

An HRO can either stand alone, or be an integral component of a larger UN field operation. That larger UN field operation may consist of a number of sub-components such as a military peace-keeping operation, a humanitarian operation, a CIVPOL operation, or a human rights operation. There have been five clearly identifiable UN HROs to date: El Salvador, Cambodia, Haiti, Rwanda, and Guatemala.¹

In El Salvador (the human rights division of ONUSAL), in Haiti (MICIVIH), and in Guatemala (the human rights division of MINUGUA), the human rights field operations were the vanguard of larger and more comprehensive UN field operations. In El Salvador and Guatemala, they were incorporated into the larger UN field operation, while MICIVIH retained operational independence from UNMIH albeit under the authority of the Special Envoy. In Cambodia the Human Rights Component was a part of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) but did not play a vanguard role. In Rwanda, the Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda (HRFOR) was a stand alone operation albeit alongside the UN Peace-Keeping Mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR).

Just these five HROs makes it obvious that so far there are no set operational models. As will be discussed throughout the study, there are a myriad of different potential functions and objectives for HROs. The potential configuration or make-up of HROs to meet those goals are even more varied. It cannot be overemphasized, that particularly in these early days of evolving models of UN HROs, that no option should be dismissed out of hand. Every UN operation is distinct and requires distinct personnel and resources, and only time and operational experience will determine common or standard HRO characteristics and components.

These five HROs also make it obvious that there have been some glaring failures in how the UN has been mounting human rights operations. In an important study done for USAID, Steve Golub lists a number of shortcomings of HROs that he refers to as human rights monitoring missions (HRMM). These include:

- “ a lack of donor coordination among agencies and governments concerned with HRMMs;

¹ There have also been human rights activities within other UN operations such as UNTAG, UNAVEM III, UNOMIL, UNOVER, UNRWA and UNOMSA, but they have been relatively small compared to the larger UN operation, and did not have a distinct character or presence within or alongside the larger UN operation. Similarly the field offices of the Centre for Human Rights in the former Yugoslavia, set up to service the Special Rapporteur and the Expert on missing persons, while given a number of tasks such as fact-finding, reporting, and recommending, was under-resourced and relatively minimal compared to both the extent of the human rights situation and the size of the much larger UN operation(s). It was more of field mission of the Centre despite the fact that it developed a degree of permanency. And finally, specialized agencies particularly UNHCR, mount large operations that are truly 'human rights' in character but have unique focuses such as refugees and merit separate classification and treatment.