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**HUMANITARIAN POLICY FORUM
WORKSHOP ON HUMANITARIAN EARLY WARNING**

**FORUM DE LA POLITIQUE HUMANITAIRE
ATELIER SUR L'ALERTE RAPIDE DANS LE DOMAINE HUMANITAIRE**

17th of May, 1996
le 17 mai 1996

PROCEEDINGS

ACTES

**GLOBAL AND HUMAN ISSUES BUREAU
DIRECTION DES ENJEUX HUMAINS ET GLOBAUX**

9/13/96 95

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the major issues and policy responses discussed at the first seminar on humanitarian early warning of the Humanitarian Policy Forum, which was held on the 17th of May 1996 at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

G-7 leaders meeting in Halifax in June, 1995, called upon the UN Secretary-General "to explore means to improve the analysis and utilization of disaster and conflict-related early-warning information...". This was not a request for the accumulation of more data; core elements for the collection of data already are in place. Instead, what was sought was an enhanced analytical capacity and a process whereby the information available could be used more efficiently by decision-makers.

Specific issues for consideration at the seminar included an examination of the UN's early warning capacity, including the adequacy of institutional and financial support for early warning mechanisms, the internal dissemination of early warning information within the UN system and to Member States, in light of political sensitivities on the part of individual countries. The role of the media and of non-governmental organizations as "triggers" for humanitarian action, and the issue of the relationship between early warning and early response by the international community were also examined. The experiences of Somalia and Rwanda provided case-studies in early warning.

Several recommendations were identified by the participants: early warning needs to be made to work more effectively; the best possible early warning mechanism is of limited use if the right people are not there to respond; there is a need to know more about how decision-making operates, and about how early warning information can be brought to bear with decision-makers; early warning is itself a form of political action; the role of leadership is critical both in early warning and response; and a tension exists between the coordination of early warning and encouraging a multitude of early warning voices.

The Global and Human Issues Bureau would like to thank Ms. Susanne Schmeidl, Post-Doctorate Fellow, Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, for serving as rapporteur for the seminar.

Introduction

Ms. Lucie Edwards, Director General, Global and Human Issues Bureau, introduced the workshop, remarking that it was the first roundtable of the Humanitarian Policy Forum, recently launched by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. The forum aims to bring together federal officials, representatives from the United Nations, the NGO community, research institutions and academics, and draw upon these various constituencies in order to form realistic policy options with regard to future complex emergencies.

Ms. Edwards pointed out that the forum coincided with a workshop on the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, hosted two days earlier by the Canadian International Development Agency. The experience in Rwanda demonstrated the importance of preventive diplomacy, of which early warning can form a part. Ms. Edwards added that today's discussions will not focus exclusively on Rwanda or on what may come to pass in Burundi. But inevitably both will provide a backdrop for the discussions.

In precisely the same way, Rwanda and Burundi provide the backdrop for much that the members of DFAIT's Global and Human Issues Bureau are seeking to accomplish. The Bureau's mandate includes rethinking of traditional approaches to peace and security, including peacebuilding and preventive diplomacy, and our approach to humanitarian affairs. The Humanitarian Policy Forum forms part of that process.

SESSION I: The Status of the United Nations' Early Warning Capacity**The Department of Humanitarian Affairs' Humanitarian Early Warning System**

Mr. Adeel Ahmed, Associate Humanitarian Affairs Officer, UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), gave a presentation on the development of an early warning system within DHA, including a description of the purpose and functioning of the Humanitarian Early Warning System (HEWS).

HEWS was formed two years ago, when there was a realization that despite the existence of a multitude of pieces of information that could be used for early warning purposes, there was too little organization and analysis of such data. HEWS was created with the purpose of placing existing information into a proper context for policy makers in order to improve early warning efforts and to facilitate decision-making.

Using visual aids, Mr. Ahmed introduced the components of HEWS. The general data provides both statistical and well as contextual and dynamic (i.e. descriptive) information about countries and regions. HEWS further provides the possibility of simple data analysis, such as data correlation, comparative statistics and trend evaluations (both by indicators and sectors), as well as the ability to identify critical factors for specific countries and regions. The HEWS database includes selected news information relating to particular countries as well as information from the Security Council and from private assessment firms.

Information relating to the following categories is available: human rights, conflict or potential for conflict, the situation of the government, military and arms information, highlights from other information sources from within the UN System (e.g. FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture and WHO's Epidemiological Early Warning System) and from other governments (e.g. USAID'S Famine Early Warning System), information from field reports, disaster reports, descriptions of the vulnerability of different regions and countries, contextual information on countries (e.g. on the state of airports, television, radio) and a category which provides data that is unique to a particular country and does not fit into any of the other categories (e.g. data on any social or economic inequalities within a country). HEWS also includes statistical data relating to economics, trade, food and agriculture, health, demographics, finance, and displaced persons. The data can be mapped by indicator and country, and countries and regions can be compared. Information can be analyzed and correlated, and key indicators can be drawn for each country.

