

Africa's refugees: a moral test for the industrialized world

by Michael Gelber

Untold millions of people are now refugees in Africa, crisscrossing the continent in desperate search of food for their families, and to escape the wars that are raging in several countries. Even the United Nations officials in charge of keeping tabs on them and getting them a few scraps of bread now and then, do not have any idea of how many of them there are. The industrialized nations of the West, in particular the "flea market" Establishment of the United States, have written them off, with U.S. support for the U.N.'s refugee program now at an all-time low.

This genocidal treatment of Africa, the world's most *underpopulated* continent, is no accident. For especially the past 10 years, the malthusian lobby has deliberately brought Africa to levels of chaos and dehumanization that can only be compared to the Black Death of the 14th century.

In an interview published in *EIR* on April 14, 1981, Gen. Maxwell Taylor (ret.), the Vietnam-era chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a member of the board of directors of the malthusian Draper Fund, unabashedly stated the perspective that was already operational on the continent: "My report is already quite selective about what can be saved. I have already written off more than a billion people. These people are in places in Africa, Asia, Latin America. We can't save them. The population crisis and the food supply question dictated that we should not even try. It is a waste of time. The Soviets are not about to save them, either.

"There will be horrible consequences for our failure to heed the warnings of General Draper and others. These people will suffer from continuous cycles of natural disaster, famine, hunger, floods, drought. Upwards of 500 million people will try to escape, become refugees, flee across borders. Most of them will never make it. Some old fools and young ones may talk of trying to mount a noble effort to help these people, and I am sure we will try to do the humanitarian thing. But they can't be saved, and we must be selective."

Who is 'really' a refugee?

There is no accurate assessment of how many refugees exist in Africa. In fact, to be a refugee, according to the definition of the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), you must have crossed a border from one nation to another, and you must be fleeing some form of persecution: religious, ethnic, or political, but *not* economic conditions. For example, 6,000 Ugandans who recently crossed into

Kenya looking for a means to eke out survival were ordered to be repatriated by the UNHCR.

By this logic, before German unification, the thousands of East Germans holed up in embassies all over Europe, would have had no right to seek refuge in West Germany. Perhaps the most notorious example of this policy in application has been the refusal to recognize the tens of thousands of Vietnamese "boat people" as anything but economic immigrants, thus denying them either the possibility to be assimilated permanently into the nation of arrival, or the right of relocation to a third country, e.g., the United States. The U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 enshrined this racist policy by establishing that flight from a communist country no longer provided automatic entitlement for refugee status.

Taking into account this limited definition, the UNHCR, the institution with the internationally accepted mandate to cope with the worldwide refugee tragedy, calculates that approximately 5 million refugees exist in Africa, and 15 million worldwide. However, this calculation reflects only those who live in camps under the auspices of the UNHCR. It must be understood that this figure changes seasonally and even daily, as refugees continuously migrate. Thus, an April 1981 U.S. State Department brief, entitled "Gist," reports: "Since October 1979, refugees from the fighting in Ethiopia have been arriving in Somalia at an average of more than 1,000 a day. As of February 1981, the Somali government estimated the refugee population in more than 35 camps at over 1.3 million, the overwhelming majority of them women and children. Another 500,000 refugees are believed to reside outside the camps." There exists no accurate evaluation of how many people live outside these camps, and they are not included in the UNHCR figures until they have been officially counted, if ever.

The most recent "Gist" analysis available, from August 1989, reports: "Beginning in June 1988, conflict in northern Somalia between the Somali government and the Somali National Movement forced as many as 400,000 civilians to flee into Ethiopia and still others into Djibouti." And the Sudanese government reports that today Ethiopian refugees are arriving in their country on a daily basis, totaling 1.5 million.

Also not included in the category of "true refugee" are those people forced to move from their homes, resettling in another part of their nation of origin but without means to

live. In the case of Ethiopia, over the past 20 years, unknown millions have become displaced. For Sudan, 4-5 million people have been driven from their homes and are living at the mercy of what are called, in relief agency terminology, private philanthropic organizations (PVOs). The Vatican estimates that there are 13 million such displaced persons in Africa.

