

# **Advocacy at the UN Security Council:**

## **Civil Society and the Rwandan Genocide**

Kseniya Oksamytna<sup>1</sup>

The literature on the relationship between civil society and international institutions is rich and fast-growing. It has explored patterns of conflict and cooperation between civil society and international organizations (Steffek, 2013), civil society's access to international institutions (Charnovitz, 2000; Tallberg et al., 2013), and politicization and contestation of international organizations' activities (Binder, 2008; Zürn, Binder and Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2012; Rixen and Zangl, 2013). Civil society actors play diverse roles vis-à-vis international institutions by being sources of advocacy and pressure, partners in service delivery, liaisons with local organizations, and monitors of international institutions' performance. This chapter focuses on civil society advocacy and analyzes how NGOs campaigned for a stronger UN response to the 1994 Rwandan genocide. It first provides an overview of the history and the current state of the relationship between civil society and the UN Security Council and then investigates how NGOs have influenced the Security Council's response to the genocide in Rwanda. It concludes by assessing the role that civil society played during the events and outlines directions for further research.

### **Civil Society and the UN Security Council**

This chapter begins by examining the relationship between civil society actors and the UN Security Council (UNSC, sometimes also referred to as SC) in terms of their access to Security Council diplomats, strategies with which they target the Council, and influence they

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have on Council decision-making. The Council has five permanent members, who are referred to as the P-5, and ten elected members serving two-year terms. Historically, many members, including the permanent ones, have been wary about engaging with non-state actors like NGOs. Recently, however, there has been a ‘substantial incorporation of prominent humanitarian, human rights, and development NGOs into Council activities’ (Graubart, 2008, p. 159). As the Council began addressing not only interstate but also internal conflicts in the early 1990s, it ‘entered an arena where the expertise and action of NGOs was especially critical’ (Paul, 2004b, p. 375). Therefore, during the 1990s, ‘Council members increasingly met with NGOs on their own and in groups, not only to brief them on recent developments...but also to seek their input’ (Malone, 2000, p. 33). The trend continued in the early 2000s, when the Council started considering a host of ‘soft security’ issues, such as children in armed conflict, HIV/AIDS, and even climate change. Today civil society actors actively ‘seek to gain some leverage against SC policy’ because they ‘have become aware of the increased role of SC and its expansion into the area of “human security” issues’ (Binder, 2008, p. 7). Have they been successful in gaining access to the Security Council and influencing its deliberations, and through what strategies?

### *Access*

In 1995, the NGO Working Group on the Security Council was created, initially to campaign for UN reform. In 1997, it changed focus to the facilitation of civil society dialogue with the Council. Members of the Working Group recognize that they have a large stake in the work of the Council given that the latter's decisions now ‘directly affect the core programs of many NGOs’ (NGO Working Group on the Security Council, 2010). Furthermore, the members realize that they possess ‘important information, expertise and experience that they want to offer the Council, to influence its thinking on policy matters’ (NGO Working Group on the Security Council, 2010). It is especially true of human rights and humanitarian NGOs that are in the field during conflicts and emergencies: in such situations, ‘international humanitarian NGOs are important information sources, and in some mass atrocity cases where other key information actors are absent, they may exclusively hold information that makes them especially influential with policy makers in advocating policy preferences’ (Labonte, 2013, p. 8). Some observers agree that the Working Group ‘has

become an influential forum at the UN level and it has astonishingly close access to high-ranking UN officials and government delegates' (Martens, 2004, p. 1066). They believe that it wields 'considerable influence over Security Council deliberations, particularly on human rights and humanitarian matters' (Mertus, 2005, p. 136). On the other hand, others offer a more modest assessment by noting that the Group at the very least 'facilitates a flow of information' between the Security Council and NGOs (True-Frost, 2007, p. 136).

Another mechanism for engaging with the Council is the so-called Arria formula format. It is an informal briefing by an expert held outside the Council chambers. The formula was invented in 1992 when Venezuelan ambassador Diego Arria invited Council members to gather over coffee in the Delegates Lounge to hear the story of a Bosnian Croat priest who came to New York in the hope of meeting with individual ambassadors to discuss the Yugoslav crisis. In the mid-1990s, the format was predominantly used to organize briefings by officials from member states and intergovernmental organizations. In 1996 some elected members tried to broaden the use of the Arria formula to invite civil society actors, but met with resistance from the permanent members, notably the UK and Russia. For example, the September 1997 briefing by the Secretary-General of Amnesty International was upon the insistence of the P-5 not called an Arria formula meeting but an 'ad hoc' event (Paul, 2003). In the autumn of 1999, the sentiment shifted among some of the P-5: in the UK a new ambassador and new government were more open to consultations with NGOs. In April 2000, the Canadian and Dutch ambassadors organized an Arria formula meeting with CARE, Oxfam and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) on the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Two more Arria formula briefings by NGOs followed that year, which 'indicated that the procedure had finally gained a firm foothold in the Council's repertoire' (Von Riekhoff, 2002, p. 82).

