

Keynote Address

Keynote address by Lt.Gen. (retired) Romeo Dallaire

Romeo Dallaire: Well good morning ladies and gentleman. It is truly most encouraging to see the turnout, and in particular, the turnout of the students, grads and undergrads to this event, as although you'll read books, and you'll read accounts, there's nothing stronger pedagogically than, in fact, listening to human beings speaking, debating with their eyes and their commitment to a subject of this nature. And so, thank you for being here, and also thank you colleagues, who have responded to come to this one day symposium that really could last three or four. And so, in the nature and meeting the challenge from Allan in regards to ensuring that we stay within the time constraints, I will do what my Marine corps colleagues taught me in 1980 in Virginia, I will power talk, and I hope that, in fact, most of my points will get across.

I thought it important to set the scene of 1993-1994, and then to go through a number of elements in which the media were involved, both locally and internationally during that year, where a country had finished of civil war and massacres, had signed a peace agreement, some of them under duress, and over the process of a year, barely 12 months, moved from a peace agreement to political stagnation to assassinations to massacres to civil war, and ultimately genocide, and then to a state, where the minority actually won the war, gained control of the whole country, and is now in a different path.

There are many factors in regards to Rwanda and the effects of that, but I think one that is pertinent, particularly to Canadians as we live in a nation that has two founding nations is the fact that the Franco-Anglo dimension of Rwanda was in the forefront, and not hidden in the back. The majority of the population spoke French. The government was a French government, out of le francophonie. The rebel forces were English speaking, and essentially introduced the English language as one of the dominant languages now, if not the dominant language in the structure of the nation.

The enjeu between the old colonial powers, and the Americans in Africa exists still today, and is heightened by an inability of the ex-colonial powers, and I think the crassness of the instruments of the imperial power of today in attempting to resolve their history, and marry it up with the history of these new independent nations. And we still see fundamental racism, we see abuse, we see raping of the nations for their resources, and ultimately the African continent, sub-Sahara particularly continue to be treated as a residual, as a problem, as a hassle, and not mainstream. The African continent is reflective of the 80 per cent of humanity that is still living in the blood, and the mud, and the misery, and the suffering, and the indignation of not being considered really human. The 20 per cent of humanity that's taking off to Mars, still considers that 80 per cent as a problem, and not as an equal, as an entity in which millions upon millions of human beings just like us exist. Until the international community, until the powers actually consider all of humanity as the same entity, we will not see humanity advance. It is not by going to Mars and leaving 80 per cent of humanity in the mud, and the suffering, and the indignity that we can say ultimately that humanity is advancing. It is only when those

people will have the serenity, will be treated with the dignity, have the hope and the aspirations for future generations that the whole of humanity will, in fact, advance.

And Rwanda is not only living in the context of the déchirement with the ex-powers and the complexity of ethnicities inside it's own nation, it's a country that is attempting to build from the past in efforts of reconciliation and bringing the nation back to a one single body. And it is my belief that, in fact, reconciliation in that nation, as in others, will be done by the women, particularly the mothers and the children. And through education, the difference amongst will be overcome.

Now, 1993-1994 was an era in the New World disorder. That's not what George Bush senior said, he said, "New World order", and in fact, many of us thought that we had entered the New World order, so much so that even though the Cold War had ended, and there was a peace dividend being demanded, the conservative entities of the powerful nations, and particularly the west, still believe that the era was an era just like the past that is the normal nation state, sovereign state situation, in which the people, the governments, and the military continued to advance these independent states into the future. And as such, required still classic military capabilities because there was a classic threat ultimately. And one could look at today the way the Americans are attempting to surround China to sometimes question whether or not there will ultimately 10 years or 15 years from now be a friction that will create possibly another classic upgraded war scenario. However, at the time, the Gulf War gave many in the west the feeling that things were going to be just like before.

And no new military thinking, no new diplomatic thinking actually was coming to the fore, and what we lived in Rwanda was the belief that, in fact, the whole of the international community would simply be going down a similar route as the past, but in a far more peaceful scenario. And so as the example of Rwanda, the mission was a classic chapter six. Both sides had stopped fighting. They had a peace agreement. They were in their trenches and waiting for the politicians to implement that peace agreement, and ultimately just like Cyprus, a green line or referee was required, and then it was in years the whole of the nation would be built in a what the west considered a democratic process.

