

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a book is, to be sure, usually an arduous business. It is made more difficult when the subject of the book is highly sensitive, eludes simple definition, and has received wide publicity. Such is the case with this book. The civil conflict in Burundi has spilled much blood within the country and generated fierce arguments abroad; it has refused to be neatly categorized; and it has attracted considerable attention both from the international media and from policymakers and scholars interested in the prevention and management of civil wars.

Writing about such a subject becomes yet more frustrating when a new publication is expected to conform to prevailing views on the topic. Any attempt to deviate from the well-rehearsed explanations of Burundi's plight, to plot a new analytical course that steers clear of established presumptions and prescriptions, is perilous. It is far safer to adopt a "politically correct" approach that includes robust calls for "justice," for an immediate end to bloodshed, and for the equally immediate implementation of democratic rule. However, while this is the safer route it is not necessarily the most honest, realistic, or useful one. The reality in the field does not always coincide with the sanitized analyses formulated far away, and there is always a great distance between life as it is and as it should be.

In this book, I have tried to stick to the honest route, as I see it. I hope that it will contribute toward a broader and also more balanced view of Burundi's conflict, and indeed of contemporary civil conflicts in general. I hope also that it will serve an audience that ranges from university students and professors to development experts, members of NGOs, and diplomats.

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CHRONOLOGY

- 1871** Two German priests establish a religious mission in what is today Bujumbura.
- 1890** Burundi becomes a German colony.
- 1908** Kigali, Rwanda, is established, also by Germans, thus competing with Bujumbura as a trading center.
- 1912** Gitega, in the center of the country, becomes the capital of Burundi, threatening Bujumbura.
- 1919** After World War I, Burundi like Rwanda is put under Belgian trusteeship by the League of Nations.
- 1961** **September** First democratic elections are held: Uprona wins with 80 percent of the vote, while the Christian Democratic Party, closely associated with the Belgian administration and supported by the Batare dynasty, receives only 20 percent; Batare's rival clan, the Bezi, sides with Uprona. **October 13** Prime Minister-elect Louis Rwagasore, son of the king, is assassinated.
- 1962** **July 1** Burundi becomes independent.
- 1965** **January 15** Prime Minister Pierre Ngendandumwe (a Hutu) is assassinated. **October** A number of political leaders are executed after a failed coup.
- 1966** **July** Mwami (King) Mwambutsa IV is toppled by his young son, Charles Ndizeye, who becomes king under the name of Ntare V.

- November** Ntare V is toppled by an army takeover; the new head of state, Captain Michael Micombero, abolishes the monarchy and proclaims a republic.
- 1972** Hutus stage a coup and Tutsis are killed in the south of the country. The coup fails and is followed by massive repression that kills an estimated 200,000 Hutus and sends many more into exile.
- 1976** Colonel Jean-Baptiste Bagaza takes power and sends his predecessor into exile in Somalia.
- 1985–87** The regime tries to end Catholic missions' influence in the country; many European missionaries are expelled.
- 1987** Major Pierre Buyoya takes power; subsequently he introduces more political and religious liberalization. Bagaza goes to live first in Libya and later in Uganda.
- 1988** Interethnic violence and repression occurs in the north of the country, Ngozi and Kirundo. In reprisal for the killing of Tutsis, large numbers of Hutus are killed and many others go into exile before returning in 1989.
- 1991** A Charter of Unity proposing national reconciliation is adopted by national referendum.
- 1992** A democratic constitution is adopted by voters in a national referendum.
- 1993** **June 1** Melchior Ndadaye, a Hutu and the leader of Frodebu, is elected president with 65 percent of the vote, defeating Buyoya, who wins 35 percent.
- June 29** Frodebu wins 65 seats in the 81-member National Assembly.
- October 21** President Ndadaye is assassinated, prompting interethnic violence that targets Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Repression by the army sends 800,000 Hutus into exile; 350,000 people, mostly Tutsis, are internally displaced. Deaths in October and November are estimated to total between 50,000 and 100,000. Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah is appointed as the UN secretary-general's special representative to Burundi.

