



TOWARDS A RAPID REACTION CAPABILITY FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

the scale and deepening the enmity. It is a classic vicious circle which adds to the human, financial, material and developmental costs of responding to crisis.

Rwanda again illustrates the need for timely intervention. During the slow process of creating UNAMIR, the Security Council made it clear that it wanted the operation conducted at minimal expense. Only a fraction of the US\$200 million estimated cost of the operation was ever received by the UN. Only a portion of the troops required to implement UNAMIR's mandate ever arrived in the theatre. The lack of funding and material support for UNAMIR stands in sharp contrast to the money spent by the international community in aid and human resource support once the crisis attracted the attention of the international media. The United States alone provided US\$350 million in aid in the first six weeks of the Goma catastrophe.

De-escalating such a crisis is not simply a matter of reversing the chain of events. As a crisis escalates in severity, it represents an exponential increase in the scope of the problem. It therefore requires a much larger and more vigorous response if it is to be effective. As the Australian Foreign Minister, Senator Gareth Evans has written, "After a dispute has crossed the threshold into armed conflict, the process of peaceful resolution — peace making — becomes more difficult, demanding and complex. With the eruption of violence, the issues tend to generalise and proliferate.... As the parties invest ever greater resources in the conflict, they become increasingly committed to and entrapped in the struggle to prevail." As an intervention is delayed, greater amounts of political influence and financial resources are needed to have a positive impact over the course of the conflict. These are lessons the international community has already learned from crisis situations in the 1990s, but for which it has not yet adapted the political, security or developmental structures of the UN system.

Dramatic depictions of mass suffering can lead to enormous pressure on governments and international organizations to take action. Even in the midst of addressing humanitarian tragedies of the gravest proportions, it is worth raising questions about cost-effectiveness. Is it better to do something early when the impact will often be greater, or should decisions be put off? Admittedly, there are times when delay may be appropriate, when rewards are reaped by those who wait. This is particularly true when the climate for intervention is inappropriate because of large-scale war or insurrection over which the UN can have little control. But when it is fairly clear that inaction means postponing the inevitable, then a rapid response is fully appropriate.

Some have argued that the UN is devoting too much attention and too many of its scarce resources to peace operations, especially at a time when development assistance efforts are flagging in many quarters. To this argument it is worth responding along the following lines: first, investments in international security through peacekeeping will bring developmental returns by ensuring the stability which permits development to take place; and, second, we can reduce the investments in peacekeeping, and enable states to focus on development assistance, by taking more timely, effective action. In order to do this, we need a UN which is able to act more rapidly.