PART THREE: CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE
Putting the Victims First

The Rwanda crisis, like many other post-Cold War complex emergencies, has shown once again how difficult it is for humanitarian concerns not to become pawns in a larger political game. The lack of consistency of the international community in addressing crises, whether political or humanitarian, and the institutional complexity of the United Nations system are realities with which humanitarian agencies have to struggle and work. Relief agencies often find themselves at the cross roads between politics and victims. Coordination plays a crucial role at this intersection. It must ensure that the humanitarian traffic is not held up by politics. While the brazen law of politics will sometimes overrule, humanitarians must nonetheless make certain that the voice of the victims is heard. When political mandates change or are incompatible with humanitarian objectives, it is incumbent on the humanitarians and on DHA as custodian of humanitarian principles in the UN system to point this out.

The three coordination case studies presented in this monograph illustrate three distinct facets of the relationship between humanitarian assistance and politics. The nature and intensity of the crises is undoubtedly different – and the magnitude of Rwanda overshadows the others – but a common thread runs through them: the vulnerability of humanitarian work to political demands and outright manipulation.

When crises are sudden and violent and when humanitarian needs are massive as in the case of Rwanda, it is particularly important to ensure that humanitarian principles, and the humanitarian space in which the victims and the relief agencies interact, are protected. This is a key priority for UN coordination. In particular, DHA should ensure through active lobbying and dissemination of information that the specificity of the mandates of the humanitarian agencies of the UN, but also of ICRC and the NGOs, is understood perfectly by all actors, whether at the Security Council level or at the level of the local warlord. In other words, while the quest for coherence and unity of purpose in the UN response to complex
(End p 117)

emergencies is a sensible objective, DHA should see to it that humanitarianism is not utilized as a wedge to achieve political goals.

Direct advocacy of humanitarianism is of course easier said than done. Relief agencies are aware that they are operating in an eminently political context. Moreover, "raising the flag" of the humanitarian imperative too high may defeat the purpose if it impedes access to victims. In Goma-like settings, difficult decisions with long-term implications have to be made in a rapidly changing environment. The point here is awareness. Issues should not be brushed aside. Humanitarian agencies – and their coordination body is on the front line in this – have a responsibility to the victims to discuss and to learn and hopefully to improve their effectiveness.

This responsibility goes beyond daily survival. For humanitarianism to be effective, policy makers and practitioners must make it a point to be aware of the implications and potential consequences of their work. In this sense, coordination is a much more

complex and delicate undertaking than orchestrating the response. While generating consensus is of course essential, the policy of mercy, that is humanitarian coordination in the broader sense, extends upstream into preparedness and policy development and downstream into the reflective processes by which organizations learn from experience and apply this knowledge in the future.

There are also indirect approaches to the coordination policies that need to be cultivated systematically: training of UN and NGO as well as country staff on the specificity of humanitarian mandates, studies documenting success stories and abuses of humanitarian aid, and the elaboration of policy guidelines on how to operate in conflict situations. There is a practical agenda here and addressing it will help in disseminating a humanitarian culture and ethos. If the humanitarian actors are not convinced that it is necessary to push this agenda, it is unlikely that they will be able to convince others to do so. The formulation and implementation of guidelines on do's and don'ts on such issues as negotiated access, use of armed guards, negative implication of inappropriate assistance, and delivery methods will help to advance the cause of humanitarianism. The frank discussion of such issues "in
(End p 118)

theater" with implementing partners, sister agencies, UN political representatives, and local authorities will be a powerful expression of the UN's determination not to compromise (or to do so only when the trade-off benefits the victims).

Another area deserving attention is the involvement of the victims in the decision making concerning their situation and the best mechanisms to alleviate it. Too often it is taken for granted that the outsiders know best, and coordinators are no exception here. Local coping mechanisms are disregarded or not systematically supported. This adds to the risk of fostering dependency and long-term unsustainability of programs. Unlike the development strategies of the 1970s and 1980s that promoted, or at least paid lip service to, self-reliance, the knee jerk reaction of the humanitarian community often results in a rapid disbursement syndrome in which donors and implementors are complicit. The availability of funds and the eagerness of agencies – in particular, NGOs – to tap into them are all too often the force that drives relief programs.