1994

January Cyprien Ntaryamira, former minister of agriculture, is elected president by the National Assembly. He is sworn in on February 5. Anatole Kanyenkiko is appointed prime minister.

April 6 Ntaryamira is killed over Kigali airport in an airplane carrying him and the president of Rwanda.

April–July Genocide in Rwanda kills more than 800,000, mostly Tutsis. Two million Hutus, mostly members of the army and militia and their relatives, go into exile fearful of the advancing forces of the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front.

July 14 The Rwandan Patriotic Front enters Kigali and takes power from the Hutu regime.

September 10 A Convention of Government, based on the principle of power sharing, is adopted by Burundi's political parties and endorsed by the National Assembly.

October 1 Sylvestre Ntibantunganya of Frodebu is elected president by the National Assembly.

1995

March 2 Antoine Nduwayo is designated prime minister, replacing Kanyenkiko.

April Violence in Burundi greets the first anniversary of the beginning of the Rwandan genocide.

July 16–17 UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali visits Burundi.

August Ambassador Jesus Maria from Cape Verde is appointed by the UN secretary-general as special envoy for the Great Lakes region; the new envoy visits Burundi.

September 6 Ould-Abdallah submits his resignation as special representative; he leaves Burundi on October 12.

December Ambassador Marc Faguy of Canada is appointed as the new UN special representative for Burundi.

1996

March Julius Nyerere, former president of Tanzania, is appointed as UN facilitator for Burundi and given the mission of bringing peace to the country.

July 25 Buyoya takes power by force after weeks of turmoil.

July 31 Regional governments impose an economic embargo on Burundi.

October A rebellion begins in eastern Zaire (Kivu) by Tutsi Banyamulenge and other Zairians, led by Laurent Kabila, a lifelong opponent of President Mobutu of Zaire. Kabila is supported by Rwanda and Uganda.

1997 **May 13** In Rome, a public announcement makes official the agreement (signed on March 10) between Buyoya's government and the CNDD rebel movement led by Léonard Nyangoma.

May 17 Rebel forces enter Kinshasa (from where Mobutu has already fled); Kabila becomes president and renames Zaire, the Democratic Republic of Congo.

June 2 Buyoya is welcomed at an OAU summit in Harare, Zimbabwe.

1998 The Arusha peace process, managed by Nyerere, intensifies. However, in June an internal power-sharing partnership is signed by Buyoya's government and the Frodebu-dominated National Assembly.

August A new rebellion, led by former allies of Kabila, begins in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

October The Arusha process establishes five commissions to address the main issues in Burundi's conflict. Divisions increase within each community and between political parties.

1998-99 The new rebellion in the Democratic Republic of Congo involves many African governments, some supporting Kabila (notably, Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe), others supporting the rebels (Rwanda, Uganda, and probably Burundi among them).

1999 **July 10** At a summit in Lusaka, Zambia, a peace agreement is signed between the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Congolese rebel groups; Burundi attends the summit.

October Nyerere dies after a long illness.

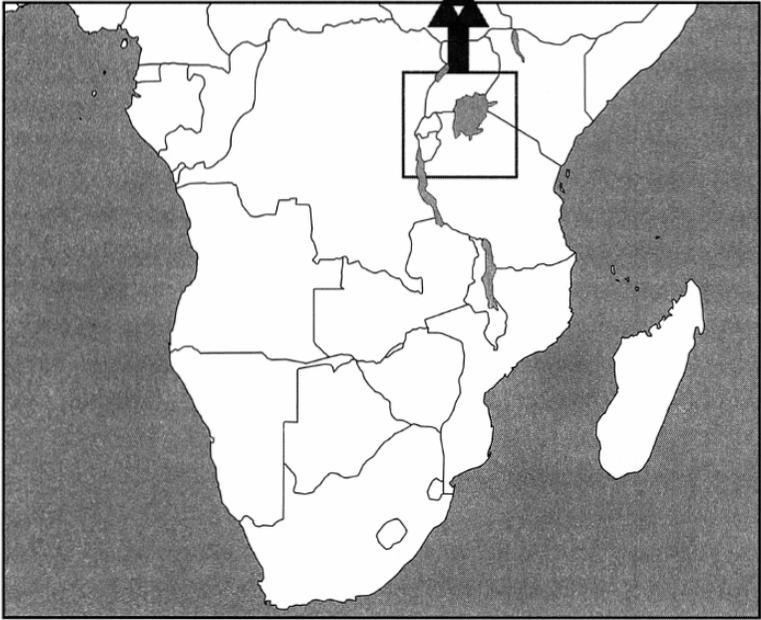
November After Burundi's government and its opponents quarrel about who should replace Nyerere, former South African president Nelson Mandela is appointed facilitator for Burundi.

