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1

THE NATION'S NEWSPAPER

# USA TODAY

No. 1 IN THE USA . . . 6.6 MILLION READERS A DAY

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8, 1992

## Don't forget the Cold War's other victims

**While starting to aid needy people in the liberated Eastern bloc, we must not abandon the poor and hungry in developing countries.**

A few short months ago, all of us watched in awe as the hammer and sickle were lowered from their perch over the Kremlin for the last time.

Since then, however, we have been shaken by the reports of hunger and despair in what was once known as the Eastern bloc. I am reminded of that difficult time in my own childhood, when UNICEF — the United Nations Children's Fund — came to our town after the war to deliver the food and medical supplies we so desperately needed to survive.

It was this experience that later led me to become a spokesperson for UNICEF and to travel around the world to

try to help children in need. I never imagined that UNICEF, which changed its mandate to focus on developing countries in 1950, would again be needed in Europe.

Moved as I am by the plight of the children who are caught in the recent wave of political change, I can't help but also think of the 27 million Africans who are suffering from prolonged drought, famine and war. I ask myself: What will become of them?

The people of the Communist bloc were not the only victims of the Cold War. For more than 40 years, the developing world was used as a battleground for the East-West conflict, and too many governments spend money on arms instead of feeding hungry mouths. Development in many countries ground to a halt or even reversed. The legacy of this postwar era was poverty — and poverty is the real underlying cause of all hunger and disease.

I've spent time with poverty-stricken people in developing countries like Ethiopia, the Su-

dan, Vietnam, El Salvador and Bangladesh. Unlike suffering families in Europe and the former Soviet Union, they do not occupy the international spotlight. They have no cultural ties to wealthy countries. They have few highways or hospitals. They are without basic health care, clean water, schools — all of the things that add up to a better life and food on the table.

To make matters worse, unrealistic foreign debts continue to stunt the growth of developing countries and that of their children. Many developing countries borrowed money in hopes that it would speed development, only to find their efforts undermined by setbacks like drought, falling commodities prices and a drastic increase in the price of oil.

The African countries alone owe \$150 billion in foreign debts, and they are sending more overseas in interest payments than they are receiving in aid from governments and relief organizations. If we are to weaken the hold of poverty on much of the developing world, we must recognize the inhumanity of this burden.

The world's poor children are not without hope. Like UNICEF, there are many individuals and groups that remain

committed to fighting the effects of poverty in developing countries, even if their work is not necessarily making headlines. But these efforts are only a beginning; we cannot let the children in developing countries blend into the background. There is no question that we must come to the aid of families in the now-liberated Eastern bloc. That does not mean, however, abandoning the families whose plight is not so new or dramatic, but equal-

ly catastrophic.

Mikhail Gorbachev, writing in the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, said: "The long years we spent plunged in the Cold War made losers of us all." He's right. Let's not forget the Cold War's other victims.

*Audrey Hepburn is honorary chairwoman and keynote speaker for the Alan Shawn Feinstein World Hunger Awards Thursday at Brown University in Providence, R.I.*



AP  
By Audrey Hepburn, Academy Award-winning actress and UNICEF goodwill ambassador.



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