From Afghanistan to eastern Zaire, the contract culture is thriving. Projects and funding cycles focus on the short term. In narrowly focused programs, victims tend to be treated as objects, as a caseload that needs to be fed, institutionalized in camps, or moved. The terminology stresses the passive characteristics of victims rather than their role as active subjects with more or less sophisticated survival strategies, forms of social organization, and rational decision making processes. The three countries studied all offer examples of how relief – and the modalities of its distribution – carried the risk of creating dependency. In all three, and in many other settings, it can be argued that aid has weakened local coping mechanisms or that the massive and sometimes unthoughtful intervention of humanitarians has generated a culture of expectation.(Endnote 104) Also, the UN coordination mechanism and, more generally, DHA as custodian of humanitarian principles and as advocate for the long-term perspective must ensure that program planning takes into account the larger context within which humanitarian assistance is provided and that a balance is maintained between outside intervention to meet lifesaving needs and the capacity of

local populations to cope with crisis. This is vital in the transition to recovery and development,
(End p 119)

as Mozambique demonstrates. A sense of ownership and ultimately of self-reliance is essential. Recovery, the healing of society after conflict, can only succeed if it is "illuminated from within."(endnote 105)

The Three Cultures

The issue of how much intimacy humanitarian activities should maintain with the political processes of the international community on the one hand, and with the development agencies on the other, has cropped up repeatedly in this study. Following the demise of the old order and with the emergence of complex crises, the temptation to integrate the responses of the international community has been strong. The experience in Afghanistan, Mozambique, and Rwanda, however, indicates that complex issue linking and "integration" run into theoretical and practical problems. From a theoretical view point, while nobody would disagree that a coherent or unitary response to crises makes eminent sense, the subordination of the humanitarian imperative to political/military considerations is clearly unacceptable. These considerations derive their legitimacy from Security Council decisions, which represent the best available political compromise at a particular time and which, where the banner of Chapter VII is hoisted, result in the abandonment of a cardinal principle of humanitarianism – neutrality. The humanitarian imperative is non-political and categorical: the obligation to provide assistance to victims. The mandates of humanitarian agencies, especially the protection mandates of ICRC and UNHCR, cannot be mixed with or subordinated to politics.

This does not deny that conflicts are messy, contexts political, and humanitarian actors subject to manipulation from warring parties or from the condominium of powers that want to push for peace and utilize humanitarian assistance with this in mind. Humanitarians are not naive about believing that they can be insulated effectively from political or military processes. Indeed, the case studies provide a number of practical examples of positive or negative synergies between the various components of UN activities in the three countries. Mozambique is a practical demonstration of the
(End p 120)

problems resulting from the integration of the coordination of humanitarian activities within the command structures of a UN peace operation. Rwanda points to the advantages of a separate identity for the humanitarian effort. The level of interaction between the humanitarian coordination body in Rwanda and UNAMIR was generally good in the sense that it was provided with equal billing within the overall framework supervised by the SRSG. In Afghanistan, the two tracks were almost completely separate and the case is made that this in fact facilitated the provision of humanitarian assistance in a war-torn environment.

There are also valid institutional reasons for not mixing UN politicos with relief and with development. Peacekeeping missions are short term by definition. Their motto is "assist and forget." This is sometimes their strength, as in Mozambique, because the time limited approach helped to push the peace process to fruition. Humanitarians – and even more so the development set – are in for the long haul. While it is essential for the three cultures to understand each other's mores and values, placing them into one mold is tantamount to a *reductio ad absurdum.*

This being said, it is necessary that the relief and development cultures should intermingle more not only because ultimately one has to hand over to the other, but also because the task of reducing vulnerability to crises demands that those who are most adversely affected are enabled to overcome the root causes of their suffering. More importantly, misconceptions relating to the nature of complex emergencies need to be lifted. Such crises are not aberrations in the linear process of development. Internal conflicts that result in the breakdown of the social order and preexisting coping mechanisms are often struggles over resources, while the economy and society themselves harbor the roots of conflict. It is to be hoped – and here again there is a role for DHA – that humanitarians and development activists will put their heads together to understand better not only the requirements of the transition from relief to post-conflict reconstruction, but also how the development strategies of the past, as in Rwanda, may have contributed to the genesis of the crisis and to a downward spiral from development to conflict to relief.
(End p 121)

Is Coordination Really Necessary?

