

On the 4th of May, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights José Ayala Lasso finally announced his intention to undertake a mission to Rwanda and Burundi. He went on to suggest the calling of a special session of UNCHR and sending human rights monitors to Rwanda. Even assuming that staff and resource constraints at the Centre for Human Rights precluded any particular emphasis on Rwanda prior to the massacres starting on April 6, it is surprising that it was 4 weeks before any substantive action was taken by either the HCHR or the Centre. It is reported that his relatively tardy entry into the issue was at the bequest of the SG and pressures from NGOs as opposed to any internal organizational motivation. Questions were raised that apart from token symbolism, whether there would be substantive benefits from a special session and HCHR Lasso going on mission to Rwanda. Most felt that they should have been playing a role much earlier, and that quite apart from missing the moment to affect reality, that their very inaction had sent the wrong signals to the Rwandan military and government.

The initial failure of the Centre and the HCHR to play a role in early warning and rapid deployment stems from several weaknesses:

- narrow perception of their role
- administrative and organizational weaknesses
- new 'territory' for them, and thus little idea on how to proceed.

It is useful to look at these weakness in the context of the issue of Rwandan human rights monitors.

Monitors

There is no doubt but that human rights monitors are a necessity in Rwanda. There are two main components to any such monitoring mission. The first is as their title indicates that of monitoring human rights violations. In the Rwandan context this will be retroactive, partly to fulfil their commitment to help the Commission of Experts and now the newly created Tribunal. It is felt that identifying more precisely what happened and who the worst perpetrators were is necessary not only to prosecute the worst offenders, but to provide a prerequisite for reconciliation. Failure to do so would leave uncertainties along with guilt and anger to fester.

Ongoing monitoring is equally, if not more, important in helping to create confidence amongst the internally and externally displaced so that they will begin to return to their homes. In this ongoing crisis, the presence of human rights monitors will remind leaders and civil society of fundamental human rights norms and encourage them to continue to observe these rights in the face of ongoing adversity. The threat of international observance and possible penalties will also not go amiss.