December Sir Ketumile Masire, former president of Botswana, is appointed OAU special representative to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Burundi on the Brink



Area of Detail



Burundi and Its Neighbors

INTRODUCTION

This book is a memoir of two years I spent in Burundi in the mid-1990s. It tells the story of my efforts as a special representative of the UN secretary-general to prevent a serious domestic crisis from exploding into a devastating, genocidal conflict. The story is worth telling for at least two reasons. First, it enhances our understanding of the nature and dynamics of conflict in Burundi, a country whose postcolonial experience of political turmoil and ethnic strife is sadly all too typical not only of its neighbors in the Great Lakes region but also of many of the nations in Africa as a whole. Second, it stands as an example of the possibilities—and the limitations—of preventive diplomacy. Preventive diplomacy has become an important item on the agenda of the international community as it looks for ways to respond to, and to contain, the tide of intrastate conflict. Yet, though the term “preventive diplomacy” is much employed, few accounts of preventive diplomacy in action are available. Still fewer are the number of *firsthand* accounts. In presenting this account of my experience as the special representative of the UN secretary-general for Burundi between November 1993 and October 1995, I hope to add to the store of knowledge about how preventive diplomacy actually works on the ground. In addition, by drawing lessons from my experience, I hope to stimulate reflection on the broader principles that should govern decisions regarding if, when, and how to launch a preventive mission, and to provide some operational guidelines for the conduct of such a mission.

I have no intention here of trying to present a definitive portrait of Burundi,¹ nor do I aim to present the full story of preventive efforts in Burundi, where as of this writing (October 1999) internal instability is still acute and external efforts to address it are still in progress. Although I offer some thoughts in chapter 4 on the uneven course of those external

efforts, this book focuses on the period during which I was in Burundi. Furthermore, it offers an account of events *as I saw them*. My intention here is to convey a sense of what it was like to be a UN special representative in Burundi at a very turbulent time in that country's postcolonial history.

I should also point out that this is by no means a story of unblemished, untrammelled success. The field of international politics rarely, if ever, lends itself to perfect solutions and perfect outcomes, and conditions in Burundi in the early 1990s were very far from perfect. My job in Burundi was not to prevent the outbreak of violence; violence was already occurring. Nor, given the circumstances, could I realistically expect to halt the bloodletting. Rather, I saw my role as helping to prevent an *explosion* of violence. That may sound like a relatively modest goal, but given Burundi's downward spiral into chaos when I arrived in Bujumbura, and given that Rwanda was shortly to be engulfed by a genocidal tide, it seemed like a very bold ambition. I also strove to help Burundi's leaders rebuild the country's nascent democratic system, and together we did achieve some success in restoring political stability and agreeing on a form of power sharing. After my departure, however, these advances were reversed and the democratic government was overthrown in a coup.

The story this book tells is, then, one in which success is mixed with failure. I make no apologies for this: it would be a disservice to future mediators and would-be peacemakers to pretend that the problems of Burundi can be easily resolved, just as it would be a disservice to the people of Burundi to claim that their conflicts are intractable and thus a waste of the international community's time and attention. I hope that this book will foster a better understanding of the problems Burundi's people face. I hope, too, that it will encourage reflection on what preventive diplomacy can and cannot do to forestall catastrophe and promote peace and cooperation in the numerous intrastate conflicts that have emerged in the wake of the Cold War.