It has been argued in the past (and to be fair, some in the UN system still argue) that the institutionalization of UN coordination entities for humanitarian assistance adds a bureaucratic layer to a process that is basically self-regulating. In other words, once agencies have clear mandates and the turf problems between adjoining sectors are ironed out, humanitarian agencies should get on with the job of providing assistance. Information exchange and the fact of being neighbors in the same operational theater will ensure that sufficient coordination-by-default will occur.

This is a shortsighted view, if not a self-serving one. The experience from the three case studies in this monograph, and from many other settings as well, point to at least two fundamental reasons why coordination must be actively (some would say aggressively) pursued. Reasons include the volatility of crisis environments and the multiplicity of actors. Post Cold War crises are no longer simple affairs of single cause or single response. The political, military, human rights, and humanitarian dimensions, as well as the economic and development implications, now all come together like an accordion. Someone must ensure that all the actors – the traditional UN agencies, the ICRC, the myriad NGOs, and the local authorities – know how to read from the same sheet music, even if they do not necessarily dance to the same tune. Put differently, a coordination entity is essential to orchestrate the management of the various inputs and programs so that all the actors can fit into a coherent and effective response. As the experience of Afghanistan, Mozambique, and Rwanda

demonstrates, this is a task that no single agency or lead agency can undertake. Moreover, the increasing realization that effectiveness and accountability go hand in hand is an additional argument for a nonoperational entity that sets standards and guidelines while eschewing vested interests in program implementation.

The fundamental lesson of Afghanistan, Mozambique, and Rwanda is perhaps that more rather than less coordination is required. In the continuum from coordination-by-default to coordination-by-consensus to coordination-by-command, the Afghanistan experience ranks closest to coordination-by-
(End p 122)

command. This resulted from strong leadership and the availability of some unearmarked resources, at least in the initial years, which allowed UNOCA/UNOCHA to do more than simply plead for consensus among humanitarian partners. A coherent program and consistent priorities were actually shaped. Leadership, personalities, knowledge of the terrain and of the local actors, and a small carrot, i.e. a small amount of catalytic funding, made this possible.

The Rwandan coordination experience was one of strong consensus (but minimal, if any, command), at least during the first six months of UNREO's existence. As UN agencies be came more organized, the level of consensus decreased, which was a factor that contributed to the decision to close the UNREO office and to transfer residual humanitarian coordination functions to the resident coordinator at the end of October 1995. Unlike Afghanistan, UNREO's responsibility was limited to humanitarian needs inside the country and did not cover the coordination of humanitarian assistance in the three neighboring countries, and, consequently, also weakened its consensus building efforts.

Mozambique ranks lowest on the scale among the three case studies, that is, somewhere between coordination-by-consensus and coordination-by-default. Because UNOHAC was overshadowed by ONUMOZ and because its existence was never really accepted by some of its UN agency counter parts, it was never able to generate strong consensus in the humanitarian (and development) community in Mozambique. As an integral part of ONUMOZ, UNOHAC is related to its failure to achieve coordination-by-consensus. This is an important lesson for future reference.

The UNOCA/UNOCHA coordination mechanism was the strongest of the three, but is not presented here as a model. UN humanitarian coordination entities must be adapted to circumstances, and these will differ from emergency to emergency. Moreover, the present institutional setup in the UN humanitarian system is by no means carved in stone. Essential as it may be in theory and in practice, DHA is still somewhat a concept in search of a commitment. The donor community has yet to make up its mind as to the best possible shape of the UN humanitarian enterprise and is holding back on measures
(End p 123)

that would allow DHA to achieve strong consensus and some command in orchestrating a coherent response to complex emergencies.

