

THE RWANDAN CRISIS OF APRIL 1994

THE LESSONS LEARNED

1 INTRODUCTION

This is an assessment of the international community's response to the humanitarian and genocidal tragedy of Rwanda. It evaluates how international institutions and organizations gathered and assessed information on Rwanda prior to April 6th 1994 and how they then responded as the cataclysm unfolded.

This study through the Rwandan looking glass is looking at the capacity and potential for international action in situations such as Rwanda. Rwanda has provided not only an unfortunate but incontrovertible catastrophe of incredible dimensions, but it's most recent chapter¹ has played out within a relatively small political context (Rwandan and international) and over a short time period. These factors make it a relatively transparent and quantifiable case scenario.

This study is not an attempt to point the way forward for Rwanda despite the fact that such studies are essential and fortunately many are underway. The apparent failure to achieve even a rudimentary broad based social commitment to human rights, power sharing, and resource equity after 30 years of international bilateral and UN development programs and major efforts by international NGO developmental and church groups, poses perhaps the largest question mark for the future of Rwanda.

Also, it will not be looking at what went wrong with Rwandan society per se. It is true that outsiders actively and callously armed Rwandans, and outsiders over the years allied with and encouraged particular élites in the hope that those élites would further their political or business objectives. Such realpolitik is not new and certainly not excusable, often moving into the morally reprehensible and at times internationally illegal. However it only mitigates the fundamental responsibility of Rwandans for themselves. If we can draw any conclusions from Northern Ireland, Lebanon, ex-Yugoslavia, the Arab-Israeli conflict, Cyprus and so on, it is that the

¹ This is not to ignore the historical roots, for the Rwandan civil war has been an on and off event for generations, and the underlying political battle between competing élites, both local and colonial, has been going on for centuries. See the Annex for a short history of Rwanda followed by a detailed chronology of events leading up to and following the April 6th plane destruction.