

# The Devil and Mr. Dallaire

General of ill-fated Rwanda mission describes the 'new world disorder' in Munk Centre talk

By Allison Martell, The Varsity  
Published: Thursday, February 3, 2005



Lt.-Gen. (Ret.) Roméo Dallaire spoke at the Munk Centre for International Studies on the subject of "The UN in crisis"

"Are all humans human, or do some humans count more than others?" asked Lt.-Gen. (Ret.) Roméo Dallaire last Saturday afternoon during his talk entitled "The UN in Crisis: Where are the Middle Powers?" His lecture was sponsored by the Munk Centre, the Cambodian Genocide Group and the Asian Institute.

Dallaire has had to ask himself this uncomfortable question before. He was the Canadian general in command of the UN force in Rwanda during the 1993–94 genocide that saw 800,000 Rwandans brutally slaughtered in a fierce campaign of ethnic cleansing. The mission was chronically underfunded, understaffed, and overlooked by the rest of the world. In Dallaire's estimation, this was partly because developed nations were not willing to put their soldiers in harm's way for the sake of a Rwandan. Dallaire's mission was not able to prevent or stop the genocide, and he has suffered post-traumatic stress disorder from the horror he witnessed.

A fellow at the Carr Centre for Human Rights Policy at Harvard University, Dallaire now speaks about Rwanda, human rights, the UN and war-affected children, among other things. His book, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, won a Governor General's Award, and a documentary of the same name was released recently. *Hotel Rwanda*, a major motion picture, is currently in theatres, bringing more attention to the Rwandan genocide.

"After reading the book and learning about Rwanda, Roméo Dallaire became a personal hero of mine," said Amy Goertz, a student who attended the talk, echoing the sentiments of many others. "I really liked the entire talk," she continued. "I thought that it was inspiring."

Dallaire's talk focused on the "new world disorder" that he sees as an era of complicated, ambiguous conflict. He described a state that is not total war nor total peace, but somewhere in between.

"At least they could fight, and they knew where the line was and could see the enemy," he said of the Second World War. He also described changes in the methods of warfare.

"The wanton slaughter of civilians...became an instrument of conflict," said Dallaire, pointing out that children are not only killed in contemporary warfare, but "are, in fact, prime targets."

In this era, Dallaire said, "classic peacekeeping is no more the norm." He criticized the inflexible perception of sovereignty that kept anyone from jamming a Rwandan radio station widely known

to have helped incite the genocide, and the stubborn neutrality of non-governmental organizations which paid taxes to various factions and may have indirectly caused more suffering.

"He's an inspiration to Canadians, he's a great speaker, and he brought a great perspective," said Kartick Kumar, an organizer from the Cambodian Genocide Group. Dallaire's lecture was the last in the "Responsibility to Protect" lecture series.

"I think it was remarkably successful," Kumar said of the series. "From the first speaker we held at Trinity College, which was a smaller gathering, it kept getting bigger." The event was well attended, with 120 people in the main conference facility and more in two overflow rooms.

Dallaire has been speaking to youth across Canada, particularly on war-affected children. He is, in his words, "convincing Canadians to be activists on things other than tuition." In Kumar's opinion, the message is getting across.

"Young Canadians and U of T students—we have an obligation to do so much more."