The only possible and as yet untested alternative to the present setup is the consolidation of the main elements of the UN relief system – UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and DHA – into a single agency. Although this has been advocated in different quarters, the implications of such a change have not been worked out. These implications are likely to be wide-ranging especially for those organizations – UNICEF and WFP in particular – with dual development and relief mandates.(endnote 106)

Some Recommendations to Strengthen Coordination

Sweeping reform in the UN humanitarian system is unlikely in the short term. Thus, increasing the effectiveness of the existing coordination capabilities becomes more urgent. A key lesson of the country studies is that the nature and magnitude of the crises that confront the international community require some systematization of humanitarian coordination mechanisms. Amateurism and adhocracy – i.e, reinventing the coordination wheel at every new crisis – is as disrespectful to the victims as it is bad management. The components of a package approach to coordination have been described already in Part I. There are encouraging signs that this mission in a box concept is gaining wider currency in the UN system. Problems, however, remain.

Regrettably, a culture that puts a premium on a shared approach to problem solving is still lacking in the UN system. As advocate and facilitator, DHA should take the lead in pointing out to its partners, including donors, the synergies that result from joint action and the repercussions of "going it alone." The issue of the appointment of humanitarian coordinators and particularly the cumbersome process of getting the key agencies and UNDP on the same wavelength is an example of unnecessary irritant, which should be solved.

This leads to another lesson, repeatedly stressed in this monograph, that coordination in the three case studies has been mainly by consensus. DHA and the humanitarian coordinator can provide the software but they cannot force the
(End p 124)

agencies to use it. DHA's credibility would be well-served by a limited dose of coordination by command, both in terms of some unearmarked funds and in terms of leadership and authority on the ground. It is recognized that this is a particularly difficult and contentious area, but the donors (and the general public) cannot forever claim that the UN is ineffective in coordinating emergencies, while at the same time refusing to give it the means and resources to do so. A crippled coordination body lacking leadership and the respect of the other actors defeats the purpose of coordination.

There follows another major lesson: DHA cannot be expected to coordinate effectively if it does not have access to a modicum of its own resources to hire local staff, open field offices, make local purchases, and even engage the services of implementing partners in a limited way. DHA cannot rely on UN bureaucracy. It should be granted the flexibility that only UNHCR and to some extent UNICEF have in the UN system, but also that flexibility that many organizations such as ICRC,

some bilateral agencies, and countless NGOs have outside it. Such flexibility allows agencies to quickly divert personnel and funds (including cash) to breaking emergencies, move supplies and equipment, recruit staff locally, and sign letters of understanding with implementing partners, all with a minimum of bureaucracy. DHA needs to lobby for and obtain a similar capacity based on post-facto controls rather than on the fetishistic respect of outdated rules and regulations. More important, as mentioned above, DHA needs a carrot, however small, to act as a catalyst and generate momentum on specific policy initiatives.

In a post-conflict scenario, the UN system obviously has an important role to play in both facilitating interaction with government and local authorities, while also assisting the government to develop the capacity to launch rehabilitation programs and other activities essential for peace and stability. Given the lead time required by development agencies to commence operations, and their inclination to focus on capacity-building programs that do not necessarily address the immediate needs of dislocated and vulnerable groups, there is a role for a coordination mechanism that facilitates a transition and maintains momentum on a recovery trajectory. The presence
(End p 125)

of an operational peacekeeping force providing security, logistics, or other support for the provision of humanitarian assistance, and the need to ensure harmonious interface between the military and the humanitarian community, also underlines the continuing need for an impartial coordination body.

In terms of lessons that can be derived from recent experiences, it is important that the coordination body and DHA are aware of and respond to the changing requirements of the humanitarian community as a crisis evolves; structures and mechanisms that were useful at the peak of the crisis will need to be phased out or adapted as their utility decreases or becomes redundant. The three case studies demonstrate that effective coordination obeys the law of diminishing returns. The transition process is not necessarily linear: the motto of the coordination entity should be "adapt or die."