Conceptually, HEWS is both simple and easy to grasp. Its purpose is to provide information for contingency planning. A wealth of information can easily be incorporated

into reports which highlight crucial developments and trends. DHA can analyze the data further and feed it into the decision-making process within the UN, with the objective of obtaining early warning for disaster preparedness and for the avoidance of humanitarian emergencies.

Overview of the UN's Early Warning Assets

Dr. Jurgen Dedring, Senior Humanitarian Affairs Officer, UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, then provided an overview of the UN's early warning assets. He began his presentation by remarking that the UN has made a major breakthrough with regard to information. HEWS demonstrates the power of information, showing that an information structure should not stand alone but should instead be interactive.

The question that arises is whether the purpose of HEWS is to *prevent* conflicts or, instead, to make possible early responses. There may be some tensions between prevention and contingency planning. Objectives of early warning must be determined before the approach can be fine-tuned.

Dr. Dedring outlined several of the early warning and information systems that exist. In addition to HEWS, information is available from commercial data bases and from other UN organizations involved in systematic information-sharing, including UNCHR, FAO, WHO and UNDP. These various information sources make it clear that information is readily available. However, the crucial question remains: what is to be done with that information? The following important issues arise:

- While early warning information often is readily available, in most cases there is a lack of analysis, as UN political officers often have little time for such analysis. Furthermore, officers may not have the appropriate qualifications and training for analysis, and may work in isolation from each other.
- How can triggers be identified once information on the background to potential is obtained?
- Is it preferable to speak with one voice or with many when providing early warning?
- Are good response mechanisms in place once warning messages have been received?
- How can early warning messages be conveyed to senior decision-makers? Will they listen despite being pressed for time?

- The UN remains a member-based political organization. Its Secretary-General and the Security Council may not share the same views as to what constitutes an appropriate response or solution.
- Ultimately, the early warning issue is one of political will. Burundi is a case in point. Information that a coup was possible was put forth, but there was no willingness to take decisive action.

In summary, in addition to the issue of the existence of adequate early warning information, several other issues need consideration: how early warning is put forth, how it can be made to reach decision-makers, and whether political will exists to act upon that information. The issues addressed by Dr. Dedring touch upon the limitations inherent in "humanware" and in the decision-making process, as opposed to any deficiencies in software or in the breadth of information available.

Procedures for the Analysis and Dissemination of Early-Warning Information

Mr. Stan Carlson, Chief, Situation Centre, UN Department of Peace-keeping Operations, discussed how information is put forth within the UN system, and how this very process leads to complications with regard to early warning. In particular, Mr. Carlson emphasized that many constraints exist within the UN which may not necessarily exist within governments or NGOs, not least the need for caution in dealing with Member States. HEWS exists as a *humanitarian* - rather than a *political* - early-warning system because the latter form would be unacceptable to Member States.

Citing the example of Burundi, Mr. Carlson emphasized that early warning signals must not only be noted but must also be reported, analyzed, communicated to decision-makers, and acted upon. Given this long action-chain which early warning information must pass through, it is surprising that any action takes place at all.

Factors which need to be considered with regard to early warning include the following:

- Trends: There are long- vs. short-term events, some of which are predictable and some of which are not. Most importantly, what is to be done in the absence of a single, obvious event that can be noticed?
- Observers: There exists a wide variety of observers, of varying quality. The UN relies on local governments and populations as well as on a variety of NGOs, international organizations, UN agencies (e.g. UNDP, UNICEF) and foreign governments. The information that each provides varies in quality and detail. In addition, there is a tendency whereby people in the field opt against transmitting bad news.

- The media: also plays a role in providing early warning information, in real time. However, because of the emphasis placed on early reporting and because incorrect information can subsequently be corrected, media organization such as CNN may not thoroughly cross-check information before disseminating it. UN bodies generally do cross-check information thoroughly.
- Analysis: Again, some observers analyze information prior to disseminating it whereas others pass on information as is. Within the UN system, information gets passed to any of four bodies: DPKO, DHA, DPA, or the Security Council. Each of these varies in the level of analysis they can provide. After early warning information is analyzed on a preliminary basis within particular UN departments, it may then be analyzed on an inter-departmental basis, and appropriate recommendations developed.

Individual Member States may also analyze and disseminate early warning information. Ultimately, certain decisions relating to early warning information, such as those relating to Chapter VII, can only be taken by Member States. Thus, discussion of early warning within the UN system will not yield any silver bullets.

Mr. Carlson identified several other problematic for discussion:

- The very act of responding to early warning information -- for example, by dispatching an observer mission to the country in question -- can change the situation on the ground. However, the impact of such action will never be known; e.g. whether it changed the course of events or whether the situation would have evolved the same way of its own accord.
- Information may mean different things in different contexts and in different countries. In Burundi, for example, it may not be uncommon for an average of 60 people to be killed each week in civil unrest. However, were the same to happen in a European country, it might be perceived more widely as a reason for grave concern.
- Certain sensitive information may be available to Member States but not to the UN Secretariat, and so analysis by the latter may be undertaken in the absence of key indicators.