Slashing the budgets

"The struggle is in our history and in our hearts. We can no longer allow petty selfishness and fear to confine the immensity of our compassion. We are at our best when we no longer endure injustice, when we take the moral high road, when we see the world as one family—then, we move ahead together and we prosper." So said Rep. Mickey Leland (D-Tex.), who died in a plane crash last year on the scene in Ethiopia, investigating the needs of Sudanese refugees.

Unfortunately, his attitude does not reflect the thinking governing the nations of the world in solving the refugee crisis in Africa.

In the July-August 1988 issue of *Africa Report*, President-elect George Bush stated what purported to be his policy toward Africa:

"Perhaps most of all, Africa is important to us in human terms. Africa is now suffering from a severe economic crisis. It is the moral duty of the world's wealthier nations to help Africa overcome the crisis. Our concern is all the more compelling because a significant percentage of Americans trace their cultural heritage to Africa. . . .

"The callous manipulation of human suffering by the Marxist regime of Ethiopia is an example of the bankruptcy of the Soviet model in Africa. We must replace this model with one based on mutual respect and a shared commitment to free enterprise and human dignity."

But what is the reality behind President Bush's fine words? The U.S. Committee for Refugees' "1989 World Refugee Survey" reports, "In FY 89, U.S. support for the general program [of the UNHCR] hit rock bottom at 16%, and an overall low of less than 20% for its general and special programs combined. [A general program refers to the regular anticipated expenditures of the UNHCR; special programs meet emergency needs.] The situation for FY 90 looks equally bleak, with the twin pressures of State Department and congressional fixation on Soviet emigration and the need to balance the budget."

Indeed, the UNHCR's 1990 budget, reflecting all nations' contributions, was \$550 million—less in absolute terms, not even taking into account inflation, than 1989's \$569.5 million. The 1989 budget reflected \$100 million less than what the UNHCR planned to spend; the 1990 budget fell \$200 million below the original UNHCR request. This paltry sum is to be applied to meet the needs of today's 15 million refugees, while virtually the same amount, \$497 million, was allocated in 1980 to provide for an estimated

8.2 million refugees.

Due to this austerity policy, the limited infrastructure development investment that the UNHCR undertakes has been rendered impossible to implement. Interviewed in September in the *Los Angeles Times*, Kingsley Amaning, a Ghanaian UNHCR official on the scene in Ethiopia, said, "Now we just have enough money for basic life-saving programs—but just for refugees." Education for the refugees has been eliminated, as has any road building, which would also benefit the host countries. Forget any meaningful medium- or long-term infrastructure development, which the UNHCR was never involved in and the World Bank has always opposed. "Revenue-raising" activities in Africa, promoted especially by the World Council of Churches—weaving, pottery making, cultivation of small gardens—have also been suspended.

A real problem that any host country faces is whether to integrate these people into the economic life of the country—and if so, how.

In a nation such as Malawi, with a native population of 7 million and a refugee population, primarily from Mozambique, of at minimum 850,000, this poses an immense problem, which cottage industries and "appropriate technologies" can never solve. In 1988, when "merely" 500,000 refugees resided in Malawi, a frustrated relief worker said that their dilemma is that "we can't take another half-million people, but we can't stop them from coming, either." Malawi has a per capita income of \$160 per year.

