Early reports show that the rebels are largely complying and many are already on the move to these camps. As LRA rebels assemble, delegates continue to negotiate the terms of a final peace agreement that could end the twenty year war in northern Uganda. Yet the U.S. government continues to resist declaring support for the negotiations.

Since the signing of this temporary truce, hopes of peace in northern Uganda have been raised to a new high. The Government of Uganda, preparing for peace, has set aside \$340 million as part of a plan for resettlement of displaced peoples and reconstruction of the region. The security situation in northern Uganda continues to improve, thanks to the peace talks and now the cessation of hostilities.

Yet, as the third round of negotiations are set to resume, the LRA delegation has made a strong statement that they will only sign a final comprehensive peace agreement if

the International Criminal Court (ICC) withdraws its indictments against the top rebel commanders. This will prove difficult as the ICC has thus far refused. The Ugandan government has planned on using a comprehensive agreement to convince the Court to withdraw its arrest warrants. Now more than ever, the international community, especially the United States government, can play a key role in endorsing the peace process and giving confidence to the parties.

In the past month, AFJN has been lobbying Congress and the State Department to lend needed legitimacy and support to the negotiations process. AFJN staff authored a letter that was eventually signed by a number of U.S. Senators and submitted to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, calling for endorsement of the negotiation process and funding for post-conflict reconstruction if a pact is reached. Join AFJN in calling for these needed initiatives from our government!

Take Action Today!

Visit AFJN's website (www.afjn.org), click on the Uganda campaign link, and send a letter to your members of Congress urging support for this important initiative! And then join AFJN at the Uganda-related events listed below.

Action Calendar

- **Save Darfur Rally at the U.N., September 17th**

Join the Save Darfur Coalition in New York City to call for U.N. peacekeeping troops to be deployed in Sudan's Darfur region, where a genocide has been taking place against the region's marginalized Black population for the last three years. Watch www.savedarfur.org for details.

- **AFJN Annual Conference, October 3-4th**

Join other AFJN members in gathering at the University of Notre Dame for this year's annual conference, themed "*Africa's Children: Peril and Promise.*" Conference participants will hear an address from Archbishop John Baptist Odama of northern Uganda about the challenges facing children in war situations and from other distinguished speakers. See enclosed brochure or AFJN website (www.afjn.org) for details.

- **Northern Uganda Lobby Days, October 9th-10th**

AFJN is taking the lead in sponsoring northern Uganda-focused lobby days from October 9-10 in Washington, DC. Participants will be coming from across the U.S. for a symposium and lobby to learn about and advocate for peace in Uganda, where a twenty-year war has been waged on children. Watch the website for details.

- **Global GuluWalk, October 21st**

This year's second annual GuluWalk will take place in over 100 cities to raise the profile of the crisis in northern Uganda. Visit www.GuluWalk.com for details on how you can participate in your own city!

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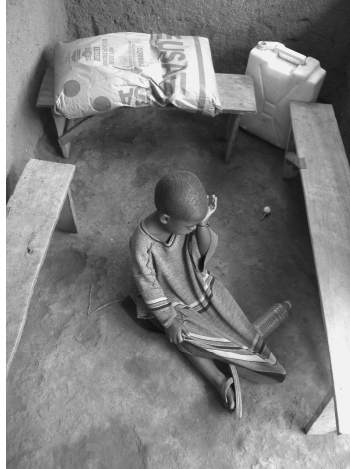
expectations of free food and handouts, and even exacerbate conflicts. During the civil unrest of the 1980's and 90's in Somalia, refugees saw food aid as a reason to remain in the camps, realizing their families would be better fed by the World Food Programme (WFP) than by their own farming labors. Additional problems arose when what began as charity quickly evolved into business as donor organizations intentionally overestimated refugee numbers to boost their success rates. The resulting surplus food was sold by rebels on the Somali black market to purchase weaponry that fueled further instability.

