

Introduction

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The number of horrifying attacks on representatives of the United Nations, relief agencies, the media, non-governmental and other organizations while on missions to alleviate and report human suffering throughout the world has escalated alarmingly. In the past, the blue UN letters and the red cross provided protection; increasingly, they designate targets.

International protectors and providers and their locally recruited colleagues have been taken hostage, tortured, and even killed. They and their families have physically and psychologically paid a very high price, both immediate and long-term, for their efforts on behalf of others. They have gone to countries and cultures not their own, often with little advance training, little support during their mission, and little or no assistance at the time of and following their (re)integration or discharge.

Who cannot but be moved by what Carlos Caceres said in his last e-mail from West Timor:

You should see this office. Plywood on the windows, staff peering out through openings in the curtains hastily installed a few minutes ago. We are waiting for the enemy, we sit here like bait, unarmed. . . .

A few hours later, he and two of his UN colleagues were brutally murdered. And by General Romeo Dallaire's reflections after Rwanda:

It took nearly two years to all of a sudden not being able to cope; not being able to hide it; not being able to forget it or to put it in, keep it in a drawer. I became suicidal because there was no other solution. You couldn't live with the pain and the sounds and the smell and the sights. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't stand the loudness of silence. And sometimes I wish I had lost a leg instead of having all those brain cells screwed up. You lose a leg, it's obvious, you've got therapy, all kinds of stuff. You lose your marbles; very, very difficult to explain, very difficult to gain that support that you need. But those who don't recognize it and don't go to get the help are going to be at risk to themselves and to us.

Recent decades have seen a litany of man-made and natural disasters resulting in immense suffering and misery. Violations of human rights abound. Tens of millions of refugees and internally displaced persons have cried out for help from

governments and international and non-governmental organizations. While the international community has made some attempts to respond to these overwhelming needs, enormous human suffering remains. In this maze of human agony, despair replaces hope and the world loses sight of the accomplishments as well as the considerable costs borne and the sacrifices made by those who are responding to the plight of the victims.

THE BOOK AND ITS VOICES

This book tells the story of the thousands of individuals who, as citizens of the world, have dedicated themselves to helping others, often with too little protection and support and at great sacrifice to themselves and their families. These are people who have worked with peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions, humanitarian workers with UN and other humanitarian and disaster relief operations, human rights defenders, journalists and other media professionals. The first goal of this book is to establish awareness of and create an appreciation for the accomplishments as well as the costs and sacrifices of these international protectors and providers. These stand in stark contrast to the acute deficits in protection and support given to them. Where failures and abdication of responsibility have occurred, such as in Somalia, Srebrenica, Rwanda, Timor or Chechnya, it draws some lessons to prevent their repetition or, at least, reduce the risk.

The second goal is to integrate issues of protection into all levels of planning, implementing and evaluating international intervention and action. The book discusses, develops, and advocates specific policies and practices that enable protectors and providers to serve effectively and safely. It reviews existing knowledge, identifies approaches that have proven useful, even in a limited way, explores and suggests future directions for the role of protectors and providers, and makes policy recommendations to relevant implementing organizations.

This book follows and will build upon two earlier related volumes published for and on behalf of the United Nations: *International Responses to Traumatic Stress: Humanitarian, Human Rights, Justice, Peace and Development Contributions, Collaborative Actions and Future Initiatives*, in 1996 [1], and *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Fifty Years and Beyond*, in 1999 [2]. The first described the nature of trauma, its psychological consequences, and the responses by the international community to the suffering incurred and to its prevention. The second reviewed the international human rights system and evaluated it critically from the point of view of whether it has reached the people by protecting individual human beings or averting their victimization. This book expands the initial work on the emotional responses of international humanitarian aid workers [3] and focuses specifically on international protectors and providers, those who report about traumatized people, serve them, and try to prevent (further) victimization.

Some systematic knowledge has existed about stress reactions and associated interventions primarily among military peacekeepers, both during their service and following their return. However, almost nothing comparable is known about what their civilian counterparts' experience, be it from the secretariats of organizations in

the UN system, from voluntary, non-governmental organizations, or from the media. The book is the first significant effort to fill these gaps.

Following heightened coverage in the media, the security of personnel has been receiving more attention by the relevant intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations. The General Assembly at its 49th session adopted the (so far sparsely ratified) Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel (A/RES/49/59 of 9 December 1994) and the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (GA/RES/53/144 of 9 December 1998). The security and protection of UN personnel have been in recent years the subject of several Security Council meetings and presidential statements.

The main flaw of these conventions and declarations and other statements emerging from intergovernmental bodies remains the fact that the state in a conflict situation cannot be relied upon as the protector of international workers, given that it often cannot protect its own citizens. Multiple non-state actors, who often escape the control of central authorities and who flout international covenants and declarations, are a major hurdle in ensuring the protection of international workers.

