

# How long will we stand by as Congo crumbles?

*U.S. can't police the entire globe, but we should recognize need for humanitarian assistance*



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► Mr. Eales lived in Congo from 1965-1983. Eales went to Rwanda in September 1994 with World Relief, Inc. to assist in the refugee camps.

**I**n 1994, "the world failed Rwanda." President Clinton uttered these words, splashed across the front pages of the newspapers of America and the world. I saved The Orange County Register from that day, March 26, 1998, as a hope that even though it took us four years to admit it as a nation it would never happen again.

Unfortunately, it has ... again. And, cynically, I am not surprised. Congo, formerly Zaire, has been involved in civil war for several years now with chaos reigning, the economy destroyed and tens of thousands of civilians murdered or killed. Genocide, pillaging, raping and total destruction of a country is in process. Disease, poverty and death, coupled with hopelessness, prevail. And as in 1994, when 800,000 or more people were hacked to death in Rwanda, humanity is sitting on its laurels, ignoring it. The mass migration into Goma, Congo, in the summer of 1994 of more than 1 million Rwandan people finally jolted humanity to do something - too late. Unfortunately disease set in, primarily cholera, in the early weeks, and 20,000 were dying per week. It took more than two years before people returned to rebuild and start over. Houses, businesses, vil-

lages and factories can be restored.

But let's not forget the 100,000 orphans with emotional damage. One can't rebuild an orphan kid's emotional health in a few months, after he watched his parents get hacked to death. I know. I was there in the refugee camps in 1994 and saw the total emptiness in the children's eyes. Those scars won't ever heal, unfortunately.

"Never again must we be shy about the evidence of mass killing," said President Clinton during his 1998 trip to Rwanda.

Interesting comment/commitment. Congo has been racking up considerable similarities to 1994 Rwanda in 2000. On June 12 of this year, the International Rescue Committee found that since August 1998 there have been at least 1.7 million deaths in the war-affected areas. And why is the world standing by?

For a few weeks in June, shelling went on in Kisangani (formerly Stanleyville). Buildings, schools, homes and hospitals were shelled. Civilians died. The United Nations made a feeble attempt at protecting the civilians. And just a few weeks ago, a government plane bombed the city of Gemena -



Photo courtesy of Jeff Eales

**The poor camp out in downtown Bukabu, Congo Sept. 1994. At one time this town was referred to as 'the Pearl of Africa.'**

my hometown. Word is five kids were injured. This was buried in a six-line news paragraph.

In 1998, in the northern part of the country, the population ran to the forests to hide from the fighting. President Kabila's soldiers were ruling with impunity and corruption. Anything left in their homes was burned, destroyed, stolen or looted. The Rev. Mossai Sanguma, currently studying for his doctorate in Southern California, went back to Congo to perform research for his thesis. On his return from a two-week trip in April, he recounted the incredible destruction of the infrastructure. Doctors and nurses are

trying to treat what they can. Schools and businesses are in disarray. Sleeping sickness is running rampant, since so many people spent months in the forest exposed to Tsetse flies.

In the northwest province of Equateur, things had been much more subdued and calm. Essentially, the Movement for the Liberation of Congo political party is in control of the area. Jean Pierre Bemba, also known as head of the rebel group, is trying to overthrow President Kabila. There is peace, the soldiers are not corrupt and stability is restored to that part of the country.

Mark Thornbloom, a childhood friend of Jean Pierre

Bemba and a childhood friend and schoolmate of mine, visited the rebel leader in Congo for two weeks in April.

His observations and interviews throughout the entire region concluded that the rebel "government" currently in place is good.

And President Kabila's regime, the one that controls most of the country, is indeed corrupt. Yet, regardless of who is deemed "good" or "bad," the basic question still remains: Why does the world sit back and do nothing?

I don't believe the United States should be the world's policeman. We all know we are spread out too thin all over the globe, usually in places we don't need to be.

Yet 1.7 million people are dead in Congo, directly or indirectly due to corruption or genocide or civil war. So where is the outcry from the world? Where is the press?

Déjà vu. Congo is already like Rwanda, and one would like to hope and believe that we would do what is right. Congo is Rwanda all over again. We're supposed to be better than this.

Such a tragedy. Too bad we don't learn. Too bad our country gets involved only if it's politically beneficial and not for humanitarian reasons.

Rwanda. Congo. Déjà vu.