

UNITED NATIONS AFRICAN MOTHERS

FOR THE CRISIS

(U N A M C)

STATING THE PROBLEM AT THE INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN RELIEF
CONCERT IN THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY HALL

FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 1985

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née

NGO TJEGA of the Republic of Cameroon

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tonight, here in the United Nations General Assembly Hall, you are participating in a unique event, an event which heralds the beginning of a new era. This event is unique because those who are hosting it in this palace of modern thought are the invisible and forgotten of the modern age. They cannot read nor write, they do not understand English nor French, nor speak Japanese, Russian, Chinese, nor Spanish. Nevertheless, they deliberately chose this Hall to tell their story. These forgotten ones are, of course the mothers of Africa represented here in New-York by the United Nations African Mothers for the crisis.

In true African tradition, when someone dies, you must explain to those who come to comfort you, the cause of death, the burial ceremony, and the feelings of those who are left behind. These explanations are generally given under a big tree or in a large tent made with palm leaves, since a house is often too small.

We, the mothers of Africa, have lost almost all our children. And you, the International Community have come to comfort us. We would have loved to have received you under a big tree, but both our children and our trees have disappeared.

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We wished we had a large tent made of palm leaves because the palm tree is the most resistant of our trees, but even the palms, (those wonderful trees which reach up to the gods) have died. So we looked for a place to contain the world, a place which would echo our voices weakened by tears. We looked and looked. And finally we found the biggest "tree". The UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY HALL.

Welcome ! Here is the story :

We bore wonderful children to farm our land and feed our people. One day ships came out of nowhere, took our children, and made them slaves. Our LAND trembled in fear. We suffered, we cried. But with hope, we bore more children. Once more, the big droughts of 1914, 1940 and 1944 swept them away. We thought the gods were angry, and so we went back to work, we created another generation of children, and made sacrifices to the gods. Something wonderful happened : not only did we get water, but also political independence of our oppressed countries and health for our children, people, and cattle. Our LAND once more, trembled, but this time with joy. And the MOTHERS OF AFRICA, reassured, went back to their fields, dancing.

Unfortunately, the dust cloud reappeared. It came time and time again in those early years of the seventies. Was this a bad Omen ? Were our children in danger once more ?

And the LAND became drier. And the rain stopped. And the harvest became smaller and finally disappeared.

Suddenly posters of our dying children covered the world. The International Community came to our villages. They seemed to be studying the situation and finding solutions for us to get water, for our LAND to be more fertile, for our children to stop dying. IN 1974 a "recognized authority" even told us that the world was equipped with all the proper technologies which will enable Mankind ten years after to ensure that no child in no part of the world goes to bed with an empty stomach.

We waited for the results of these studies, we waited a long time. While waiting, we were caught in the terrible treadmill of going to the fields, keeping planting corn while carrying our sick children on our broken backs, only to travel many miles to get water before sunset. We couldn't stop this useless movement because " Save Africa" kept ringing in our head like an alarm. But 1984 destroyed all of our resistance because we suddenly saw our children dying by the hundreds and we fainted from despair.

So french or not, English or not tonight we are going to speak. Just speak, not in scientific articulate language, but in the language of reality.

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We got all the canned sardines, rice, milk, ham, bla and medecine you sent and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts in the name of Africa.

But if you really want to save Africa for the sake of Mankind as we believe you do, then listen to our prayers :

1°) The drought has evaporated all the water of our river. We have no water -neither to quench the thirst of our children, nor to water our gardens. Please give water to the rural woman of Africa. Thus, we hope that the Secretary General's report to the 41st Session of the United Nations General Assembly, will tell the World that all the villages of Africa have wells.

2°) Our other problem is that our main source of energy is wood and millions of our trees have been cut without replacement. We ask you to help us replant these trees to protect our soils and make them productive again, so that we can avoid eating the left-overs of other continents. We invite you to work with us to make Africa green again.

3°) We plead with all of you in this room, to ask your delegates to the U.N Nairobi Conference in July (which marks the end of the first UN Decade on Women), to call for a second

decade devoted to rural women. For, as you know, in Africa, it is the rural women who have fed their people for centuries. This decade will help the rural women to get new techniques of food production and preservation. We want this second decade for them because we do not want the people of Africa to reach the year 2000 on their knees still begging for food.

Finally, we speak to you tonight because, we are tired of being the mothers of a helpless group of people. Their helplessness discourages the few children we still have, and keeps them from the struggle of building their own future. Thus take away the pictures of dying babies from your walls and televisions. Replace them with water which flows, trees which grow, and children looking to their future !

Thank you for coming tonight to comfort us. We want to hope that tomorrow we will welcome you in our villages, when the drums will beat to celebrate our full harvests. We will then sit together in the moonlight, under the tree of life, drinking the cool, clear water from the wells of international solidarity.

Thank you.