The case of Sudan

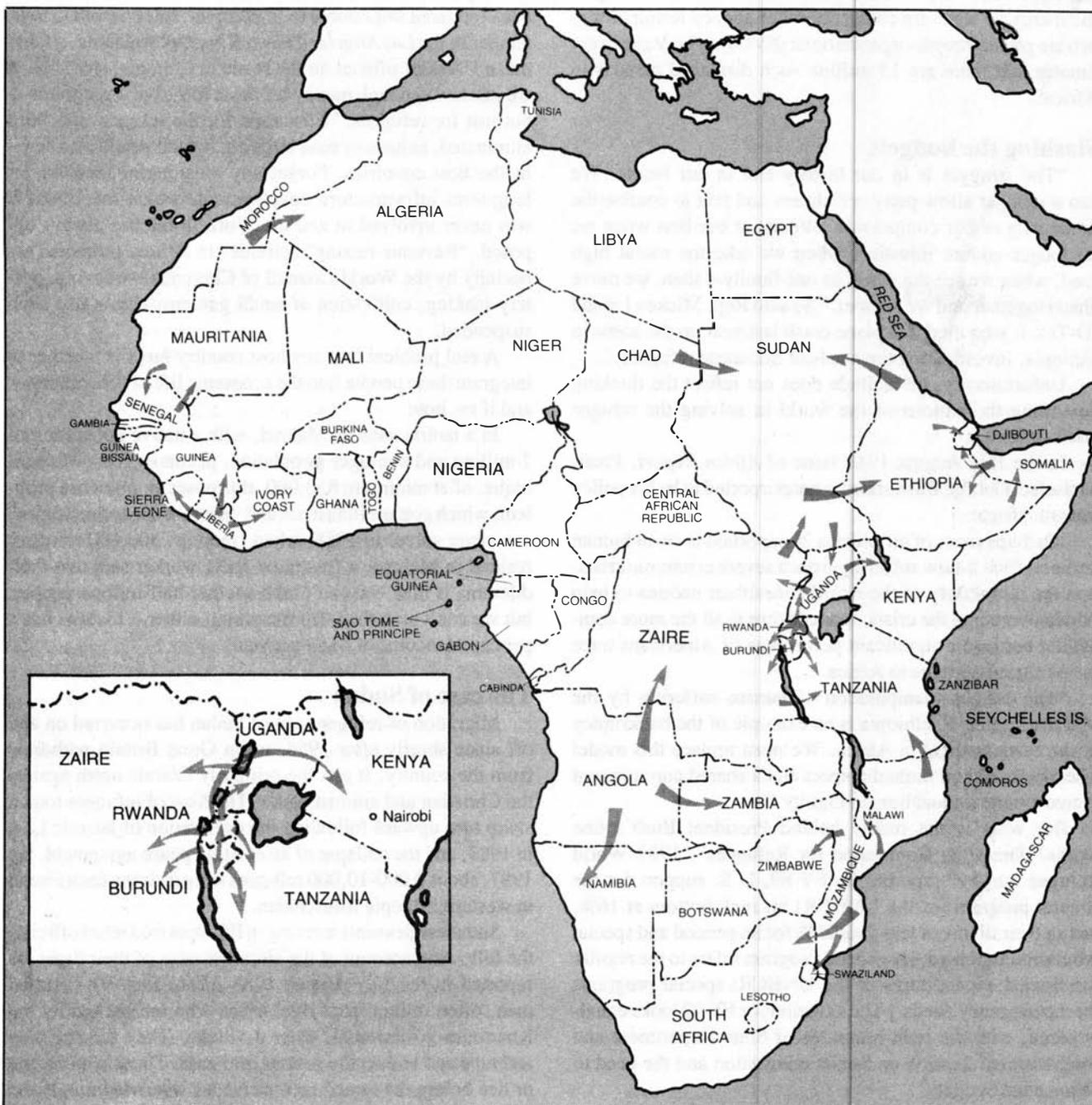
Migration of refugees out of Sudan has occurred on and off since shortly after 1956, when Great Britain withdrew from the country. It pits the primarily Islamic north against the Christian and animist south. The flow of refugees took a sharp turn upward following the declaration of Islamic Law in 1983, and the collapse of an existing peace agreement. By 1987, about 8,000-10,000 refugees were arriving each month in western Ethiopia from Sudan.

Sudanese peasants arriving in Ethiopia told relief officials the following account of the circumstances of their flight (as reported in the July-August 1988 *Africa Report*): "Armed men, often militia from rival tribes who are backed by the Khartoum government, enter a village. They kill the men and rape and abduct the women and girls. Those who escape or flee before the armed men arrive are overwhelmingly the adolescent males, who for the combatants represent recruiting prizes or potential enemy gunbearers.

"The youths begin the trek into Ethiopia, which can last up to four months. About one-fifth die on the way. The survivors live off the meagre leaves, seeds, and beans found in the dried up countryside and enter the camps 'staggering . . . the walking skeletons seen in Kampuchea in 1979-80,' says one U.N. official."