Today the situation is quite different from the mid-1990s: NGO participation in Arria formula meetings is quite common, while it is rarely used to invite the type of officials who gave briefings in this format two decades ago (Sievers and Daws, 2014, p. 92). For example, from January till November 2015, sixteen Arria formula meetings were held and eight of them included representatives of civil society, defined broadly as NGOs, policy research institutes, and individual activists but excluding political actors (Security Council Report, 2015). Most member states are positive about the Arria formula. During the November 2011 debate on the Council working methods, European countries, Australia and Egypt speaking

on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement commended the Arria formula as useful outreach tool. A representative of Luxembourg called upon the Council to ‘make more regular use of “Arria-formula” meetings in order to strengthen interaction between the Council and civil society and non-governmental organizations, whose analyses and experience on the ground may have particular relevance for the Council's deliberations’ (as cited in Sievers and Daws, 2014, p. 77). At the same time, criticism of the Arria formula is ‘increasingly common’ because the meetings are seen as being ‘not nearly as effective as they used to be’: they are often attended only by junior diplomats and the discussion are ‘very limited’ (Security Council Report, 2007). This is echoed by some NGO representatives: according to Paul Mikov of World Vision, ‘the Arria-Formula meetings have become completely useless and inconsequential and have become a tool for them to say they have taken care of the NGOs’ (as cited in Niemetz, 2015, p. 149). Since the meetings are confidential, it is difficult to assess the depth and usefulness of the discussions taking place during such briefings.

Overall, nowadays ‘the relative ease of access NGOs have to the Secretariat and diplomats (of some countries) stationed at UN headquarters means that the more active and credible NGOs have little trouble making their voices heard’ (Johnstone, 2003, p. 462). Indeed, several organizations, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, Save the Children, World Vision, CARE and the MSF ‘actively lobby the Council and meet with individual missions on a continuous basis’ (Global Policy Forum, 2013).

### *Strategies*

Civil society actors, unlike states or even IOs, ‘have only discursive resources: expertise, arguments, and publicity’ (Deitelhoff, 2009, p. 44; see also Keck and Sikkink, 1998, p. 16; Labonte, 2013, p. 54). Civil society actors ‘rely foremost upon their reputation as committed upholders of principled norms’ and ‘their expertise, their connections to a network of actors, including local activists and influential policy-makers, and their public support’ (Graubart, 2008, p. 160). Civil society actors targeting the Council usually employ several tactics at once: ‘[a]s NGOs gained experience in Council advocacy, many concluded that the most effective strategy combined diplomacy in New York with world-wide public advocacy campaigns’ (Paul, 2004a).

New York advocacy focuses on establishing links with UN Secretariat officials and member state diplomats. The ten elected Council members are assumed to be NGOs' 'more natural partners' (Paul, 2004b, 379). As these members struggled to cope with the growing decision-making burden associated with the expansion of the Council's responsibilities in the 1990s and 2000s, they discovered that 'NGOs can provide exceedingly valuable field information from their contacts in crisis areas, helping to improve their delegations' awareness of the issues' (NGO Working Group on the Security Council, 2010). They welcomed 'information, expertise and policy ideas from NGOs that could help them fulfill their responsibilities in the Council and act as a counter-weight to the large mission staffs and vast intelligence capabilities of the Council's P-5' (Paul, 2004a). However, as the discussion in this chapter will demonstrate, civil society actors work with both elected and permanent Security Council members.

### *Influence*

Determining the degree of influence that civil society has on Security Council deliberations is a notoriously difficult undertaking. While Binder (2008, p. 16) argues that 'the impact of SC-NGO interaction on a number of issues is fairly apparent', he also acknowledges that 'more detailed case studies will be required in order to trace the influence of NGOs in the Security Council decision-making process'. Overall, the NGO community has 'successfully established regular consultations with the members of the SC and in some cases it has even authored Council resolutions' (Niemetz 2015, p. 147). An example that is often cited in the literature is the role of NGOs in the promotion of the agenda on women, peace and security, which culminated in the adoption of Resolution 1325 in 2000 (Carey, 2001; Hill et al., 2003; Ancil et al., 2004; True-Frost, 2007; Shepherd, 2008; Tryggestad, 2009; Otto, 2010). For observers it was clear that Resolution 1325 'had come from the NGO side' (Paul, 2010). In comparison to the issue of women, peace and security, the influence of civil society in other cases seems to be less apparent. This chapter aims to address this gap by looking at the role of NGOs in advocating a stronger UN response to the Rwandan genocide.