Discussant

Mr.. Jeremy Bristol, Early Warning Officer, international Alert, described HEWS as an information system of great potential, the first such system to be available. He also described the DHA's ReliefWeb internet site as an excellent body of information, particularly since NGOs are able to feed into it.

Mr. Bristol expressed regret that the UN inter-agency consultations on early warning of new mass refugee flows, held in Geneva between 1993 and 1995, were discontinued. Dr. Dedring noted that such consultations were halted because of internal divisions within DHA. Efforts to revive the consultations had failed so far. Mr. Carlson added that weekly meetings between DPA, DPKO and DHA still take place with the objective of enabling departments to bring critical issues to general attention. Particular items of importance can be conveyed to senior UN officials.

Mr. Bristol stated that three questions relating to early warning had not been adequately addressed in the general academic debate thus far:

- Who should the targets of early warning be?
- When should the early warning signals be given?
- What actions need to be undertaken?

In general, too much emphasis is placed on crisis response. DHA can respond to crises within 48 hours, UNHCR within 24 hours; but this does not prevent crises from occurring. The one body that is capable of taking preventive action, the Security Council, is unlikely to do so if Member States are opposed.

Mr. Bristol then considered the indicators used in HEWS. Although the use of early warning indicators is the most productive way of going forward, there is a methodological debate within the social sciences community that revolves around objectivity and truth. Some researchers are trying to set up a quantitative model based on empirical information. Nevertheless, the question remains, how can early warning information derived from indicators be translated into conflict prediction?

In considering the links between NGOs and the UN, Mr. Bristol recommended that:

- such links be nurtured by having the UN assist and feed into regional early warning networks set up by NGOs and other organizations (e.g. human rights and development assistance groups);
- assessments by as many individuals and groups as possible be pooled together;
- informal links with NGOs, which may be able to act in circumstances where the UN cannot, be developed.

Mr. Bristol concluded that, when designing early warning mechanisms, there is a need to understand what tools are available and who will undertake action. The analysis should be designed around this knowledge, and not vice-versa. The time-frame for action must also be taken into account.

Discussion

The general issue of the availability of information from HEWS arose (e.g. when the information might be available to Member States or to other bodies such as the OAU).

It was stated that the first goal of HEWS is to make early warning information available within the UN, and that certain issues must be addressed before such information is shared more widely: a) how to share it and, more importantly; b) what information can be included in a version of HEWS that is shared with other organizations. Efforts are underway to link HEWS with the ReliefWeb, and the UN has begun discussions with academics. The HEWS team in DHA includes only three officers, which means that the time available to undertake theoretical work is limited. It has therefore been argued that academics should be invited to undertake some work and to feed into HEWS.

A participant asked to what extent HEWS is in fact a *political* - as opposed to a *humanitarian* - early warning system, and to what extent the one diverts attention from the other. In response, Mr Carlson noted that the UN could not provide political early warning. The problem with humanitarian early warning is that the better it gets, the more sensitive the information it produces becomes. HEWS is intended to cover humanitarian issues, but inevitably such information have a political component as well.

The following issues and concerns regarding indicators were raised by participants:

- There is a risk that early warning "noise" may drown out essential early warning information. In Africa, for example, the amber light might be flashing in relation to many countries, given economic conditions there, but this would make it difficult to anticipate true crises.
- Greater effort should be accorded to drawing upon the various research projects being undertaken by academics and NGOs (Minorities at Risk, PANDA, KEDS, GEDS, etc.).
- Indicators need to be reconciled and information overload taken into account. Why is HEWS not already overloaded, given the quantity of information it absorbs? A pilot study undertaken by York University's Centre for Refugee Studies indicates that the most useful information may in fact be received from a myriad of small actors.

The following issues and concerns regarding analysis were raised by participants:

- In considering early warning information, consideration must be given to context as well as quantity. To what extent does HEWS draw upon area experts to place early warning information in context?

- The issue of "humanware" must be considered in addition to software. HEWS has only three people on staff, which is too few for proper analysis to be done. What is being done to address the "humanware" problem?

It was noted by Dr. Dedring that there are many crises worldwide and that lack of human resources will always be a problem. HEWS is able to draw upon the DHA's Complex Emergency Division as well as the three staff assigned to it to undertake analysis and develop responses. It is important to note the DHA and other UN departments have been discussing the issue of a unified system and a common database. However, for now there exists only a comparative approach, not a combined one.

In closing the session, one participant asked to what extent the incorporation, within HEWS, of information derived from media sources affected the credibility of the resulting early warning information. Mr. Carlson responded that this depended on the credibility of the media sources used. The participant noted that the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Response to Rwanda had concluded that in most cases, media analysis had been wrong. Both agreed that there is a difference between describing information and analyzing it.

