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JOHNS HOPKINS  
BLOOMBERG  
SCHOOL *of* PUBLIC HEALTH

# Causes of Conflicts and Population Displacement

**Gilbert Burnham, MD, MPH**  
**Johns Hopkins University**

# Origins of Refugees

## 1980s

- ◆ Vietnam
- ◆ Cambodia
- ◆ Afghanistan
- ◆ Mozambique
- ◆ Ethiopia
- ◆ Angola
- ◆ Sudan

## 1990s

- ◆ Iraq
- ◆ Yugoslavia
- ◆ Armenia
- ◆ Georgia
- ◆ Tajikistan
- ◆ Somalia
- ◆ Rwanda/Burundi

# Past Causes of Displacement

- ◆ Principal reasons for people fleeing
  - Ideology
  - Individual acts of persecution
  - Proxy wars

# Present and Future Causes of Displacement

- ◆ Most displacements follow wide-spread violence spiraling from the following:
  - Weak states with weak institutions
  - Poverty and economic collapse
  - Environmental disasters
  - Ethnic tensions exploited through political opportunism
  - Wide-scale human rights abuses

# Current War Trends

- ◆ Previously saw wars between states
  - Now minor contributor to population displacement
- ◆ Most wars resulting from states targeting a single ethnic group
- ◆ *War within* states
  - Attempts to seize control of weakened or collapsed states

# Who Is Displaced?

- ◆ Subsistence, peasant farmers
- ◆ Educated people
- ◆ Urban dwellers
- ◆ Certain social groups
- ◆ Religious groups
- ◆ Professionals

# Political Roots

- ◆ Who is persecuted often depends on who controls the state



# Political Roots

- ◆ Who has power, privilege, patronage, and perks?
- ◆ Which groups are stigmatized?
  - Education or status
  - Geographic location
  - Religion
  - Language, culture, social group

# Circumstances that Create Conflict

- ◆ Weak states prone to internal violence
  - May lack historical identity and cohesiveness
  - Have poor resolution mechanisms
  - Political institutions not representative
  - Judiciary not independent
  - Lack of impartial law enforcement

# Circumstances that Create Conflict

- ◆ Violence falls as per capita GDP rises
- ◆ Armed insurrection may be seen as the only way to change
  - Especially with ready access to cheap arms
- ◆ Opposition weak and often divided
- ◆ Political controversy disintegrates into anarchy

# External Political Factors

- ◆ External forces may complicate unstable internal events as follows:
  - Raise the level of violence

# External Political Factors

- ◆ External forces may complicate unstable internal events as follows:
  - Disrupt traditional mediation processes
  - Prop leaders that lack legitimacy
  - Military aid increases destructiveness of conflict
  - Economic aid may raise the stakes

# Economic Roots

- ◆ Economic tensions increase potential for population displacement
- ◆ Even though poverty alone may not cause displacement in static situations:
  - Extreme poverty breeds resignation
  - Poverty may increase ethnic and communal tensions
  - Poverty may interact with other factors to promote displacement

# Economic Roots

- ◆ As economy declines . . .
  - Tensions may rise
  - Distribution of resources becomes politically explosive
- ◆ Search for scapegoats to blame
  - Often minority groups

# Conflicts Accelerate Economic Decline

- ◆ Food production and distribution often early casualty
  - Precarious in subsistence economies
  - Resulting malnutrition accelerates disease and death
  - Salaried workers particularly at risk
- ◆ Rapid economic growth can also contribute to development of conflict



# Environmental Roots

- ◆ Migration occurs as traditional lands become uninhabitable
  - Natural disasters
  - Man-made
  - “Eco-refugees” do not qualify for UNHCR protection
- ◆ Ecological factors may combine with other factors to promote displacement

# Ecological Effects with Other Factors

- ◆ As population increases, competition over arable land increases
- ◆ Increasing land pressure leads to soil exhaustion/erosion, overgrazing
- ◆ Drought increases the impact of other factors

# Ecological Effects with Other Factors

- ◆ Existing tensions may be turned into armed conflict
- ◆ Government or other forces may target environment of ethnic groups for development projects

# Ethnic Tensions

- ◆ Some nations still cling to the idea of homogeneity of population
  - Race in Germany, Rwanda/Burundi, Yugoslavia, Somalia
  - Orthodox beliefs in Serbia
  - Sheriat law in Sudan
  - Language in Quebec

# Ethnic Tensions

- ◆ Irredentism—Based on race, religion, culture
- ◆ The world's 190 nations have 5,000 ethnic groups
- ◆ Continuing efforts to create/impose homogeneous states is a major source of conflict

# Consequences of Ethnic Tensions

- ◆ Ethnicity highly susceptible to political exploitation
  - Groups seek community support by fanning ethnic antagonism, reactivating ancient hatreds
  - Political movements may use religion in same way
  - Ethnic conflict likely when one ethnic group takes control of state

# Consequences of Ethnic Tensions

- ◆ Nationality defined by characteristics of one ethnic group
  - Even though nation may have multiple groups
  - Those not belonging may be seen as obstacles to nation-building

# Conflict Resolution Depends on Power

- ◆ Powers of central government are important in controlling group conflicts
  - Mediating capacity lost in single-group government
  - Cold war patronage often supported one client group



# Mediation to Alleviate Ethnic Tensions

- ◆ Mediation to alleviate ethnic tensions is a challenge
  - Prevent them escalating into violent conflicts
  - Promote acceptance of ethnic diversity
  - Promote tolerance within and without national borders

# Human Rights Abuses

- ◆ Forced departure violates the right to remain peaceably in one's home
- ◆ Intentional targeting of civilians via military actions
  - Military sweeps thought to be sympathetic to the enemy
  - Use of land mines

# Human Rights Abuses

- ◆ Human rights violations often at core of humanitarian emergencies

# State's Responsibility

- ◆ State's responsibility encoded in the following:
  - The Universal Declaration on Human Rights
  - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Binding Form of the UDHR)
  - International Convention on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

# Defenders of Human Rights

- ◆ Sovereign state primary defender of citizen's rights as follows:
  - Freedom from torture and arbitrary detention
  - Freedom of expression, thought, or belief
- ◆ International community responsible once states fail in their duties

# Human Rights Abuses Do Not Occur in a Vacuum

- ◆ Usually coexist with . . .
  - Economic strains
  - Disruption in food supplies
  - Political weakness and instability
  - Ethnic conflict
  - Tradition of violence
  - Ecologic deterioration

# Resolving Conflict Situations

*Process Involves Three Main Components*

## 1. Immediate protection

- Cease-fire agreements to stop human rights violations and persecution
- Provision of humanitarian assistance
- “Corridors of peace”

# Resolving Conflict Situations

*Process Involves Three Main Components*

## 2. Build structures

- For mediation
- For resolution of conflict
- For the return of refugees

## 3. Develop an economic base

- To reduce resource inequality



# Causes of Conflicts

## *An Alternate View*

- ◆ Conflict is inevitable
- ◆ Violent conflict is often inevitable
  - In some conflicts, violence is appropriate
- ◆ Conflicts have two principal origins
  - Conflict over resources—the majority
  - Conflict over identity—the minority

# Defining Conflict Resolution

- ◆ Mainly has to do with power and compromise
- ◆ Resolved when parties begin to realize pain and see that they may not win total control
  - Conflicts are then “ripe” for resolution
- ◆ The mediator’s role may be that of helping to ripen the perceptions of pain