

The Global Refugee Crisis

by *Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim*

Le nombre croissant de réfugié(e)s de partout fait de leur situation un problème universel. Dans le présent article, l'auteure examine trois solutions pour mettre fin à ce problème: premièrement, assurer aux pays en voie de développement

According to UN statistics, the number of refugees worldwide is about 20 million. Eighty per cent of these are women and children. The vast majority come from the poorest of the developing countries.

l'indépendance économique, deuxièmement, empêcher l'intrusion d'étrangers dans les affaires nationales et, finalement, baser la démocratie et les droits humains sur des principes de justice sociale.

It is only quite recently that the phenomenon of displacement and political asylum has reached a global crisis point. The increasing number of refugees world wide make this an issue of paramount importance. It has become crucial to examine the reasons that have led to the spread of this phenomenon.

While some of the factors contributing to this situation are the lack of democracy and the denial of human rights in many countries around the world, the wave of military takeovers sweeping most of the developing countries, and the numerous outbreaks of civil wars globally, the roots of this problem lie in the historical situation of developing countries, and in particular the practice of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Western countries have continued to influence the economies of many developing countries around the world in order to have control over resources, trade, prices, and over the movement of products. This control is reinforced by financial institutions of neo-colonialism like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which plan and direct the economies in these countries. Many of these countries have borrowed from the World Bank and IMF, which have subjected them to severe economic and financial management regimes, making them dependent on foreign loans, and unable to resist any conditions imposed on them by neo-colonialism.

Western companies and institutions are encouraged to promote the sales of arms and weapons to developing countries at the expense of food and essential needs of the people. Huge arms sales to these countries are usually

accompanied by plans to accentuate conflicts, civil wars, border clashes, uprisings, etc., which direct resources away from their proper use. To safeguard their interests, western countries, which claim to be democratic and defenders of human rights, do not hesitate to intervene in these countries by supporting reactionary regimes or even by staging military coups-d'états, which often result in the defeat of democracy in these countries.

Western colonial and neo-colonial involvement in developing countries, and the effect that this has had on the national unity of these countries and on their economies, has contributed significantly to the phenomenon of displacement and political asylum and the burgeoning of the refugee population. Standards of living in developing countries have deteriorated to all-time lows, with considerable deterioration of social services, as well as significant increases in poverty, famine, and homelessness, leading to migration and the need for political asylum.

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What are the solutions?

Solutions involve ensuring economic independence of developing countries and ending foreign interference in their national affairs, as well as preserving democracy and human rights based on principles of social justice. It is vital to give women equal rights with men and an equal role in development, policies, and decision making in all fields and at all levels. Illiteracy must be eradicated, especially among women and in rural areas.

Economic and social development initiatives should aim to alter the economic structure of the country if necessary. This depends on developing local resources by creating multiple production sectors, modernizing the agricultural sector, and creating a vast industrial base dependent on local raw materials, as well as commercial cooperation with other developing countries on equal bases.

The distribution of the national income should be based mainly on social justice. Minimum wage should be based on living expenses, and there should be fair working conditions in order to develop a strong work force which can become involved in managing production.

Solutions should also involve preserving peace, ending civil wars, disarming tribes, political parties, groups and individuals, as well as protecting the environment, offering health care and family planning services, and providing education for both sexes on equal footing. The achievement of these goals will promote higher standards of living, abolish illiteracy, and begin reducing unemployment.

These goals are not easy to achieve, but there are certain short term steps that could pave the way for radical solutions in the future. Human rights organizations world-

wide should be strengthened, and organizations should be established in countries where they do not exist. Full cooperation should be developed between these organizations, women, children's organizations, and ngos. An international campaign should peacefully press for the implementation of un conventions concerning human rights, and the rights of women and children. An international campaign should be organized against governments which use violence, violate human rights, and repress women.

It is also important to contact UN organizations which deal with culture and education, as well as EEC countries, the Arab League, the OAU, and other international and regional bodies to work towards the inclusion of education on democracy and human rights in all curricula at all educational stages. Further educational programs, accompanied by campaigns against illiteracy should be implemented. The media should disseminate continuous programs about human rights.

Public opinion in western countries should be mobilized to put peaceful pressure on western governments to stop supporting reactionary and military governments in countries which oppose democracy and violate human rights. The UN should be persuaded to introduce practical measures and appropriate sanctions against any government that violates human rights and opposes democracy. The UN should also make sure that such governments get no support from others governments.

Women should be encouraged to exercise their rights to vote and to stand for elections. The maximum number possible of women candidates should be nominated and encouraged to support women's and children's rights. Women should not vote for men unless they adopt a program supporting women's equality and the implementation of the UN conventions. Heads of governments, ministers, and national and international figures who are women should be contacted to enlist their support.

In my view, these suggestions are not difficult to carry out, especially if ngos unite their efforts and create a network nationally, regionally, and internationally.

We must build an international community guided by democracy, peace, and social justice, in which every individual has the right to a decent standard of living, in which he/she enjoys free medical care, free education, and pension benefits. Everyone must have freedom of belief, expression, and movement, without any racial, class, sex, religious, or political discrimination. Children must secure and fully protected. Women of the world unite your efforts! We have had enough.

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