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The Responsibility to Protect

**From the EPHIC Symposium, Sovereignty
& Intervention, Tufts University, February 2003**

Romeo Dallaire, Lt. Gen (ret.-Canada) Former Force Commander, United Nations Mission in Rwanda; author, Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda, upon receipt of the Jean Mayer Global Citizenship Award:

I accept this [Jean Mayer] award as part of the mission of those of us who have survived the Rwandan catastrophe, for it's our aim to never let the Rwandan genocide disappear. The Rwandans have no money, no influence, and no impact around the world. We will not forget that genocide and it should be a reference when people say "never again."

Now let me turn to the subject of this part of the symposium, Humanitarian Intervention and Human Rights, the Responsibility to Protect.

During the genocide in Kigali in Rwanda, I was not authorized to protect the forty thousand-odd people that we protected. It was done against orders. My mandate was self-defence and watch the show go by.

Within the structures that we have been using, we have instruments that are ineffective. We do not know how to resolve conflict with these new complex problems. We still insist on solving them within two years — from the peace agreement to a democratic process and elections in two years. That's impossible. It creates frictions, it creates problems, and it explodes.

In my country [Canada], we are still arguing a problem between a minority and a majority that started in 1759, and we're going to tell other nations how to solve their problem in two years? Where does that pretentiousness come from? Why do the big international institutions impose such milestones?

Ladies and gentlemen, humanitarian catastrophes with security problems are resolvable. They are resolvable if we use a far more mature premise of involvement. We are reacting as if we've been punched in the nose and we're going to sort out the other person once and for all. In Afghanistan, for example, we have not looked at the options of going after the Taliban and Al Qaeda and if they don't want to give up, then we fight. But if we can make it an aim of our mission to work for them to give up, then we could bring them to the International Tribunal and take twenty years to prosecute, and gain twenty years of maturity in the international justice system, and while we're doing that maybe people will realize that sooner or later you will be held accountable, and you will be brought before justice.

The will to intervene is the problem. The instruments of intervention are there in a spectrum that needs to be harnessed, then to be improved, and then made usable in a systematic fashion. We need a whole new conceptual base to conflict resolution — multi-disciplined, political, diplomatic, military, humanitarian — all working on one plan, not separate plans, and for a long time. Cyprus, we were there for forty years, and they haven't been killing each other. Prosperity is there, and maybe in

twenty years the green line will disappear. Isn't that the aim of the exercise? We're in for the long haul in these missions.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have no confidence in single nation-led coalitions. They are fundamentally not altruistic; they are fundamentally based on self-interest. Their aims are not necessarily humanitarian. It is my opinion that we must work through the UN — it is still the most transparent and impartial world organization (with warts) — and that it can, in fact, grow if we want to use it.

Why should we worry about that 80 percent of the humanity that's in poverty? Is it relevant to us? Is humanity in fact the 20 percent of the haves and the other ones not? Within forty-eight hours of the start of the genocide, French, Italian, Belgian and American troops were landing in and around Rwanda, pulling out about four thousand expatriates and leaving every black person behind: the people who had raised their kids were slaughtered in their houses. The others left with banks full of gold and precious jewels and ivory. They even brought their dogs. Forty-eight hours and add two days, so four days and there were over two thousand of the best trained and equipped soldiers in the world in and around Kigali. And with the last white person on the plane, they left and abandoned nearly two thousand ineffective (for the most part) UN troops. Bangladesh had received the order not to not help or protect anyone. That's eleven thousand troops. The Belgians pulled out because of casualties and influenced everybody they could to pull out with them.

No one came. Weeks and weeks and weeks and no one came. Why? Well one staff officer from a power came to me within the first couple of weeks with the report that he was bringing back to his country, and he said, "Sir, we're not going to come in to help stop this." And what were the reasons? One, Rwanda is of no strategic value in its placement in the world. Two, there is nothing here, no resources, certainly no strategic resources. He said, "The only thing here is humans, so we're not coming." The only thing is humans. Are humans worth sacrificing other humans for? Or putting it another way, are all humans human or are some more human than others? And if some are more human than others, then the reaction of the international community even in Sierra Leone when it started, is correct. They just don't count; they aren't worth our effort or interest.

