

The African Refugee Crisis

Text & Photographs by Richard Falco

For decades, Africa has been afflicted by the horrors of war and famine. The last decade has witnessed a steady climb in violence across sub-Saharan Africa. It is estimated that between 9.2-10 million people have died over the last 10 years due to the effects of armed conflicts. Over 70% of these individuals have been civilians -- mostly women and children.

During this period of time, the number of states at war or with significant lethal conflicts doubled to 22. Full-blown regional wars grew out of conflicts in Liberia, Rwanda, and Zaire in the mid-'90s; simmering tensions boiled over between Ethiopia and Eritrea and led to a major interstate war; civil wars in Angola, Mozambique, Somalia and Sudan have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives; and ethno-political hatred in Rwanda led to the genocide of nearly one million people. Currently, over one-quarter of sub-Saharan African states are engaged in either civil or interstate conflict, or both. Several others are threatened by imminent political, religious, or ethnic division that could erupt into violent conflict at any time.

The United Nations estimates that there were some 21 million internally displaced people and 5 million refugees in Africa. Women comprise about half of the refugee population and children under the age of 18 constitute 56% of all refugees in Africa.

Complicating the situation is the fact that 80% of the refugees have migrated to countries that are classified as least developed. These countries have over-stretched their inadequate resources and are least capable of handling the influx of the crisis.

The post-Cold War decade, which held out the promise of an "African renaissance," deteriorated rapidly into severe instability across the continent and shows no sign of abating.

(text information taken from United States Institute of Peace & United Nations reports)

Drought, Famine & War

Sub Sahara Africa
Refugees flee the chaos
and horror of civil conflict



A woman makes her way through the dust and heat. She has walked many miles to retrieve water.



A family waits for the dawn light before setting out to find wood.

As the drought and war rage, the majority of people who become refugees are women and children. The men are usually caught up in the fighting and are on one side or another. It is the women and children who are caught in between. It is they, who seek out safety and stability from the chaos and ensuing famine. Often they will travel great distances under harsh and dangerous conditions to refugee camps that have been established at the peripheries of the conflict.



A soldier stands guard over a mother and child at a military check point. She, along with several others, will be transferred to an established refugee camp where they will be safer and can receive food and medical care.



Refugee children undergo a terrible childhood. Many will die or become sick. A number will watch their parents die or disappear. The ones that survive live a harsh existence, continually witnessing the tragedy that surrounds them.

