

Gen. Roméo Dallaire

**Are all Humans Human?**

**Ethical Responsibility in a New World Disorder**



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Are all Humans Human?  
Ethical Responsibility in a New World Disorder

Cleveringa speech delivered by

Gen. Roméo Dallaire

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Mr. Rector Magnificus, ladies and gentlemen, it is my deep honour to be here with you, through the advancement of technology, during this very troubling pandemic, to accept the 2020/2021 Cleveringa Chair, and deliver this address to you today.

For 50 years, the Cleveringa lecture has provided an opportunity for sober reflection on the concept of personal bravery and our mutual responsibility to our fellow human beings. We take this time to commemorate Rudolph Cleveringa — who 80 years ago today — spoke out against injustice and discrimination, at the forced mass resignation of his Jewish colleagues, including Professor Eduard Meijers, early in the Second World War.

Professor Cleveringa clearly felt that he had a moral, ethical obligation to speak up for those being persecuted on his own campus. He was an intelligent, reasonable and principled gentleman, and so that conclusion was likely a very easy one to reach. However, Professor Cleveringa also clearly understood that his act of bravery was, in fact, *illegal* by the laws of the moment, making his decision and subsequent action far more complex.

After his lecture, he was arrested and imprisoned; apparently, he already had his bag packed and waiting by the door when the authorities arrived.

In times of war, one is often faced with the juxtaposition between legal orders, moral dilemmas, and ethical imperatives. Such ambiguity can have serious physical and mental health consequences. And this affects none more directly in situations of extreme urgency than the soldier on the front line.

Imagine: you are ordered to neutralize a threat under the well-regulated rules of war and international laws and conventions. But when you look through the sight of your weapon, you see the threat is a 12 year old girl with a bomb strapped to

her chest. You have a split second to take a decision for which there is no good outcome. You stand down, and you go against the legal rules of engagement for mission success, the bomb explodes in a busy market, killing dozens of civilians as well as your own comrades. Or, you fire, and are never able to look your own kids in the eyes again.

Imagine: you are the Force Commander of an international peace operation which has descended into genocide, with mass slaughter erupting; bodies of men, women, babies, and elderly civilians littering the streets, clogging the rivers, and drowning, mutilated, in latrines. You have 32,000 people cowering in your compound for protection. You have no food, no ammunition, no water, and United Nations Headquarters in New York orders you to abandon the mission.

Such were just *some* of the situations that I and the few peacekeepers under my command faced 26 years ago in Rwanda, and continued to relive in our injured minds day in and day out since then, through our ongoing battles with the Operational Stress Injury (OSI) called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Back then, the Armed Forces did not have these terms, did not acknowledge these injuries: neither mental nor moral. Getting a bullet in your leg meant immediate emergency treatment, long-term therapy and prostheses, family support, R&R, and often a medal to boot. But there was nothing, *nothing*, for injuries of the mind or the soul.

For me, I was given two weeks leave and then told to get back to work, back to the “real world.” “Don’t dwell on what you saw,” they told us. “Work hard, work will keep you sane.” For three years I pushed through my injury, refusing to acknowledge it. Despite working all hours, passing out at my desk, drinking to incoherence, and four failed suicide attempts, there were simply no systems in place to recognize and treat operational stress injuries. It was only when I received a report

on a spate of soldier suicides which claimed these men had “predispositions” unrelated to their combat service, that I knew I had to speak up. To stay silent would be unethical.

So, in 1997, I – a two-star General in the Canadian Armed Forces – admitted publically that I was suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a direct result of my mission in Rwanda. As difficult and scandalous as this revelation was at the time, it proved to be a crucial step in destigmatizing this potentially lethal OSI among military veterans, and later in first-responders, and I am pleased to see the progress that has been made over these past 25 years. I only wish it had come in time for my dear comrades who succumbed to this honourable injury. One hundred and fifty-eight Canadian soldiers died fighting in Afghanistan, but an additional 71 have since committed suicide due to Operational Stress injuries sustained in that mission.

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Every November, when we remember the Fallen from Battlefields, we *must* also count and recognize those who die of OSIs by their own hand. It is critical that we research how to prepare them better for these complex and ambiguous missions, where they face untold horrors and mass atrocities in imploding nations and conflict zones of civil wars. We must research how to treat them more effectively in the field throughout their tour of duty, and after, with the same urgency as physical injuries.

And, if we can spend billions of dollars repairing the equipment and vehicles upon their return from theatre, then we can surely invest a whole lot more on research and assets for those still at war in their minds. As well as their families, who also suffer the impact of this cruel and terrible injury.