Not only have aid organizations faltered in providing emergency aid, but little attention has been paid to the nature of chronic food insecurity or the vital role that Africans have to play in identifying where altruism might be most effective. The old adage of teaching a man to fish was not typically put into practice, and if it was, it was done in ways that were often counterproductive for Africans. Frequently, food was thrown at the situation without attention to the long-term causes of hunger. The fact that HIV/AIDS affects the most productive sector of society, that inadequate infrastructure inhibits the transfer of goods, and that climate change is causing crop destruction are all important to recognize when looking at food insecurity.

It is widely accepted that emergency food aid is necessary and beneficial in crisis situations. More than half of all food crises are believed to be caused by conflicts where people are displaced from their territory and forced to live on marginal lands or in camps dependent on humanitarian aid. WFP assistance in the Darfur region of Sudan has been essential in recent years, providing sustenance to the people displaced by the genocidal violence. However, due

to budget cuts and increasing danger for aid workers, more people in Darfur will go hungry this year.

It might therefore be best to tackle conflict food insecurity from a more holistic approach, by promoting long-term peace. When individuals are able to live without fear of violence, they will generate the food and capital to begin pulling their communities out of poverty. Advocating for peace in the most war-torn regions of Africa may be one of the most crucial steps toward eradicating hunger in Africa.



Food aid from the United States and other countries assist refugees, such as this child, who fled violence in eastern Congo.

Natural disasters, climate change, and weather problems are also causing the need for emergency food aid. Unfortunately, as in the case of Niger, the international humanitarian response is often insufficient and calls for help are frequently cast aside. Famine scales and other terms of delivery tend to inhibit immediate food aid dispersal. Thus, though emergency food aid is essential in many situations, ineffective response systems should be reformed to improve future aid delivery.

Additionally, food aid should more often be bought from the region where it is needed. Traditional food transfers encouraged the United States to accumulate all of its surplus grain and “dump” it on countries suffering from draught or famine. These practices are slow, expensive, and detrimental to local economies. Shifting funds toward purchasing regional goods enhances local agriculture, a key target for improved foreign assistance.

It seems clear that the causes and results of food insecurity are intertwined with other issues plaguing sub-Saharan Africa and that working on each piece as part of the whole may be our best solution for both chronic and emergency food aid. In light of the history of food aid, it would behoove the international community to take these things into consideration as new policies are formed. Additionally, as concerned citizens and people of faith, these are things we can advocate for by electing responsible members of Congress, buying fair trade goods, and donating money to conscientious organizations working toward such causes. There is an end to global food insecurity. It is only a matter of establishing an effective and holistic approach that encompasses the greater problem of destitution in the developing world.

Legislative Watch

- **The Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act (S.2125)** passed the Senate unanimously on June 29th! There is currently no companion bill in the House, so please call your Representatives in the House and request that they introduce and pass the bill as soon as possible.

Though Congolese Elections Successful, Concerns Remain

By Phil Reed

For the first time in their history, on June 30 the Congolese people were invited to elect a President. After four decades of dictatorships and conflict, eighty percent of the twenty-five million voters turned out to vote. In the Kivu districts of eastern Congo, turnout was over ninety percent. Clearly, a serious hunger for democracy was generated during the forty plus years of so-called independence.

Eager Congolese voters were presented with 32 candidates for President, even though each candidate was required to pay the government \$50,000 for their bid. The ballot itself was a very unwieldy document; in order to take into account the number of illiterate voters, each ballot contained the name and picture of each candidate as well as the name and the symbol of the party of the candidate. Each Presidential candidate shared the legislative ballots with local candidates as well. One election monitor in Kinshasa, the capital city, reported that a ballot he saw was six pages long, of which each page was two feet wide and forty inches long in order to contain the information on the 850 candidates running for one position. From many standpoints, successfully running these elections was truly a challenge.

Even before election day, there was suspicion and mistrust. Donor countries and the U.N. played a significant role in trying to bring about the elections but some Congolese expressed fear that the international community had implicitly chosen their preferred candidate in the incumbent President. At one point, Catholic Church officials called for a boycott of the election, only to pull back from that position a few days hence. The Independent Electoral Commission was also beset with logistical nightmares and mistakes that made it suspect as well.