SESSION II: Non-Governmental Triggers to Humanitarian Action**The Media**

Mr. Clyde Sanger, Director of Communications at Canada's North-South Institute, made a presentation that focused specifically on the media, and on the complex, and at times chaotic, triangular relationship that exists between the media, humanitarian workers and policy-makers.

Mr. Sanger's argument constituted a defence of the media, which had received some criticism in the previous session. He argued that the better journalists have an intuition about situations that comes from years of experience, and that in most cases, they turn out to be correct. Mr. Sanger argued that journalists have a tendency to work in isolation, in competition with their colleagues and at a distance from policy-makers. Humanitarian workers, on the other hand, often have better local networks and a greater ability to draw upon reports produced by academics and other analysts, with the result that they may be less isolated in carrying out their work. Journalists benefit from several advantages. They are very mobile - more so than humanitarian workers and policy-makers - and can ask awkward questions as they need not be as cautious as those who make or advise on policy.

Mr. Sanger next discussed the comparative advantage of the different media, highlighting the importance of distinguishing among them rather than talking about the media as a uniform instrument. First, television reaches the broadest audience but is open to imbalance. Visual images can have great impact and television can stir the public even if it sometimes provides little new information. Mr Sanger cited as examples the "CNN effect" and the role of the media in covering Operation "Restore Hope" in Somalia. Second, radio is more direct than television and passes through fewer filters, but generally reaches a smaller audience. Finally, print media lends itself to discussion of complicated issues and disputes since it can provide longer articles with in-depth background and analysis.

The media do not like early warning stories but instead tend to wait until events have occurred and violence has exploded. This phenomenon is linked to the fact that the media tend to rely on visiting "firemen" rather than on resident journalists - that is, journalists who arrive only once events have taken place. Local media can often be self-limiting in that they may prefer to run articles by reporters on staff in favour of pieces by freelance journalists or journalists from other companies. Then there is the broader problem of gate-keeping by editors. Although journalists may produce good stories, they have still to get them past editors. Often, such gate-keepers do not necessarily get into the field, and their judgement as to what is newsworthy may be coloured accordingly.

In conclusion, Mr Sanger emphasized that early warning practitioners should not be overly critical of the media. The information they provide can be useful for early warning purposes, particularly if linked to that which is provided by aid workers and policy-makers. After all, it was the BBC that broke the news of the Ethiopian famine and provided the extra push needed for action by governments.

Relief and Development NGOs

Mr. Gilles Sandré, National Director of International Services, Canadian Red Cross Society, made a presentation on early warning mechanisms within non-UN international organizations, most of which rely on field-based early warning systems.

Early warning has been used more or less systematically since the early 1990s when, as a result of developments in Somalia, it was recognized that there existed a need for contingency planning, conflict- and disaster-prevention, rapid assessment, and rapid response. Data collection is used as one of the parameters for determining response.

NGOs employ two kinds of data for their early warning: macro-triggers and micro-triggers. The first, macro-triggers, relate to data reflecting national and international perspectives (e.g. data on national and regional politics, geopolitical context, national security, national economic phenomena, satellite-based climactic and agronomic data, and the presence of operations involving international actors).

Mr. Sandré then assessed whether such systems already in place could be relied upon to collect such macro-level data, and concluded that what exists is rather crude. While there are organisations that are interested in such issues, it is unclear whether any of them is already advanced enough for complex early warning purposes. These organisations include: the UN departments, programmes and agencies (DHA, WFP, FAO, UNHCR), which tend to look for raw data relating to their field of work; the media, which is more interested in selling news than in collecting data; nationally-based early warning systems, such as USAid's Famine Early Warning System; diplomatic and intelligence networks; and international organizations and international NGO networks, including the International Red Cross Movement, Médecins Sans Frontières, CARE International and church networks.

Mr Sandré discussed the obvious limitations of global, macro-level early warning systems:

- They are very sophisticated and often compile too much information;
- The focus is on the "big picture", which can vary greatly from the "small picture";
- The data is raw, is rarely updated and generally is not analyzed in any depth;
- The data requires full verification in order to be credible;

- Data collectors often operate on a regional rather than local level, with the result that data is often imprecise, and data collection often becomes difficult precisely when that data is needed most, e.g. when conflict breaks out and collectors of data disappear.

The second type of data, micro-triggers, relates to ground-level, or household, perspectives, including the local political situation, climatic conditions, activities of IGOs and NGOs, the local security situation, food issues, market information, population movements, agricultural information, health information and, most importantly, coping mechanisms. The data constituting micro-triggers generally are monitored by local community organizations, NGOs having a national constituency and partnership base, such as CARE International and the International Red Cross Movement, and churches.

What is done with the information gathered? First, data has to be cross-checked and its validity verified. Second, full and proper analysis of data has to be provided, causes of any changes identified, and possible repercussions and consequences assessed in light of the coping mechanisms and response time available. Over the longer term, more reliable and robust sources of data will have to be identified.

