

Question Period

Allan Thompson: General Dallaire, thank you very much. You've set the stage for us today, and General Dallaire will be returning to this stage in the fourth panel as the chair. We have some time for a few questions from the floor. There are microphones in the middle aisle here next to the camera positions. We have a few minutes if people would like to come forward. I'll ask the first one while people take the stage. I know you've mentioned in the book and in other places that you sought permission from the United Nations to jam the broadcasts, particularly of RTLM, and that you were denied permission. I'm just wondering if you can address that point? Have we learned that lesson? Is there any sort of architecture internationally to intervene when media are being abused?

General Dallaire: When I said we entered a new era, the new era puts into question the absolute of sovereignty, and questions whether or not sovereignty is an instrument to move us forward, or is an impediment for a humanity in its total to move forward. When RTLM started to attack not only the mission, but myself, when RTLM was launching in its description of how to kill, it was obvious by any of the references that I had and those around me that RTLM was not operating with any rules. It was beyond rules. It was beyond limits, and that it was an overt instrument of genocide, and so I went to the UN, and the big powers, and I said, "I need two things; one a radio station, which ultimately Canada said they had one, but it couldn't get there, and two I need somebody to find that emitter, and close her down, either jamming it or ultimately if necessary destroying it." And the response in the height of the genocide was Rwanda is a sovereign state, the airwaves belong to that sovereign state, and we cannot intervene. Sovereignty is an instrument not to do something. Nationalism is an instrument to create differences and friction. We must question those who use those outdated instruments to not intervene.

The Americans in March, in fact March 16, 1994, three weeks before the genocide started, President Clinton went to the General Assembly and said, "Ladies and gentleman, the United States will not intervene anymore unless it's in its self interest", and he presented and got approved in Congress his presidential proposition number 25, that essentially says that. On April 7, in the working room of the Security Council, Madeleine Albright and colleagues said bluntly, "The Americans are not going to intervene, and they're going to help nobody who wants to". And the Americans argued the sovereignty of the nations, but ultimately were using that with their lawyers to not intervene. Sir.

Question from the floor: Sir thank you for coming. I have a question in regards to an Ottawa Citizen article that I think was two days ago that had to do with the fact that a French court supposedly has evidence that the RPF was involved in the shooting down of President Habyarimana's plane, and I was just wondering your reaction to that, because it was always believed that it was extremists who shot down the plane.

General Dallaire: As I said at the international tribunal, when in a bit of an unusual circumstance, I had to defend my book in front of an international criminal tribunal,

where I was told, “What exactly did you mean in page 293 in the third paragraph?” As I said to the tribunal, I have five theories. I could give you six. I could probably modify them and give you eight. There are so many factors, with so many players in regards to that genocide, who started it, who gained from it, who lost, why, that speaking of the black box is only taking one dimension of it, and so as I told the international tribunal, yes I have ideas. Yes I have my references of my options that I felt things happened, but I don’t have hard data. Will that black box provide some? Well let’s hope so. Let’s hope so, because it’s still an enigma that deserves to be looked at. Thank you for the question.

Allan Thompson: A question from Douglas Anglin, who is a professor here at Carleton, who was one of those who briefed General Dallaire before his departure for Africa in 1993.

Douglas Anglin: Thank you very much for the splendid address. In looking over the program, I see little or nothing on the role of the Canadian media in this. They tended to ignore you when you were there, but when you came back, you and your family underwent a very painful period of abuse from the media. I hesitate to intrude on your privacy, but is there something you could say about how that effected you, and how it came about?

General Dallaire: Well I would only, if you may, respond by saying that I was surprised in particularly the French media in this country, how it was influenced by the French and Belgian media. How it was essentially taking the stories from there, and running with them, with no depth of discussion, or interview or whatever. That really surprised me. The media essentially was looking at, did I make mistakes, and if I did, how do we hang him, because in that time frame, if you remember, it was hunting generals. And so the media, with the Somali event, which I agree the media had to report. In fact, it’s true the media that we’ve assessed many of our conservative institutions, and found them wanting, including the military, however, at that time, the aim was can we find a general, any general, who is in a bad way, or scandal, or made errors and the like. And so I just slipped in. The day after I arrived, I was interviewed by the CBC, and the whole tone of it was, “How come you let that happen?” And I was barely back in Canada after a year away, and four months in the civil war, and the first question was, “How did you let that happen?” And it went downhill from that. Thank you.