After the long ballot count, two presidential candidates were left standing, the incumbent President, Joseph Kabila, and one of his four vice-Presidents, Jean-Pierre Bemba. The President won heavily in the eastern part of the country. Mr. Bemba earned most of his votes in the west. They will run off against each other on October 29.

That there were problems with these elections is beyond dispute. Some organizations, such as the Friends of the Congo, insist that even the rules for the elections were problematic. In a country estimated to be worth 24 trillion dollars in mineral wealth, they argue, the \$50,000 required of each candidate favored those belligerents who have

been plundering the country. Further, several of the candidates were responsible for much of the pillaging and massacres that have occurred in the country over the last 15 years. Many Congolese felt that these alleged war criminals were imposed on them as vice presidents by the international community. One of them, Bemba, enjoyed large support in spite of his inglorious past and the human rights charges leveled against him because he was seen by some voters as, at the least, an alternative to the candidate being forced upon them.

Karen Stauss of the Carter Center argues that there were also many positive aspects to the elections, which she observed in the Kivus. Besides the extremely high turnout, the election was run in a transparent manner in which observers were welcomed and their questions answered. In the east, which has experienced significant violence over the past decade, the elections were remarkably non-violent. There was, as well, an intense level of international support, both logistical and political.

“...the elections were run in a transparent manner, in which observers were welcomed and their questions answered.”

Making it past the first round of elections was important. If one of the candidates had won an outright majority in the first round, as none did, massive unrest could have ensued. Serge Senga, of the organization Dignity, says that the Congolese have learned their lessons from the first round of elections. They realize that they are at last back in control of their future. Their leaders were obliged to court them and to actually campaign to be elected. Democracy is on the roll and is now unstoppable.

What could stop things, however, is a withdrawal of the international political and military pressure. The losers in these elections need to be helped to accept the results and be discouraged from again taking up arms. That will require some military and political pressure on all parties.

Immediate efforts towards unification and training of a national army in the place of the various regional militias will also benefit the ongoing march towards democracy. The justice system as well needs to be shored up so that the rule of law will be the norm and war criminals can be judged rather than be candidates.

The long-suffering Congolese people have demonstrated their belief in democracy as an alternative to the last forty years of misrule. The whole world waits with them to see if their new leaders will be up to the task.

African Religious Leaders Visit Washington, Discuss Interfaith Relations

By Phil Reed

From His Holiness Abune Paulos, the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, to Sheikh Al-Hajj Yussuf Murigu of Kenya to Archbishop Anthony Obinna of Oweri Archdiocese in Nigeria, more than forty African religious leaders descended upon Washington for a one week summit in mid-July. Invited by Church World Service and the All Africa Conference of Churches, the leaders came to meet with their American counterparts. Unfortunately, the American religious leaders' response was feeble and certainly not worthy of the caliber of delegates who came from Africa, but other Americans were present (such as AFJN) to witness and to share in this unique occasion.

Protestant, Orthodox, Hindu, Baha'i, Catholic and Muslim clergy and lay people spent time visiting the American capital, briefing members of Congress and then reflecting together on issues such as water, displaced people, and peace and reconciliation. It was a truly amazing exercise in interfaith dialogue as the visitors lived, worked and prayed together in a downtown Washington hotel. Each session and meal was begun with a prayer from a different faith tradition. Throughout the week speakers from Africa and from the United States inspired, prodded, instructed and provoked the crowd.

The West African interfaith delegation from Guinea, Si-

erra Leone, Liberia and Ghana had already worked together on the various conflicts in their region. There was great joy as they met again under other skies and with some satisfaction at the results of their past collaboration: peace in Sierra Leone and in Liberia. Faith leaders from Uganda sat down together to discuss the continuing problem in the north and, with AFJN and other church advocacy groups, drafted an interfaith leaders' letter to President Bush.

What the West Africans were able to accomplish on a regional level, with the support of Church World Service, was an inspiration to inter-religious council members from other regions of Africa. Stories were shared of successful collaboration between leaders and the faithful in helping to diffuse tensions, for example in Nairobi after a mosque and a church were burned. The leaders, by their presence and their attentive listening, showed that religion can be a force for unity and peace instead of a catalyst of division and suspicion.

