

international community cannot save people from themselves. Rwandan civil society has the primary responsibility for its future and therein lies the hope for its future even in what now appears to be an almost unsolvable situation.

However, just as the international community can certainly worsen things, so too we can also actively intervene to mitigate societal disasters even if we cannot totally save. The international community can and must learn from its failure to more effectively mitigate the Rwandan crisis of April 1994. Fortunately we often learn best from our mistakes and it looks as if Rwanda is proving to be extremely instructive for many of us.

Although this is not an exercise in finger pointing and does not set out to accuse any country, organization, or individual from amongst the international community for failures, there is a need to identify who and what went wrong. Only then can we start to draw the conclusions and lessons to guide us all in the next such humanitarian catastrophe.

In this exercise, it is useful to heed the advice that many Rwandan victims themselves are voicing to the new regime and the millions of other victims in Rwanda. Although a degree of retributive justice is needed particularly for those guilty of genocide and other crimes against humanity, reconciliation and reconstruction will be impossible if the government or the victims remain the eternal accusers. All must move on from catastrophe to solutions.

While the genocidal aspect of Rwanda sets it apart from other crises in recent memory, the effective breakdown of government and society does not. In Africa and elsewhere there are increasing numbers of situations where national structures have ceased to exist and warlords and anarchy prevail, or where regimes are so corrupt and repressive that they are totally unacceptable to both their people and the international community. In such instances the duty of the international community becomes overwhelming. Cold war realpolitik often blinded us to that duty as various alliances were prepared to 'legitimize' and defend their client regime regardless of democratic or human rights shortcomings. In the brave new world of the 1990's we are a bit slower to rationalize the undefensible.

Hopefully this assessment of the actual role, successes, and failures of the international community over Rwanda will contribute in some small measure to the international community further recognising its duty and increasing its capacity to responsibly and rapidly intervene.

This study has been done for the Regional Security and Peacekeeping Division of the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Resources did not allow, nor was it felt that it was that critical, that I visit Rwanda. In fact, there was a feeling that yet another visitor to Rwanda was the last thing that on-the-ground workers needed and much of the same information could be gleaned from individuals who had been in Rwanda. Also, it was felt that most of the lessons to be learned by the international community would come from the successes and failures that occurred in New York, Geneva, and national capitals. That is where most of the UN, governmental, and non-governmental, decisions were being taken.