

relatively limited level of experience among them. Ambassador Oakley had emphasized the importance of having critics who were willing to say what many did not want to hear. The problem is that often senior officials, whether in the private or public sector, react poorly to such criticism. Senator MacEachen had agreed, arguing that one should not become a prisoner of traditional categories or ways of viewing things. One should hear out those who disagree. This is a necessary survival skill in politics, as a consequence of which one learns about one's own weaknesses.

There were two main factors that made Somalia different from other crises: the role of the media and NGOs. Professor Adelman discussed these same factors on the basis of his research on Rwanda. Television helps to convey sentimental politics. Viewers want to see people they can help, not dead bodies. In Rwanda, television did not play a significant role until the refugees were in Goma, but by then, the genocide was pretty much over. But while television based on the issue of sentimental politics can result in a fast response, it is often too late to begin with. Yet television is good for relief organizations, and can help them in their efforts to reverse the situation on the ground. Print media often present things incorrectly, with exceptions of course. Many messages are wrong, often journalists fall prey to disinformation, and often the information they convey is inadequate: too little and too late.

While NGOs do good work in sharing information, their contribution should not be overrated. The big problem is determining what they can really do. Then, there are the problems of communication and of disconnection. NGOs tend to specialize (and, so, compartmentalize) and do not necessarily pass on information that could help other NGOs. Individual NGOs may come to be associated with one side or another in a conflict and their information may be discredited accordingly. In this context, Professor Adelman asked whether International Alert had been criticized for working with the rebels in Sierra Leone.

Other problems relating to the dissemination of information relate to the following factors: i) source (often we do not listen to our own analysts but to "friends" on whose advice and information we place a premium); ii) noise; and iii) hangover/shadow, e.g. countries may be reluctant to respond to situations such as Rwanda because of a bad experience in similar situations, such as Somalia.

Professor Adelman concluded that early warning is not a silver bullet but, that it could make a marginal difference. There are many uncertainties that create difficulties, but knowledge makes a difference and may improve the chances of responding appropriately. While this may not look like a lot, it can make a difference. In Professor Adelman's opinion, it was possible to intervene in Rwanda, and early warning could and should have made a difference.