They died by the hundreds of thousands, there were more people killed, injured, internally displaced and made refugees in less than one hundred days in Rwanda than in the eight years of the Yugoslavian campaign. I couldn't keep troops on the ground, nor feed the people, or give them water to keep them alive. There are still tens of thousands of troops in Yugoslavia. There are billions of dollars of aid going in there. Why the difference? Is the international community racist? In fact, does it make a pecking order? Does it create orphan nations where there's no value because there are only humans? Ladies and gentlemen, humanity is made 100 percent of humans and every one of them counts, because every one of them is the same.

They would stop convoys by putting children in the middle of the road. Children became instruments of war. As such they're efficient, they don't cost much, they're expendable. Walk them through the minefields first and then the elders can walk through. And these kids in the middle of the road couldn't move because they would be shot if they moved off the road, and the convoys would slow down, and they'd be attacked. And people who tried to move behind the lines or between the lines would be pulled out and slaughtered. NGOs would be attacked and then one day coming through the lines, here's this little three-year old in the middle of the road. And so we slowed down and stopped. I had a couple of soldiers with me, and we looked



around and nobody is there. We walk in the huts, there are only dead bodies, decaying, being eaten by dogs. As we're doing this the little boy disappeared. We found him in a hut in a comfortable place among all the bodies of his family. So I brought him back into the middle of the road, and I looked at him, injured, bloated, full of vermin, and I looked in his eyes. And I discovered that those eyes were exactly the eyes of my three-year old. They are both the same. They are both human. Circumstances are different and circumstances are the criteria still used in whether to intervene or not.

Are all humans human or are some more human than others? Well, thank God, human rights has been in revival and NGOs are increasing exponentially. Today we teach it. Human rights or the Geneva Convention are simply the most basic kind of knowledge. Today children learn it, and they feel it, and they live it. Human rights are the instrument by which Kofi Annan could make the statement at the Millennium General Assembly in September 2000 in his speech "We the Peoples." He said, "This is the millennium of humanity." And I agree.

In this next millennium, it may take four, five, six, seven, eight centuries, but at the end of that we will stop conflict because of differences. Why? Because there is a momentum . . . in the western world there's a momentum and in different other parts of the world, that every individual counts, and as such, the expression and defence of human rights will some day override self-interest among the powerful. And so I expect millions of innocent people still to die. I expect to die and still make a little dent in human rights. But just as when I was in the army and it took twenty-five years to bring a weapon to maturity, it took twenty-five years of work every day. And so too, it will take us decades and decades every day to bring forward this incredible power of those who are advancing and protecting child rights, human rights, individual rights, and the rights of women. And that effort will ultimately change the decision processes in the White House, in the Ottawa Parliament, and in other places around the world.

And so do not despair and do not be pessimistic. I am optimistic because time is not a factor. Ladies and gentlemen, the responsibility of humanity is the responsibility of humanity, and those who do not use their capabilities in recognizing that every human is human, will carry the guilt of their self-interests into history.

So here on the verge of the Iraq war [February 2003] what do you think historians will say of the United States fifty years from now? That it was successful in securing itself and its allies? That it, in fact, brought in a new era of mature diplomacy, mature use of force, of a whole new set of humanitarian efforts in order to not find ourselves in the quandaries that we are currently living in. We are more insecure today than we were during the Cold War.

My sister and some of her friends are not going to have children for a few years yet because they are so concerned. I would contend that they are not alone.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a responsibility; there is blood on the hands of people for the eight hundred thousand killed in Rwanda. Leaders who spend an hour or two in an airport with the engines running and promise billions of dollars to wash their hands of that blood . . . this simply will not do in the future. We cannot blackmail people into accepting money after we refuse to give them help so as to avoid the problem in the first place. ❀