## **Civil Society Advocacy during the Rwandan Genocide**

NGOs have played a significant role in shaping the Council's response to the Rwandan genocide by approaching permanent and non-permanent members of the Council and running a mass publicity campaign. Although the response was too little and too late, without NGO advocacy it might have been absent altogether. The failure of the UN to take a timely and decisive action in Rwanda has prompted a series of important reforms, such as the strengthening of the organization's early warning capacities, the creation of the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, and the placing of the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict on the Council's agenda.

### *The Context*

In October 1993, the UN deployed a mission to Rwanda, UNAMIR, to oversee a power-sharing agreement between the Hutu government and Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front, which was supposed to end the Rwandan Civil War. When Hutu extremists began a killing campaign against Tutsis in early April 1994, UNAMIR, despite its limited mandate and resources, managed 'to protect tens of thousands of foreign and Rwandan civilians who sought protection in hotels, hospitals and the Amahoro stadium' (Findlay, 2002, p. 278). After ten Belgian peacekeepers were brutally murdered, Belgium, the largest troop contributor to UNAMIR, recalled its contingent and began advocating a complete withdrawal of the mission. A perception developed that UNAMIR would not be able to protect civilians, although it 'was actively engaged in such protection exercises, sometimes with as few as a handful of soldiers guarding thousands of individuals' (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004, p. 152).

Many powerful Security Council members, including the US, initially supported the idea of a withdrawal. New Zealand, which held the rotating Council presidency in April 1994, opposed it, together with other small and middle powers on the Council, such as Argentina, Czech Republic and Spain (Kovanda, 2010, p. 200). On 21 April, the Council voted to reduce UNAMIR's strength from 2,548 to 270 troops. Short of a complete pullout, it made it impossible for UNAMIR to continue its protection activities. The coalition of small and middle powers began a campaign for the mission's reinforcement (Des Forges, 1999, p. 968). On 17 May, the Council authorized a reinforced UNAMIR with a strength of 5,500

troops and mandate to contribute ‘to the security and protection of displaced persons, refugees and civilians at risk in Rwanda’ and ‘take action in self-defence against persons or groups who threaten protected sites and populations’ (UNSC, 1994, p. 3). The reinforcements took months to arrive. The genocide ended in mid-July with a military victory of the Rwandan Patriotic Front.

### *NGOs and Small and Middle Powers*

In the first weeks of the genocide, there was a severe dearth of information about what was going on in Rwanda. Small and middle powers, who did not have an extensive network of diplomatic missions in Africa, found it especially difficult to develop a correct appraisal of the situation. They therefore relied on the information supplied by NGOs: New Zealand and its allies were ‘deeply affected by independent information from non-governmental organizations about the ethnic character of the killings’ (Walling, 2013, p. 132). Czech ambassador Karel Kovanda recalls how ‘he had learned more about what was really happening in Rwanda from human rights groups in New York than from sitting in the secret Security Council meetings’ (Melvern, 2002). Kovanda started to develop an understanding of the events in Rwanda after reading a *New York Times* article by a member of an NGO Africa Watch. The ambassador was not familiar with Africa Watch, but it belonged to the Helsinki Watch network, which Kovanda knew well for their work on Czechoslovak dissidents during the Communist era.<sup>2</sup> Kovanda recalls that he had ‘an a priori reason to trust the Africa Watch folks’; in addition, the article ‘had an internal logic’, which helped him realize the nature of the domestic and foreign interests involved in the Rwandan conflict (Kovanda, 2010, p. 201). Therefore, both the reputation and expertise of Africa Watch has played a role in attracting Czech diplomat's attention.

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<sup>2</sup> The Helsinki Watch was created in 1978 as an umbrella organization for citizens' groups throughout the Soviet bloc monitoring the compliance with the 1975 Helsinki Accords. In 1981, Americas Watch was formed. Asia Watch (1985), Africa Watch (1988) and Middle East Watch (1989) followed. In 1988, these organizations adopted the name Human Rights Watch. See Human Rights Watch, ‘Our History’, 2015, available from <<http://www.hrw.org/node/75134>>, accessed 23 March 2015. Kovanda refers to Africa Watch and Human Rights Watch interchangeably.