Allan Thompson: We have time for a couple more. I will identify the questioners who I know, but I should have asked people when you pose your question, please identify yourself, so that we can keep a record of the events. Christina Spencer.

Christina Spencer: Yes, thank you very much, General Dallaire. In the 10 years since Rwanda, the UN has gone through a little bit of it’s own consciousness raising, looking at it’s peacekeeping mandates and so forth. The responsibility to protect has come out. Does the international system now generally have the right tools, and of course the will to try and prevent this in future? And second of all, do you have specific recommendations you’d like to make to media now about how we handle these things?

General Dallaire: Well, if I may, I would say that about four years ago until Sierra Leone exploded, I often used the example that I don't know how many of you have seen the movie "Gorillas in the Mist", would explain Diane Fossey's work with the very rare 300 odd gorillas in the volcanoes in the northwest of Rwanda, and at the time I would say that to me if some outfit decided to go and wipe out the 300 gorillas, there would be more of a rush through the environment and so on than there would be if they started to slaughter thousands of humans in the same country once again. However, since then, we've seen the British in Sierra Leone, we've seen the French in Cote d'Ivoire. We've seen proactive operations in certain areas. As an example, we're wondering if it's proactive in Haiti, although we could have been in there a year ago. We also could have stayed when we had the situation instead of running away and let it deteriorate, but essentially there is different set of circumstances. My only fear many of the world powers are responding to their ex-colonies, and they're operating outside of the UN, and so that to me is not a fully positive exercise. That is creating far more complex problems, and it is making sure that there are orphan nations that will exist, where nobody will actually go and help.

In regards to the media, there is nothing that the media can do if it really doesn't know the story, and so many of the media are caught up in Canada and other countries by budgets. So they've got nobody on the ground any more. However, with the instruments of communications of this era, you can get a far more in depth feel for what's going on. And so I would only comment for the future journalists: 1) get yourself a lot more cultured, know geography, learn some anthropology, learn some sociology, and maybe even some philosophy, and bring more depth to your questions and to your analysis. And 2) stay dynamic in the search for the truth of what's going on for you are an instrument of the absolute called "justice", and if you abdicate, or you are perfunctory, then to me, we will be weakened. The Arusha Tribunal is forgotten. It's the middle of Africa. The tribunal in the Hague is always present. Is that guy a worse man, if we can call him that, than the gentleman I went to respond to at the Arusha Tribunal? People were killed. Nations were destroyed. Situations still linger. Aruahs is forgotten because Arusha is not in Europe. It's not white. It doesn't count. Go and look at those places, where it doesn't count, because if you think 9-1-1 and train mishaps in Spain are bad, that 80 per cent that's still in the mud and the blood is just getting that much more impatient, and certainly very much more in depth, intellectually based media can help us enormously in seeking out getting that information, and prodding us to do things. So get off the front page banners, and get into the entrails of those stories.

Allan Thompson: We have time for one for one or two more, first from one of our panelists, Jean Marie Higirot, and then we'll go to the microphone back here.

Jean Marie Higirot: Thank you, I have a comment regarding what you said about Rwanda Radio. I was in charge of Rwanda Radio from July 31, 1993 to April 6, 1994. I was in that position as the representative of the opposition political party, and in that capacity I'm saying this for the sake of Rwandan history, I did give 60 minutes every week to UNAMIR.

General Dallaire: 30 minutes.

Jean Marie Higiroy: Thank you for correcting me.

General Dallaire: No, but you're right. Every Saturday, 30 minutes was given to us.

