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Audrey Hepburn 'The Unforgettable Silence' -- Reflections on Somalia

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FROM OWEN CLARKE 212 350 4847

Unforgettable
Silence
The noted
actress
wonders
'whether God
has forgotten
Somalia'

I have marked questions with * e-111

All lady for Newsweek
spoke on phone

BY AUDREY HEPBURN

Somalia has been on my mind for so many months. We kept reading about it, what it////the war? X////was doing and what it was going to do to children. And it all happened. And it kept happening. I've been told that there's something I can do, which is draw attention to things—that's what my job is all about. You're prepared for what you're supposed to do. But I wasn't prepared for this.

It still is so hard to talk about because it's sounspeak-able. We//X//who?//X//flew from Nairobi first to Kismayu and from the air it's obviously very dry. The earth is an extraordinary sight, a deep terra-cotta red. You see the villages, displacement camps, compounds. And the earth is rippled around these places like an ocean bed; I was told these were the graves. There are graves everywhere. Wherever there is a road, around the paths that you take, along the riverbeds, near every camp, there are graves.

People who can still walk are phantoms. At Kismayu we visited a child health care center, a big camp where it dawned on me only afterward there was something strange. I realized there were no small children. They had all been snuffed out like candles. It's unsettling, the absence of small children.

We went to a lot of places in Mogadishu. I've seen bombed cities because I was in Holland during the German occupation; we were first invaded, then liberated and bombed in between. So I've seen a bit of that. But I've never seen a whole city where there isn't a building that doesn't have holes in it or a roof on it. It is a total battleground.

As we arrived in Baidoa, they were loading bodies onto a truck, most of them very small. We went into a feeding center run by those marvelous girls from Irish Concern. They were particularly taking care of the smaller, the sickest children who were sitting and lying under the only tree in a courtyard. They were being more or less force fed—a spoon of something every few minutes—because they can't drink or eat on their own or don't want to any more. What amazes me is the resilience of human beings, that they were still alive, still sitting.

I did see a young boy, fighting for breath, who obviously had a respiratory infection. He must have been about 14. I watched him fighting for breath. I had asthma all my childhood and I was longing to help him breathe. He finally just curled up and died and they took him away after a while. He became just another of these little tiny things wrapped in whatever they can find for them. A little blanket or a piece of cloth. They are totally silent. Silent children. The silence is something you never forget.

I want to be very careful how I say this. I don't want to sound overly dramatic. But you really wonder whether

God hasn't forgotten Somalia. You feel it's a forgotten country. But not by all. There's this extraordinary human miracle and you can believe in human goodness. I think it's the first time in history there is a whole nation that's being kept afloat by relief workers. Because in this country there's no government, no infrastructure and no communications. Practically no roads nor anyone you can ask a question of. There are two warlords sharing Mogadishu but all the clans around are unreachable. There's nothing else, no one else providing. And you can't say the workers are in it for the money.

You hear it every day: "What is the solution to Yugoslavia? What is the solution to Somalia?" They're both different. I'm no expert and I don't have solutions. But you cannot bomb cities to get rid of snipers. Nor would massive military intervention have any effect on Somalia and put it back on its feet. I think with Somalia, especially, it will have to be a slow process.

Signs of hope: Much of the unrest is due to hunger. The looting is due to hunger. I do think there's a lot to be said for just smothering the country with food. Meanwhile the UN representatives are sitting there in Mogadishu talking day and night with clan leaders, because that's the only way they'll come to a decision. ~~X~~/Is this about a truce???/X It has to be negotiated clan by clan. Somalis is a very homogenous country. It's not an ethnic nor a religious fight. And there are signs of hope.

I saw this wonderful "oasis in the desert," an Oxfam project near Kismayu, that UNICEF also supports. L Some 1,200 people of different clans have built their own villages again. They've been provided with tools

and seeds. UNICEF gave the fuel for an old pump. They're growing maize, tomatoes. They look well and are living together. Their common purpose is surviving, together. It's a fact. It's there. I believe that it can continue to happen.

I was very interested to see that women have a big say in Somalia, unlike so many Muslim countries. It's a matriarchy, actually. Women are allowed in the marketplace. They are very important and they're respected.

What is particular to Somalia is that they are dying of starvation. What's wrong with them is starvation and, as a consequence, their frailty and their vulnerability to disease. But it is the guns that are letting them die. They are stopping us from saving them.

The most frightening thing for me is when a thought crosses my brain saying "Perhaps we don't have a solution." Perhaps we don't always have the answer. What if we have an ~~XX~~ is this U.N.??? ~~XX~~ "intervention?" Does that go on for years and years? Is this a different kind of occupation? Is this a different kind of colonialism? In Africa, are we not reaping the mess made many years ago when we enriched ourselves? We didn't do a hell of a lot for those people, did we?