### **What was the root of my own injury?**

It is difficult to pinpoint, even after decades of therapy. I remember back in 1994, in the early days of the genocide,

planes from nations around the world roared in to Kigali airport; however, they were not there to bring reinforcements for my mission, nor ammunition for our defense, or even humanitarian aid for the growing thousands of displaced Tutsis and moderate Hutus running for their lives — but to extract White, wealthy, and well-connected troops and expatriates who boarded planes with loads of ivory artifacts and other riches that they had acquired in Rwanda, all the while abandoning their staffs to a very real, horrible fate at the hands of the extremist militia.

The fundamental message behind that scenario seemed to me to be so reprehensible, so unethical, so immoral, that I could barely bring myself to think it.

### **Are all Humans Human? Or are some Humans more Human than others?**

And yet it was confirmed again and again, when I begged for resources and reinforcements from UN Member States representatives to help us through the genocide: “Listen,” I was told, “there’s no oil in Rwanda, no coltan, no strategic resources of any kind. There are only human beings, and there are too many of them, anyway.”

The Secretary General of the United Nations in New York, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, ordered me to withdraw and give up the mission. He said that there no longer *was* a mission. There was no more peace to keep, and the situation was too dangerous. UN HQ informed me that the world could not handle 450 peacekeepers dying in this conflict, though it was prepared to let tens of thousands of Rwandans be slaughtered daily.

This was a legal order from my commander, which I was bound by military duty, international convention, and the laws of my country to obey.

However, like Professor Cleveringa, I recognized a greater, moral and *ethical* responsibility to disobey. For me, this was simply an instinctive response bred of my upbringing, my training, the community from which I came; my school, my church, my family, my brothers in arms. These had provided me with a solid landmark of morality, and it was clear to me—fundamentally clear—that while this may have been a legal order, it was an immoral one.

And so, I, along with a tiny contingent of Canadian, Ghanaian, and Tunisian soldiers, refused the order to abandon the mission; we defied that legal order, because we recognized the greater moral obligation we had to stay, to help where we could, to protect those taking cover in our UN compounds, and to — at the very least — bear witness to what the rest of the world chose to turn its back on.

With such a decision, I had become a rogue commander in an operational theatre of war. And yet, I had seen first hand the real consequences of abandonment of this mission: weeks earlier, one of the contingents under my command had chosen to abandon the 4,000 Rwandans I had tasked them with protecting. They did so without my authority, having received orders from their own country command to pull out and leave the Rwandans behind. Within hours of that decision, all 4,000 were dead.

I had 32,000 Rwandans under my direct protection. At that stage, a thousand individuals were being hacked to death every hour. If we left, these human beings *would* die. So, I refused the order, and became a “rogue commander in an operational theatre of war”.

Armed only with Blue Berets and bluffs, we managed to save those 32,000 people from brutal massacre, while negotiating with rebel leaders to stop the killing, and begging UN member states as well as the international media to intervene. Each day, I prayed the “cavalry” would come to our rescue. Because, with

only a few thousand well-trained and well-supplied troops, plus some ammunition to back up our bluffs, I believe we could have put an end to the bloodshed. But I was continually told by the UN Peacekeeping staff that there would be no cavalry coming. No reinforcements from *any* country to help us stop this mass atrocity.

Instead, 800,000 people were mutilated to death over 100 days.

Again, the question that formed in my mind during that time, and has remained in my soul ever since: Are all Humans Human? Or are some Humans more Human than others?

At that same time, the UN and NATO sent tens of thousands of troops to stop the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia. Clearly, the international community had established a pecking order, and the sub-Saharan Black African was at the bottom of that pile.

A few weeks into the genocide, I was driving through no man’s land to negotiate moving civilians caught behind enemy lines, in order to provide them a safe conduit to their own side. As such, we were very wary of an ambush. Up ahead, I noticed a little boy, about six years old, sitting smack in the middle of the road. We slowed on approach and noticed his horrible state of health and hunger, so we investigated the nearby huts to find if anyone was taking care of him.

He had taken off when we’d stopped the truck, and we’d lost sight of him for a moment. But we found him again inside one of the huts, curled up next to the rotting corpses of his parents and a couple of siblings, half eaten by dogs and rats. The little boy was sitting there as if he were at home.

I picked him up. His clothes were mangy and filthy, his stomach bloated. But I looked into his eyes – this child of the genocide – and I saw the eyes of my six-year old son when I left for Africa. They were the eyes of a human child, and they were exactly the same. That child caught in the midst of a civil

war was every bit as human as my own son back home. There was no difference.

As the good Professor Cleveringa knew, and I know, and I know *you* know: No one human has any greater right to life, to serenity, to dignity, and to respect, than any other human. That is a fundamental truth, with conventions of fundamental human rights to back it up.

