Facilitating Human Rights Change Via UN Human Rights Field Operations

Todd Howland

Cox Price Human Rights Award and Lecture
At the Ved Nanda Center of International & Comparative Law at the Sturm College of Law
University of Denver
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• Grateful for recognition from Ved Nanda Center of International & Comparative Law

• Grateful for Ved’s teaching and encouragement during my time at DU (83-87)
UN Human Rights field work?

Early efforts in context of Peacekeeping Missions, for example Haití and Salvador (1992)
High Commissioner for Human Rights

OHCHR created dec 10, 1993

OHCHR first field mission
Rwanda 1994
UN Human Rights field work

- 1994 Guinea Bissau
- 1994-1996 Rwanda
- 1997-2001 Angola
- 2008-2010 D.R. Congo
- 2011-2017 Colombia


...But learning is constant
Tools of a UN Human Rights mission

- Public Reports
- Private Reports
- Public pronouncements
- Daily advocacy, interaction and interventions
- Empowerment via education and accompaniment
• **More supply:** Increased govt, rebel group or business respect for HR

• **More demand:** Increased understanding or what HR law is and how to use it to facilitate change
Threats and killings of activists
Protests
Problematic legal changes: 
  Ammesty law
Externalities: Impacts of cerromatoso

Prioritized community: Long term intervention to work with communities to define rights problems and overcome them
Creating structural change:
  Peace
  Economic and political inclusion
  Access to market (koffie taap)
  Access to voting rights
UN Human Rights field work can be:

- Dangerous
- Rewarding
- Uncomfortable
- Impactful
- Frustrating
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Solid theoretical understanding of HR and IHL?
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Selling skis
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Selling vacuums?
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Playing soccer?
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Cleaning carpet?
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Languages
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Understanding of the region?
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Yoga practitioner

Flexible
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Activism and commitment?
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Evangelical preacher
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Buddhist monk?

Patience and compassion
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Creativity ?
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Listening
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Strategist?
Multifaceted
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

Patience and persistence?
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?
So what makes a good UN Human Rights Field Officer?

All of the above?
UN Human Rights Field Work

AGENT OF CHANGE

Is about people, not member states or governments
Is about facilitating individual change in ways of thinking and behaving
There is not quick or easy fix
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