There exists an early warning cycle involving monitoring, assessment, analysis, dissemination and, ultimately, the triggering of a response. Bridges have to be built between these various elements, and greater attention focussed on analysis.

Mr Sandré emphasised that the issue of response is the most important the international community faces. The sustainability of the response has to be analyzed, e.g. would it strengthen or overwhelm local capacities? Would it be conducive to long-term economic and social development?

In the final analysis, one must always be aware that there will always be events that are unexpected and unpredicted but far-reaching in their impact.

International Crisis Response NGOs

The Honourable Allan MacEachen, Senator, Member of the International Crisis Group, provided an overview of the activities of the London-based International Crisis Group (ICG), formally launched in July 1995 at the initiative of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The Group, which focuses on political early warning, comprises distinguished individuals from around the world. It has a proposed annual budget of US\$4 million, based on contributions from governments and the private sector. Two Canadians sit on the Board: Ms. Barbara McDougall and Senator MacEachen.

The ICG's objective is to enhance the ability of countries and organisations to anticipate and to moderate crises. Their principal value-added will be with regard to assessment and

advocacy, with an emphasis on the latter as the area of greatest need. The Group's first meeting in January 1995 discussed its potential role and contribution relative to what the UN was already doing, although Senator MacEachen emphasised that this approach was not intended to imply any criticism of UN involvement to date in crisis management. The meeting was a test of how many of the members were interested in, and committed to, launching the ICG.

The ICG has established some initial criteria to employ in determining which events to focus on:

- The situation must be without clear international policy, with no decision yet by the international community as to whether to intervene;
- The ICG must be able to add value, meaning that no other party (whether a country or an organization) should already be addressing the crisis;
- The crisis must have a human cost; and,
- The crisis needs to be both large-scale and diverse in scope (e.g. vis. stage of development, geographic location).

In summary, the ICG proposes to focus on crises that have largely been overlooked by the international community or with which the international community has not fully come to terms, either because it is considered not to be overly important or because the options for responding are unclear.

Senator MacEachen discussed in some detail one of the crises with which the ICG has been involved, Sierra Leone, which satisfied four of the ICG's criteria and which has not emerged as a priority for any country or institution. Two ICG staff were sent on an eight-week mission to evaluate the situation, trying to draw upon all sources of information. Interestingly enough, their report indicated that the principal cause of the crisis had been the long existence of a corrupt government that had exploited the resources of the country over time, rather than any cause that could be reflected in the usual economic indicators. The ICG worked in support of the electoral process and succeeded in having CNN and the BBC run documentaries on the situation in Sierra Leone, with the objective of influencing public opinion. An assessment of the ICG's actions in Sierra Leone was then considered by its Board, to confirm whether the ICG had been successful in supporting a move towards good governance in the country.

A second example was the ICG's involvement in Bosnia, where it was asked to monitor the implementation of the civil aspects of the Dayton Agreement despite the fact that Bosnia would not normally have satisfied the criteria for involvement. The ICG deployed a four-person team to that country, and so far, their assessment of the implementation process has been largely negative. The objective is to influence political opinion and to galvanize governments on doing something about the situation in Bosnia.

In conclusion, Senator MacEachen argued that there is a real potential for ICG and similar organizations to produce change. All that is needed is to ensure that they are able to operate properly and are rendered capable of producing change.

Discussant

Professor Janice Gross Stein, Harrowston Professor of Conflict Management and Negotiation, University of Toronto, argued that the media and NGOs are absolutely critical players in the area of early warning and response. Order is the enemy of good warning and response. Paradoxically, improved organization and co-operation among NGOs could *diminish* the effectiveness of their early warning and response roles. Assessment efforts within the U.S. Government provide a good example of the possible disadvantages of a large, integrated bureaucracy. The U.S. Government possesses valuable intelligence assets but the overall system is of less use than it might be because it lacks multiple voices. The U.S. intelligence community tends to produce integrated reports, but trying to reach such a consensus will result in washing out all the potential criticism and dissident voices that can aid warning. Thus, one should be wary of efforts to create a global and integrated early warning system.

Professor Stein stated that she disagreed with the argument that the problem does not appear to be with early warning but rather with the response. The warning process remains problematic, e.g. with regard to questions such as how to determine what information political leaders require; how it can be ensured that information reaches them; and where and in what way limited early warning resources should be committed.

There is a need to differentiate between "inside" and "outside" systems. In the "inside" system comprised of the UN and governments, there is a clear advantage to coordination across departments and organizations. But in the "outside" system of NGOs and the independent media, there is a greater likelihood of success if the system is decentralized. Professor Stein emphasized that one needs to be careful in sharing intelligence and must recognize the political constraints that exist on sharing information that originates from "inside" sources, e.g. the UN or governments. If information provided in confidence to the UN is then disseminated widely outside, the information available to the UN could diminish in value over time as a result. The NGOs and the media, as "outside" groups, face no such constraints and so can preserve their capacity to disseminate information freely, and to circulate warnings based on that information. They can also give voice to information or warning that originate from within the "inside" system, and so perform a valuable advocacy function.