However, that is not what was happening under the veneer of peace, both in classic peacekeeping, and in classic war fighting. We entered an era of conflict, where ladies and gentlemen, many of the diplomats, political, military and humanitarians stumbled, not only stumbled into this era of conflict, but also ad hoc did a lot of on job training, did a lot of crisis management, and hit and miss in many circumstances, sometimes putting too much resources at terrible cost of life, and other times as in Rwanda not getting involved at all, and created orphan nations, where in fact, these people simply didn't count.

In that era, discussions and debates were taken, and modes of thought in the international community were moving. The example of the Americans in Mogadishu in October, 1993, changed significantly the will of the western world to actually commit itself to the betterment of the developing world. Eighteen American soldiers were killed, professional

soldiers, who knew that everyday when they woke up, they could be dead in some place somewhere in the world. It was part of their way of life, their professional commitment, and 72 were injured, and 1.6 million people in uniform from that imperial power turned pale and ran.

The Americans had entered with the Canadians, and many other countries, and the UN into Somali because hundreds of thousands of Somalis were dying of thirst, dying of lack of food, medical supplies and the like. And when the Americans pulled out, and pulled the heart out of the mission, leaving it in the hands of Pakistanis, and Italians, and Canadians and UN, there was still hundreds of thousands of Somalis dying of thirst, lack of food and medical support. However, the price had become too high. The price of 18 soldiers was too high for the American government to actually continue in its stated aim of helping the Somalis who were dying by the tens of thousands. Ten soldiers were too much in the first 24 hours of the war in Rwanda, for Belgium, the ex-colonial power to sustain. It was a massive shock, I agree, and the Belgians pulled out, and convinced everybody else that we should leave, because we'd all be massacred, and nobody wanted to risk returning into another African escapade, where the risk of soldier's lives was too high.

One major power came to me within the first weeks, and said quite clearly after they did their assessment that they were not going to come and stop the carnage. There were bodies all over. We were already burning bodies with diesel fuel, because of the fear of disease, and the smell, and the wild dogs. They said, "You know, this country is of no strategic value. Geographically, it provides us nothing. It's not even worth putting a radar here. Economically it's nothing, because there's no strategic resources, only tea and coffee, and those resources already the market is falling out of those markets." They said, "In fact what there's too much of here is people", and they said, "Well we're not going to come because of people." And in fact, in quantifying that said, "That not only the government, but the people of that nation could possibly reconsider if for every soldier either killed or injured, there would be an equivalent of 85,000 dead Rwandans."

Are all humans human or are some more human than others? Do some count more than others? Millions were going into Yugoslavia. Tens of thousands of troops were going into Yugoslavia. Everybody was looking at Yugoslavia. Nobody came to Rwanda. They pulled everything out, and abandoned us in the field. There were more people killed, injured, internally displaced and refuged in 100 days in Rwanda than the six years of the Yugoslav campaign, and yet they ripped the heart out of the possibility of stopping, or at least curtailing, or saving a number of black Africans. They don't count. In Yugoslavia, it was portrayed as long seething problems that educated people had debated, and it's religious, and it's ethnic, and it's been something studied and analyzed. As such, we brought in new terms, like "ethnic cleansing". That's what the problem was in Yugoslavia. In Rwanda, it was just a bunch of tribes going at each other, like they always do. Rwanda was black. Yugoslavia was white European.

Where was the media? Where was the media in that debate? How many got suckered in to the big game, perceived as a big game, set up as a big game? While when you look at

humanity, and the plight within the humanity, the big game, the real crisis was in a small country in dark Africa that nobody really was interested in. The media and its power is to my chagrin not controlled by the media. It is my opinion that because of the business dimension of the media, because of the essentiality created of certain events and certain priorities that the media, in the main, moves down the road of the mainstream crisis or thinking of the world powers, and what was missing in Rwanda was essentially the depth, the knowledge of really what was Rwanda.

O.J. Simpson, as Allan said, was on the airwaves. Tanya Harding's kneecapping of her colleague, her competitor in figure skating was sneaking in trying to take the airwaves. You had Nelson Mandela's election. You had Yugoslavia, and oh yes somewhere in there, a bunch of black tribesmen in Africa are killing each other. There was more coverage of Tanya Harding during the 3½ months of the Rwandan genocide by ABC, CBS and NBC than the Rwandan genocide. Now, was it because of a love of pathos? Was it because of a love of the excitement? Was it because it was on CNN's radar screen that that effort was done? Or was it the hand of someone above, guiding the media, and informing it in subtle fashions that, "Listen, we have absolutely no interest in going into another hellhole in Africa. We do not want to get involved in Rwanda. So don't get us involved." How much of that influence actually bayed upon the leadership of those three great media consortiums?

