

Editorial

In colonial times, Africa was sliced up like a cake, the pieces swallowed by the European powers of those days. In Bismarck's sarcastic allusion, the continent was a colonial whirl. Africa was a lottery and the winning ticket ensured glittering prizes. The colonial contest was based on the famous three "C's": Commerce, Christianity and Civilization, often enforced by brutal means.

Today Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, is on the fringe of world public interest and developed States have other priorities. The multilateral approach in development policy has been called into question and the worldwide consensus to eradicate poverty ranks lower on the global agenda. Economic development is hindered by the institutional weakness of many African States, a weakness directly influenced by the low level of their internal resources and income. Africa will have great difficulty in breaking this vicious circle on its own, and will be forced to rely on debt reduction, food aid and international support for self-help programmes.

The possible scenario of a further marginalization frightens Africans. Their per capita income has dwindled over the last thirty years, and with their share of less than two per cent of the world's trade and GDP they feel every shift in global commerce and investment. NEPAD's development plan has raised hopes that the continent could mobilize tens of billions in yearly investments and an objective of seven per cent growth has been set. But this will require radical changes in the political and administrative framework of most African States, and destructive armed confrontations and civil wars must be avoided or at least contained for any sustained development to be possible.

Since the attacks on the embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, but in particular since the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, African States have been under increasing pressure to combat international terrorism – although that struggle may be only of minor interest to Africans themselves. The institutional weakness of many of those States is compounded by the fact that security forces often do not have the monopoly of armed power within them, much less the necessary control of their borders, to efficiently combat internationally operating terrorist groups.

It is within the environment of poverty and conflict that the ICRC normally deploys its activities. Three articles in this issue of the Review deal with the difficulties and challenges that Africa faces and that the ICRC tries to overcome. Garth Abraham's article outlines the new humanitarian agenda drawn up by NEPAD. Christoph Harnisch describes the parameters for the ICRC's activities in Africa, whilst Churchill Ewumbue-Monono and Carlo von Flüe examine the cooperation between the ICRC and the African Union.

Most conflicts during the colonial contest were cruelly one-sided. Atrocities were commonplace and no efforts were made to assist the conflict victims. Since then the humanitarian assistance component in Africa has grown to such an extent that the "colonial whirl" sometimes appears to have been replaced by the humanitarian one. Contemporary conflicts are, however, no less cruel, and this is also true of the wars taking place outside Africa. In examining the violence of war Daniel Palmieri takes a temporal approach, looking

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at various contemporary conflicts from a long-term, historical perspective. In particular, he casts doubt on the appropriateness of the term “ethnic war”, which has been used to characterize some of the conflicts in Africa.

The African continent has witnessed some of the worst instances of mass war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, often perpetrated in the course of internal conflicts. For the most part, these atrocities continued while the international community remained silent or inactive. Ervin Staub explores the roots of violence between groups and the prevention of renewed violence from a psychological angle, using Rwanda as the main example. With specific reference to the origins of the genocide in Rwanda, he stresses the role that understanding the roots of violence can play in facilitating healing, reconciliation, and preventive action by leaders. He also explores how children can be brought up to adopt humane values and act according to humanitarian principles, thus making violence between groups less likely.

In response to the mass crimes perpetrated in various wars in Africa, the Constitutive Act of the African Union provides for the right of the Union, in cases of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity, to intervene in the territory of a Member State. From a legal point of view, Ben Kioko argues that while implementation of the right of intervention will most probably be fraught with problems, the provision nonetheless underscores the fundamental values underpinning the African Union. Likewise from a legal standpoint, the article by Nairi Arzoumanian and Francesca Pizzutelli looks at the responsibility arising from the shocking presence of child-soldiers in Africa.

In December 2003, the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent was held, preceded by the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The Review will provide a full analysis and coverage of this Conference in its June 2004 issue, but it already includes in this issue the key speeches given at the Conference and the conclusions and resolutions adopted at these international meetings.

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