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**PEACEMAKING AND THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE
IN SITUATIONS OF INTERNAL STRIFE AND INTRA-
STATE CONFLICT: THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS AND
NGOs**

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1. The Post-Cold-War Era

We are living through a time of uniquely contradictory trends. It is a post-Cold-War-era which for many may be characterized by one sentence: there is less threat, but much more insecurity than ever before. We do not any more fear a superpower driven Third World War. But in Latin America, Europe and elsewhere people are increasingly concerned with growing social tension, in some cases amounting to intra-state conflicts, as well as environmental crises which seem to come progressively closer.

The paradoxes and contrasts of our time within and outside of Latin America are are manyfold:

- there are fewer international wars, but more internal strife than before;
- there are more democracies, but also more weak states with power vacuums breeding anti-democratic movements;
- there is more international cooperation, but also more aggressive nationalism and xenophobia than before.
- there are fewer international refugees than a couple of years ago, but more displaced people than ever before; and,
- there are more rich people in Latin America and the rest of the world and more national economies experiencing economic growth than ever before, but there are also more people living in absolute poverty at a time when there is less international assistance to the growing number of vulnerable societies in need of assistance.

It is on this background we should discuss new partnerships where we as inter-governmental organizations, individual governments and non-governmental organizations collectively meet the challenges posed by the violence, the complex emergencies and the intrastate wars affecting so many societies.

I will speak here as one who has for more than 20 years worked with conflict prevention, peace mediation and human rights in NGOs, academic work and high government office. Ever since I first worked as a 19 year old volunteer in social work here in Colombia I have alternated between non-governmental human rights and humanitarian organisations locally, nationally and internationally, academic peace research, and, for the last seven years, vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway.

2. From Competition to Co-operation

Whereas during much of the Cold War period, governments, UN agencies and NGOs tended to pursue separate paths and strategies in attempting to alleviate conflicts, the new climate is for an integrated, holistic approach to conflict, drawing on a multiplicity of methods. There is increasing recognition that the sources for violence and social strife are complex and multifaceted, and requires a co-operative approach involving both governments and NGOs. One way of encouraging this development is by cooperating closely with and channelling resources through local or international voluntary organisations working in conflict areas or in violence prevention. Norway has increasingly done so in many parts of the world, and I shall be mentioning some examples later.

Such activities for peace and security should focus more and more on efforts to solve problems *before* they deepen into crisis or conflict. Preventive policies require early action to become effective action. We have seen that national and international assistance can preserve peace, save lives and protect human rights and democracy - *if* it reaches vulnerable communities in time. But far too often we have remained passive observers, while unique opportunities were lost because we, as individual nations or UN members, did not mobilise resources in time. Too often our response mechanisms have proved to be inadequate for the early needs of embattled democracies, peace initiatives or vulnerable and disaster-prone communities.

In our view all democratic countries have an obligation to improve their ability to respond when democratic and peace-oriented initiatives call for urgent support. Our joint ability to provide flexible, speedy and effective assistance to those holding humanity's first line of defence will also determine our ability to protect and promote our own collective security.

Faced with these enormous challenges, will the IDB, the UN and individual governments fight an impossible uphill battle for sufficient resources to act? Not necessarily, my experience is that funds are increasingly available for programmes aiming at building peace and preventing violence. At the same time there is, in all societies, an untapped reservoir of resources and expertise in government structures and non-governmental organizations available for human rights projects and conflict prevention.

3. The Challenge of Internal Strife

It is important to bear in mind that internal strife and so-called “intra-state conflicts” pose a set of challenges which are significantly different from those associated with “classical” conflict and war between states. Wide-spread violence in contemporary societies may be of a purely criminal nature, but rooted in widespread poverty, deepening social inequalities and ineffective law-enforcement. Violence may also be of a political, ideological or even cultural nature. Or it may, as in Colombia today, stem from a mixture of these sources.

Looking at the more extreme cases of violence, which in international humanitarian law frequently is described as intra-state conflicts or internal strife, we see a number of distinctive features:

- these conflicts frequently take place in a condition of anarchy with little or no source of authority;
- they often involve a number of parties with varying strength and control of territory;
- the unity of command within each of these parties is often questionable;

- there are often complex cultural, economic, and social causes which make the conflicts frequently seem intractable;
- international human rights and humanitarian law of armed conflict is in most cases ignored to an even greater extent than in international wars;
- the civilian population is often directly targeted, the division between combatants and non-combatants is nearly erased, and the human suffering unlimited;
- furthermore, intra-state conflicts are often linked to allegedly “ethnic” divisions or other markers of identity defined by conflict entrepreneurs who derive personal or group gain from mobilising conflict.