Ladies and gentlemen, the media like so many others failed. We failed. The media failed. The world powers failed. Individually we failed. How is it possible that in the news in the evening in a country like Canada with its depth of human rights and its belief in the individual, that its people can watch a newscast, where one of our own is being abused by our own judicial system, yet in the same newscast, they're showing thousands of human beings, barely 12 hours away, being slaughtered. We're uproared against our own judicial system abusing our own, but we take it in stride the destruction of human beings far away.

How can we be so becifal (sic), and in fact, in the media coverage, how can they be so becifal? The media before the war started was essentially internal with some local staffers, who were responding more often than not to the main reporters or journalists in Nairobi. Nairobi was a lot better and more interesting than Kigali. And so international involvement up until the start of the war was one of, "Is there an event? Do we go or do we just get the staffer?" And so in the months leading to the genocide, when we opened up the headquarters with the President, Habyarimana, there were a number of international press. When the president was signed in as part of the new government, there was international press. When there was a massacre in the northwest of the country, there was international press. But in essence, the international press were neophytes of Rwanda to the extent that one international media body was taking the information from a Rwandan staffer in downtown Kigali, who was part of the extremist movement. And so I get a call from London, oh did I mention that, saying, "What's going on? How come you're doing this, and this and this", which were false. The staffer was feeding false information to London, who was airing it until someone realized that maybe we got to get another angle to this. And thank God a person like Mark Doyle came on the ground, and

proved the whole situation wrong.

Ladies and gentlemen, people who came into Rwanda when the war started knew nothing of Rwanda or very little, and those who knew a lot were not necessarily listened to. Many of the stories were simply gruesome reaccountings. In the European press, there was a lot of discussion on recommendations on the loss of the soldiers, on the Anglo-Franco, American, European, colonial exercises going on at that point. But in the heart of it, why the reconciliation had failed over the years, and why did we let a potential peace process fall into disarray? It was nothing.

Within the country, as you will hear in the discussions and the debates of the panelists, media was exceptionally important. The country is known as a radio country. The voice of the radio is the voice at some villages in talking to them, of near God. In the displaced camps, in the refugee camps, at the height of the killing, you could still find people with portable radios. Where did they get the batteries? We couldn't even get batteries for our flashlights. How were they able to keep that going? And how did they continue to advance it? The events, in fact, the media response, and in particular, the response to the RTLM, the extremist radio. There was a government radio that did expound the party line of the single party nation, an nascent multi-party system, and there was a radio handled, or under the authority of the rebels called Radio Muhaburu, who gave their side of the debate. We came in there bare bum. We had no radio station. We had looked at Cambodia, how essential it had been. No radio stations were available in the inventory of UN, and it was dropped from the budget.

Not only did we not have a radio station to partake in the debate, to be a platform for both sides, to come with us and discuss, to sell our product for it became evident that none of the radio stations in Rwanda actually told the people that we were there. There was no information being passed on, and all they saw was a white vehicle with a blue flag going by at 70 kilometres per hour. That does not explain what we were doing there. And so many Rwandans didn't have a clue why we were there. And those who knew we were there, were told that we were to do so much more than the mandate had permitted us.

The peace agreement wanted the neutral international force to do this much. My report said about the same. By the time, the Security Council signed my mandate, we had that much. And although we fiddled in the margins to go beyond the mandate, we were brought back brutally on January 11, with the response to our desire to launch offensive operations, and in fact, disrupt the activities of the extremists. RTLM became the voice of the devil, and through January, and February and March, accelerated its concepts, its precepts that there are people, who should not live in that country, and here are the ways to eliminate them.

The war started, and all of a sudden everybody wanted to jump on whatever aircraft or truck to get to Kigali. They didn't know exactly what they were looking for, but there was excitement, and it had reached the CNN radar scope. And so within the first days, a number of journalists did appear, and within the first week, over 200 were sitting in Nairobi. I have a long time ago learned that 1) you never lie to the media ever, 2) you

don't play coy with the media, 3) you must establish a credibility with the media, 4) some of the reporters have got to establish personal credibility with you.

