

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.⁶⁷

This chapter will look at the salient aspects of HROs. In doing so, it will identify some important issues and lessons learned from past HROs without going into extensive detail with regards to those operations, as this has been well done in other writings.⁶⁸ First the roles (section one) and then mandates (section two) of HROs will be discussed, although they will be elaborated upon in Chapters seven through eleven. Those more specific details of what an HRO would do have been left to later since many of those tasks are also applicable to the various HRO partners as will be identified in Chapter Five.

Then section three will look at the unique universal mandate of the High Commission for Human Rights and how that mandate which transcends the UN is critical with regards UN HROs, but logically should stop short of actually running them. This leads into section four which will examine the need for a UN office of primary responsibility for HROs. And finally, section five will look at the staffing composition of HROs.

4.1 Role

UN human rights operations should be merely one part of the UN's response to human rights violations. Most certainly UN HROs are merely one component of a much broader set of international human rights initiatives, concurrent with varying degrees of human rights activity by local society. In other words, there will be action by international NGOs, donor states acting individually or in multilateral groupings other than the UN, local government, local NGOs and civil society, and so on. It is important to emphasise this larger constellation of human rights activity, so that it is understood that a UN HRO is not expected, nor should it arrogate to itself, the sole or even the primary responsibility for human rights in the country or region.

Most certainly, there are a number of activities and roles that are better carried out by others. For example, often it is more appropriate for others to undertake certain tasks, such as local NGOs undertaking public education. Equally, certain activities can be done more effectively by others, such as international NGOs publicising violations and actively advocating for action

⁶⁷ See footnote #1

⁶⁸ eg. *The Lost Agenda: Human Rights and UN Field Operations* by Human Rights Watch 1993; *Peace-Keeping and Human Rights* by Amnesty International January 1994; *Honoring Human Rights and Keeping the Peace* by the Aspen Institute 1995; *Haiti: Learning the Hard Way, the UN/OAS human rights monitoring operation in Haiti 1993-94* by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1995; *Improvising History: a Critical Evaluation of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador*, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, December 1995.