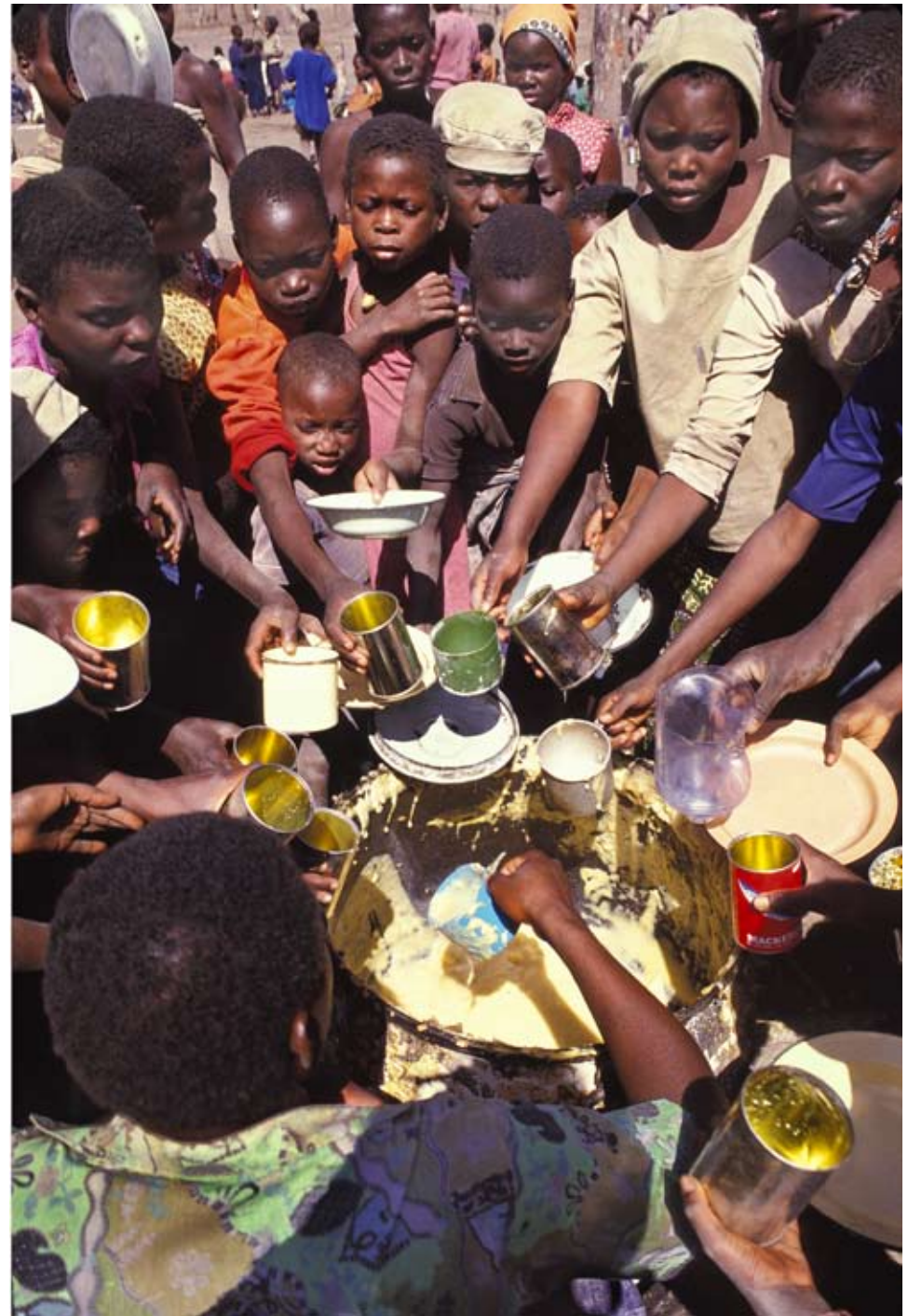




After arriving at the induction center of a refugee camp, a distraught mother worries about the whereabouts of her missing family members. They were separated during an attack on her village. A surviving daughter sits behind her.



Every day millions of children will wait in line for hours for a plate or can of pasty gruel. They are completely dependent upon the United Nations, NGOs or other government agencies to feed them.





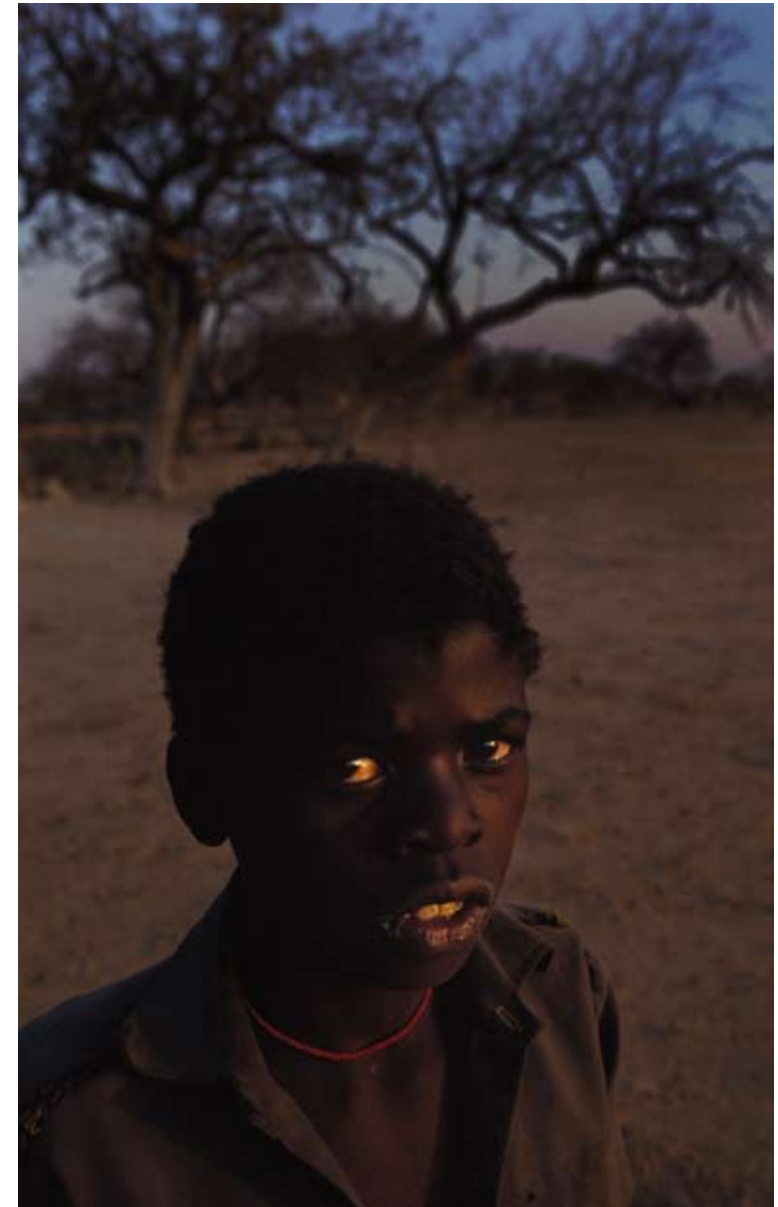
The life of a refugee is in a perpetually state of waiting - no matter how difficult the situation.