By mid-1988, some 180,000 Sudanese resided in one

Migration of refugees in Africa



camp about 50 miles from the border at Itang. Thirty-five thousand were living nearby at Fugnido, soon to be known as the “boys’ republic” because one-quarter of its inhabitants are “unaccompanied minors”—relief terminology for children with no parents.

A relief worker in 1988 described the patients in Fugnido’s medical center this way: They “compared poorly with

pictures of Nazi concentration camp victims and were as bad or worse as anything seen in Ethiopia during the 1984 famine.”

As of September 1990, the most recent documentation available, there are 240,000 Sudanese living in Itang, and 76,000 in Fugnido.

The ecological holocaust unleashed, caused by forcing



United Nations

Refugees in the Sahelian zone of Niger, roaming in search of food and water. The United Nations does not even know how many of them there are, and the world's governments are cutting the budgets for the meager relief efforts that do exist.

these human beings into a dependence on the most savage, backward existence imaginable, mocks all environmentalist yearnings for "living off the land." Referring to the Itang vicinity, an Ethiopian relief worker commented, "Just five years ago, this entire area was so thickly forested you couldn't see from here to here." Hundreds of thousands of refugees have inundated the land, cutting down trees for fuel and denuding the landscape. For the first time ever, the region is experiencing extensive flooding during the rainy season. Wild animals native to the area have not been seen in years.

There have been two efforts at negotiations this year between the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which is leading the insurrection in the south, and the military government of Lieutenant General el Bashir; both have failed. The SPLA is demanding that the nation be a secular state, and the government is willing only to lift Islamic Law in the non-Muslim areas by referendum. With as many as 10-11 million lives in jeopardy if last year's drought continues, there is ample motivation to reach a negotiated settlement.

Ironically, both the SPLA and the Khartoum government have given their verbal support for the development project which could transform Sudan into the breadbasket for Africa: the Yonglei Canal. This strategy to drain the swamplands of the upper Nile and increase the flow of the river, creating hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland was sabotaged by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) after it was one-third completed (see *EIR*, Sept. 28, 1990, and *EIR Quarterly Economic Report*, first quarter 1986). Apparently, neither faction is capable of breaking out of the Thirty Years War scenario they are locked into, to challenge the IMF and environmentalist movement which insists on preserving the "wetlands" of the Sudd swamp.

A continent-wide maelstrom

In addition to the Sudan-Ethiopia-Somalia nexus, there are at least four other focal points generating refugees,

drought, and famine. The longest-standing is in Angola, and goes back to the early 1960s, when a liberation movement was launched against the Portuguese. Eight months after independence, in 1975, the conflict was transformed into a left-right bloodbath. Today there are approximately 310,000 Angolan refugees living in Zaire, 97,000 in Zambia, and 25,000 in Namibia. The Soviet Union has been spending \$800 million per year in military support to the Angolan government, while the United States continues to invest \$60 million per year in the anti-communist UNITA of Jonas Savimbi. Though negotiations are ongoing to resolve this conflict, there is no talk of a development program for the nation on the part of any faction, and as Maxwell Taylor underscored, certainly not by either the Soviet Union or the United States.

The figures are so large that they are difficult to internalize; however, they get worse. Some 350,000 people, overwhelmingly non-combatants, have been killed in the past 15 years, and 800,000 face starvation in Angola alone. Displaced persons are estimated at between 600,000 and 1.2 million.

Also in southern Africa, is the 15-year war to overthrow the leftist government in Mozambique. First, the former British colony of Rhodesia, and then South Africa supported the anti-communist Renamo guerrillas. Since 1984, when South Africa and Mozambique signed a peace treaty, no nation has officially backed Renamo. Over 1 million Mozambicans have fled their country for Malawi, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Zambia. Between 1 and 2 million people have been displaced and over 400,000 lives lost. Peace talks now under way are being mediated by the Archbishop of Beira in northern Mozambique and a delegation of Italian notables.