The Costs of Contemporary Conflicts

It may be helpful to begin by underlining the seriousness of the problem posed by contemporary intrastate conflicts, and by indicating the

enormous costs inflicted when these conflicts escalate into widespread violence.

The end of the Cold War brought many hopes: hopes at the international level that a lasting world peace was at hand, and hopes within nations that a “dividend of peace” would soon be made available and distributed among the needy for better and cheaper education, training, health and housing programs, and so forth. Assistance to developing countries was expected particularly to benefit from the peace dividend. Everywhere—North, South, East, and West—expectations were very high. It was also realized, with great relief, that there would be no more dramatic confrontations between the superpowers or the rival East and West camps, and that even the South’s sometimes colorful and often strident rhetoric was abating, making way for a new, pragmatic political culture with much more freedom for ordinary people.

No one, of course, expected all the conflicts begun during the Cold War to suddenly reach speedy resolution. And, indeed, some Cold War conflicts degenerated into devastating civil wars, such as those in Afghanistan and Angola, while others were contained. These crises are no longer sustained or fueled by the rivalries of the major powers, but are remnants of the superpowers’ past confrontations. Born during the Cold War, they continue on like comets on their own independent trajectories. No one expects them, however, to degenerate into an international war. The few turbulent orphans of the Cold War are under control, well contained within their own borders.

At the same time, however, a growing number of bizarre domestic conflicts have emerged, conflicts that are motivated not by ideology but, typically, by ethnicity or by political leaders adept at arousing ethnic, religious, or regional hostility for their own ends. Since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, about one hundred conflicts have erupted. In Africa alone, extremely bloody civil wars have broken out in Algeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), Congo-Brazzaville, and Guinea-Bissau. Elsewhere, the scale and ferocity of violent conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Guatemala, and El Salvador have drawn international attention.

Despite that attention, the high costs of intrastate conflicts are still only beginning to be recognized. It is only recently, and especially thanks

to electronic media reports and the advocacy of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), that the scale of the damage wrought is becoming better known.

From 1992 to 1999, these vicious civil wars claimed more than 3.5 million lives; countless others were disabled for life. Unlike the case with interstate wars, but typical of domestic conflicts, the vast majority (90 percent) of these casualties were civilians.² Eighteen million people were made refugees and nearly 40 million were internally displaced—that is, they became refugees in their own countries. In Burundi, after the attempted coup in 1993, more than 800,000 people ran away from their homes, becoming refugees in Rwanda, Zaire, and Tanzania; another 350,000 became internally displaced. In the spring of 1994, after the genocide, 2 million Rwandans became refugees in Zaire, in Tanzania, and also in Burundi, where one of their camps became the country's second largest population center. Thanks to its decades-long civil war, Sudan has the unhappy distinction of possessing the world's largest number of refugees: 4.5 million. In Angola, 25 percent of the population was at one time internally displaced and living around the capital Luanda, with disastrous consequences for the country's economy and stability. One of the most painful legacies of the present cycle of civil conflicts is the ever-increasing number of war orphans, who in 1996 totaled 100 million.

Intrastate or domestic conflicts are typically no less devastating, and sometimes more devastating, than interstate conflicts. Unlike international clashes, however, domestic conflicts are characterized by *random violence*, or by what one could call senseless or unnecessary destruction: burning houses, breaking doors and windows, killing cattle and domestic pets, hurting purely for the sake of hurting. Foes, real or imagined, are killed by atrocious means and are mutilated to further demoralize their relatives and allies. These extreme forms of violence not only are emotionally very costly; worse, they perpetuate the cycle of violence by provoking reprisals and counterreprisals. In African civil conflicts such as those in Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, and Burundi (as well as in the conflicts in Afghanistan, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Bosnia), hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, very often by atrocious means designed to cause pain to families and friends. In Rwanda, official figures cite more than half a million people killed, *by hand*, in

only one hundred days. To involve as many of their followers as possible, to “mobilize their energies” and instill hatred deep in their hearts, the leaders of the Rwandan genocide issued orders that the victims were to be killed by hand rather than by modern weapons such as guns, mortars, or grenades. At some level, it seems as if the main objective of such violence is to humiliate others—though this psychological motivation rarely seems to be acknowledged or addressed in the approach of most foreign mediators and observers. It is this deliberate attempt to humiliate that leaves societies divided and their institutions, especially the police force and the judiciary, tainted if not totally discredited. In its extreme manifestation, this violence could be compared to a child’s game turned deadly by sheer irresponsibility; a child’s game that is played by the entire adult population.