Professor Stein also stated that one must be realistic in his expectations while also assisting the UN and other bodies in improving their early warning capacity. Higher standards of behaviour by the UN than those placed on governments should not be expected. It was not just the UN that failed in Rwanda, but Member States too.

Opportunities for information-sharing between the UN and other organizations must be expanded, so that different voices can be heard across the early warning system. But care must be taken in doing so, in order that neither the UN nor NGOs risk compromising their sources as a result.

Professor Stein noted that there exists a problem whereby middle and senior level officials in the UN Secretariat avoid pushing information up to higher levels within the organization for fear that it will be poorly received by the Security Council. It may be that other sources of warning, e.g. within the NGO community, do not suffer from such internally-imposed constraints. Thus it might be better not to co-ordinate the gathering of information, but rather co-ordinate the dissemination of warnings so that the various organizations that provide early warning could do so with a common voice.

The biggest problem is success. What the ICG is doing does not generate much media attention. More broadly, the international community may not know if small actions and efforts that are undertaken produce change, as the media tend to focus only on large-scale actions and results.

SESSION III: Early Warning, Early Action: The Relationship Between Early Warning and Early Response by Governments and the UN System**The Experience in Somalia**

Ambassador Robert Oakley (Ret'd.), Distinguished Visiting Fellow, Center for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, provided insight into the Somalia experience, beginning with an overview of what happened in that country between 1989 and late 1992 -- the period during which the UN and the international community intervened in various ways to stop civil war, or at least to mitigate its effects.

Ambassador Oakley mentioned the importance of the media - both print and, later, television. Their coverage of the situation and the intense lobbying by NGOs resulted in the decision of the U.S. Government to get involved.

Ambassador Oakley argued that there was no lack of early warning information on Somalia but rather a lack of attention and political will. The problem within the UN, NGOs and the U.S. Government was that action on Somalia was pushed for, but not hard enough. Only when the pressures started building was action taken. The U.S. decided that a peace-keeping force was not going to do the job and subsequently sent in the Marines. A strong international response followed once the "ice was broken". Somebody had to take action in order for others to be willing to follow.

The experience in Rwanda

Ms. Lucie Edwards, Director General, Global Human Issues Bureau, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, stated that the Rwanda Joint Evaluation was successful in debunking several myths about events in that country. The most notable myths are: a) the crisis came like a thunderbolt from a clear blue sky, i.e. the international community did not know; and b) before the crisis erupted in April 1994, the international community was generally indifferent to what was going on in Rwanda, i.e. we did not care.

In fact, the international community did know about Rwanda. The crisis was well-known and long-standing. While the war in the early 1990s did not get much attention in Canada, it was highly publicized in Europe and regularly discussed at the Security Council. There was an intensive effort on the part of Rwanda's neighbours and the international community to resolve the conflict by facilitating the return of Tutsi refugees and the negotiation of a power-sharing arrangement. This effort resulted in the Arusha Accords, a far-reaching agreement to return Rwanda to peace and stability. Even after the accords were signed, Rwanda enjoyed an extraordinary political commitment. The international

community contributed substantially to the democratic transition, and the Security Council agreed to send a Special Representative and a small peacekeeping force under Chapter VI rules to monitor the border with Uganda and the transition to democratic elections. There was a feeling of sense of relief and optimism that Rwanda was heading for a textbook political reconciliation.

Then followed a period of intense rumours and political controversy. The first stages of political transition had taken place. President Habyarimana seemed to be dragging his feet about implementing the accords; the French soldiers had still not left the country and there were rumours of a military coup. By January 1994, the country was plunged into a constitutional crisis. Not only was the President resisting implementing the accords, but his term of office had expired and there was technically a constitutional vacuum. Violence was escalating and opposition figures were targeted for assassination. Rwanda's human rights organizations were fingering death squads supported by the youth wings of the MRND and CDR parties, tasked with killing the regime's political opponents and disrupting opposition meetings. What is interesting is that nobody predicted an organized genocide. There seemed to be a widespread agreement that the primary targets were Hutu opposition figures and not the Tutsi, even when the situation began to deteriorate further. The latter, although concerned with the worsening situation, did not see themselves as being in real danger or as targets of genocide. There was over time a fairly gradual ratcheting up of the violence, so much so there seemed to be a growing tolerance to it, even by the expatriates. This may help to explain why people did not react more vigorously to what was happening around them.

Although the media, particularly Radio Mille Collines, started spreading anti-Tutsi propaganda, so many lies were told that it was hard to take any of it seriously. To have done so would have been like relying on the *National Enquirer* to determine a country's policy on outer space. The international community discounted virtually everything printed or said in public by politicians, and instead relied on their private comments, which were invariably more moderate.