There is a lot of soul searching that even I have to go through. I keep sane by saying it is not my job to solve all the problems. My job is to help save a child. And finally, that is the most important thing. Because it is these children that will, we hope, grow up healthy, productive citizens. And change their country.

Hepburn is UNICEF's goodwill ambassador.

The Din of Silence

Born in Belgium and brought up in the occupied Dutch city of Arnhem during World War II, Audrey Hepburn went on to become one of the world's best-known film stars. But for the past five years she has devoted most of her energies to UNICEF's efforts to help the world's children. In a sense, says Hepburn, she is repaying the international relief organizations that came to her family's assistance after the war. Late last month, with her husband, Robert Wolders, Hepburn traveled from her home in Switzerland to the battered cities and countryside of Somalia. On her return, she talked with NEWSWEEK's Christopher Dickey. Excerpts:

DICKEY: Why did you go?

HEPBURN: It's been on my mind for so many months—Somalia. I wanted to go much earlier, because it's frustrating for everybody. You feel you can't do anything. But I've been told that there's something I can do, which is draw attention to things, and that's what my job is all about.

Do you find it disorienting to go from Switzerland to Somalia?

I wasn't prepared for Somalia. No.

What did you actually see? What did you experience?

It was hard then, and it still is so hard to talk about, because it's unspeakable. We flew from Nairobi first to Kismayu, and from the air it's obviously very dry. The earth is red—an extraordinary sight—it's that deep terra-cotta red. And you see the villages, displacement camps, compounds, and the earth is all rippled around these places like an ocean bed, and I was told these were the graves. There are graves everywhere. Along the road, wherever there is a road, around the paths that you take, along the riverbeds, near every camp—there are graves everywhere. Those that can still walk are phantoms. At Kismayu we visited a child-health-care center, a big camp where, I promise you, it dawned on me only afterward there was something strange about this camp. And I realized there were no small children. They were just all snuffed out like candles.

It's weird, that: the absence of small children. It's the 10- and 12-year-olds you can resuscitate if they're not too ill. If it's a matter of malnutrition and [they don't

Audrey Hepburn



DAVID GILES—PA

The noted actress, a UNICEF envoy, bears witness to Somalia's suffering

have] any terrible infections or measles or tuberculosis, you can still save them. But not these tiny ones.

And in the towns?

We went to a lot of places in Mogadishu. I've seen some bombed cities and some cities that have been fought over. But I've never seen a whole city where there isn't a building that doesn't have holes in it or a roof on it. That city was a total battleground.

Baidoa is supposed to be among the most desperate refugee centers.

When we arrived there, they were loading bodies onto a truck, most of them very small. We went into a feeding center, run by those marvelous girls from Irish Concern. And what do you see? They were particularly taking care of the smaller, the sickest children, and these were sitting and lying under the only tree in this sort-of courtyard. They were being more or less force-fed—a spoon of something every few minutes—because they can't drink or eat or don't want to any-

more. And what amazes me is the resilience of a human being, that they were still alive, still sitting.

I saw a young boy fighting for breath. He obviously had a respiratory infection, and he finally just curled up and died. He must have been about 14. I watched him and watched him fighting for breath and—I had asthma all my childhood and, ah, I was longing to help him breathe—and they took him away after a while. And they were just these little tiny things wrapped in whatever they can find for them. A little blanket or a piece of cloth. They are totally silent. Silent children. The silence is something you never forget.

Apart from the horror of what you saw, what sort of conclusions did you draw from your trip?

I want to be very careful how I say this. I don't want to sound overly dramatic. But you really wonder whether God hasn't forgotten Somalia. He has so much on his hands and you feel it's a forgotten country. It *was* forgotten for too many months. Not by all, but basically. And then, parallel to this, there's this extraordinary human miracle, and you can believe in human goodness. Because in that country there's no government, no infrastructure whatsoever. There is no communications, practically no roads. I think it's the first time in history there is a whole nation that's being kept afloat by relief workers. There's nobody else providing. And you can't say they're in it for the money. They're in it out of goodness.

Yet 100,000 people have died already, and all the efforts, all the provisions are a trickle in this ocean of misery.

It's true you can't take care of 1,000 if you're only one person. But there are, I think, enough health workers there today to take care of great numbers. And finally, if you can save one, I'd be glad to do that.

Do you ever feel like a voyeur?

I'm very sensitive about that. You don't want to be in any way exploiting the tragedy. But then as one of the Irish girls said to me, "We're delighted when you all come because we know it's going to mean more help." And that's what helps me, too.