August 21, 1992

Dear Friends,

This week there has finally been news of larger-scale responses by the United Nations and the United States to the specter of starvation in Somalia. But as you are well aware, a sustained response will require sustained public attention.

In addition to the actions you might already be taking, there are several resources and action possibilities which we would like to mention to you.

- Africa Watch and Physicians for Human Rights have just issued an updated document *No Mercy in Mogadishu*, with a companion *Situation Update*. If you do not already have these materials, please call Africa Watch at 212-972-8400 or Physicians for Human Rights at 617-695-0041.

- The level of public attention depends in large part on media attention. This has increased (for example, *The Washington Post* had two long front-page stories last week), but is already in danger of fading again. For your reference I enclose a copy of a letter we sent in late July to the *Post*. You can make a similar comparison for any news source you follow regularly, and a similar plea for more balanced coverage. (*The Post* has improved somewhat in August, but is still carrying almost three times as much copy on Bosnia as on Somalia.)

- If you have access to electronic mail on Peacenet or on the Internet, contact dmorse@igc.org or Bernhard.Helander@antro.uu.se about facilities for sending free faxes to United Nations or United States officials, with your polite messages urging *sustained* and *massive* efforts to get relief supplies to all parts of Somalia.

- Congratulate Senator Nancy Kassebaum (202-224-4774), as well as members of the House Select Committee on Hunger (202-226-5470), for their actions in drawing attention to this issue, and urge them to continue their efforts.

Sincerely,

Imani Countess

Acting Director
To the editors:

In your editorial of June 19 ("Indifference and Somalia"), you rightly deplored the lack of attention given to millions at risk in Somalia. In Bosnia the great powers also appear unwilling to avert the worsening tragedy, but at least the world is watching, and the response is greater. Your editorial stance is welcome.

Those responsible for deciding your own news coverage priorities, however, should also pay attention. The Post should put its money where its mouth is.

Over the month preceding and the month following your editorial, you carried 8 articles on Somalia, averaging only 420 words each. You carried 26 articles on Bosnia, averaging over 800 words each. Twenty-one of the Bosnian articles were substantive news stories over 500 words long. Sixteen of them ran on page 1. There was only one such article on Somalia.

Altogether you published more than six times as many words on Bosnia as on Somalia, although your editorial notes that the scale of the tragedy in Somalia is far greater in terms of human lives.

It is undoubtedly somewhat more difficult and risky to cover Somalia than Bosnia. But surely there would be Post writers or stringers brave enough to try if the paper's management made it a priority.

The coverage reflects precisely the neglect by policy-makers and opinion-makers that your editorial deplores. One newspaper alone cannot change that, but you could provide leadership rather than just follow the crowd. Regardless of the personal attitudes of those involved, do not the missing stories say loud and clear that white lives matter more than Black?

We would welcome your urgent efforts to act on this matter, by assigning a full-time correspondent to the crisis in Somalia. As your editorial stresses, millions of lives are at stake.

Sincerely,

Imani Countess
Acting Director

Enclosures: 2
cc: William Raspberry, Joann Byrd, Colman McCarthy, Mary McGrory, Maralee Schwartz