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War and Poverty: Looking Back at the Balkans' History

ON JANUARY 30, 2021

WORLD NEWS

MUSKEGO, Wisconsin —The cyclical process of war and poverty and whether poverty creates war more than war creates poverty is open for debate, where the devastation of either is not. War creates poverty [by destroying buildings](#) worth billions of dollars as well as homes, businesses and schools. People lose work and flee their countries looking for safety and leave with nothing. It can take countries more than 14 years to recover from the devastating effects of war. Roughly 1.5 billion people around the world experience cycles of war and poverty. The ratio of impact on countries who have seen war or major conflict is that for every three years of conflict occurring, the country is set back more than 2.7% on improving poverty. Countries that have seen conflict in the past 40 years had poverty rates more than 21% higher than non-violent countries.

A History of Conflict and Violence

After World War II the country then [known as Yugoslavia](#) was extraordinarily diverse in nationality and religious background. Serbians, Muslims and Croats resided in the once German-occupied country in peace under the dictator President Tito until his death in 1980. It was not until 1991 that the tensions between the groups led to war as each group attempted to break away from the once united country.

Religious and political tensions led to war and poverty in the Balkans during the 1990s. The Balkans region has had a history of war dating back to World War I. It was at that time that Yugoslavia separated from the Hungarian empire. In 1991, [war broke out](#) between Serbian and Croatian forces in the Balkans region attempting to divide Yugoslavia. In 1992, Serbian armies attacked Muslim communities in Bosnia. The conflict killed 200,000 people and displaced nearly one million people.

The Story of Zoran Saric

The Borgen Project spoke with Zoran Saric, a Serbian refugee whose family was residing in Croatia at the time the conflicts began in the Balkans in 1991. Saric and his family fled Croatia to reside in Bosnia when he was 10 years old. Saric recalls staying in multiple refugee camps after leaving his home. As violence spread into Bosnia, Saric's family had to leave again to Serbia. At the refugee camps, Saric would share one room with his mother, father and older brother. He recalls aid sent from UNICEF — bags of food and clothes for the refugees. Each person at the camp would get a token for meals. The token is turned in for the meal and is returned when the plate is returned.

People without tokens cannot access a meal. The food portions were small and Saric recalls that sometimes there was insufficient food for the number of people.

As refugees, Saric's parents found it difficult to find work. He recalls at times, farmers would show up at the camps and recruit residents there for work in the fields. He remembers that his parents would go to pick cherries, corn or other crops from morning until night. Their pay was the equivalent of \$10 per day. This work was infrequent and they did not make enough money to sustain themselves and were dependent on aid at the refugee camps. Saric also would partake in any work he could. When he was 13, he remembers unloading semi-trucks full of bags of concrete for a small amount of money.

Hope on the Horizon

When traveling to Belgrade, Serbia, Saric's older brother received word of a refugee program helping refugees in Serbia migrate to the United States. The program offered relocation to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The chances of acceptance to the program were higher if the family knew somebody already located in the U.S. Saric's family was acquainted with another refugee who left for the Milwaukee area, however, they lost contact with him. Despite seemingly small odds of acceptance, Saric's brother applied to the program and the family was chosen to relocate to the United States.

When the Borgen Project asked Saric if there was anything he would like to add to help others understand the relationship between war and poverty and the devastating effects on innocent people, he replied that he would not wish it on anyone. "You lose everything and sometimes you lose hope," Saric states. "You lose your property, you lose your childhood, you wonder when you can go home or if you even have a home to go home to."

The Link Between War and Poverty

Roughly 70 million people face similar hardships, resulting in worldwide displacements. More than 25 million people worldwide are refugees and more than 3.5 million others seek asylum due to conditions such as violence.