The material costs of intrastate conflicts are almost as appalling as their human toll. Infrastructural damage is typically extensive. Roads, bridges, airports, ports, and electric grids are favorite targets during a civil war; social, cultural, and health care facilities are abandoned, looted, and destroyed. All public sites become potential sites for ambushes or landmines. The latter are particularly destructive. Landmines are now scattered in more than twenty-two countries, with Angola estimated to have 9 million on its territory. A landmine can be bought for just \$3; it often costs \$750 to clear one landmine from a field.³ Not only do landmines destroy infrastructure and maim the local population, especially youngsters and peasants, but they make it dangerous to work on farms or to drive on many roads long after the war is over. They destroy the freedom of movement so inherent to the culture of the Africans.

Domestic conflict is a massive burden on the economy, particularly in Africa, where national economies are already too weak and fragile to meet production requirements and to support the institutions of a modern state. The war-torn economies become more than simply unstable: they have a tendency to disappear, at least for a while, as has happened in Liberia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, and Afghanistan. Trade and production systems break down, fields and farms are deserted by owners and workers, urban centers grow rapidly and empty rural areas of most of their manpower, while rebel forces recruit their troops among young unemployed farmers. Products, when available, are not marketed for lack of secure transportation and financial resources. As a

consequence, production falls off sharply, compelling authorities and the international community to import food while exports—especially exports of raw materials, which are the main source of income in many African countries—decline or collapse.

During such crises, humanitarian assistance, though necessary, does not facilitate a quick return to normal production levels. Farmers who remain in their fields have no incentive to grow crops when, thanks to humanitarian organizations, free food is available in urban centers. Transportation of externally supplied aid is much more profitable for national carriers than is transportation of local products, so the national economy is weakened further. Humanitarian assistance becomes a substitute for a state declared to be failing, and the state in question consents—either through indifference, desperation, parsimony, or avarice—to rely on such assistance. The rather cumbersome machinery for granting humanitarian aid by the international community can serve to prolong a crisis indefinitely: when the worst of the crisis is over, the bulk of the money has only just arrived, so the charity organizations stay on, seeking to ameliorate the shortages in food, the absence of medical care, the lack of basic infrastructure, and so forth. In Africa, it may be noted, such inadequacies are more or less the rule, more or less normal. The aid worker lands at a time of crisis and never manages to get away, because the return to normality, even if it happens, does not allow the population to meet its basic needs. Once the mechanics of aid are in place, the crisis, previously endured silently on a daily basis, becomes a perpetual emergency. The fact that the provision of humanitarian aid tends to perpetuate a conflict presents the international community with a dilemma: whether to withhold aid that will alleviate suffering, or to furnish assistance that will allow both sides to continue fighting.

Prolonged civil war severely hampers the generation and distribution of incomes within the country, making more people dependent either on a wealthy elite or on local warlords. Subsequently, unemployment becomes very high, causing many groups, especially frustrated young people, including children, to swell the ranks of the armed factions and to further aggravate the deterioration of the country.

Worse for the future of the country, a culture of violence often develops among the young and other vulnerable groups. Crime, both petty and organized, burgeons. Trafficking in narcotics and other illicit goods

(arms, ivory, and the like) flourishes during domestic conflicts. Whole societies are militarized and their economies criminalized. In addition, fearing for their lives or seeking food and protection, many people move from the countryside to urban centers, especially the capital. This is a heavy blow to long-term stability and security in rural areas, the backbone of Africa. The economy, especially the agricultural sector, which often accounts for 80 percent of GDP in African countries, suffers heavily from these population movements.