Interested to learn more, Kovanda contacted Africa Watch and befriended Alison Des Forges, a leading specialist on Rwanda, who ‘became the source of accurate, dependable information about the situation in the country’ (Kovanda, 2010, p. 201). On 18 April, he invited her to brief the ten elected Council members. It was ‘a very unusual meeting during which “small countries”, nonpermanent UNSC members, had an opportunity to learn from reliable and extremely well informed, albeit informal, sources about the causes, origins, and course of the Rwanda catastrophe’ (Kovanda, 2010, p. 202). As for Alison Des Forges, the meeting was also ‘a quite extraordinary opportunity for her as an NGO representative to communicate directly with diplomats working on the UNSC’ (Kovanda, 2010, p. 202). In 1994, the relationship between civil society and Security Council diplomats was still at a nascent stage.

On April 19, two days before the Council's vote to reduce UNAMIR to a token presence, the executive director of Human Rights Watch wrote to New Zealand ambassador Colin Keating that ‘the Rwanda military authorities are engaged in a systematic campaign to eliminate the Tutsi’ (Melvern, 2000, p. 169). Keating also sought information from NGOs on his own initiative. Since the Secretariat did not communicate clearly what was going on in Rwanda, Keating started having personal meetings, sometimes two or three times a day, with representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the MSF. He then conveyed the information to other diplomats on the Council (Keating, 2004, p. 506). On 26 April, the UK ambassador reported back to the Foreign Office the information that Keating had received from the MSF about the murder of doctors and patients in one of the hospitals run by the relief organization, which was described by the MSF Director-General as ‘the worst atrocity seen by MSF since it was established’ (UK Mission to the UN, 1994, p. 2). The information provided to Keating by NGOs was reaching other Security Council diplomats and subsequently foreign ministries in their respective countries.

On 28 April, a draft statement by the President of the Security Council, a non-binding but politically consequential document, was circulated by the Czech delegation, referring to the events in Rwanda as genocide. The draft also contained the following phrase: ‘In addition to information available from the Secretary-General, the Security Council has considered information available from well-respected NGOs’ (as cited in Kovanda, 2010, p. 218). It was ‘unheard of’ but reflected the reality in which the ‘most valuable and most trustworthy information originated with Africa Watch, Amnesty International, the ICRC, and MSF,

whereas the UN Secretariat did not furnish much of value' (Kovanda, 2010, p. 205). Following long negotiations, the term 'genocide' was dropped but the ethnic character of the killings was recognized.

Besides, 'not a word remained about the work of and information from NGOs that the Czech delegation had stressed in our original draft' because 'China and Oman were particularly loath to allow for a precedent of the Security Council's reacting to information from NGOs' (Kovanda, 2010, p. 207). While many small and middle powers were eager to acknowledge the role of civil society in shaping their perceptions of the conflict (which was also an implicit criticism of the Secretariat's inability or unwillingness to provide accurate information), some major powers like China were anxious to preserve the state-centric nature of the Council politics. In general, as Cora Weiss of the Hague Appeal for Peace observes, 'the willingness to listen certainly depends on the member state and the flexibility of thinking of the ambassador': while some 'are really grateful to get information' from NGOs, there are also 'countries that feel treated by civil society' (as cited in Niemetz, 2015, p. 47).

#### *NGOs and UNSC Permanent Members*

In addition to keeping contact with diplomats from non-permanent UNSC members, NGOs targeted powerful member states, most notably the US. When a complete withdrawal of UNAMIR was discussed, Alison des Forges and a representative of Rwandan NGO, the Association for the Defense of Human Rights and Public Liberties (known by its French acronym ADL), contacted US Ambassador Madeleine Albright. She 'gave them a sympathetic hearing' and directed them to the US National Security Council, which agreed to keep a small number of UN troops in Rwanda. '[L]obbying by human rights and humanitarian organizations' is believed to have played a role (Des Forges, 2004, p. 35).

Representatives of another humanitarian NGO, InterAction, attempted several times to meet with Madeleine Albright, but she declined. At the same time, international humanitarian NGOs spoke to other key US officials, such as Richard Clarke, the focal point for humanitarian policy, Anthony Lake, National Security Advisor, and other State Department officials from the interagency task force on Rwanda. In early May, Alison des Forges and an ADL representative met with the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for

African Affairs ‘and urged US support for an expanded UN force with a robust civilian protection mandate’ (Labonte, 2013, p. 109).