And yet, over and over, we see abhorrent actions guided by hate, by self-interest, and by the massaging (or even abandonment) of legal instruments to suit those actions.

Since the first Cleveringa lecture was held, we have stumbled into a New World Disorder — in which ambiguity and complexity are the norms. And as such, we are in an era of increasingly complex moral, legal, and ethical dilemmas. Mass rape, terrorism, forced displacement, as well as the recruitment and use of children as soldiers —the “success” of these new weapons of war is evident in their visceral effect on the unsuspecting soldiers, governments, and civilians who are their larger victims.

Over 420 million children are estimated to be living less than 50 km from where fighting is occurring, and many of these children remain in urgent need of protection. Among children affected by armed conflict, children recruited and used as soldiers face unimaginable violence. In order to prevent the recruitment and use of children in violence — be it for trafficking, sexual violence, criminal networks, radicalization, or armed forces, groups or gangs — we have to recognize the interconnected links between these violations and global trends that may drive the increased exploitation of children.

At the Dallaire Institute, we are building a Children, Peace, and Security agenda to develop a deeper understanding of the fragile contexts that threaten the protection of children. We can not create the conditions for sustainable peace without

prioritizing children, and I am calling on global partners to join us in order to put the rights of children front and centre.

I am also calling on children and youth themselves, those under-30s whom I call the Generation Without Borders, who seem to instinctively understand the interconnectedness of humanity as a whole. Their comfort with internet technology has literally brought the world into the palm of their hands, and so they are planetary; truly global.

The leadership of universities, of governments, and of NGOs must nurture leadership among these youth, and encourage young people to coalesce to create powerful, influential movements. Their numbers, their empathy, and their inclusive global perspective give them more power than any other generation has ever had. And it is they who hold the political will of the international community accountable, through their activism. It is they who will insist on the moral engagement and courage that is required to bring peace and the advancement of humanity.

Eighty years since the good Professor Cleveringa demonstrated his own courage and moral strength in the face of hateful and unethical behaviour, we have seen great advancements in human rights, but too many horrific failures, in massive abuses of those rights. There seems to be—even with all the conventions and declarations that have been agreed to by almost every nation—not the will, nor the courage, nor the sense from the political elites of the world to be ready to engage in the protection of civilians, and ultimately the protection of human rights, in so many imploding nations and failing states.

His legacy reminds us we must remain vigilant, for now and forever. Because every human is human. And no one human is more human than any other.

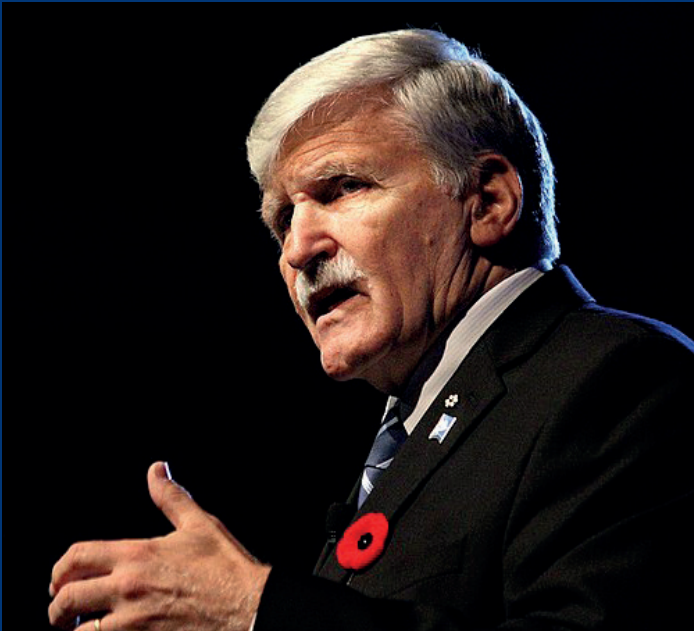
Rector Stolker, Council of Deans, I am grateful for this opportunity to deepen my connection to the country of my birth, and this fine institution. I would also like to thank Professor Roos van der Haer who has provided invaluable insights to my team at the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace, and Security. She was essential to the development of our early warning model for the recruitment of children as soldiers, sharing significant data to support the creation phase. I am proud of this connection between Leiden University and the Dallaire Institute, and I hope for further opportunities for engagement and support between our institutions.

Thank you.





## GEN. ROMÉO DALLAIRE



Canadian General Roméo Dallaire (1946) was UN Commander in Rwanda at the time of the genocide there, subsequently becoming a champion of human rights. He has worked as a researcher at several different universities, and was a senator in Canada for nine years. General Dallaire's 1997 revelation that he suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a direct result of his mission for Rwanda paved the way for destigmatizing this potentially-lethal Operational Stress Injury among military veterans as well as first-responders.



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