The environmental costs of domestic conflicts, though often overlooked, are also substantial. In addition to the damage caused by armed factions seeking protection in forests and mountains, the presence of refugees and internally displaced persons places a heavy burden on the environment. For example, in Burundi, Rwanda, and eastern Congo, one hill is turned into a camp for refugees while another hill is stripped of its trees for charcoal and firewood. The greater the number of refugee camps, the greater the destruction of the natural habitat. Animals and birds are killed to be eaten or trapped to be sold. Trees are felled for timber export and the earth is mined for diamonds and gold without any regard to the environmental consequences.

These conflicts should be seen not only as confrontations within states or societies, but also in terms of their negative regional and global effects: criminalization of the international economy, drug and mineral trafficking, money laundering, arms flows, use of mercenaries, and the spread of violence and political intolerance in weak states with fragile institutions. The risks of infection of neighboring states is another challenge. For example, the disaster in Rwanda has had devastating and lasting effects on the Great Lakes region as a whole. Poor and ill-equipped governments in Burundi, Congo/Zaire, Tanzania, and Uganda have had to divert funds and human resources (army, police, administrators, and so forth) to protect and control vast numbers of Rwandan refugees. These governments have had to delimit large areas to accommodate the refugees, whose very presence inflicts great damage on the local environment. They have also had to deal with the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations attending to the refugees' welfare (while ignoring the welfare of the governments' own citizens), and watch as many of the staff at their own schools and dispensaries quit for better-paying work with the UN agencies and NGOs. National security forces, fearful

that the refugees will directly or indirectly destabilize their host countries, act aggressively toward both the refugees and the local population, spawning human rights abuses and fostering further violence. Another, little-reported consequence of the Rwandan civil war and genocide has been to foster a negative image of the region—and, indeed, of Africa—as a whole. Trade, investment, and tourism all suffer.

The International Response

Faced with such a range and magnitude of costs, what can the international community do? Doing nothing is usually not an option, at least not indefinitely. Even if the major powers have no pressing strategic or economic reasons for acting, it is both morally and politically difficult for them to ignore these conflicts and their human costs. Military intervention is sometimes an option, but governments are understandably, and often wisely, reluctant to send their troops into a state embroiled in internecine violence and teetering on the brink of collapse.

Typically, the international community responds—whether with diplomatic initiatives, peacekeeping troops, humanitarian assistance, or any other available tools—only after a conflict has exploded into violence. By then, the cost of action is usually very high and the chances for its success are usually quite low. Liberia, Somalia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Albania, and Bosnia, not to mention countries in the Great Lakes region of Africa—in all these nations, domestic conflicts have absorbed far more of the world's attention, energy, and resources than would have been the case had those conflicts been addressed earlier by a concerted international effort. Furthermore, because funds for both emergency assistance and development aid originate from the same sources (chiefly, member-states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), the provision of humanitarian assistance to countries in conflict means that peaceful developing nations receive less aid and therefore become more vulnerable to political instability and civil conflict and ultimately more likely to require emergency assistance. The question arises as to how to address these domestic problems, how to find means to resolve disputes, even minor ones, before they develop into violent civil confrontations. Thus the need for preventive diplomacy.

Preventive diplomacy is here understood to mean *a coherent, sustained course of action involving multiple actors directed by an agreed-upon lead actor and aimed at reducing tension and encouraging a constructive, cooperative environment in a country that is either threatened by violence or that has already experienced some degree of violent conflict*. This distinction between preventing a conflict from erupting in the first place (what Luc Reychler calls “proactive conflict prevention”) and preventing a conflict that has already begun from escalating (“reactive conflict prevention,” in Reychler’s terminology) should be borne in mind.⁴ In a fluid situation, both kinds of preventive action could be undertaken simultaneously.