There is much unnecessary and unhelpful discussion among UN agency representatives in the field as to whether or not the coordinating entity is or should be "operational." It is unclear what is understood precisely by this term, but it appears that much of the concern and discussion centers around the fear that DHA will start encroaching on the mandates and will duplicate the activities of existing UN "operational" agencies. DHA's inability to articulate its role and to clearly define the nonpassive nature of its coordinating function partly explains the hesitation and distrust of sister agencies. Given the types of tasks DHA is required to perform to meet its responsibilities, it should be able to explain the necessity of activities such as monitoring and data collection, which are essential to its coordinating role and that it is normally not directly involved in the actual implementation of specific projects. In other words, it is operational in so far as the coordination of complex emergencies is a dynamic activity, but it is not an implementing arm of the UN in the sense that UNICEF or WFP are.

Given the present state of play in the UN system, it is unreasonable to expect that

DHA will become a major implementor of programs. As we have seen above, instances in which DHA has become operational are limited to areas where no other UN body had a mandate and a capability such
(End p 126)

as demining in Afghanistan, and to exceptional situations where it was expressly requested by sister agencies to take on an implementing role such as with the internally displaced persons in Jalalabad. As a rule, the more DHA operational functions in the field are perceived as a service to the entire humanitarian community (for example, the 24 hour radio watch and operating the UN airplane in Afghanistan) or to the population at large (demining), the more they will be accepted. Treading on the turf of others, or worse, telling them how to run their programs, will only raise the adrenaline levels both in the field and at headquarters.

DHA's ability to have a positive impact is partly linked to its image and the confidence it inspires within the humanitarian community and the larger UN system. It needs to develop a profile that is consistent throughout all operations for which it performs a coordinating function. This includes utilizing a standard acronym and logo that is easily recognizable (e.g. DHA-Rwanda or DHA-Afghanistan).

As in all emergencies, the three case studies in this monograph indicate that a high proportion of aid workers and media personnel are brand-new to the relief scene and have minimal understanding of how the different components of the UN function. From this perspective alone, it is important that DHA has an identity that explains its role and facilitates its task of coordination both at the ground level and globally in the sense of advocating the humanitarian agenda (e.g., a total ban on landmines) vis-a-vis public opinion.

It is equally important that DHA should operate as one program and that it projects the same message and image at all levels of activity. The fact that some UNOCHA, UNOHAC, and UNREO staff were unfamiliar with DHA's constitution and the tasks it is required to perform at the interagency (IASC) and international level is disquieting. As a first step, as mentioned in Part I, DHA should put together a concise, but brief, information package that should be handed to all staff members, however short-term. Such an information kit also could be used to brief personnel and colleagues not familiar with DHA but who interact with it.

The studies also have stressed the crucial importance of information and analysis. In each case, the coordination office's
(End p 127)

capacity to be ahead of the curve in terms of understanding fast-changing events and country contexts was greatly valued. In Afghanistan, the coordinator made it a point to tap the best available academic talent, including historians and anthropologists, to guide his first steps. In Mozambique, the UNOHAC office had a team of experienced old Mozambique hands that prepared situation and other reports. In Rwanda, UNREO might have benefited from the presence of a Rwanda specialist or an anthropologist. In the initial months the information collected and distributed by UNREO was crucial for the overall shaping of the humanitarian effort.

Many other coordination and housekeeping issues are raised in the case studies. Most are self-explanatory and need not be referred to here. However, a few of the most important lessons deserve to be recalled:

- When a crisis has a cross-border or regional dimension, DHA should, as a rule, set up a regional coordination structure. This is most important to avoid differences of perception or biases among the relief community. As experience in Afghanistan and Rwanda shows, a "good UN – bad UN" syndrome can easily set in. That is, local authorities in one location, and even UN staff, may look with diffidence or suspicion on activities conducted by UN agencies from other locations, especially if there is a political or military demarcation in between. As indicated, there are also advantages in not placing the main office of the coordination body within the territory of one warring party at least during the phases when the emergency breaks or until a humanitarian consensus develops.

