

Title: The UN and Equality, Freedom, and Justice

Student ID: 18238159

“And we remember—with shame—the failure of the international community. The failure to listen—and the failure to act,” mournfully stated the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres earlier this year at the reflection of the 1994 Rwandan genocide (press.un.org). The genocide engendered the deaths of more than 800,000 Rwandan civilians; these killings were overwhelmingly comprised of the minority Tutsi people and Hutu people who did not emphatically promote the slaughter of fellow citizens (History.com, 2009). The decimation of innocent Rwandan lives, fueled by propaganda and extremists’ animosity, lasted approximately 100 days without direct intervention of the international community (Britannica.com). Not only did the UN ignore the destruction as it happened, but did not consider the earlier warning signs of discourse. The year before, the leading commander of the UN’s peacekeeping organization, Roméo Dallaire, requested more forces...his pleas were denied by the UN, as the organization saw the rising tensions as an ‘internal conflict’ (ushmm.org). When General Dallaire insisted on more troops in April 1994, the UN ignored the pleas again and issued to remove most of the peacekeeping forces out of Rwanda. This failure, which is collective of the world’s leading nations, is a deep and settled wound of the UN. A dark blemish of human lives dripping through the grate of global failure and the barbaric killings issued by one’s own country.

While this was the failing of the world’s governments, the UN acts as a symbol of uniting to treat other countries with brotherhood, as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 1 urges individuals to do. One could argue that the UN was at fault, sharing the blame with global leaders, or that the UN is the primary enabler of this disaster. However, this paper is not making an argument for either party being the chief

failure of tensions or slaughter of the world. This paper is meant to express the ethics of the UN, and whether the organization truly promotes equality, freedom, and justice for all.

According to the UN's website, the gap of equality between genders was narrowed in print by the end of the year in 1948 (un.org). The UN ensures that, while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights secures women as being seen as equal, the world's practice is often misaligned. Secretary-General Guterres defines women's rights as "the greatest human rights challenge in our world," (un.org). It is established that the *promotion* of women's rights is present within the UN's model, and the *practice* of gender equality is greatly accounted for. It is represented through the flagship programs of the UN's UN Women organization. The flagship programmes are present on The UN Women's website, which includes strategies for "transformative results", personal accounts, and news articles.

Secondly, the UN promotes freedom for all people. In fact, across the preamble and 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the term (or a derivative) is used 30 times. With that amount of repetition, along with specific articles relating to a person's freedom (articles 1, 2, 13, 16, 18, etc.), it is understandable that the UN strongly supports the freedoms of every citizen. The UN's practice can be proven by the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, where those defenders are defined as "ordinary men and women who act for the respect of human rights..." (ohchr.org), while the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders website claims that these defenders are agents of security, especially to "recognized human rights and

fundamental freedoms”. The presence of this organization under the UN proves that the UN does favor the rights of freedom, such as speech and expression.

Finally, this paper must explain the UN’s role in promoting and protecting the justice of the nations’ people. As printed in the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN promotes “justice and peace in the world”. The UN’s views of the matter are clearly stated in the declaration’s preamble, but what about the notion being applied to reality, as well as ink and parchment?

As you may recall, this paper introduced itself in the form of deep regret and a terrible atrocity. The 1994 Rwandan genocide was a horrific period that would have been mitigated with the support of the nations. Approximately one million people were either killed or harmed because of the law-sanctioned slaughter; hundreds of thousands of others were displaced from their homes, as their country became threatening and hostile to them (History.com). In this situation, the UN did not actively assist the troubled society, it simply ignored the symptoms of a greater plague. The UN’s silence, in addition to the refusal to give General Dallaire more peacekeeping forces, did not uphold justice.

There is no possible avenue of action that the UN could take to reverse the damage it did not fight against. Professor Ibrahim Gambari stated that the situation is “beyond apology” in a 2004 conference at the United Nations headquarters in New York. While an apology would not undo the killings and terrors that gripped Rwanda in the past, an apology could prevent tensions between the country and the UN. Not only is an apology the first step towards assistance, it is the first step to taking accountability for the heinous events. The victims deserve their dignity. The UN can do them justice.

Works Cited

Gambari, Ibrahim. "Beyond Apology: Looking Back And Looking Forward." un.org, United Nations, 26 Mar. 2004, https://www.un.org/esa/africa/speeches/speech_rwanda.htm.

A&E Television Networks. (n.d.). *Rwandan genocide - facts, Response & Trials*. History.com. <https://www.history.com/topics/africa/rwandan-genocide>

Declaration on human rights defenders | who defends human rights?. UN SR Human Rights Defenders. (2023). <https://srdefenders.org/who-is-an-hrd/the-declaration-on-human-rights-defenders/>

Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. (2023, October 9). *Rwanda genocide of 1994*. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Rwanda-genocide-of-1994>

Flagship Programme Initiatives. UN Women – Headquarters. (n.d.). <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/flagship-programmes>

United Nations. (n.d.-a). *Commemorating 1994 genocide in Rwanda, secretary-general urges standing firm against rising intolerance, "being ever vigilant and always ready to act"* | UN press. United Nations. <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21761.doc.htm>

United Nations. (n.d.-b). *Gender equality*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/gender-equality#:~:text=a%20human%20right-,Gender%20Equality%20was%20made%20part%20of%20international%20human%20rights%20law.Assembly%20on%2010%20December%201948>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (n.d.). *Pleading for Help*. United States holocaust memorial museum. <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/rwanda/pleading-for-help>

Universal declaration of human rights. United Nations. (n.d.-c). <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>