NGOs targeted officials from other P-5 countries as well. After Oxfam had telephoned David Clark, shadow Secretary of State for Defence, the Labour Party put pressure on the UK government to provide diplomatic and logistical support to the UN operation (Melvern, 2000, p. 232). The support failed to materialize, despite promises. The belated and inadequate action by Security Council members is one of the reasons why some NGO representatives are quite pessimistic about their role during the genocide: the president of the US branch of Save the Children believes that ‘he did not succeed in changing a single US policy maker's opinion about intervening in Rwanda’ (as cited in Labonte, 2013, p. 119). While the UN failed to intervene forcefully to stop the genocide, a small presence was kept on the ground to observe the events and attempts were made to reinforce the mission.

### *NGOs and Public Opinion*

In parallel to the efforts to pressure the Security Council, civil society continued to call public attention to the events in Rwanda. Both before and after UNAMIR's downsizing, ‘[n]ewspaper editorials and opinion pieces (“op-eds”) by human rights workers or aid agency officials advocated UN intervention to stop the killing’ (Hilsum, 2007, p. 173). The overseas director of Oxfam wrote in *The Guardian* on 16 April that while the Council focused on protecting civilians in Bosnia, under-resourced UNAMIR troops ‘have to look away while people are hacked to death’. On 20 April, the executive director of Human Rights Watch called for a stronger UN response to the violence in Rwanda in a letter to *The New York Times*. On 1 May, the executive director of Amnesty International condemned the fact that while Bosnia was in the spotlight, ‘the massacres of tens of thousands in an African country is met with a collective denial of responsibility and a hasty retreat’ (all cited in Melvern, 2007, p. 208). The mass publicity campaign continued after the decision to reinforce UNAMIR. On 23 May, the Secretary-General of MSF argued in a *New York Times* article that since a reinforced UNAMIR was not given a ‘clear mandate’ to protect civilians and without a prompt deployment of a sufficient number of troops, UNAMIR soldiers could ‘end up being mere observers of the cold-blooded massacres of defenseless women and children, allowed to take action only in “self-defense”’ (Destexhe, 1994). Therefore, civil society

actors not only targeted Security Council diplomats but also ran a campaign in the press to attract public attention to the genocide.

## **Conclusion**

Over the years, the relationship between civil society and the UN Security Council strengthened and became more institutionalized. The NGO Working Group on the Security Council is a useful vehicle for keeping in touch with Council diplomats. Arria formula briefings are another mechanism for engaging with the Council, despite the recent doubts about its efficiency. However, during the genocide in Rwanda, it was highly unusual for Security Council diplomats to consult with NGOs. Civil society advocacy for a stronger UN response to the genocide was therefore groundbreaking.

Assessments of the civil society's role during the events differ in the literature. James Paul (2004b, p. 381) believes that 'Rwanda firmly established NGOs as indispensable information sources'. Similarly, according to the Security Council Report (2007), the Rwandan genocide was '[t]he first systematic process for incorporation of input from NGOs [which] had the widest presence in the field and were best able to report the true dimensions of what was actually unfolding throughout the countryside'. On the contrary, Melissa Labonte (2013, p. 100) argues that compared to the 1992-1993 crisis in Somalia, NGOs were less influential because they had a limited field presence during the initial weeks of the genocide and therefore 'avoided lobbying policy makers on the matter'. As this chapter demonstrates, although NGOs mobilized only in mid- to late April 1994, they influenced officials and diplomats from permanent and non-permanent Security Council members as well as public opinion. While non-permanent Security Council members are expected to be more inclined to work with NGOs, as was indeed the case with the ambassadors of New Zealand and the Czech Republic, some officials from permanent member states were also open to civil society.

The growth of civil society's engagement with the UN Security Council and other international organizations calls for further research on the issue. Depending on the investigator's theoretical perspective, two sets of questions can be interesting. Researchers who focus on international organizations might ask: What factors affect the receptivity of

international organizations to civil society's appeals? What models of engagement with civil society provide for the most fruitful exchanges? Researchers who focus on civil society, on the other hand, might ask: How do civil society actors choose strategies for targeting international organizations? What strategies are effective and under what conditions? A more nuanced understanding of the relationship between civil society and international institutions can enrich our understanding of international politics and help elaborate suggestions for making this relationship more effective and mutually beneficial.

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