Over the longer term, preventive diplomacy seeks to promote political, social, and economic tolerance and to encourage the belief among both the population and its leadership that their interests will be best served by peace and stability. Over the shorter term, preventive diplomacy represents a concern for, and assistance to, people and countries in danger. It also serves as a form of insurance of past political and economic investments made in a country and in its neighbors by the international community. Preventive diplomacy is essential because at the very least it is always better and easier to prevent than to cure. In the case of Rwanda, in the four months from June to September 1994 the international community spent over \$1 billion in humanitarian assistance and related costs for Rwandan refugees in Zaire, Tanzania, and Burundi. Millions of dollars were also spent to help the internally displaced who remained in Rwanda. In a few months, the amount spent in assisting the Rwandan refugees exceeded all U.S. foreign assistance to Africa for 1994. Set against such expenditure, preventive diplomacy is clearly a good investment for both African countries and their development partners.

An Obligation toward Humanity

At first glance, preventive diplomacy may seem an odd or an arrogant approach to conflicts. What right have we to prevent people from trying to build their nations as most nation-states have been built: through bloody convulsions and protracted civil wars? How were France, Germany, and Italy built, if not through civil wars? Did not the Civil War strengthen the unity of the United States? Is not modern foreign

interference in civil wars delaying or derailing the formation of modern states? A Burundian leader once told me that colonization was in fact an interference in the process of formation of many African states. Furthermore, where a clearly defined state already exists, even though it is under attack from domestic foes seeking, say, to secede, what right have we to disregard the sovereignty of that state and, uninvited, interpose ourselves between the regime and its opponents?

Two answers can readily be found to the question of what right we have to intervene. First, large-scale violence is simply no longer acceptable in the opinion of large numbers of people throughout the world. Past suffering should not be a justification for new tragedies. Second, national sovereignty is no longer regarded as sacrosanct. Advances in international law (most notably, the adoption in 1948 of the Convention on Human Rights, in 1991 of UN Security Council Resolution 686, and in 1998 of the International Criminal Court) have led the international community to consider itself justified in interfering in a country's internal affairs if the government of that country inflicts death and suffering upon its people. Moreover, even though the United Nations itself is still limited in its capacity to intervene in intrastate conflicts by Article 2, Paragraph 7, of the UN Charter, an increasingly large and vocal chorus of NGOs, media, and civil society organizations are under no constraint to remain silent. Their advocacy often leaves governments and intergovernmental organizations with no option other than to disregard sovereignty and intervene in cases where sovereignty is being used as an excuse for abusing or for not protecting people. In the euphoria that accompanied the end of the Cold War and briefly inspired visions of a "new world order," the United Nations launched increasing numbers of global interventions. Almost all of them were, *a posteriori*, questionable, but it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the international community accomplished a shift of Copernican proportions: if national sovereignty had been the foundation of the international order since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, if not before, now the right of peoples across the world to life and human dignity takes precedence. It is a matter of exception, of last resort, but this exception puts the rights of the people at the heart of international relations. Seen from this angle, humanitarianism is legitimate—an absolute right founded on a guaranteed minimum for all people—authorizing

interventions by the international community without the approval of the state concerned.

But while preventive diplomacy is thus legitimate, is it feasible? How can the international community prevent individuals from fighting when for many reasons, rational or not, they are determined to do so? How can we stop an ethnic (or regional or religious) group convinced that its very survival is at stake from attacking its perceived enemy, another ethnic (or regional or religious) group? Moreover, and provided we are willing to step in, how can we detect signals indicating that peace is at risk and address crises before they develop into a full-fledged civil war between desperate people or frightened populations led by irresponsible leaders or pushed to insubordination and revolt by cruel and corrupt dictators?

In fact, prevention is technically very feasible. In the same manner that, say, governments track a variety of economic indicators to prevent soaring inflation, the international community could monitor a variety of signs and developments in vulnerable states to detect major conflicts in the making. The persistence of oppression by a brutal dictator or, on the contrary, the absence of effective leadership and institutions; lack of tolerance and dialogue; political and economic exclusion; rapid and uncontrolled urbanization; high levels of unemployment, especially among youth; blatant corruption; civil war in a neighboring country—all are indicative of fertile ground for civil strife. The dramatic development of telecommunications and the worldwide reach of news media make it easier than ever before to identify, and to draw attention to, threatening situations.