Through all this, the international community "kept its eyes on the prize", the Arusha Accords. Major efforts were made by diplomats to get the government of national unity up and running. Some observers think that it was the President's final acceptance, in the face of intense donor pressure, of the need to implement the accords in full that sealed his fate; a victim of the death machine he himself had set up. And it is worth noting that, in the background, was a very similar reconciliation process underway in South Africa, which led to a successful government of national unity. If it could work in South Africa, surely it could work in Rwanda. In addition, there was a parallel crisis in Burundi, triggered by the coup in October 1993. Many of the policymakers in Kigali were also immersed in the Burundi issues and UN agencies in Kigali were focusing on Burundian refugees in Rwanda and displaced persons in Northern Burundi. If one had asked regional leaders which was the most dangerous crisis, all would have said Burundi.

Although the international community knew the situation in Rwanda was critical, the best strategy was thought to be to continue pressing for the broadest political participation in the Accords. Unfortunately, the signals that extremists were preparing to take over the government and mount large scale war on their opponents were totally missed. In effect, the signal was not distinguished from amongst the noise, in view of the widespread disinformation, the accrued tolerance to political violence and the preoccupation with competing crises. No one was prepared to consider the imminence of evil, and no one could think the unthinkable: that anybody could or would construct such a death machine, or that people actually thought they could gain power through genocide.

Then the war began and chaos broke out, and still, the international community was concerned about Burundi, still smoldering from the fires lit during the crisis the previous October. There was little information on the situation outside Kigali. Only weeks later did reports of the genocide began to filter out, when survivors came to tell about it and when no Tutsi had made it to the refugee camps. By then, the international community had lost the precious window of opportunity for strong military intervention.

In sum, what lessons can be drawn from Rwanda, in terms of key indicators for early warning? Monitoring human rights, particularly the rise of death squads, disappearances and systematic harassment of the opposition, is of critical importance. The rise in poisonous political rhetoric must also be closely watched. A general atmosphere of insecurity, associated with banditry and the spread of weapons, is also a powerful warning signal. Finally, the polarizing of key institutions of civil society, as happened with the Roman Catholic Church and human rights organizations in Rwanda, is also a sign of danger.

Discussant

Professor Howard Adelman, York University, co-author of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, began by emphasizing the differences between humanitarian early warning and political early warning. The former was initiated in the late 1980s and had nothing to do with prevention and mitigation; instead, its focus was on relief. Today, however, humanitarian early warning is used as a euphemism for political early warning, since it is also referred to in a mitigation and prevention context. The politics become very important.

In general, the earlier the early warning signal is received, the less attention anybody pays to it and the less is likely to be done. This is due to three issues: unless the crisis confronts us immediately, there may be too much competing noise; there is not likely to be conclusive evidence; and, there are likely to be many factors arguing against any response.

Prof. Adelman recalled that Ambassador Oakley had referred to the issue of personnel, including the lack of continuity and institutional memory among relief staff and the

relatively limited level of experience among them. Ambassador Oakley had emphasized the importance of having critics who were willing to say what many did not want to hear. The problem is that often senior officials, whether in the private or public sector, react poorly to such criticism. Senator MacEachen had agreed, arguing that one should not become a prisoner of traditional categories or ways of viewing things. One should hear out those who disagree. This is a necessary survival skill in politics, as a consequence of which one learns about one's own weaknesses.

There were two main factors that made Somalia different from other crises: the role of the media and NGOs. Professor Adelman discussed these same factors on the basis of his research on Rwanda. Television helps to convey sentimental politics. Viewers want to see people they can help, not dead bodies. In Rwanda, television did not play a significant role until the refugees were in Goma, but by then, the genocide was pretty much over. But while television based on the issue of sentimental politics can result in a fast response, it is often too late to begin with. Yet television is good for relief organizations, and can help them in their efforts to reverse the situation on the ground. Print media often present things incorrectly, with exceptions of course. Many messages are wrong, often journalists fall prey to disinformation, and often the information they convey is inadequate: too little and too late.

While NGOs do good work in sharing information, their contribution should not be overrated. The big problem is determining what they can really do. Then, there are the problems of communication and of disconnection. NGOs tend to specialize (and, so, compartmentalize) and do not necessarily pass on information that could help other NGOs. Individual NGOs may come to be associated with one side or another in a conflict and their information may be discredited accordingly. In this context, Professor Adelman asked whether International Alert had been criticized for working with the rebels in Sierra Leone.

Other problems relating to the dissemination of information relate to the following factors: i) source (often we do not listen to our own analysts but to "friends" on whose advice and information we place a premium); ii) noise; and iii) hangover/shadow, e.g. countries may be reluctant to respond to situations such as Rwanda because of a bad experience in similar situations, such as Somalia.

Professor Adelman concluded that early warning is not a silver bullet but, that it could make a marginal difference. There are many uncertainties that create difficulties, but knowledge makes a difference and may improve the chances of responding appropriately. While this may not look like a lot, it can make a difference. In Professor Adelman's opinion, it was possible to intervene in Rwanda, and early warning could and should have made a difference.

