

The importance of the UN quickly and unequivocally responding to human rights violations does not infer that all parts of the UN can or should play the same role. In particular, as will be discussed further in section 5.6, human rights operations (HROs) like other parts of the UN must adopt operational strategies that will most effectively achieve their goals.

The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights observed that “in the search for a political solution to a conflict such as El Salvador’s, it may be advantageous to abstain from publicizing certain facts if this is likely to secure the cooperation of the offending party.”²² For example, when does an HRO publicly criticize past violations and when does it remain silent in exchange for greater future human rights protection? Strategic silence about violations raises a “dichotomy [that] has marked each successive UN peacekeeping operation in recent years, from Cambodia to El Salvador and Haiti.,” and “may be the most difficult dilemma facing the UN as it plans future human rights verification missions.”²³ It is suggested that part of the solution lies in different parts of the UN playing different yet complementary roles.²⁴

2.4 Human Rights Rapid Reaction

If Rwanda has taught us nothing else, it is that at times there is a need, and a substantial payoff, for a UN capacity to be able to react more rapidly in deploying human rights operations. This is not to imply that a rapidly deployed Rwandan human rights operation, even if deployed months in advance of the June 6th death of the presidents, would necessarily have prevented the outbreak of genocide. However at a minimum, a correctly configured²⁵ rapid reaction HRO deploying within weeks of June 6th, would have served to mitigate the genocide and subsequent retribution, and would have accelerated moves to achieve reconciliation and reconstruction.

The actions that a Rwandan rapid reaction HRO could have taken are numerous. They could have had an impact on actions taken by some of the ruling élite, some of the government forces, the RPF, the populace at large, and not least of all, UN negotiators and military. UN responses, both political/strategic and tactical, probably would have been quite different if states and other decision makers had been informed by UN human rights field experts providing relevant up-to-date human rights intelligence.

²² p.24, *Improvising History: A Critical Evaluation of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador*, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, December 1995.

²³ p.25, *ibid.*

²⁴ For example, see the discussion of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ role in section 4.3, and the role of UN treaty bodies, special rapporteurs, workings groups, and other ad hoc bodies, in section 5.6.

²⁵ It must always be remember that human rights operations are extremely varied in their configuration and functions, and success is predicated upon correctly setting each individual HRO mandate and providing the resources including personnel to do the job.