

Chapter 1 Introduction: Human Rights in Complex Emergencies

1.1 UN Field Operations

The fundamental premise of this study is that human rights underpin, and help determine, the outcome of any UN field operation. The broad objective of this study is to look at how the UN and its field operations deal with human rights violations in complex emergencies. A primary focus of the study will be the concept and practice of UN human rights operations (HROs).

This study does not pretend to be able to canvass the full range of potential international human rights actions to help prevent, or respond to, complex emergencies. It is largely restricted to looking at how the UN does or should deal with human rights in the field context of complex emergencies. Inevitably of course, there will be some overlapping analysis of the earlier actions that the UN could or should have taken, such as in the area of early warning and preventive field action. There will also be some overlapping analysis of the long term field follow-up actions that the UN should take, such as human rights capacity building for sustainable peace and sustainable human rights protection. Both that long term human rights development, and early warning and preventative action, have obvious implications for, and usually are components of, HROs.

The phrase **human rights operation (HRO)** has been used in this study as a generic term for any large or functionally substantial UN human rights field operation. Such human rights operations (HROs) are conducted in the field, and are of relatively long duration. As such they can be differentiated from a broad variety of UN human rights 'missions' which consist of individuals or teams sent out from headquarters, eg. from the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights or from the Centre for Human Rights. Such 'missions' are of relatively short duration, often days or weeks, and normally would have a narrowly defined task. However in the past some HROs such as MICIVIH have been referred to as 'missions', 'human rights field missions', etc., and a degree of confusion has developed as to terminology. It is suggested that the term 'operation', drawing upon its use in 'peace-keeping operations', connotes an activity that is of relatively long duration, whose operational roles are substantial, and which takes place in the field. Many of these distinctions are admittedly arbitrary, but until such time as the UN or the human rights community selects a common term, and to avoid confusion, HRO has been used throughout this study.