

General Discussion

Several participants raised the following issues relating to response:

- Policy makers often can focus only on urgent issues and lack the time for longer-term analysis relating to potential crisis prevention;
- Early warning may become increasingly relevant only once the situation has changed dramatically, e.g. once the extremists had come to power in Rwanda;
- Often, no international consensus emerges on whether a genocide risks occurring and, if so, on how to prevent it. The absence of any consensus on what to do in Burundi is evidence of this;
- Often, it is difficult to know where intervention in response to an apparent genocide will lead. Are governments that are considering intervening willing to use force and see their own soldiers killed? By intervening, are countries in effect establishing a new trusteeship and, if so, are they willing to see it through? In Viet Nam, one speaker argued, the U.S. set up an artificial entity, then learned that it would collapse were they to leave. The issue of colonialism remains sensitive, and this makes many wary of outside intervention.
- Lack of knowledge can impair response. One problem with the genocide in Rwanda was that what was happening at the village level was not known. As a result, it was assumed at first that the violence was directed at political leaders.
- Intervention may lead to, or hasten, violence or genocide -- that is, the very results it was intended to avoid. In Burundi, the risk existed that the arrival of foreign troops would goad the armed forces towards further violence.
- If the army functions as a terrorist organization, it may in any event be unclear whom to negotiate with.
- Such armed forces may be more willing to use force than are those intervening. In Rwanda, for example, UNAMIR was not perceived to be a force ready to inflict or to withstand violence. Rwandan extremists knew that if they killed UNAMIR peacekeepers, the UN's will for engagement would collapse.

A participant raised several issues concerning NGO involvement: what restrictions, if any, should be placed on NGO actors; with whom should they not deal; and what kind of actions by NGOs might disqualify them as a partner? In response, it was noted that Sierra Leone had been a difficult situation for International Alert, which had received much criticism for negotiating with rebels. However, it was emphasized that it is important that NGOs talk with anyone who can veto a solution, hence International Alert's willingness to