

General Romeo Dallaire: ‘Are all humans human or are some more human than others?’

Holocaust Memorial Day National Commemoration 2006

Jamie Owen: In Rwanda, General Romeo Dallaire, head of the UN peacekeeping force, ended up attempting to stop the genocide with just two hundred men. He was ordered by the UN to leave on three occasions. He refused each time. Eyewitnesses report him driving into town at night and personally rescuing people.

General Romeo Dallaire: Twelve years ago in a small African country a group of citizens met and decided that the only way they could maintain power was to simply eliminate 1.2 million people by mutilation killing. A hundred days into the genocide they had slaughtered 800,000 and over 3 million had been displaced and refugeed of which not only the Tutsis but the moderate Hutus who supported them also suffered. And no-one came. Within ten days of the start of the civil war and genocide my colleague from the International Red Cross and I reflected, then decided that what we were facing was a genocide yet it was near impossible to imagine because to me genocide and Holocaust were synonyms, and I couldn't phantom another Holocaust.

Five weeks later and over 350,000 dead and nearly a million displaced and refugeed, the big powers of the world sitting in New York decided that yes, I should be reinforced with 5,000 troops, and we should attempt to stop what was finally called a genocide. Only the big powers and middle powers like my own country Canada would have the capabilities of deploying fast enough, with the capabilities to stop the slaughter. Two months later, one month after the end of the genocide, with another 500,000 human beings killed and another 2 million displaced and refugeed the first reinforcements came and they were from Ethiopia, with none of the skills or equipment to stop the genocide that has already run its course. We called it genocide and no-one came, and yet at the same time, in ex Yugoslavia we were pouring in tens of thousands of troops and billions of dollars.

The question is are all humans human or are some more human than others? Do some count more than others? One of the instruments that the extremists would use during the genocide to gain more food and water and medical supplies, would be to use very young children; five, six and such ages, put them in the middle of the road and keep them there in order to stop the convoys with those resources coming through. If the children moved away they simply killed them outright with their machetes. And so on one day I was going between the lines, and up ahead there was a child of about three or four years old, and in no-man's-land we [were] not

going to abandon a child, so we slowed down expecting an ambush, we stopped, jumped out with a couple of soldiers – there was nobody. We went around to the huts to see if someone would take care of this child, and all we found were bodies of people who had been killed five or six weeks earlier on, decomposing and half eaten by wild dogs and rats, and as we looked around we lost the child. So we went back and found him in a hut where there were two adults male, female, and some children in advanced states of decomposition. He was sitting there as if it was home. I took the child and I brought him into the middle of the road and I looked at him, and this young three or four year old boy with a bloated stomach and scars and dirt in rags, flies all around him, but then I looked into his eyes, and what I saw in the eyes of that child was exactly what I saw in the eyes of my young son before I left Canada. They were the eyes of a human child and they were exactly the same. We have a responsibility to protect, we do not have the right to assess and to establish a priority within humanity, for all humans are human and not one of us is more human than the other.