



"Where is the world?"

By Paul Harris

(YellowTimes.org) – In 1985, the tune, "We are the world," was riding high in the charts. It was written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Ritchie and recorded live when the singers gathered at the 1985 American Music Awards ceremony. It included such popular and legendary performers as Jackson and Ritchie, Bob Dylan, Harry Belafonte, Kenny Rogers, Billy Joel, Tina Turner, Paul Simon, Bette Midler, and some thirty-five others. The recording was made as an American answer to an earlier British effort, "Band-Aid," and both were aimed at raising funds and awareness to ease atrocious living conditions in Africa. Later follow-ups by other groups carried on the process, as did similar efforts in other countries, including mine.

It is unclear how much of the money raised, and there was a lot of it, ever became food in the mouth of an Ethiopian baby, or shelter for a pregnant Somali woman, or medicine for a sickly Eritrean teenager. Corrupt officials and brigands in some of the countries where the aid was destined and distribution problems among the donors managed to siphon off much of it but there is little question that at least some of the money was put to good use; and for that we can be grateful. The jaded might say that many among this musical elite loaned their names and voices to these projects for the publicity but the

end result and the nobility of the cause is justification enough for any inflated egos.

Today, the question has to be: "Where is the world?"

All that misery that excited the world's concern in 1985 is still there, and many new miseries have been added. But there isn't much point in looking to your local newspaper or your television set for information because you won't find it; this is just not glamorous stuff.

Except for those African states lucky enough to have resources that foreign white men want, the Africans are on their own to stew in their juices, to kill each other at an alarming pace, to die from horrible (and often preventable) sickness and starvation. In those states where resources are to be found, there is sometimes a helping hand from the foreigners, but only until the assets are secured.

International aid organizations and charitable groups are struggling in obscurity to help because the world is just not listening -- again.

There are ongoing droughts and famines in Mauritania, Zimbabwe, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Zambia, Malawi, Angola, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Lesotho, putting about 40 million people in danger of starvation or the diseases brought about by incessant hunger. In addition, several other countries are perilously close to similar conditions. People are on the move to escape the unremitting poverty and starvation in their homelands and a new refugee crisis is brewing.

There are civil wars in several countries; there is inter-tribal warfare in several countries; there are foreign mercenaries in several countries; there are more cases of AIDS in Africa than in all the rest of the world combined; there have been recent severe outbreaks of Ebola virus in both Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Congo-Brazzaville.

Further, virtually all African countries are facing the devastation brought upon them by the disastrous intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the dumping of heavily subsidized Western produce into their markets; they are unable to compete, which weakens their economies ever more and exacerbates all the natural and manmade problems.

We all remember massive killings in Rwanda and Somalia that occurred during the past decade; we should also remember how much attention the outside world gave to these problems until after the bleeding had stopped. So now the killing is going on in Zimbabwe, in Uganda, in DRC, in Angola, in Côte d'Ivoire, and a few others, and the world is ignoring it again.

Most of us have never seen reports in our press of the more than 3 million dead in DRC, mainly from starvation, during the past five years of civil war. Our media is mostly silent about ongoing mass murders in Burundi; the West does nothing about the rule of a cruel henchman in Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, and other "warlord" leaders in other countries.

James Morris, head of the United Nations' World Food Program has complained that the 40 million Africans facing immediate starvation are receiving no attention while 26 million Iraqis have the largesse of the world's great powers because, well, they were desperately in need of democracy. And Morris is only addressing part of the problem; even he is ignoring the famine in Madagascar. Despite the occasional news that trickles from Madagascar about cyclones and flooding, the news of the other part of the country where drought is rampant is largely unknown.

Morris says: "I cannot escape the thought that we have a double standard. How is it we routinely accept the level of suffering and hopelessness in Africa that we would never accept in any other

part of the world?" Mr. Morris's question is likely rhetorical because he surely knows the answer as clearly as the rest of us.

Your local press doesn't think you'll be interested in any of these things, and perhaps you are not. But, oh my, can't we all manage to get excited about the prospect of blowing up one little Iraqi with a potbelly and a funny mustache. And don't we all get indignant about him living in splendid luxury and golden palaces while his people suffered.

The world's governments stood by largely mute while the United States and Britain did their best to ruin the infrastructure of Iraq, at a cost of billions of dollars, so that they can then rebuild it, at a cost of billions of dollars. Then they stand by largely mute while Africa teeters on the brink.

Even though the musical elite of America and Britain saw fit to help out in the 1980's, their homelands are ignoring the situation right now. It is fair to say that much of Africa's problem derives from several centuries of European colonial rule, but that ended long ago. These are today's problems, and they need the attention of those who can help today, including America and Britain. Instead, in a triumph of moral leadership, America and Britain have managed to keep priorities straight and they haven't wasted any of that Iraq-bashing money on starving Africans.