

Secretary-General should strategically decide which office of the UN is best suited to run human rights operations. One ramification of taking an early and effective decision on this, will be to dramatically enhance UN efforts to professionalize its mounting of human rights operations.

Operational Professionalism

Human rights are both immensely complicated and inherently political. Therefore it comes as no surprise that human rights action by UN field operations generally, and human rights operations specifically, are just as complicated and political. Add in the logistical complications of running UN field operations, and it is understandable that there have been a number of limited human rights operation successes and at least one qualified failure.

Limited successes and failures are partly excused by the groundbreaking nature of these early human rights operations. We no longer have this excuse, and in fact, enhancing human rights operational professionalism will be far easier to resolve than the lack of political will. There are innumerable dedicated individuals in this field, and they are working hard to help evolve 'best practices'. This is not to infer that they always work harmoniously. Because they feel passionately about their human rights vocation, they sometimes fail to understand the need to compromise both with each other and the UN system.

The call goes out to human rights activists in this field to work harder at achieving common purpose both amongst themselves, and with supportive UN member states and bureaucrats. Infighting amongst those working at professionalizing human rights in UN field operations can only play into the hands of those who wish, or expect, such endeavours to fail.

The Way Forward

Various individuals inside and outside of the UN have worked long and hard to put human rights into UN field operations. Despite inevitable 'start-up' mistakes, there is no contradiction in the observation that the first generation of human rights operations has been particularly innovative and successful.

It is important that the momentum and strategic vision of that first generation not dissipate. Now is the time to learn from past mistakes and successes, and move on to the next generation. However, it is only through a combination of political will and operational professionalism, that human rights principles will be fully operationalized and integrated into UN field practice.