Let there thus be no doubt: Internal conflict or strife is not only the most frequent of violent conflicts, but also the most complex, difficult and dangerous environment to operate in. To try to approach and solve such internal conflicts with a mindset focused on international conflicts is futile. A classical trap would be to accept the definition of a conflict presented by many of the conflict entrepreneurs themselves. By treating them as we would treat parties in international armed conflicts, one may end up endorsing their strategy towards legitimacy by recognizing and encouraging extremists.

4. Small Arms Transfers

The unrestrained proliferation in our cold-war-era of hundreds of millions of small arms constitute one of the biggest sources for violent deaths, internal armed conflicts and massive human rights abuse. The growing waves of post-cold-war light weapons transform minor incidents into massive massacres and escalates small group tension into wars.

An estimated 90 per cent of casualties - mostly children, women and other civilians - are caused by arms that can be carried by an individual. Even after conflicts formally end, demobilisation and reconciliation efforts are frustrated by the flow of these unexpensive and sturdy weapons into the wrong hands at the wrong time. There will be little progress in settling existing and future wars and

complex emergencies if there is not a more concerted effort to control and limit production and transfer of small arms.

Representing two of the world largest non-governmental movements, the Norwegian Red Cross and the Norwegian Church Aid have joined with the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo and the Norwegian Institute on International Affairs to initiate a joint international effort to study, control and limit global small arms transfers. Working together with international partners this core group has received financial assistance from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The ultimate aim of this project is to form the widest possible coalition of likeminded governments and NGOs to control and limit the transfer of small arms to areas and communities where they are likely to lead to conflict, violence and human rights abuse. Given the vastness of the problem, the campaign-goals will be progressively specified as the campaign and the coalition builds. It is important to realize that this effort will be very different from the successful effort to achieve a total ban on anti-personal mines, which was negotiated in Oslo during September 1997 and signed by more than 100 governments in Ottawa last december. In general, the small arms initiative will attempt to:

- a) Formulate and advocate the adoption of standards and agreements by which countries control, register or ban certain kinds of small arms transfers.
- b) Promote a better understanding of the relationship between security and development, and seek practical ways of curbing the flow of small arms in order to create a secure environment for development.
- c) Provide information and documentation on small arms transfers,
- d) Stimulate, support and establish networks and institutions among interested organizations, researchers and officials involved in local, regional or global efforts to limit small arms transfers.

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- e) Provide support, morally and financially, to local and regional arms transfer Moratoria, like the one currently being initiated for West Africa by the Government of Mali.

5. Criteria for Third Party Intervention

Increased awareness about the way intra-state conflict differs from traditional wars, has led to a need to re-think traditional state-centric approaches and, in particular, to re-think the role of governments seeking to intervene.

What then are the opportunities for governments or NGOs to play an informal "third party role" - either as facilitator or as mediator in a conflict situation? In what way can, for example, a small country like Norway contribute to conflict resolution and peacemaking in internal conflicts?

Based on my experience with peace facilitation in the Middle East, Central America, the Balkans and elsewhere, I see five fundamental preconditions for effective intervention:

1. The third country must be perceived by the parties to the conflict as having no national interests that conflict with an impartial settlement of the conflict and promotion of human rights. The third party must gain the trust and confidence of the parties.
2. A national political consensus is needed within the third country allowing for her long-term use of the necessary political, diplomatic and economic tools to facilitate the peace process in question.
3. The existence with the third party of an institutional memory in the form of relevant and accessible expertise and the ability to maintain the necessary quality on the involvement.
4. A substantive foreign economic assistance with sufficient discretionary funds ("venture capital for peace") to finance, if necessary, the negotiations and reconciliation programmes.

5. The ability of drawing upon and making use of the flexible networks of NGOs.

6. The role of NGOs

The advantages of involving non-governmental organizations are many: NGOs have local expertise and links with local actors. They are often able to get access to areas of conflict where official representatives should not or cannot go. The factions in a conflict often regard NGOs as impartial, humanitarian do-gooders, making them effective as operatives for peace initiatives.

