



UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION *of the United States of America*

POMONA VALLEY CHAPTER

Africa and You

By Robert E. Smith

It was interesting for me to see the receiving end of United Nations help. That was during my early years in Congo in the 1960s, when the textbooks I was using, some of the colleagues I was teaching with, and the armed forces keeping peace and unity in the country were all from the U.N. And after the horrible years in Congo of the late 1990s and early 2000s, when over four million are estimated to have died from war, and from starvation and disease resulting from war, the U.N. was back again, helping last year to hold elections and to keep the peace in the troubled eastern part of Congo. Its 17,000 troops form the largest U.N. peace-keeping operation in the world. Please seek information about this and other Africa events from the U.N. web site, irinnews.org.

And what was one of the major causes of that recent war? Take a look at your computer or your cell phone. It may have coltan in its parts, and that coltan may well have come from Congo. Diamonds are also a big export from Congo, many of smuggled out. See a great movie, "Blood Diamond" for insight into how the riches of Africa (in that case Sierra Leone) can be a curse, thanks in part to our participation in a global economy where corporations exploit riches in Africa without care for the disastrous consequences. Please spread the word that only diamonds that are certified through the Kimberly process be purchased, diamonds that are not covered with the blood of those who produced them in Africa.

Darfur is another area where you need to get involved. Have you heard of the "Genocide Olympics"? One of the main supporters of Sudan's government is China. Simple. They built the pipeline to get Sudan's oil, and they are anxious to have plenty of that oil go into their burgeoning economy. So they buy the oil, and Sudan uses that money for arms from China and elsewhere to slaughter the people of Darfur. And China supports Sudan when the U.N. tries to force that nation to change course. But China also is very proud to host the 2008 Olympics. So by pressuring China in this sensitive area, they might be persuaded to change course. Log onto SaveDarfur.org and join those who are active in wanting change in Darfur.

The example of South Africa is right there for us all to see. A groundswell of American support for the Anti-Apartheid movement eventually caused Congress to legislate economic sanctions that were very instrumental in bringing down the walls of Apartheid. Nelson Mandela's wise leadership brought about non-violent change in a nation that had been said by many to be headed for a giant blood-bath.

So by joining in campaigns, whether by internet, letter, or on-the-street, you can bring about change for Africa's good, whether supporting U.N. peacekeeping in Congo, an end to genocide in Darfur, or development aid to Uganda.

I'll be sharing information on these countries and others in a course at the Claremont Adult School this Fall. It is called "Today's Africa." You are welcome to join me there.