Countries involved in wars suffer great economic hardships leaving people in poverty for years thereafter. As a result of war and conflict, inflation occurs and jobs become scarce. Healthcare becomes inadequate and taxes increase as national debts increase due to the costs of war. Civil war can be especially damaging to countries. The traumatic impacts of war on the citizens make a difficult economic situation even more devastating when people are left to try to piece their lives back together after experiencing violence, deaths and displacement.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is an organization that assists refugees like Saric in the Balkans region. In 2019 alone, the IRC helped more than 7,000 refugees find new homes in the United States. At the end of 2019, almost 80 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced from their homes. Fortunately, a significant portion of U.S. citizens believes that taking in refugees is the right thing to do. Organizations such as the IRC hope that under the Biden administration improved refugee resettlement programs and policies will better the lives of these vulnerable groups.

– Carolyn Lancour

Photo: Flickr

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COVID-19 Could Not Stop Help for Haiti

ON DECEMBER 28, 2020

WORLD NEWS

MUSKEGO, WI — Of all the countries in the Western Hemisphere Haiti is most stricken by poverty. Haiti's Human Development Index is at [170 out of 189 nations](#). Children born in Haiti today have a 55% chance of not reaching their full potential. More than 6 million of Haiti's citizens live in poverty. Almost 42% of the six million who live in poverty live in extreme poverty defined as living on less than \$1.12 per day. COVID-19 has [posed an even greater challenge](#) for providing help to Haitians living in poverty. While COVID-19 cases have been low in Haiti, the impact it has had and will continue to have on the economy is troubling. The Gross Domestic Product of Haiti was expected to be negatively impacted by more than 3.1%.

Haiti's susceptibility to natural disasters makes it additionally vulnerable to poverty. Haiti has a long history of earthquakes and hurricanes. With such natural disasters come flooding and landslides. These conditions make it especially hard for Haiti's economy to improve. In 2004, Haiti experienced massive rainstorms. Communities were forced to evacuate and leave their homes, which were washed away in the flooding. Around 2,400 people died in this tragedy.

Haiti's landscape is susceptible to erosion, which makes flooding especially dangerous. In 2008, three hurricanes and one tropical storm caused more than \$8 billion in damage and killed 800 people. In 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake hit Haiti killing 300,000 people. That year Haiti also was forced to deal with another hurricane and a cholera outbreak. The complications of the earthquake made dealing with the additional issues even more difficult since [so many individuals were displaced](#). In 2016, the country was hit again with another massive hurricane, costing an additional \$1.9 billion in damage. It left 600 people dead and tens of thousands of people displaced.

Living Conditions for Some in Haiti

The Borgen Project spoke with Dr. Anita Frew, the executive director of Transformation Ministries regarding how she brings help to Haiti and how she was able to modify things considering COVID-19. While the World Bank has illustrated Haiti's [unemployment rate as 14%](#) for 2020, Dr. Frew has seen the suffering of the people of Haiti firsthand and identifies the unemployment rate as much higher at 90%. In order to find work, [many must leave the country](#). Single mothers are left with children they cannot feed.

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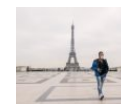


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Some families [abandon their children](#) because they do not know how they can take care of them. She has seen mothers make cookies out of mud and contaminated water, which they leave out in the sun to dry so that they have something to feed their children so that they do not feel hungry. Women [lack transportation to hospitals](#) during childbirth and are left to give birth at home in unsanitary conditions.

After witnessing the suffering of the people in Haiti Dr. Frew started Hope Song. Hope Song is a refuge that consists of a bible school, a technical training facility and an orphanage for abandoned children and where mothers who are struggling to take care of their children find help. Dr. Frew was able to purchase a van in Haiti and provide transport to mothers to hospitals, but the travel is difficult. To get there, they must drive through a river. Currently, their van is in need of repairs or replacement, and costs are high for this service in Haiti.

COVID-19 in Haiti

COVID-19 poses its own unique challenges to Dr. Frew's mission to provide help to Haiti. She normally visits Haiti six months out of the year for three months at a time. After three months, she returns to raise funds for the people of Haiti. She said that 100% of what Transformation Ministries raises benefits the people directly. This year, that was not possible due to travel restrictions and her flight being canceled.

Inflation due to COVID-19 has caused an increase in already high food prices. The cost of staples such as [beans and rice have doubled](#) since 2018. Haiti had its own pandemic before COVID-19: food insecurity. Additionally, the people of Haiti suffer from many diseases, such as cholera and malaria.