* * *

The account of preventive diplomacy presented in this book details a pragmatic, personalized approach to a conflict in Burundi, in the Great Lakes region of Africa. In the following pages I explain the nature of the preventive diplomacy I tried to implement in that beautiful and unfortunate country, whose hard-working people deserve better than their current lot. It was within the framework of a UN mandate adopted by the Security Council that I was sent to Burundi in November 1993, one month after the assassination of its democratically elected president. The initial duration of my mission was, like all UN missions, three months; in the end, I served in Burundi for two years.

As noted at the outset of this introductory chapter, this is not a history book, nor is it a social scientific study employing academic methodologies and hypotheses. Instead, it is an account of the problems I confronted during the two years I spent in Burundi; it describes how I understood those problems and what I did to try to address them. Much of my time was spent out of the public eye, working behind the scenes with a broad array of domestic and international actors. Much of what I learned in private meetings and in informal conversations is reflected in these pages. However, I cannot always attribute opinions and details gleaned in such encounters. I am always hesitant to give the names of individuals who have not gone public with their views. Moreover, some of the Burundian actors are still alive and, unlike me, do not live in a safe environment, immune from revenge.

The first chapter of this work introduces Burundi, its demography, geography, and recent political history. As this book underscores, preventive diplomats should do their utmost to understand the country where they are to work; each country is a specific case and facile generalizations are to be avoided as they could be fatal to any peace action. Chapter 2 recounts the deepening crisis in Burundi in the second half of 1993, the deliberations at the United Nations that led to my appointment as special representative of the secretary-general, and the challenges I confronted in Burundi from November 1993 to February 1994. Chapter 3 takes the story from early 1994 through to October 1995, when my tenure as special representative came to an end. As this chapter shows, the genocide in neighboring Rwanda threatened to ignite massive violence within Burundi too; however, although outbreaks of violence were by no means rare or negligible, preventive diplomacy helped the country to avoid full-scale civil war and to fashion a basis for some degree of political accommodation and cooperation. Unfortunately, much of the progress made in the direction of political reconciliation was reversed by a lack of focus on the part of the international community, which contributed to a deterioration of the internal situation that led finally to a military coup in 1996. Chapter 4 sketches the course of events in Burundi to the late 1990s, and describes how an overabundance of mediators, each courting a different audience of Burundian groups, contributed to the fragmentation of the peace process. Encouragingly, chapter 4 also describes an initiative taken by the Burundians

to restore peace and promote political cooperation through a power-sharing agreement signed in the summer of 1998.

My experience in Burundi, together with subsequent events in that country, suggests or underscores a number of general lessons and guidelines for preventive diplomacy undertaken in situations of intrastate conflict. In the concluding chapter, I present these lessons in two categories: lessons for the international community in deciding if and when to launch, and how best to support, a preventive mission; and guidelines for the person given charge of a specific mission.

One of the most important of these conclusions is that preventive diplomacy calls, first of all, for a strong political commitment at the international level. Without the assertion of this political will—with a clearly identifiable international actor leading the way, but with the international community offering its support through the United Nations or another credible international organization—our world would become a yet more dangerous place.

A second, no less important, conclusion concerns the psychological dimension of the deeply rooted conflicts in Burundi and Rwanda. Overpopulation, poverty, and repeated episodes of both mass and targeted killings over three decades have traumatized both the people and their leaders, and have made human life seem worthless. Hysteria and paranoia have accentuated very real fears for the survival of oneself and one's ethnic group; the distinction between rumor and fact has blurred; and what is not said is often more important than what is said. Burundians live in a self-enforced psychological ghetto surrounded by high walls of fear, rumor, and death. This psychology and the behavior it generates are difficult to decipher by external actors. Yet, to be effective, preventive diplomacy must take these psychological factors into account. If it does not, then even the best-intentioned preventive efforts are likely to hurt rather than to help the people of Burundi.

