

# Genocide through indifference

As I write I am reflecting on the sometimes quivering, emotional voice of Stephen Lewis, the U.N. envoy on HIV/AIDS in Africa (<http://stephenlewisfoundation.ca/>). His 2005 Massey Lectures, 'Race Against Time' are currently being broadcast on Australian radio (<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bigidea/>). I highly recommend this broadcast, which uses unusually forceful and frank language.

While focusing on HIV/AIDS in Africa (not just a tragedy, but a form of genocide by neglect), Lewis also savages the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These cop it for their role in introducing fees for basic health care and education in Africa, in the so-called 'Structural Adjustment Programs' (SAPs). SAPs, imposed in exchange for more credit, were especially notorious in the 1980s. True believers claimed that the introduction of 'free markets' would create winners from losers and lead to an economic boom. In most countries they failed dismally. It is little

“  
**A rush for male  
circumcisions (probably  
partly effective against HIV)  
is underway in Swaziland**  
”

consolation that SAPs, strongly criticized at the time, are now largely discredited. In my darker moments I think their failure was intended. It is more likely that these programs had genuine and well-meaning supporters and that they were approved because they suited the powerful of the time, who then as now were largely contemptuous of the health of the poor.

## THE HOLLOW MEN OF THE G8

Lewis is also strongly critical of the double standard of trade and aid policies practiced by the rich and powerful club who constitute the G8, none of whom have come close to meeting the target of government provided overseas aid of 0.7% of GNP. Of the G8 club, he is particularly scathing of the meanness and double standards of the US, Japan, Italy and his own country, Canada (whose Prime Minister Lester Pearson, had originally devised the 0.7% target.) Lewis shows how these countries repeatedly find ways to evade their promises. It is true that nearly all of us place personal well being before that of strangers, but how much money do we waste on trivia? (And don't draw me on the topic of military spending).

## PHANTOM AID

Lewis draws attention to 'phantom aid,' citing the work of Action Aid (<http://www.actionaidusa.org/realaid.php>). According to their report, phantom aid constitutes up to two thirds of aid that is claimed to be delivered. Phantom aid does not target poverty relief and is not tied to the sale of goods and services from the donor country. Much aid is wasted on technical assistance, usually paid to highly priced consultants who fly in and fly out. A recent example of phantom aid from Australia is the payment by AusAid of A\$679,000 to Trevor Flugge for eight months' work in Iraq in 2003. Flugge and his company, the Australian Wheat Board, knowingly provided illegal kickbacks to Saddam Hussein's regime

(<http://www.reportage.uts.edu.au/stories/2006/special/flugge.htm>). At best, Flugge's work might be considered a form of export enhancement. It was surely not aid. Flugge's appointment was criticized by Aidwatch and Oxfam.

## MORE ON THE DOUBLE STANDARD

Old enough to recall how the Uruguay Trade talks were supposed to provide a more level playing field for developing countries, Lewis is also deeply skeptical that the current Doha round of trade talks will achieve its stated goal of enabling poor countries to access markets in rich countries.

Speaking at the recent American Academy of Science meeting, Per Pinstrup Andersen, a distinguished expert on nutrition and development, observed that none of the 26 international conferences on poverty and hunger in the last 30 years have achieved their goals and targets. Few have come close. People have short memories. Pomp surrounds the pronouncement of targets, usually held in luxurious, well-fed environments, and little publicity is given to their non-attainment.

## DEMOGRAPHY OVERLOOKED

Excellent as Lewis is, his analysis seems likely to overlook the causal contribution of demographic factors in the collapse of much of modern Africa. Devoted readers of this column (if there are any!) know that I am obsessed with the harmful economic effects of excessively rapid population growth. Of course, many countries in sub-Saharan Africa now have low or even negative population growth rates because of the ravages of HIV/AIDS and in some cases warfare. This sad fact does not negate the demographic argument. Instead, consider the current decline in growth rate (if not numbers) as the second part of a  $\cap$ -shaped curve, where a steep rise in population is followed by a crash. If this slowed growth is due to fewer births, then it would probably be economically and socially beneficial, unless overdone as in Russia and — if sustained too long — parts of Europe and one day even China. But the current decline of population growth in Africa is mostly from excessive deaths, many of them among people who should be highly productive. This worsens the problem.

Unless good governance can be introduced the cycle will repeat itself, a phenomenon technically known as 'irruptive.' While non-phantom foreign aid will not guarantee good governance, it will surely help.

**A large question rarely asked.** A large question remains which is rarely asked: who really wants to see the end of abject poverty? Hopefully you and I do, but the current global situation seems not all that different to the US in 1850 or the British Empire in 1750. Much modern affluence is underpinned by the poverty of the masses. Effectively, there exists a system of quasi-slavery; a global 'claste' system (see BODHI Times 14). We need a new William Wilberforce (whose campaign

led to the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833) and a new John Woolman (a Quaker whose work preceded Wilberforce).

Fear of the other is likely to drive 'strategic demography' for the foreseeable future. There is growing evidence from basic neuroscience that humans are deeply wary of people who look and act differently. A rational way to respond to this fear of the other is to think and behave as part of a discrete group. It then follows that personal safety and advancement lie in constantly seeking to advantage that small group, rather than the bigger group we are all part of. We have evolved with this strategy, but we can expand the group with which we identify.

## EURABIA AND TERRORISM

The historian Niall Ferguson has criticized multiculturalism — the idea that peoples of different ethnicity, religion, education and socioeconomic circumstances can be fused into a single cohesive mass — as naive optimism. He warns that the higher birth rate among the Muslim countries that flank the south and east of Europe bodes ill for the contrastingly 'senescent' European Union. He has used (perhaps coined) 'Eurabia' to describe 'the subtle Muslim colonization of Europe's cities — most striking in places like Marseille, France, where North Africans populate whole suburbs.' Let's hope Ferguson is wrong. His vision implies a bleak future. Ferguson will be proven wrong if enough people can be convinced that a fairer, more inclusive world is in their own interest. We have far to go, but the cost is high if we fail.

The Dalai Lama has recently linked global terrorism with inequality, stating: 'This new terrorism has been brewing for many years. Much of it is caused by jealousy and frustration at the West because it looks so highly developed and successful on television. Leaders in the East use religion to counter that, to bind these countries together.'

His Holiness also warned of the futility of a harsh crackdown on terrorists: 'The problem will escalate [if bin Laden is assassinated by the West] ... If there is one bin Laden killed today, soon there will be 10 bin Ladens.'

## CRYING WOLF?

I conclude by responding to the implicit criticism of work similar to ours by Prof. Furedi (author of *The Politics of Fear*). He argues that raising claims about the Cold War, terrorism and global warming are forms of sensationalist propaganda. Of course, activists and the press do exaggerate threats, sometimes at the cost of more important issues and risks. But the past century saw the emergence of Nazism, the Chinese famine, the Spanish flu, the epidemic of HIV/AIDS, and the Rwandan and other genocides — and that's just the beginning. Would Furedi really claim that people who foresaw and attempted to warn of these disasters warranted disrespect?

Full references on website.

*I am now working for Deakin University in Melbourne (but living in Tasmania) as a Senior Research Fellow in Global Health. I am researching the viability of a new post-graduate course in global and international health. I remain linked to the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University in Canberra as a Visiting Fellow.*