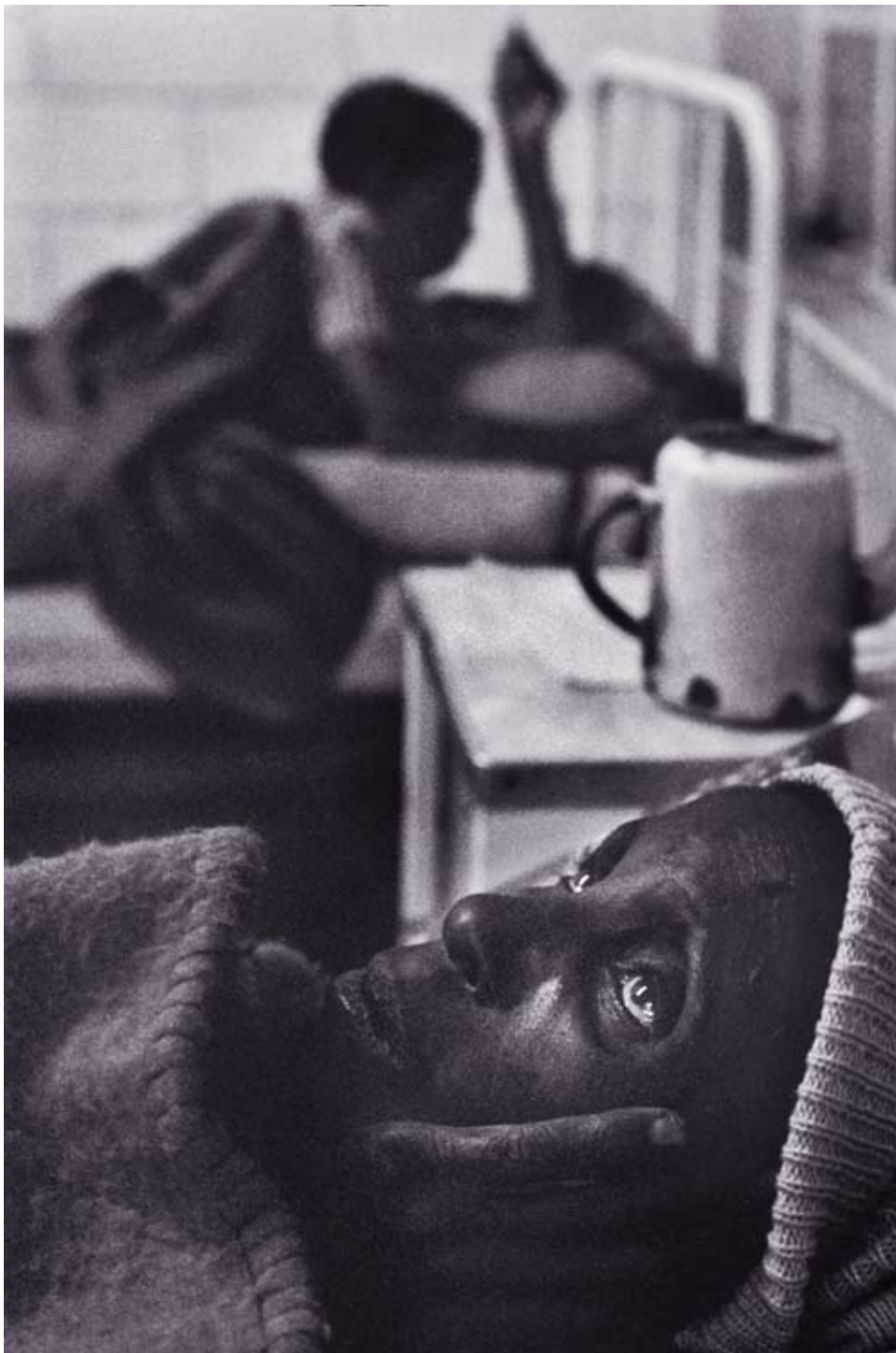


Refugees are often continually on the move. They will periodically find places where rest and safety exist. But as soon as the fighting closes in, fear drives them onto the road again. Though some of the resettlement areas provide relative safety to their inhabitants, they also create an equal number of other problems: such as food, sanitation, disease, water and housing.

In a number of the camps throughout Sub-Sahara the populations are as high as 50,000 people in one camp. All of these individuals are totally dependent upon the world's aid organizations for survival. The region must find a way to create lasting social, political and economic stability, otherwise, the camps will become only temporary answers that require permanent solutions.



As night comes on there is always the fear of an attack, the fear of vulnerability, the fear of isolation, the fear that everything is out of control.



For some refugees, the tragic consequence of their ordeal is that they cross the line into insanity.

This project is a production of

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Vision Project is an organization dedicated to the development of documentary photography and educational programming related to still photography.

The goal of Vision Project is to produce documentary material and educational programs that encourage understanding and awareness about a broad variety of social issues. This information and programming are made available to the general public with a particular focus on members of the younger generation.

Vision Project seeks to reinforce the social, cultural and historical contribution that visual documentary work contributes to society. To reach these goals, we have assembled a group of talented professionals with extensive expertise in photography, web technology, journalism, design, and education.

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