The systematic destruction of indigenous populations by green groups in the African state of Congo is a story never told before. Georgianne Nienaber sends us this stark report from the heart of Congo.
Here is a conundrum that might be interesting for Indians to consider. India is the second country in the world to have its population reach the one billion mark. This landmark certainly presents challenges as India enters the new millennium. A billion people in a country one-third the size of the United States is a stunning statistic. However, one wonders, would India watch from the sidelines as the western world imposes sanctions on it considering the rapid population growth? Would India allow environmental groups to set up shops in rural areas and forcibly sterilize villagers? Would India allow white British militias to roam the countryside, capturing and interrogating innocents suspected of killing wildlife?

Consider this: according to the MONUC (Mission des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo, which translates as the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission), active in the eastern provinces of the DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo), 113 000 people have fled the countryside due to the ongoing fight between government forces, rebels, and local militias since February 2007. Some human rights organizations have put the numbers much higher at 250 000. At least 1000 people die in this region due to war, disease, and lack of simple immunizations and basic medical care in one single day.

Human rights and genocide investigator, Keith Harmon Snow, comments, ‘War and insecurity continue to destabilize the region. Countless women and girls in the DRC have been brutalized by unprecedented sexual violence, but issues like that of rape and war in Congo remain almost totally off the agenda for the American mass media.’

The same western press has endlessly trumpeted a story manufactured, enhanced, and promoted by environmentalists in this same region. From Reuters, the BBC, and the Voice of America to obscure gorilla discussion forums, the lead paragraph from a story on gorillas, datelined Kinshasa, 21 May 2007, read the same in every venue – ‘Congolese militia are threatening to slaughter rare mountain gorillas in Congo’s Virunga National Park after they raided the eastern reserve over the weekend, killing a wildlife officer.’

Once the AP (Associated Press) picked up the story, it made headlines around the world. No one denies that the mountain gorilla needs protection, but what exactly is happening in Congo? Why is the mainstream news media in the West ignoring a grave humanitarian crisis and focusing instead on 21 mountain gorillas, which are protected by a private British militia and funded by WildlifeDirect and USAID? The gorillas have their own veterinarian and medical team.

The misinformation got worse. ‘About 200 of the Mayi-Mayi fighters who remain active after Congo’s ruinous 1998–2002 civil war attacked three posts in the Virunga National Park on Sunday,’ WildlifeDirect said in a statement. ‘One ranger died and three were injured in the attack,’ wrote a stringer from Nigeria, whose story was picked up by the AP.

The truth was buried in an obscure blog supported by WildlifeDirect and was not reported by the western media. Was it really the ‘savage’ Mayi-Mayi? Hardly. According to WildlifeDirect and the Advance Ranger Force, the men who attacked the park were not part of the Mayi-Mayi group but revolutionaries out to reclaim the rights of the people. The group consisted mostly of youths between 14 and 22 years of age and was dressed in civilian clothes. On the contrary, the sensationalist media claims that the attackers planned to kill every last remaining gorilla in Virunga.

Here is what the attackers told the wildlife groups, but that will not be seen in any news report. ‘Our mission was to weaken the guards of the park by disarming them, so that the local communities are able to cultivate easily within the park boundaries,’ the attackers said.

People in and around Virunga suffer from malnutrition, which is stark and terrifying. Go to any village market and the most popular ‘delicacy’ for sale is discarded fish skins and heads, gleaned from the fancy western restaurants and NGO-protected communities in Goma and Kinshasa.

To make matters worse, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) has now joined the environmental groups to suggest that the human population be removed from the park—a protected area almost totally devoid of wildlife. Virunga is a failed
environmental experiment, but one does not learn the truth from the mainstream media. UNESCO is a lead sponsor of the Great Apes Survival Project, the purpose of which is ‘to save the great apes and their habitat from extinction through intergovernmental dialogue and policy-making, conservation planning initiatives, and technical and scientific support.’

The National Geographic magazine, in a 2005 issue devoted to Africa, had within its pages stories that urged population control in wildlife habitat. It was a simple message, but profound in its implications: wildlife habitat must be preserved at all costs.

William G Mosely, in comments published in the African Geographical Review, puts it this way, ‘This promotes a simplistic understanding of the relationship between population growth, environmental degradation, and conflict... and tends to unquestionably privilege the preservation of wildlife and natural areas over human livelihoods.’

A small but growing group of intellectuals in American academic circles have coined the phrase ‘the greening of hate’ to describe this phenomenon. Their thesis explains that ‘zero population growth’ as a concept has been hijacked by the far right to argue in favour of immigration control. Racists are opposing population growth in Africa, as a result of which environmental groups, especially those concerned with preserving ape habitats, are piggybacking on planned and systematic genocide in animal habitat.

USAID made use of the Earth Day to deliberately factor in its family planning initiatives with programmes on population, health, and the environment. The use of language like ‘a sustainable balance between people, animals, and the planet in regions critically important to the conservation of biologically diverse ecosystems,’ made the message very clear. There are too many poor black people in areas that the West wants preserved, either because the animals are of special interest, or because there are other resources that can be hijacked to fill corporate coffers.

We visited a family planning initiative at the Tayna Gorilla Reserve near Lubero in eastern DRC. This habitat is located in the middle of gold mines of great corporate interests. USAID is working in partnership with the Jane Goodall Foundation and ENGENDER Health on this ‘conservation’ project.

While it may be very difficult to believe that western interests are to espouse and implement population control and forced sterilization in the deepest regions of Africa, we witnessed disturbing evidence of what is an ongoing programme.
Condoms remain stacked in unopened boxes that touched the ceiling of a ‘clinic’ that was little more than a shell of a building, while shelves were stocked with Depo Provera (injectable hormonal sterilization) and birth control pills. Meanwhile, HIV/AIDS – the scourge of Africa – remains a mammoth concern.

In a nutshell, the entire population of the poor, illiterate Congolese was facing the spectre of a double whammy of disease and death by HIV and the reduction of the population through forced sterilization, which would, in effect, bring it below sustainable levels.

Doctors there told us that they were asked to inculcate fear in the minds of the poor Congolese by representatives of USAID and the Goodall Foundation so that they start believing that having babies is dangerous to a woman’s health.

Elizabeth Hartmann of the Population and Development Programme at Hampshire College, USA, slams population pressure as a misleading ideology. This Malthusian concept has recently been used to explain the Rwandan genocide, but as scholars, such as Hartmann, point out, the racism-incited carnage began in underpopulated areas before spreading to the cities in Rwanda. Hartmann says that, on average, women around the world have less than three children each—hardly threatening and definitely sustainable.

So, while the United States and the rest of the developed world consume most of the world’s resources, certain USAID-backed NGOs in Africa continue to live in their protected compounds with satellite television, build mansions from pilfered funds, visit over-stocked NGO stores, and generally live high-off-the-hog while engaging in systematic population control.

Food for thought?

*Georgianne Nienaber is a journalist and writer based in the United States. She was a MONUC-accredited journalist in the Congo region in February 2007. For more on the situation in Congo, visit <www.allthingspass.com>.