There is a great debate that went on about the January 11 fax, in which because I received orders not to intervene, many people felt I should have simply leaked it to the media, and then see the reaction. You will not get the depth of the story. You will not comprehend all the factors that are involved in these stories if you wait, or as I say, you work under the doctrine of in, out and a prayer for a scoop. You will not get the story. And so as an example, if the media had come and asked me what was going on, if they had come and queried at this stage of the evolution of the stagnation, and the process that was going on politically and security wise, and asked me what were we doing, they would have got the answer. And they could have reported what was happening, but I was not going to leak it. You cannot be ethical and fiddle. And so the problem of that event and that point rests in the inability to get within the entrails of the organization and the story.

And so ladies and gentlemen, it was fine to come and report that they were slaughtering them by the tens of thousands, and it was fine platoons of journalists would come in for three or four days, and then they'd leave so I could bring more in. And it was fine that we guaranteed their safety, and provided them with transport, and food, and lodging. Their people were on a budget too, so if we can do it for free, why not? And it was absolutely essential that every day they get their story. And I put the lives of my troops on the line to guarantee that people got their daily story. Not only in these places, where in fact, the catastrophe was evolving, but also in getting their stories out. I had officers and soldiers run the gauntlet to get the story to my headquarters in Uganda, from which it went to Kampala and then Nairobi for the technology was not available inside Rwanda. And only after time did the big outfits come in and set up their international capabilities. It was fine to do that, in fact, ladies and gentlemen, it was essential, because within the third week of Rwanda, where the UN had buckled under, and had decided that it was not only not going to reinforce, but it was going to abandon Rwanda, the only voice, the only weapon that I had was the media. If I could shame the international community into acting through the media, then I would have achieved my aim. And although there were valiant efforts done and courageous work done in the field, often it never went beyond the editor's desk. And the story never really got told, and that's why O.J. Simpson and Tanya Harding got a lot more press than 800,000 human beings being slaughtered daily.

The media is a two way street. I was able to give them what they required and more, but they were also instrumental in providing me with intelligence information. Many of the journalists were courageous enough to go between the lines, and they would come in, and I opened my headquarters totally to them. The only time I didn't want them there was when we were doing planning of operations. The other times, I saw journalists standing at the big map boards with my operations duty officers, and they're marking on the map, and then saying, "Yes I've been through there, and yeah there is a massacre site there, and yes there are about 50,000 people on the side of that hill over there." The exchange was transparent. The credibility had been established, and individuals had come into my realm of decision. People, as an example, like Mark Doyle stayed throughout, and he stayed throughout because he was there before. And he and I exchanged continuously.

Yes, establishing an intimate, or least a human link between the authorities and yourselves based on credibility will give dividends beyond your wildest expectations, and when it was said “off the record” with those people, it was off the record.

And so ladies and gentlemen, I have spoken too long, and I wish only to present to you the multifacetedness of the media, and how significant it can be considered as a weapon to advance a situation, as well as a conscience to humanity and to the local, both inside and beyond. I will give you what I consider the most perverse abuse of the media in Rwanda, perverse and the most unethical. I was against children being exported. Everybody wanted to come and take the poor children away, and I kept telling them that we don't export Rwandans, we help them. We build orphanages. We protect them. We feed them. We talk to them. We teach them how to laugh again, and so the money you want to move a dozen or two, I can build an orphanage and feed 1,000. And so my superiors gave me an order to permit this nation to come in and to take some of the children from Rwanda. The nation was France, and the front man was Bernard Kouchner and essentially the argument was that Paris could not handle any more seeing these children being abused and destroyed, and something had to be done. And so under duress, I let 60 children, who were badly injured, on a Canadian Hercules airplane, go to Nairobi, where a hospital aircraft was to bring them from there to Paris. And so the plan went on, the children in the Hercules aircraft landed in Nairobi, but the hospital aircraft was not there. They waited nine hours on the tarmac in the heat, and one child died, because the Kenyans didn't want them off the aircraft. And finally the aircraft came in, and the hospital aircraft, and we loaded them, and they went back home. And when we queried “Why was there a delay?” the candid response...was that if we had stayed with the original plan, the children would have arrived around midnight, and so in order to get maximum impact, we delayed by 9 hours so the children would arrive in Paris at 10 o'clock in the morning, and ultimately that led to an operation that I can be very caustic about its ulterior aims.

Ladies and gentleman, you are powerful individually and collectively, but you can be set up so easily if the depth of the subject is not there. Thank you so much.