Jean Marie Higiroy: That's right ??? your spokesperson used to come to correct the misperception regarding UNAMIR. In fact, for many Rwandans UNAMIR was there to protect them.

General Dallaire: Exactly.

Jean Marie Higiroy: To defend them in the case of the resumption of the war. But your spokesperson, in fact, came to explain to them that, in fact, UNAMIR was not there to protect them, but only to make sure that the peace process was implemented. So after, of course, April 6, I had left. I imagine that the Radio Rwanda ran the official line of the government, but I just wanted to say that during my tenure, there were diverse political views, which were aired by Radio Rwanda.

General Dallaire: In fact, thank you very much for the correction, and it's in the book, and I omitted, and that's not very fair of me. We got 30 minutes a week, but what we discovered was that nobody in the small mission had the skills to do 30 minutes of programming, and in fact, there were some weeks, where we didn't even go. I found out that our spokesman didn't even use the 30 minutes, and so between not having interpreters for a long time, and not having media analysts for a long time, we didn't even have the skill sets in order to present a very lucid program. That being said, one of the greatest, well I can't say it that way, one of the great disappointments was, in fact, when I would meet with a lot of people, who were being displaced. You know imagine the city of Ottawa moving down the road with barely the few belongings they have, and women having children on the side of the road, and elderly dying, and so on. There was always this sort of look of astonishment from Rwandans in regards to the Blue Beret, because they believed exactly as you've indicated that the mandate, which was in the peace agreement that wide was to come and protect and defend the Rwandans, where in fact, ultimately the Security Council limited it to assist in establishing an atmosphere of security, and so we were doing that, and they expected us to do that, but that side never really got explained to the whole of the nation, and that's one of the great tragedies of that mission.

Allan Thompson: We have about 1 minute left. I'm in charge of keeping the trains running on time today. So we can take one very quick question, and General Dallaire, for news media representatives here, General Dallaire will be available briefly in the foyer at the lunch break for a scrum if desired, so perhaps there can be some more questions at that time. So we have this question here.

Question from the floor: I'm a Carleton University student. My name is Chi (sic). Thank you very much, General, for the speech on media coverage of the facts on the

genocide in Rwanda. Actually, it is lesson, but now I would like to raise the question currently in China, the persecution of Falun Gong, which is a peaceful exercise, which has lasted for five years, and this persecution and genocide of Falun Gong prisoners was exactly following the same pattern that Rwanda has. But even more severe, it was started as a state run media, and followed by the systematically false media coverage, and deceiving people so that they found the foundation of the persecution.

General Dallaire: So what's the question?

Question from the floor: Yeah, my question is, how the international society, also the media can take their role and stop this persecution. Yeah, especially one thing is Chinese regime also exported the false media to Canada, even other countries.

General Dallaire: Yes, in fact, the prime minister and two ministers in Belgium wrote letters to the Canadian government telling me that I shouldn't have written in my book bad things about the Belgian military and their political involvement in Rwanda. So you don't even have to go that far to see how states can, in fact, corrupt and manipulate the information flow. Interesting though, RTLM was privately owned, and when we tried to assault it, we were told that "Hey that's a privately owned organization. It's not the government, and we've got to respect that sort of dimension to it." In regards to the media and international conflicts and the like, well you're just not interesting enough. That's it. You're just not interesting enough, and so it's not going to make it past the editor's desk if, in fact, the effort is even there, and so how do you make crimes against humanity, how you make such scenarios interesting is, I think, one of the dimensions of not only those who read and watch the media, but those who actually produce it. How do things like that keep or are alive, and continued to be looked into and the like? I mean three years after Rwanda, revisionists were already saying that there wasn't a genocide, that it was large massacres, and in fact, there were massive massacres on the other side too. And so by five years after, whenever I'd speak on Rwanda, I'd have to explain what had happened, because it had disappeared, even in the academic institutions. So history to North Americans as an example is what happened last week, and so if it's five years ago, you can imagine the effort you've got to put, and things like this keep, as I hope the Rwandan genocide alive in the minds of the western world in particular. Thank you.