- The quality of staff working in humanitarian emergencies is uneven. Many do not have relevant prior experience. Serious problems arise with staffing coordination offices that are by definition short term. It is important to have the right mix of staff at the right place and at the right time. In addition to a cadre of experienced humanitarian coordinators, DHA would be wise to invest in training staff for the key support functions in coordination offices such as the administrative and financial officer, information officer,
(End p 128)

NGO liaison officer, and senior secretary. A system needs to be developed that emphasizes both quick deployment and quality. Skills, competence, prior UN field experience, and good judgment must combine into one – that rare bird, the facilitator. Trained and competent staff will make the difference between a happy-go-lucky coordination outfit and a coordination mechanism that is at the cutting edge of the response to complex emergencies.

- DHA, being part of the UN secretariat, suffers from a culture of bureaucratic control that impedes rapid deployment, flexibility in using funds, and handling cash. Routine tasks such as renting offices, hiring local staff, translators, or security guards, which must be done quickly when a coordination presence has to be established in an emergency, must be simplified. DHA must be given the same flexibility that UNHCR, UNICEF, and countless NGOs already have. A culture of accountability, built on delegation of authority and retroactive controls, needs to be fostered.

- The crucial importance of information gathering, analysis, and dissemination already has been mentioned. The need for proper reporting, specifically consolidated re porting on the use of funds, but also reporting on the evolving social and economic conditions of the areas of concern, is also essential. Feedback to donors is crucial for I continuing support to the evolving needs of a coordination office.

- Coordinators should not lose sight of another lesson: ultimately their objective is to work themselves out of a job. An exit strategy should be developed early so that it can be carried out smoothly and understood by all actors. DHA should capitalize on

its
strengths – the services that it can provide to the relief community and local
authorities at the field level as well as to the international community, including
donors – and not on its weaknesses, i.e. the perception that it is a redundant layer in
the response system.
(End p 129)

-      The final lesson relates to evaluation. It is worthwhile in the early stages of a
complex emergency to build an evaluation study into the planning of the
operation.(endnote 107) In fact, it may be necessary to plan for two distinct studies: a
process or management review to be conducted a few months after the emergency
phase of a crisis begins (and subsequently if the crisis is long-term) and an in-depth,
ex-post evaluation. DHA also should advocate the systematic collection of evaluation
materials, ranging from the completion of routine end of mission reports by all key
staff involved in a coordination exercise to the preparation of structured
questionnaires to elicit assessments from DHA, agency, NGO and local beneficiaries,
and the constitution of a data bank of interviews and videos documenting specific
coordination situations. Mechanisms for the constructive use inside and outside the
organization of the wealth of material arising from humanitarian and peace-keeping
operations also need to be developed. A research program on the memory of complex
emergencies, using such materials as video interviews of key actors or write ups of
their experience, could provide the basis for the work of researchers and historians for
years to come. Such a project might well be undertaken by outside research
institutions.

Thus, DHA should take the lead in documenting, and in encouraging others to
document, the strengths and weak nesses of the humanitarian response to complex
emergencies. This is key to charting the road ahead, which is likely to be a troubled
one, given the growing disparity between escalating humanitarian needs and the finite
resources of the international community. In this sense, DHA has the potential of
becoming a reflective institution. Practical insights are needed on what works and
what does not in the orchestration of the response. Comparative analyses of the
challenges confronted in different settings can be particularly useful in learning how
best to guarantee access to victims, to safeguard humanitarian space, and to shield
victims and practitioners from partisan politics and manipulation. Moreover, DHA
can help in ensuring that humanitarians do not lose sight of the forest because
(End p 130)

of the trees. Improving effectiveness of the response is an essential task. It can be a
thankless one if more is not learned about the root causes of conflict and if more is not
done to tackle these causes.