In Norway non-governmental groups often prove to have the best access to people and networks that can be mobilised quickly. Many of the larger NGOs have long experience of working with government agencies, are knowledgeable about government requirements, specifications and budget procedures, but maintain their ability to operate in a very flexible manner. Decisions can be decentralised, and operations can be jump-started. NGOs are often able to track down key personnel whom the government may not even know exist. Considerable resources can be deployed, often within hours.

Altogether NGOs frequently display impressive creativity in solving practical problems, and they play an important role in paving the way for the implementation of conflict resolution.

7. Tension Between Government Actors and NGOs

However, as we all know, there are too many examples that real life operations do not always run as smoothly as this. Perhaps the greatest obstacle lies in the inherent *lack of co-ordination* between the various agencies and organisations involved in such undertakings.

Part of the problem is that NGOs and governments traditionally have different cultural and institutional mindsets, and sometimes different objectives. Governments inevitably tend to focus on 'large' and longer-term macro issues, while NGOs tend to gravitate to more socially based, shorter-term micro issues. Furthermore, governments may see their main function in a conflict as contributing to an overall agreement between warring parties - to bring peace to a region even if this sometimes involves less than ideal compromises, for example allowing for amnesties to those responsible for human rights abuse during the conflict.

NGOs, on the other hand, tend to look at the weak spots and consequences of peace agreements: how equitable they are, how they impact on minorities, whether human rights are protected and, importantly and controversially, they campaign to have those responsible for human rights abuse tried and punished for their crimes.

In contemporary conflict situations, media interest has often led to a high level of international awareness of the conflict, and subsequently a series of parallel and often completely un-coordinated initiatives for dealing with it. It is not at all uncommon for hundreds of international NGOs to be present in a conflict zone. Many of them are very small. Their level of competence – for instance knowledge of the region they are working in varies.

The situation is, however, not ideal on the intergovernmental side either. UN agencies can in many cases prove to be fairly un-coordinated too. There are numerous examples of situations where the military and the humanitarian agencies live in isolated worlds in spite of working in the same area.

All in all, the net product of such lack of co-ordination is at best that scarce resources are not utilised optimally. At worst, the variety of international activity can lead to situations where a number of different, well-meaning agencies and organisations nullify each other's work.

10. Improving NGO-Government Co-operation

I believe there are a number of ways in which the capabilities of NGOs and governments can be more effectively harnessed:

- more effective institutional mechanisms for co-operation or consultation, both in the field and at headquarters, can be established;
- policy and strategies in key areas can be more closely co-ordinated, or at least a dialogue can be established;
- both NGOs and governments need to acknowledge the importance of the other's role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding; and,
- NGOs and governments both need to work together to make their role more active in cases of intra-state conflict, for example, by implementing preventive measures, improving humanitarian co-ordination, and contributing to greater international preparedness.

Achieving this co-ordination and co-operation will require an attitude of give-and-take from both governments and NGOs. There will be times when it will be difficult to reach a common position, and times when NGOs and governments will have to 'agree to disagree'.

In Norway we have attempted to develop a model of co-operation with NGOs that has proved effective in many of these problem areas. I would like to give you a few examples of our experiences in this area.

9. Norwegian Co-operation with NGOs in Crisis Situations

In 1991, in the wake of the Kurdish refugee disaster we established the Norwegian Emergency Preparedness System (NOREPS), and the Norwegian Resource Bank for Democracy and Human Rights (NORDEM). These are flexible stand-by arrangements for humanitarian, human rights and conflict related work to the benefit of the UN system and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The system draws upon voluntary organizations,

government institutions and academia and is coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

There are more than 20 Norwegian NGOs receiving government support for humanitarian assistance, conflict prevention and human rights activities in nearly 100 countries. Over the years, tens of thousands of Norwegians have acquired field experience from working with these organisations as well as with the government development cooperation agency NORAD.

Furthermore, it is estimated that the number of Norwegians who have participated in UN peace-keeping operations is now equal to more than one per cent of the population (some 55 000). Several hundreds of these experts have agreements with their respective employers and can be rapidly deployed for conflict-preventive measures.