After the onset of COVID-19, the attendance at Dr. Frew's school went from more than 200 children to 32 students. School attendance was a primary way that the mission provided aid to the children. Despite the low attendance, she did not allow this to stop help from getting to Haiti. While children remained home because their families feared the virus, the mission continued to operate. It distributed food to the children's homes increased the number of people the organization was able to feed.

Improving Lives Through Donations

Donations continued to come in during COVID-19. Dr. Frew was able to connect with others who provided aid to Haiti. She procured two shipping containers of supplies to send over instead of the two suitcases she would typically take. She purchased land in Haiti and is working to expand Hope Song to help provide the care that is desperately needed. Wells have been built to bring clean water to Hope Song, and a third well is currently being built on the land that was purchased. Through donations, work has also been done on the roofs of homes that are made of banana leaves. These leaves are insufficient in the heavy rain of Haiti, and donations have helped provide tin roofs.

The costs of helping are high. However, through donations received from people in the United States, Dr. Frew will continue to bring much-needed help to Haiti in the years to come.

– Carolyn Lancour

Photo: [Flickr](#)

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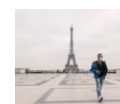


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The NFL Waterboys Providing Clean Water

ON MARCH 5, 2021

SPOTTED

SEATTLE, Washington — Access to clean water is one of the most pressing issues in the world today. For perspective, approximately 785 million members of the global population currently lack access to safe drinking water. Approximately one million deaths each year arise from complications due to a lack of clean water. Additionally, one in three people lack access to proper bathroom facilities, and millions of man-hours are exhausted on water collection annually. This mostly affects women and children, taking time away from education and work opportunities. The charity NFL Waterboys is currently working to make a difference and expand access to clean water.

Access to Clean Water: What to Know

Access to clean water is a human rights issue. In 2010, the U.N. General Assembly declared having access to sanitary water a basic human right. The international body decided, more specifically, that the cost of water must remain affordable for each household and should not exceed 3% of a given household's budget. Furthermore, individuals should not have to travel more than 1,000 meters from their homes to access clean water. However, for many, it takes hours to gather water. Girls often do not attend school because the burden of time and energy gathering water for the survival of their families takes precedence.

Worldwide, two out of every five people do not have proper facilities to accommodate proper handwashing and wastewater disposal. Additionally, one in three people do not have access to a toilet. This results in the flow back of 80% of untreated wastewater into the ecosystem. More than one billion people end up drinking contaminated water as a result. In addition, more than 295,000 children each year under the age of five die due to diseases caused by ingesting contaminated water.

NFL Waterboys

NFL star Chris Long started a charity to help get clean water to children in developing countries. Long took a trip to Tanzania and became aware of the issue of clean water. He wanted to help and, upon his return, rallied other NFL stars to help tackle the problem. Long started a charity in 2015 called the NFL Waterboys. Along with other NFL players, he commissioned fans to help raise awareness and funds to assist the children lacking access to clean

water. NFL Waterboys began raising funds to build 32 solar-powered deep borehole wells in East African countries. Each well would represent one of the 32 NFL teams.

The work of the NFL Waterboys has so far impacted 395,000 people through providing access to clean water, preventing disease and helping individuals lead more productive lives. The charity's goal is to get one million people to access drinking water.

The World Health Organization projects that by 2025 [half of the world population](#) will be impacted by clean water deficits. The NFL Waterboys' approach is to fund sustainable solutions. It aims not only to provide clean water to some of the most in-need communities but also to restore joy and hope to the people who call Africa home.

- Carolyn Lyrenmann

Photo: [Flickr](#)

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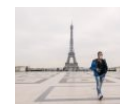


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Wisconsin Senator Sponsors Aid to Immigrant and Refugee Communities

ON JANUARY 2, 2021

CONGRESS

SEATTLE, Washington — Unexploded devices of war continue to be an issue in countries that allied with the United States during times of war. Each day devices such as landmines are responsible for the injury of an average of 23 people per day globally. In 2016 alone, more than 8,000 people were injured or killed by undetonated explosives. Thousands of people in more than 60 countries live with the threat of losing a limb or their lives to these devices of war. On April 4, 2019, Senator Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin sponsored a bill that would provide aid to immigrant and refugee communities in countries that supported and defended the United States military.