The Calculus of Pain

This study has attempted to highlight, on the basis of an analysis of three distinct
humanitarian settings, the importance of coordination of humanitarian assistance in
complex emergencies. The extent to which such coordination has be come an essential
fixture of the international landscape is a sad reflection on the state of the post-Cold

War world. With the collapse of ideologies, alliances, states, and societies, internal resource wars are inflicting an increasing toll on the civilian population of large tracts of the Third and of the former Second World. The nature of warfare is also changing. While in the past technological innovation and numbers of casualties seemed to be positively correlated, the relationship is now being reversed. Relatively simple and cheap weapons – the assault rifle and the antipersonnel mine – are wreaking greater havoc. It is paradoxical that the genocide in Rwanda, comparable in this century in violence and intensity only to the Holocaust, was achieved through the use of a simple agricultural implement – the machete. Simple, silent, but nearly equally as deadly, scorched earth policy, or the manipulation of famine as a tool of war, has made a tragic comeback.

In a sometimes unholy alliance, the ethics of solidarity and hard-nosed *Realpolitik* contribute to shaping the response of the international community to internal conflicts and resulting humanitarian needs. Indeed, response is the operative word. Development, the lost paradigm of the Cold War decades, contained in its very essence a design for structural change. Humanitarian assistance, the defining paradigm of our cowardly new world, is fundamentally reactive, if not altogether passive. The gray sun of humanitarianism is but a dim light: reliance on humanitarianism as the sum total of our response to a plague of suffering bodes ill for the future.
Coordination is ultimately about saving lives. The effectiveness of humanitarian assistance is judged by the quantity
(End p 131)

of mercy and the amount of suffering averted. The humanitarian imperative dictates that all victims have the same fundamental right to assistance. *Realpolitik,* however, imposes triage: the quality of mercy extended to Sarajevo is fundamentally different from that provided to Kabul. Too often humanitarian assistance is a fig leaf for political inaction, a Band-Aid on a festering sore, a costly recipe f or the containment of crises. Too often it borders on appeasement. Until the root causes of crises are tackled, there is little hope that such imbalances will be redressed.

The quality of mercy *is* indeed strained, and will remain so unless we meet the challenge of the coming decades. We need to question the conventional wisdom and naivete of the knee jerk response to crises. It is necessary to look beyond the horizon of humanitarianism, to reappraise root causes of crises and the nature of North-South relations in their evolving complexity. Issues of justice and solidarity, however difficult to raise, must not be avoided. It will be necessary to take a hard look at the strategies and at the very concept of development. Complex emergencies and development policies are not unrelated, but the linkages between the emergence of the former and the failure of the latter have yet to be explored seriously. The North and South are complicit in this failure, which is perhaps the starting point from which to unravel the knot of root causes.

As unsatisfactory as this situation may be, we must not lose sight of the humanitarian imperative that nonetheless remains categorical. The importance of safe-guarding *humanitarian space* and nurturing the conditions that will allow it to be maintained, whether in conflict situations or in the face of political pressure, cannot be

overemphasized. Not to ensure such protection is to become a party to the calculus of pain. The fact that there has been much erosion and that relief programs are usurped for partisan purposes ought to provoke greater, not lesser, commitment on the part of those convinced of the value of humanitarianism and to carve out the space necessary for it to operate. Power politics will not disappear. Until the international community gives itself the means to tackle the underlying causes of poverty and underdevelopment, which often combine in lethal internal resource wars, humanitarian
(End p 132)

assistance will continue to be required to alleviate the suffering of victims and to staunch the flow of events that further suffering will exacerbate.

There is no reason to believe that pain should be the inevitable burden of the human condition. The provision of humanitarian assistance in complex emergencies is not an end in itself. Its moral justification must extend beyond the mere tasks of keeping victims well-fed and protected. It must encompass the search for justice and durable solutions. This is a tall order. Progress will be slow and tortuous, but humanitarians are not believers in the inevitability of suffering. "It is necessary to cultivate the quiet art of disbelief. It is necessary to act quietly and disbelievingly, out of that compassion which is the only credible motive for any actions to change the world."(endnote 108)
(End p 133)
(See original text for endnotes)