A further goal of this book is to describe in greater detail these major initial steps taken by the various international organizations as well as their weaknesses and develop policy and practice recommendations leading to the creation of a more comprehensive support system.

The book consists of 6 Sections, subdivided into chapters according to the type of international protectors and providers (such as UN military and non-military peacekeepers and peace builders; civilian staff of the UN system; UN and national volunteers; International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent; NGOs; and the media); the organizations they represent; their focus (such as women, children, and forensic work); the nature of knowledge (data-based, descriptive, and reflective experiential voices) and challenges and remedies (such as psychological, educational, legal, and political). The concluding chapter elaborates policy and program recommendations.

A special feature is the voices of the interveners themselves. These were provided by the participating organizations and individuals and are interwoven among the chapters.

The chapters present themes, points of views informed by different experiences. They include, among others, a detailed consideration of the requirements of pre-mission selection, assignment and training, support during mission, and post-mission assistance and counseling. They consider distinct problems posed by intensive, short-term involvement, usually on an emergency basis, as compared with extended assignments.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

The initial subtitle of this book referred to protectors and providers as “international interveners.” In the health professions, the choice of the word “intervention”

comes naturally; it conveys the need to take urgent and sometime invasive measures to change the course of a disease and thus halt or prevent its progression. However, many colleagues working in international humanitarian and political organizations advised against the use of the word “interveners,” particularly when prefaced by “international.” In their view, the word conjures up unilateral and forceful interference in the affairs of other nations by powerful nations or entities who, in the guise of moral or humanitarian motives, create more problems than solutions.

Recent military and political ventures into other countries, while frequently tolerated during the cold war, have now become one of the most troubling issues on the international policy agenda and thus have given the word “interveners” a negative connotation. It also brings to the fore the international community’s floundering attempts to find an appropriate response to internal conflict, having gone through counterproductive intervention in Somalia to inaction in the face of genocide in Rwanda [4].

The heated debate generated by the address of the United Nations Secretary-General to the 54th General Assembly (September 1999) [5] on sovereignty and humanitarian intervention, was pointed out as an added reason for steering clear from the word “interveners.”

Others associate the word “interveners” with the hordes of competing international, non-governmental organizations which descend upon a stricken country and spend an inordinate amount of money on relief that could have been better spent on staving off the disaster. Yet others point to the media who tend to accompany military interventions and withdrawals and take interest only when deadly violence engulfs a country and massive human rights violations occur. They invariably depart when the novelty of the crisis wears off or the world’s attention is drawn to more “newsworthy” events [6].

In the search for a better word than interveners, “actors” was briefly considered, only to be discarded. Finally, the phrase “international protectors and providers” was chosen to refer to all contributors to the book, including the media who provide information. Whatever their name, they are called upon to intervene because prevention has failed or did not take place in time. They intervene because the national or international entities entrusted with defending, preserving, and promoting human security are unwilling or unable to shoulder their responsibilities.

The environment in which international protectors and providers labor has changed drastically since the end of the cold war. It is a world where the core military and non-military threats to international peace and security no longer come exclusively from interstate violence [7]. Intra-state discord stemming from social, economic, demographic, and environmental pressures accounts for the majority of the conflicts witnessed today. In many of these states, ineffective governance and repressive or predatory practices by State and non-state actors constitute a further source of human insecurity.

In countries where internal strife has broken into open conflict and where state forces are battling armed insurgents, civilian populations are often caught in the cross fire and bear the brunt of death and destruction. In the past decade alone,

internal armed conflicts have turned over 40 million people into refugees and displaced persons. The chaotic situations these conflicts create, where combatants mix with civilians, endanger not only the lives of these errant populations but also those of medical and humanitarian relief workers. In the melee, hospitals are invaded, clinics destroyed, relief convoys barred from reaching their destinations, forced military recruitment of children flourishes and women and girls are exposed to sexual and other degrading violence. Where greed for rare commodities like diamonds, rather than legitimate grievances, fuels the conflict, and where access to small arms is easy and affordable, the conflict tends to be open-ended and the human suffering visited upon the civilian population widespread and unrelenting.

This is the uncharted and hazardous environment in which international interveners—protectors and providers—and their local partners operate, often unprepared and unprotected. It is an environment where the traditional principles of humanitarian intervention (neutrality, impartiality, and consent) seem to have been fashioned for a different world populated by accountable governments and regular armies, where civilians are accidental, not prime, targets of warfare. It is a world where humanitarian assistance tends to fuel conflict dynamics and is often usurped to “sustain war economies that redistribute assets from the weak to the strong” [8].

While this book does not address directly the multiple institutional and moral quandaries protectors and providers face, it provides ample material for future reflections on the complex role they play in zones of conflict where politics and humanitarian action inexorably intersect.

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