General Discussion

Several participants raised the following issues relating to response:

- Policy makers often can focus only on urgent issues and lack the time for longer-term analysis relating to potential crisis prevention;
- Early warning may become increasingly relevant only once the situation has changed dramatically, e.g. once the extremists had come to power in Rwanda;
- Often, no international consensus emerges on whether a genocide risks occurring and, if so, on how to prevent it. The absence of any consensus on what to do in Burundi is evidence of this;
- Often, it is difficult to know where intervention in response to an apparent genocide will lead. Are governments that are considering intervening willing to use force and see their own soldiers killed? By intervening, are countries in effect establishing a new trusteeship and, if so, are they willing to see it through? In Viet Nam, one speaker argued, the U.S. set up an artificial entity, then learned that it would collapse were they to leave. The issue of colonialism remains sensitive, and this makes many wary of outside intervention.
- Lack of knowledge can impair response. One problem with the genocide in Rwanda was that what was happening at the village level was not known. As a result, it was assumed at first that the violence was directed at political leaders.
- Intervention may lead to, or hasten, violence or genocide -- that is, the very results it was intended to avoid. In Burundi, the risk existed that the arrival of foreign troops would goad the armed forces towards further violence.
- If the army functions as a terrorist organization, it may in any event be unclear whom to negotiate with.
- Such armed forces may be more willing to use force than are those intervening. In Rwanda, for example, UNAMIR was not perceived to be a force ready to inflict or to withstand violence. Rwandan extremists knew that if they killed UNAMIR peacekeepers, the UN's will for engagement would collapse.

A participant raised several issues concerning NGO involvement: what restrictions, if any, should be placed on NGO actors; with whom should they not deal; and what kind of actions by NGOs might disqualify them as a partner? In response, it was noted that Sierra Leone had been a difficult situation for International Alert, which had received much criticism for negotiating with rebels. However, it was emphasized that it is important that NGOs talk with anyone who can veto a solution, hence International Alert's willingness to

negotiate with the rebels. In Sierra Leone, as elsewhere, it is important to talk to as many groups as possible and to draw them into the peace process. Another participant agreed, noting that it is more useful to maintain a dialogue than to cut some factions off.

Another participant argued that NGOs should be able to operate provided they obey the law. Others agreed, noting that the only restrictions on NGOs should be that their activities not exacerbate the situation on the ground, e.g. by causing local price structures to explode through competition for cars and house rentals. Participants recommended that ground rules and codes of conduct be devised from which NGOs should not allow other NGOs to deviate. On the broader issue of NGO accreditation, it was emphasized that in Rwanda, NGOs had not even wanted to register. It would be beneficial if independent, senior NGO officials would create an accreditation system for NGOs, in order to avoid a situation whereby the poor behaviour of a small number of NGOs harms the reputation of others.

Participants agreed that a pluralism of viewpoints and analysis is preferable, but noted that similar activities are carried out in vastly different ways. There should at least be some agreement on how to present information, so that coordination would be rendered easier.

The question arose as to the role of economic model in early warning analysis. There exists a close connection between human rights violations and economic problems, and between ethnic conflict and such models. One participant discussed her research, which indicates that specific institutional human rights violations do not cause mass exoduses, but that mass violence (such as genocide) does. In addition, economic issues on their own do not have a direct impact on refugee movements, but such issues may have such an impact when combined with violence. Thus, economic issues should be considered in early warning models, not as primary factors but as underlying or integrating factors.

SESSION IV: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The principal themes identified thus far were summarized by the Chair:

- The best possible early warning system is of limited use if the right people are not there to respond;
- There is a need to know more about how decision-making operates, and about how early warning information can be brought to bear with decision-makers;
- Early warning is itself a form of political action;
- The role of leadership is critical both in early warning and response;
- A tension exists between the coordination of early warning and encouraging a multitude of early warning voices;
- Early warning needs to be made to work more effectively.

A participant argued that a triage approach may be necessary, whereby conflicts are ranked by their salience and are then acted upon in order. Thresholds and break-points for a rapid response system have to be identified, e.g. numbers of people killed, or numbers of refugees. Other participants questioned the utility of such an approach, noting that there may not be sufficient information available on which to rank conflicts, and that, in any case, there would likely be disagreement on the rankings.

An overall discussion evolved on whether priority should be placed on early warning or early response. There are indications that good early warning systems have already been established, and that instead, greater emphasis should be placed on early action. Is it true that the international community is well served with existing early warning systems, or does it need to find ways to improve them? If so, how?

One participant noted that the critical problem with regard to responding is determining how to intervene most effectively. Different actors have different thresholds and different means of intervening. He emphasized that there may often be an advantage to using regional organizations to intervene, given their particular regional expertise and their particular links with states and leaders in the region.

In closing, another participant cautioned that conflict prevention does not necessarily mean the prevention of any conflict, but of violent conflict. Thus, there is a need to focus on violence. Prevention is the key; once conflict has erupted, it becomes too late and too costly to intervene effectively.

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