

Problem regions - Africa

There have been over 9.5 million refugees and hundreds and thousands of people have been slaughtered in Africa from a number of conflicts and civil wars. If this scale of destruction and fighting was in Europe, then people would be calling it World War III with the entire world rushing to report, provide aid and try to diffuse the situation.

DR Congo (former Zaire)

Many reasons for the conflict:

- conflicts over basic resources such as water
- access and control over rich minerals and other resources
- various political reasons

This has been supported by various international corporations and other regimes which have an interest in the outcome of the conflict.

Since the outbreak of fighting in August 1998:

- 3.3 million people (mostly women, children and the elderly) are estimated to have died because of the conflict, most from disease and starvation
- 2.25 million people have been driven from their homes, many of them beyond the reach of humanitarian agencies

Immense natural resources = various foreign and internal powers wanted gain an advantage

All sides (DR Congo's political parties, Rwanda, Uganda) have been accused of having commercial interests in this war due to the vast resources involved.

The DRC's rich resources provide easy ways to finance the conflict and the rebels had long been successful in setting up financial administrative bodies in their controlled areas, especially with regards to trading with Rwanda and Uganda, while *Kabila* (the president of the DR Congo) had also been able to finance his side of the conflict.

There are many other resources and minerals in the DR Congo:

- e.g. water, diamonds, tin, copper, timber

According to a Human Rights Watch report in May 2000 on the recent conflicts, "all the many combatant forces have attacked civilians, killing, injuring and raping thousands of persons and causing more than half a million others to flee their homes."

Case study: Nigeria and oil

The Niger Delta in Nigeria has been the attention of environmentalists, human rights activists and fair trade advocates around the world. The trial and hanging of environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other members of the Ogoni ethnic minority made world-wide attention. So too did the non-violent protests of the Ogoni people. The activities of large oil corporations such as Mobil, Chevron, Shell, Elf, Agip etc have raised many concerns and criticisms. Oil, which could potentially have allowed Nigeria to be one of the wealthiest countries in Africa has instead led it to become one of the poorest.

A series of repressive and corrupt governments in Nigeria have been supported and maintained by western governments and oil corporations, keen on benefiting from the fossil fuels that can be exploited. As people and trans-national oil corporations have been fighting over this "dark nectar" in the delta region, immense poverty and environmental destruction have resulted.

The Ogoni, Ijaw and other people in the Niger Delta, those who have been worse affected for decades have been trying to stand up for themselves, their environment and their basic human and economic rights. The Nigerian government and the oil companies have responded by harshly cracking down on protestors. Shell, for example, has even been criticized for trying to divide communities by paying off some members to disrupt non-violent protests.

There have been many clear examples of corporate influence in the Nigerian military repressing the protestors. The military have been accused of thousands of killings,

house/village burnings, intimidating people, torture and so on. From Shell's involvement in the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa to Chevron-marked helicopters carrying Nigerian military that opened fire upon protestors, the corporations are facing harsh criticisms for the way they have been handling (or encouraging) the situation.

There are still a number of problems to be solved, including corruption and religious tensions between Muslims and Christians. There were riots and killings, for example, at Muslim calls for imposition of Sharia, Islamic criminal law.

Case Study: Sierra Leone and diamonds

Sierra Leone has seen serious and grotesque human rights violations since 1991 when the civil war erupted. According to Human Rights Watch, over 50,000 people have been killed to date, with over one million people having been displaced.

While the rebel force, the Revolutionary United Front, (RUF) have called the various governments corrupt and accused them of mismanagement of diamond and mineral resources, they themselves have committed horrible abuses. People have been raped, had limbs amputated and more. While the RUF may have started from respectable aims, they themselves have been corrupted and attracted others who see the RUF as a way to get at the diamonds and profit from it.

Prior to the current conflict, there had been little media coverage and definitely nothing on the scale seen during and just before the crisis in Kosovo. Here, 25 times as many people have been killed compared to that in Kosovo when the international community decided to act. In fact, it has been pointed out by many that the atrocities in Sierra Leone have been worse than was seen in Kosovo.

Both sides have also used a large number of child soldiers. For example, the UN estimates that of those fighting with Sierra Leone government forces, a ¼ are children below the age of 18.

At the beginning of July 2000 the United Nations Security Council decided to impose an 18 month ban on diamond exports from Sierra Leone, recognizing that diamonds have been fueling the conflict. The RUF has been mining diamonds and selling them to fund their weapons purchase and other activities, including human rights abuses. These diamonds have been sold around the world sometimes unwittingly, sometimes knowingly by various diamond corporations.

Liberian timber industry is also said to financing the conflict.

Isn't it ironic that Sierra Leone is the poorest country in the world, while it has a rich set of natural resources and minerals, including diamonds, which have caused entire countries and corporations to get involved to fight over them?

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Keywords

DR Congo, Nigeria, Sierra Leone