Through NOREPS and NORDEM more than 1 500 relief workers, human rights advisers, peace mediators and observers have been dispatched to more than 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East at the request of UN agencies, new-born democracies and the parties to armed conflicts. Examples range from full-time facilitators of inter-community contacts across the old frontlines in Cyprus and the Middle East, personell for the “truth commissions” in South Africa and Guatemala, police detectives for the Rwanda and Bosnia war crimes tribunals in the Hague, mine clearance personell in Angola and Northern Iraq, human rights advisors in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and human rights observers in Hebron on the West Bank.

In addition to its contributions through NOREPS and NORDEM, Norway has attempted to contribute, behind the scenes, and on the Parties' own terms, to several peace processes. The most well-known is perhaps our facilitation of the Middle East peace process and the Oslo agreements. We have also taken an active part in the conflict resolution initiatives in Guatemala, the former Yugoslavia, South Africa, Sudan, the Caucasus and Sri Lanka.

10. The Secret Norwegian Middle East Channel

The well-known secret “Oslo-channel” made, for the first time ever, direct negotiations possible between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, the PLO. After long confidence building on both sides we were able to initiate the first, informal contacts in January 1993. The Declaration of Principles or the Oslo Agreement was secretly initialled by the two negotiation teams eight months later after 14 rounds of negotiations in the Oslo area.

Both the Israeli leaders Prime Minister Rabin and Foreign Minister Peres and the PLO leadership lead by Yassir Arafat and Abu Mazen were following the secret negotiations closely and imposed increasingly strict terms for the negotiations. Their goals were simple: the Israelis wanted maximum security for all its citizens indefinitely; the Palestinians wanted maximum self-rule, territory and economic development immediately.

Our secret meetings proved to have several advantages over traditional conference diplomacy.

Firstly, the news media, which tends to focus on what divides rather than on what unites, were not involved. As a former news reporter and a strong believer in free speech and open societies, I was struck by how disruptive the constant and immediate news coverage was at public peace negotiations for the Middle East. As soon as the delegates arrived in Washington or other official venues, journalists would confront them with the more hostile comments made by the opposing side, thus leading to even more aggressive responses. This was equally evident during the 6 weeks I spent in 1993 as a deputy to the EU and UN mediators for the former Yugoslavia, Lord Owen and Mr. Stoltenberg.

Secondly, there was no time-consuming diplomatic protocol to be followed and no speeches to the gallery. The participants in the official public sessions appeared to spend almost 100 per cent of their time blaming one another, whereas the negotiators in Norway

spent at least 90 per cent of their waking hours, meals included, in real negotiations. Even the many mutual provocations and acts of violence in the field did not hamper the efforts of the secret negotiators as they did the official channel in Washington.

Thirdly, an atmosphere of mutual trust and affinity was allowed to develop between people who spent hundreds of hours working, eating, quarrelling and joking together in front of Norwegian fireplaces and surrounded only by peaceful countryside.

Fourthly, close co-operation with FAFO, a non-governmental organisation, enabled us to offer the parties “deniability” - the opportunity, if necessary, to deny that anything official had happened. If anything leaked out we could explain the meetings as academic seminars or as Norwegian participation in the official peace process. The small size of our team also helped us to keep things quiet.

We were prepared to keep our secret forever if the negotiations broke down. This was important, because both sides feared that if the news of secret negotiations in Oslo were to leak out before any agreement had been reached, it might have disastrous results at home.

11. Facilitating Peace in Guatemala

The peace process in Guatemala was initiated in Norway in March 1990 when representatives of the government peace commission and the guerrilla movement URNG signed the Oslo Agreement, which established a format and an agenda for future negotiations. Almost seven years later, in December 1996, the circle was finally successfully closed as the parties signed the cease-fire agreement in Oslo, bringing a generation of civil war to an end. The good offices of the UN and of the Group of Friends, Mexico, Spain, the U.S., Venezuela, Colombia and Norway, made steady progress at the negotiating table possible, and the final peace accord was signed in Guatemala City on 29 December 1996.

Norway facilitated this peace process through close co-operation between the Foreign Ministry and two NGOs: the Norwegian Church Aid and the Lutheran World Federation. From 1990 to 1996 we provided financial support to air fares, computers and legal advisors to the guerrilla movement to enable its full participation in the negotiations. At the same time Norwegian development assistance to Guatemala, mainly channelled through non-governmental organisations, increased considerably.

