

As much of the world focuses its political and intellectual energies on finding effective solutions to combat the global credit crunch, the rest of humanity continues struggling with the more endemic tragedies of war, exploitation and racism. Chronic poverty is trapped in a downward spiral, ushering in new conflicts. Meanwhile, global media spends less and less time probing the scope and impact of humanitarian crises.

## HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

by Alessandra Cipolla

### POOR GETTING POORER

According to Danny Leipziger, the World Bank's vice president for poverty reduction and economic management, the expected contraction of global GDP in 2009 — the first since the end of World War II — and an expected decline in world trade world (the first since 1982) places “large cloud lies on developing countries. We're expecting a hard fall with a lot of people thrust below the poverty line.”

Leipziger said estimates made last spring that the world's poor would increase by 100 million poor were now expected to rise to 150 million. The unprecedented crisis is a result of three negative factors, each one normally capable of provoking a recession, working in combination: scholarships are drying up, the international real estate market is in shambles and construction industry is under siege.

“The international community is already well behind its Gleneagles goals (designating 0.7 percent of GDP to nations in need of aid by 2013) but it can't pull back. On the contrary, need increased dramatically,” he said. Vulnerability studies produced in Washington call on industrialized countries to allocate 0.7 percent of their incentive packages to aid poor countries that can't afford anti-crisis plans. But with industrialized countries paying attention to their own worsening problems, the risk is that funds earmarked for dispossessed nations are put aside, at least temporarily. In a further blow to developing nations, African infrastructure investment is still \$8 billion below the needed \$20 billion required annually.

### SUDANESE TROUBLE

The International Criminal Court at The Hague has issued an arrest warrant for President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, accusing him of war crimes perpetrated in six years of civil war. Some analysts believe the warrant could trigger further violence in already embattled Sudan where peacekeepers are trying to rein in a guerrilla war involving rebels, government militias, bandits and rival tribes. In the wake of the decision, the Sudanese government expelled nearly a dozen humanitarian organizations including Oxfam, Care, Save the Children and Doctors Without Frontiers. Amnesty International said this was very bad news for the 2.2 million people at risk in Darfur. The expelled organizations are largely responsible for assistance to those at risk. Their absence from the scene puts the fate of



—Fighting between Tibetan monks and Nepalese police during demonstrations.

the entire population of Darfur, already victimized for six years, in the hands of the Sudanese government.

Said Tawanda Hondora, deputy director of the Africa program of Amnesty International: “Like any other country, Sudan has a responsibility based on international law to ensure access to people in need.” Based on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ratified by Sudan, Sudanese authorities have an obligation to refrain from actions that violate the economic, social cultural needs of their citizens and to request international assistance if they are unable to help.

### TIBET: NEW YEAR'S BLOODSHED

More than 100 Tibetan monks in the monastery of An Tuo, located in the Chinese province of Qinghai, were arrested following a demonstration held at the Tibetan New Year on February 25. Meanwhile, Chinese President Hu Jintao urged Tibetan officials to build a new “Great Wall” to guard against separatism.

Some 300 monks live in An Tuo, 109 of whom were detained. According to a report from the International Campaign for Tibet, the latest Chinese crack-



Corbis, N. Shreshtha/epa

down suggested that repression was reaching levels last seen during the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The report was circulated on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Tibetan revolt. It named 600 political prisoners arrested in the 12 months following March 2008 protests. It also cited 130 peaceful protests in Tibet over the last year and denounced the arrest of hundreds of monks of the monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Ganden, each one closed by the authorities. The organization said some 1,200 Tibetans were missing in connection with dissident activity.

On the 50th anniversary of the Lhasa uprising, the Italian Chamber of Deputies delivered a bipartisan message asking the Italian government press China for guarantee free access to region and to undertake constructive dialogue with the Dalai Lama "within the framework of the Chinese Constitution."

### **FORGOTTEN BY THE MEDIA**

Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières), founded by French journalists and doctors, has listed the 10 top humanitarian crisis ignored by Italian media. They include the health crisis in Zimbabwe and Myanmar; the humanitarian catastrophe in Somalia; civilians facing brutal bloodshed in the eastern Congo; child malnutrition; catastrophic conditions in the Somali region of Ethiopia; civilians killed or fleeing into Pakistan northwest; violence and suffering in Sudan; the fate of Iraqi civilians and the HIV-tuberculosis pandemic.

The MSF report confirmed a steady decline reporting on news regarding humanitarian emergencies. It represented 10 percent of all news coverage in 2006, dropping to eight percent in 2007 and six percent last year.

In cases where the emergencies have endured for years, media attention is usually focused on what's generally considered the worst phase of the crisis, after which there's often a void. In cases where humanitarian crises are covered in depth, such as in Iraq or Pakistan, the fate of civilians is usually second to coverage of warfare. Concerning Iraq, the focus is on civil violence and terrorist attacks, with the Italian and American political response prominently featured. In the case of Pakistan, violence is again featured, with a political backdrop. MSF undertook the project thanks to aid from the Italian Press Federation, which has also launched an "Adopt A Forgotten Cri-

sis" in an effort to press national media to discuss forgotten or little-mentioned crises over the next 12 months. The results of the effort will be noted in the group's 2010 report.

### **PATRAS: DREAM BECOME NIGHTMARE**

For thousands of Afghan migrants huddled in a makeshift shantytown in Greek city of Patras, the dream is to make it to Bari, Ancona and Venice by latching themselves to the underbellies of trucks. Daily, in groups of threes and four, they jump the fence, elude police, and try finding Italy-bound vehicles that park in the port to pick up goods. The trip, if they're able to find a truck, takes 20 hours. Some die in the attempt, suffocated or killed because the ropes attaching them to vehicle underbelly snaps. Yet they keep on trying.

According to Doctors Without Borders (MSF), which recently chronicled their plight, the slum days of the migrants begin at dawn, when they're awoken by sunlight. Their living conditions are punctuated by stench so pungent it stuns the senses. There are no toilets or drainage system. Electricity and water are available only illegally, by haphazard connection to the local municipal grid. Hygiene is mostly non-existent, says MSF.

Illnesses such as scabies, skin diseases and respiratory tract infections are commonplace. Many of the migrants also have unhealed wounds, mostly inflicted by the truncheons of Greek police that show little mercy in their monitoring and patrolling of the unwanted slums.

One man interview, known only as Ahmed, had a broken cheekbone; Yasser had a gash in his leg; Tony had a bleeding foot. "We play Tom and Jerry," said Yasser, trying to downplay the situation. "We are the mouse and they're the cat. Sometimes they win, sometimes we win."

But when the cat wins the result can be frightening. Migrants can be brutally beaten, then left to bake in the sun while handcuffed and denied water. They're identified, held for a few days in jail, and finally released. They usually return to the slum once again in search of a ride. Two organizations, "No Border Patra" and "Antiracist Patra," were created two years ago in an effort to safeguard migrant rights. Says Evdokia Katsighianni, a volunteer: "For some time we've been discussing the idea of a real camp that can accommodate the refugees. It would be located outside the city. The problem is that the migrants are never going to stray far from the port. To them, the port means Italy."

*(Giampaolo Musumeci)*