All who were gathered for the week desired to continue the dialogue on the continent. Some were not sure that the same sentiments that were expressed in Washington would be repeated once back in Africa. There was, however, an overwhelming feeling of hope and that a sign of the Kingdom had indeed been amongst us for those few days.

Darfur Continues Downward Spiral; AFJN Joins Demonstrations

Since the May signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement, security has continued to deteriorate for the more than two million people displaced by the ongoing genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan. This month, the government utilized Janjaweed militias, Antonov bombing campaigns, government soldiers, and allied rebel groups to launch fresh attacks against villages in the region.

Accomplishing effective protection for civilians does not seem likely this year. Struggling African Union (AU) forces have called for UN reinforcement, but the Government of Sudan is refusing. On August 31, the U.N Security Council adopted Resolution 1706, authorizing U.N. takeover of the African Union's peacekeeping mission in Darfur. The resolution gives the United Nations Mission in Sudan authority to use all necessary means to support the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement and ceasefire. According to the UN resolution, the 7,000 AU troops currently in Darfur should be replaced with 17,300 UN personnel and 3,300 civilian police. But resistance from the Sudanese government and weak diplomatic engage-

ment from the international community are preventing the transition from occurring.

On the day of the resolution's adoption, Sudan's president, Omar al-Bashir, rejected the UN's peacekeeping offer calling it "part of a comprehensive conspiracy for confiscating the country's sovereignty." The government remains adamantly opposed to any UN takeover.

The UN adoption and subsequent Sudanese refusal comes at a time of rising international concern over the Darfur crisis. Earlier this month, the International Rescue Committee reported an increase in violent attacks and sexual assaults throughout Darfur, recording over 200 rapes during a five week duration in one refugee camp alone.

AFJN will join activists at the White House at noon on September 9th, and at the UN on September 17th from 2-5pm, to demand that the international community backs up its words with action to protect the people of Darfur. *See www.afjn.org for more info on these events!*

AFJN Happenings in Brief...

Sign-on Letters:

- Religious leaders letter to President Bush calling for US support of northern Uganda peace process
- Organizational letter to Defense Committee members regarding Darfur amendment requiring regular reports to Congress on Darfur Peace Agreement
- To Secretary Rice regarding the crisis in Somalia
- Organizational letter to Secretary Rice regarding US support of northern Uganda peace process

Advocacy Meetings:

- With Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Donald Yamamoto, and Uganda Desk Officer Barbara Yoder regarding peace process in northern Uganda
- With Senator Feingold’s office regarding legislation on northern Uganda
- ADNA & Catholic Task Force on Africa
- Faith-Based working group on Health Care Worker Initiative for AIDS Impacted Countries

Rallies/Demonstrations

- With Africa Action at the White House to call for deployment of UN peacekeepers in Sudan

Congressional and State Department Briefings:

- Africa Summit briefing on trade with religious leaders from Africa

Media Appearances

- Voice of America interviews regarding northern Uganda peace process and D.R. Congo elections
- Foreign Policy in Focus and SudanTribune opinion/editorials regarding peace process in northern Uganda
- Uganda’s Daily Monitor regarding Senate letter authored by AFJN staff

Conference Exhibits

- African National Eucharistic Congress
- Pax Christi USA Annual Conference
- Leadership Conference of Women’s Religious
- Ugandan North American Association

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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Advocacy for justice and peace in Africa doesn’t just happen. AFJN needs your help and participation! Thank you for your financial support.

Last Chance!

Register today for the
AFJN Annual Conference
October 3rd and 4th
University of Notre Dame
“Africa’s Children: Peril and Promise”

- *Hear from preeminent experts such as renowned peacemaker Archbishop John Baptist Odama of Gulu, Uganda on the challenges facing today’s youth across Africa*
- *Have a chance to pray and reflect on how to be effective in transforming American mentality and policy toward Africa*
- *Share in fellowship with other AFJN members*



Sign up today at www.afjn.org!