

Chapter 4 - UN Human Rights Operations

The optimum situation for almost any UN field operation is to have human rights field experts on staff. This is even more essential for UN operations dealing with complex emergencies, and invariably they would benefit from an identifiable human rights field component or operation (HRO). The assumption is that where there is a complex emergency requiring UN intervention, that the time has long passed for a minimalist graduated UN human rights response.

Complex emergencies invariably require a relatively large and comprehensive UN strategy. Of course that UN strategy should recognize the moral and legal imperatives of addressing human rights. However often more persuasive, are the broad operational payoffs from protecting and promoting human rights. That operational imperative⁶⁶ for dealing with human rights contains potential benefits for a broad range of UN field activities ranging from military peace-keeping tactics, to cease-fires, to sustainable peace and the withdrawal of UN operations. Creating a UN human rights operation (HRO) will usually be the most effective way to operationalize a UN operations' human rights objectives.

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.

⁶⁶ See Chapter 2.