

Spotlight on violations of international humanitarian law

The role of the media

by Roy W. Gutman

Fifty years after the United Nations proclaimed its ambitious Universal Declaration of Human Rights, skeptics will have no trouble demonstrating that the international community's commitment to the document is shallow at best. The pretense was laid bare by the UN's inadequacy to stop genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, compounded by the institution's failure to conduct a thoroughgoing self-examination to determine the lessons of the debacle in Bosnia.

That being said, the United Nations is not a monolith, nor is it synonymous with the international community; and attitudes have shifted at the top of the organization itself, among many UN Member States, non-governmental organizations, and the media, with many groups in many locations focusing attention on war crimes. The most significant sign of change was the Security Council's establishment of ad hoc international tribunals to address the genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes in the Bosnia and Rwanda conflicts. A third tribunal may be created to address the massive crimes against humanity in Cambodia during the 1970s. Finally, States recently adopted in Rome the terms of reference for a permanent criminal court. Despite these steps toward ending impunity, major powers have yet to fulfil their obligations under the Geneva Conventions to arrest indicted war criminals in Bosnia.

Non-governmental organizations have also drawn lessons from these terrible events of the post-Cold War era, some by adopting a more militant

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