In central Africa, the Rwanda-Burundi-Uganda conflagration zone has been seething since 1959, the period immediately before independence. Over 250,000 people have fled both Rwanda and Burundi—in the case of the former, relo-

Burundi acts to overcome tribalism

Burundi's President Pierre Buyoya, who came to power in 1987, has adopted a policy of encouraging tribal harmony between the majority Hutu tribe and the ruling, but numerically smaller Tutsi. Motivating his decision, no doubt, was a massacre in mid-1988 killing somewhere between 10,000 and 100,000 Hutus. The U.S. State Department estimated that 47,000 Hutus fled to Rwanda to avoid the bloodbath. One year later, in August 1989, only 1,000 of these refugees remained in Rwanda. The State Department correctly attributed this "unprecedented" massive and rapid repatriation of refugees to "the Burundi government's serious attempts to effect national reconciliation."

This latest conflict was not an isolated case; similar "cyclical massacres" occurred in 1955, 1972, and 1979, producing a permanent refugee population of not less than 250,000. Like neighboring Rwanda, Burundi's population of 5.2 million is 80% Hutu. Unlike Rwanda, members of the Tutsi tribe until recently have dominated all areas of government and society.

Hutus, the vast majority of whom are Christians, are now being permitted to attend church—an act which had been discouraged before Buyoya—and encouraged to attend school. Only an estimated 20% of students are members of the Hutu tribe. The Army, which had participated in the massacres, is being opened to Hutus, as is the government.

Leaders of the Tutsi refugees living in Uganda are publicly identifying Burundi as a model for their reintegration into Rwandan society. However, the Rwandan leadership is distrustful, especially following the just-repulsed invasion of some 10,000 Tutsis from Ugandan territory. Rwandan President Habyarimana has chosen to solve the problem by requesting that Tutsi host countries Uganda,

Kenya, and Tanzania accept the refugees as citizens. Not surprisingly, they have refused.

The role of the Pope

Crucial to Burundi's commitment to national reconciliation has been the support provided by Pope John Paul II. On Sept. 6, during his most recent pilgrimage to Africa, the Pope addressed Burundi's civil service and representatives of the nation's university, financial, and social professions:

"You have clearly placed your Christian commitment within the framework of the changes that the people of Burundi are well on the way toward achieving for the consolidation of their unity. And you have spoken of a necessary examination of conscience. It is true that these questions are the consequence of a past of confrontation and suffering. You are not dodging them. In my opinion, they demand two important requirements from you. On the one hand, the nation's professionals must be the first to resolutely take the path of forgiveness and reconciliation. You remember Jesus' reply to Peter when he asked how often to forgive: 'I say to you, not seven times, but 77 times.' In other words, forgiveness knows no bounds (Matthew 18:22). It is not a question of forgetting everything, but of letting brotherly love overcome former misunderstandings or rivalry for the sake of building unity.

"The second obligation for Christians is to see that every human being enjoys the just respect of equal dignity. The jurists among you know well that for a state of rights, this is a basic principle which cannot be compromised. You should not seek artificially to deny the diversity of the members of a people, the diversity of groups and individuals, or the diversities of their gifts and capacities, but rather to adhere to a still more basic truth: Every human being is created by God, who in fidelity to his love, gave his Son for the salvation of everyone. This affirmation is at the very core of our faith; let us take care never to contradict our profession or our communion with the unique body of Christ."—*Michael Gelber*

cating in Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zaire, and Kenya; in the latter case to Tanzania, Rwanda, and Zaire. The accompanying box documents the possibility of resolving the crisis in this region by overcoming tribal conflicts through the efforts of regional leaders with the support of Pope John Paul II.

Liberia has become the latest nation deserted by the West. According to an off-the-record assessment by the U.S. Agency for International Development, America made a decision no later than early 1988 that Liberia, whose major

products are iron ore and rubber, was no longer of strategic interest. Simply put, from the standpoint of American pragmatism, we weren't getting out enough compared to the dollars and cents we put in. An October report in the *New York Times* documents people "dying from starvation and epidemic. People are boiling leaves and eating them just to survive. One palm kernel is sold for 25¢ or more in some places. Rice is now called 'gold dust' and many people cannot afford to buy even a cup." One-half the population, 1.2 million people, either have fled the war, or have been displaced.