

The Plight of the Refugees

by Janet Jagan

Looking at the TV screen showing the plight of tens of thousands of people living in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a devastating experience. The utter pain and agony of the men, women and children running away from the war zones of the DR Congo is almost beyond belief. Yet it is happening in this supposed enlightened 21st century.

Thousands upon thousands of Congolese have had to flee from their homes in terror of being killed. According to a Reuters News report, "an estimated one million people have been forced from their homes in North Kivu by two years of violence that has persisted despite the end of a 1998-2003 war in the vast former Belgium colony, rich in copper, co-



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balt, gold and diamonds."

That gives part of the picture, but underneath is the still burning tension between the Tutsi and the Hutu people that led to the horrifying genocide that took place a few years ago in Rwanda. In the present crisis that has led to the massive migration of Congolese from their homes, seeking refuge from the violence, is the recent offensive by Tutsi rebels led by General Laurent Nkunda. There have been many instances, also, of

looting and killings by Congolese troops. Refugees have had to move from one place to the other, from camp to camp to escape the killings and thefts by one or the other armed groups. The horror of the mass exodus is that the fleeing multitudes have absolutely no resources – no food or water. Recent reports indicate that the provision of humanitarian aid from the United Nations and international agencies is an extremely difficult task in view of the extensive warfare going on.

The refugees' fears can be understood in the experiences of the genocide in neighbouring Rwanda, which led to the death of some five million people in the last eight years. The world watched on and did nothing to prevent or protect the people.

Now, the United Nations has sent to the DR Congo the largest peace-keeping mission in history

– 17,000 troops. However, if their role is "peace-keeping," this means that it cannot take any offensive action. The usefulness of

edge of events, never before experienced. In a matter of hours, events of importance can be known, so that people everywhere, if they are

many people, but we must see the man-made problems that lead to suffering, pain, homelessness, death, poverty, and the list goes on. The

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peace-keeping troops, as previous missions have shown, is, unfortunately limited. They can provide only a limited protection for people as previous operations have shown.

In this modern day of high technology, the people of this world in which we live have access to knowl-

interested, can see, hear and understand events that have a great impact on society. But that knowledge must be put to use in ways that can assist humanity to survive not only the natural events like floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc., that create so much misery to so

millions who lost their lives in Rwanda should not have died. The millions of refugees now in the DR Congo do not deserve the suffering they are enduring. Is mankind again turning away from this disaster, allowing events to unfold that will cause more loss of lives, more misery?