

Because of the sensitive nature of human rights even within the larger UN field operation, HRO staff must be particularly adept in using informal lines of communication. For example, to enhance early warning and other intelligence gathering, an HRO needs to access the human rights intelligence of the other parts of the UN operations such as the military peace-keeping operation or the humanitarian operation. Quite apart from information gathering, invariably an HRO needs to quietly convince much larger operation components such as the military, that they can and should take human rights action in certain situations, and facilitate the work of the HRO. At all times, the HRO must work to put human rights into the political agenda of senior UN operation personnel, in particular the SRSG and the SRSG's staff. In these and other attempts to work through other UN operation partners, the HRO must prove that they understand and respect the operational objectives of those partners and that they will not unnecessarily complicate the attainment of those objectives. Also, the HRO must continually motivate their partners not least of all by regularly reporting back on results of those partners' 'human rights' actions, or follow up action taken by the HRO.

Of course the corollary to this cooperation/coordination role within the larger UN operation, is a similar role vis-à-vis all of the non-UN human rights field partners. An HRO can help in the coordination of potential partners ranging from the ICRC and human rights NGOs, through international aid agencies, to local authorities and civil society. The next chapter on human rights field partners will examine this partnership and its much more problematic coordination.

4.2 Mandate

A successful HRO has three prerequisites: first a reasonable chance of success; second, the necessary financial and personnel resources; and three, a clear mandate actively backed up by UN and member states' political will.

The first criteria, a reasonable chance of success, depends initially on the political and security situation in a country, the latter largely determined by the de facto authorities be it government or guerillas. The threshold requirement is that the parties to the conflict be prepared to tolerate the presence of an HRO even if they are not immediately ready to cooperate with it. The temptation for the UN to deploy an HRO despite the absence of such a minimum condition may merely provide a repressive regime with a public relations payoff, and in a worse case scenario will put HRO staff at great risk, and the local populace at greater risk.

Decisions must also be taken as to whether that threshold criteria, that an HRO presence will be tolerated by the parties to the conflict, is sufficient. The attitudes and receptivity of the parties in the country are an essential determinant of both HRO and larger UN operation success. A number of factors, including the degree of violations and the vulnerability of groups such as children, must be considered. This study can only highlight this extremely important issue, for the identification of factors for consideration and how to aggregate and assess them, is as complicated as it is important.