Senator Tammy Baldwin has a history of sponsoring and supporting bills that relate to foreign aid. Baldwin supported the Peace Act of 2009, which provided economic aid to Pakistan. She also supported allocating \$156 million to the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Trust Fund and \$15.2 billion allocated for foreign operations to promote peace in the Middle East. Senator Baldwin co-sponsored a bill proposing a multi-year commitment to fund Africa with food and medicine. She also fought for the repeal of laws that violate women's rights in Afghanistan.

Unexploded Devices in Laos

More than two million tons of bombs were dropped on Laos during the Vietnam War to attempt to prevent the military of Northern Vietnam from transporting supplies. Laos has tens of millions of unexploded devices left behind. In Laos, more than 20,000 people have been injured or killed by mines since the end of the Vietnam War. Close to one-third of Laos is covered with mines or other unexploded devices.

Over time bombs were buried and became a hazard to farmers when attempting to agriculturalize land in the affected areas. Many of the impacted farmers have no choice but to take the risk and continue to farm on the land they own despite knowing that they may encounter unexploded war devices. Devastating injuries such as loss of limbs, loss of hearing and loss of sight continue to be a threat to the citizens of Laos. There are around "80 million cluster munitions" that remain unexploded in Laos following the Vietnam War.

The Legacies of War Recognition and Unexploded Ordnance Removal Act

The Legacies of War Recognition and Unexploded Ordnance Removal Act would aid immigrant and refugee communities of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. These [countries supported the United States](#) during the conflict in Southeast Asia. Senator Tammy Baldwin recognizes the importance of partnership with our foreign allies. The act provides assistance to impacted countries, creating safer communities for U.S. allies.

The bill highlights the reasons why the United States should take responsibility and assist in resolving the many undetonated devices of war the conflict left behind. The United States is home to citizens from ally countries such as Hmong, Cham, Lao and Vietnam. These countries fought alongside United States soldiers during the Vietnam War. The bill highlights key partnerships such as providing food and shelter to United States soldiers and providing information on enemy strategies during the Vietnam War.

The Importance of Clearing Unexploded Devices

The fighting in Southeast Asia left behind unexploded devices that are deadly to these immigrant and refugee communities. The devices are present in forests, school grounds, rice fields, roads and other main areas of these communities. The presence of explosive devices hinders the ability of the areas to develop and reduce poverty. The United States is currently the leader in providing aid for immigrant and refugee communities regarding the detonation of unexploded devices. The U.S. has spent more than \$3.7 billion since 1993.

- Aid to the immigrant and refugee communities in Vietnam would assist in the safe removal of the unexploded contaminants. Around 800,000 tons of unexploded devices of war were left behind in Vietnam alone. More than 100,000 people have died due to these unexploded devices. At least 40,000 of these were civilian deaths.
- The bill would also provide aid to immigrant and refugee communities in Cambodia. Since 1979, unexploded devices have killed or injured more than 64,000 Cambodian citizens. This is an average of one incident a week. Cambodia has one of the highest death and injury rates due to the devices.

Where the Act Is Now

The Committee on Foreign Affairs reviewed H.R.2097: The Legacies of War Recognition and Unexploded Ordnance Removal Act on July 17, 2019. There, it was ordered to be reported [by unanimous consent](#). The Committee then introduced the bill to the U.S. Senate under S.4686 on September 24, 2020. If passed the bill will authorize appropriations of \$1 billion per year from 2021 to 2025. It will supply aid to immigrant and refugee communities impacted by unexploded devices of war.

– Carolyn Lyrenmann

Photo: [Flickr](#)

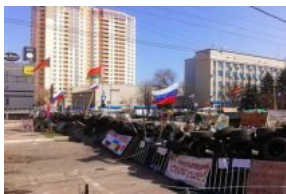
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