

5.2 Advocacy

The HCHR has the authority to place a particular situation or issue onto the international agenda¹⁶, including the agenda of the SC and the SG. The HCHR and the Centre should be acting as the institutionalized human rights conscience of the UN and have as a mandate the duty to ensure that human rights issues are taken into account at all levels and forums, including if not particularly in political forums.

In the Rwandan context, it looks as if the advocacy worked the other way. In other words, the UN Secretary General and events themselves forced the HCHR to address the human rights dimension of what was happening. It is true that the new High Commissioner only moved into what was a brand new position as the Rwandan Crisis escalated in April. However, it appears as if his staff at the Centre did not brief him as to his capacity and arguably his duty to actively advocate in New York on behalf of Rwandan human rights.

Such a failure by the Human Rights Centre in Geneva, ostensibly the focal point of human rights activity within the UN, is not new. In recent years there have been a number of comprehensive peace settlements¹⁷ that have often been brokered by the UN and in which the UN has had a key role in their implementation. All of these peace building exercises have not only monitored human rights, but most had substantive human rights development programs. Largely because the settlements were seen as both political and an extension of the more traditional peacekeeping mandate of the UN, the settlements were directed from the UN in New York. There was a relative dearth of involvement by the Geneva based UN human rights community, either the Centre or other UN human rights bodies or experts.

Prior to early May, the Centre's failure to project itself and to play the role in Rwanda it should have, as the preeminent UN human rights operational body, appears to have occurred for 3 reasons. It appears as if senior staff were not fully cognizant that they should be getting involved, and even more so that they should have been pushing from the beginning for the incorporation of human rights into Rwandan peacebuilding and peacekeeping.

Second, the Centre lacked the internal capacity to advocate in New York. Plagued consistently by inside turf battles, hobbled by arcane bureaucratic procedures, and desperately underfunded largely because funders have little confidence in their ability to

¹⁶ see GA document 11 Dec. 1993, A/C.3/48/L.85, which created the post of UNHCHR, operative para 4(b) calling on the HCHR to carry out "the tasks assigned to him/her by the competent bodies of the United Nations system in the field of human rights and make recommendations to them...", and 4(g) instructs the HCHR to engage in dialogue with governments in the implementation of the mandate.

¹⁷ Namibia (UNTAG), Angola (UNAVEM II), Western Sahara (MINURSO), El Salvador (ONUSAL), Mozambique (ONUMOZ), and Cambodia (UNTAC).