

# The Forgotten Continent

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Kosovo attracted worldwide attention early this year. There has never been such a peculiar war and the Kosovo crisis was reported day and night in all the media.

However, how many people know that, at the same moment, 6 million refugees, several times more than in Kosovo, were suffering from continuing wars?

I wish to talk about such a forgotten place: Africa, where one-tenth of the world's population lives, but where half of the armed conflicts are occurring.

In August, 40,000 people fled the "almost forgotten civil war" in the Congo to Gabon. Brutal conflicts are still continuing in Angola, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Hundreds of thousands of refugees are wandering from country to country, threatened by plunder, starvation and epidemic.

The most devastating war this year was the one in Sierra Leone. Eight years of civil war has displaced nearly half the population and 10% has fled the country. Thousands of civilians have lost their limbs and life expectancy has driven down to 37 -- the lowest in the world. Last July, the government and rebels signed a peace agreement. They must now try to restore peace and development. Indeed, it is time to help them.

However, the United Nations is currently receiving less than 15% of its needs for Sierra Leone. The U.N special representative for Sierra Leone, Francis Okello, said, "A fraction of the resources being donated to Kosovo would go a long way to solving our problems."

Recently, many African officials claim that rich nations favor Kosovo over Africa in aid. In fact, the Danish government decided to cut aid for Africa in order to allot it to Kosovo. UNICEF announced that it received less than 20% of its requests for aid to Africa, while aid for Kosovo was collected within a few weeks. The president of Zambia cried out, "Why is it that \$1.50 a day is spent for a refugee in Kosovo while only 11 cents is spent for a refugee in Africa?"

All human beings should be treated equally. Then, what created this gap? Why did Kosovo catch the world's eye and not Africa?

There are four elements in the case of Kosovo.

The first one is urgency. "Ethnic cleansing" in Kosovo started almost overnight.

The second element is location. Kosovo is located in Europe, raising concern among her neighbors.

The third element is race. Needless to say, people in Kosovo are all white and, simply put, they could get more sympathy from advanced white nations.

The fourth element is the "cause." European countries and the U.S. felt that the Kosovo conflict was a "just" war. Therefore, their governments and mass media supported it.

In contrast, Africa has none of these elements. First, there's no sense of urgency. The civil war in Sudan has continued over 16 years. Second, Africa seems distant from everywhere. How can war in Congo affect life in Europe, the U.S. or Japan? Third, people in Africa are black. Can you say that there is no racism among those who give assistance? And fourth, it is hard to say which side is "just" in many African conflicts. As a result, Africa has become the forgotten continent.

This summer, two African boys from Guinea tried to attract media by sneaking into an airplane to escape the turmoil and poverty. They were found dead in a freezing, unpressurized compartment. Beside them was a letter clumsily written in French. "Help us!" it begins,

*"The excellencies and officials of Europe. Help us. We have problems in Africa. We lack rights as children. We have war and illness, we lack food... We have school, but we lack education... We want to study, and we ask you to help us to study so we can be like you, in Africa."*

Africa needs someone who can focus attention on Africa, report the facts and ask for international aid. The advanced nations and especially the mass media should throw away their double standard,

one for Europe and another for Africa, so that we can at least know their suffering.

I want you to think about this problem. I want you to feel for the people in Africa. And, I want to think about what you can do.

Japan is the only major contributor of foreign aid that is a non-white nation. Both Europe and Africa are equally distant. Isn't it time that Japan started thinking about helping all troubled countries, just as she was once helped? I believe that we can make a difference.

*Africa is forgotten  
need someone on side.  
If you know their plight  
Please not forget again.*