

Congo's Forgotten Tsunami
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As Americans begin observing the holidays this year, I cannot help but be sobered by the reality of the abundant blessings bestowed on our nation and our families – a stark contrast to the dusty towns of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Last week I returned from a week-long trip to Africa where I focused on the eastern region of DRC, a place that has been riddled by war, rebel violence, and humanitarian crises for several years. It is a place that has seen death and disease of great proportions. In one of the deadliest conflicts since the end of World War II, an estimated 4 million people have lost their lives and many more have fled as refugees.

This crisis in the Congo has been called the “forgotten tsunami” by humanitarian workers on the ground. With as many as 1,000 people dying per day, a tsunami-sized tragedy is happening every few months. Basic infrastructure, education and healthcare are lacking, perpetuating the crisis day in and day out.

Everyone's story is different, yet the common threads are unmistakable: finding security and basic necessities are immediate priorities, often undertaken while dealing with the grief of losing children to machete-carrying rebels. Young girls are abducted into the militias to serve as wives or sex-slaves to the rebel commanders. Others are given or sold by their own families in the hopes that the village will be spared from violence. Hundreds of girls have been treated for rape and sexual violence, which is only a fraction of thousands who have suffered this rampant evil. Hundreds more await surgery for obstetric fistula, a condition resulting from sexual violence and prolonged childbirth.

The Congo is at a critical juncture. Upcoming elections provide hope for a brighter future, but the population is severely affected by diseases like malaria and HIV/AIDS. It will be a missed opportunity if we fail to address what has become one of the most under-reported crises in the world. The need for a basic health system, clean water, food security, and infrastructure is great in this land of the “forgotten tsunami.”

My trip to Africa brought to life even more one of my favorite Christmas hymns: “truly He taught us to love one another; His law is love and His Gospel is peace. Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother. And in His Name all oppression shall cease.”

My visit was a stark reality of Africa's forgotten children – children left by war, disease, hunger, and genocide. The faces of the women and children I saw had stories of sorrow, triumph and hope – unforgettable faces that reinforce the need for humble humanitarian compassion to help the people of Africa.