We hosted new rounds of negotiations in June 1994 which resulted in agreements on the repatriation of refugees and on a “truth commission” to investigate past atrocities and human rights abuse. A precondition for enabling these compromises at the negotiations table was our efforts to influence and reform the Guatemalan armed forces through a unique and comprehensive dialogue. A number of military delegations from Guatemala have visited Norway, and high-ranking Norwegian officers, led by the former Chairman of the Military Committee of NATO, General Eide, have visited Guatemala.

They were able to convince the military leadership that the only possibility of the Guatemalan military forces to take part in modern international military co-operation was by ending the “cold war conflict”. An undisputable product of previous the superpower rivalry, the Guatemalan civil war continued to exact a heavy toll on the people of Guatemala, 65 per cent of whom are Maya Indians, long after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

There are many signs indicating that peace has “broken out” in Guatemala, after 36 years of civil war. The demobilisation of the 3000 guerrilla soldiers was completed by May 1997 before schedule and only five months after the signing of the cease-fire agreement in Oslo. The army is reducing its size by approximately 10,000 men, the feared anti-guerrilla village brigades have been dissolved along with the mobile military police. Now the major challenge is to prevent the increase in criminal violence which has taken place since the peace agreement, and which may, in part, be due to unsuccessful reintegration of some of the demobilized soldiers and fighters.

The UN and the international community must continue to help Guatemala to take advantage of the opportunity for peace which is being offered through the international support of the peace process and the deployment of the UN human rights commission in Guatemala.

12. Conflict Settlement in the Balkans

Norway has also tried to provide support for UN mediation and peace-keeping measures in the former Yugoslavia. In addition to our peace-keeping forces, we have, through NOREPS and NORDEM, provided hundreds of relief workers for the UNHCR, UNICEF, the International Red Cross and other organisations. For example, the Norwegian Refugee Council organised the largest relief convoys in Bosnia on a regular basis, Norwegian People's Aid has built large refugee villages inside Bosnia and the Norwegian Red Cross has established medical facilities in the conflict areas.

We also provided personnel on very short notice for the peace efforts of the UN/EU co-chairmen Lord Owen and Mr. Thorvald Stoltenberg. When the authorities in Belgrade gave in to foreign pressure and decided to impose internationally monitored sanctions on the Bosnian Serbs in September 1994, Mr. Stoltenberg and Lord Owen's requested personnel to monitor the Serbian/Montenegro borders. We were able to provide 20 observers within 48 hours. Their work was essential to the credibility of sanctions against the Bosnian Serbs, as an incentive to accept the final Dayton agreements instead of seeking advantages on the battle ground.

There are many similar examples. Technical problems often have a tendency to become political, but the presence of impartial experts can help move the parties towards a solution. In January we provided an expert on electropower within 24 hours to help the Croats and Serbs in the Krajina to implement the socio-economic agreement they had signed in December last year concerning the joint use of a hydropower dam and the electricity grid.

As a deputy to Stoltenberg / Owen I could see first-hand that even these most dynamic and professional mediators could not reach a comprehensive agreement pre-Dayton, because the big powers, among them U.S., did not give the necessary backing to encourage and pressurize the totally irresponsible local political and military elites to make peace.

13. Long-term Settlement of Conflicts

I would like to make one final remark before summing up. When an internal conflict has escalated into physical fighting, it is a very long-term and up-hill effort to make real peace irrespective of the quality of the mediation effort and strength of the international pressure. Fresh misconceptions and causes for hatred are easily added to the already existing ones, and people are slow to forget.

Let us, however, remember that conflict resolution does not imply that people should stop disagreeing. Conflict in form of disagreement is the normal state of societal affairs all over the world. What we should try to stop or, even better, prevent from starting is violent conflict. The aim of good conflict management should be to transform violent attempts to settle disputes into peaceful means of seeking compromise. One way to do this is through the democratic conduct of elections and the (re)introduction of popular political participation into war-torn societies.

However, in the long run, peace requires sound and equitable *economic* development: The reconstruction of infrastructure, housing, public health care, employment, etc. And it also requires *social* development. After a civil war, enemies have to live together again. To make this a viable proposition, the social patterns of conflict must be transformed into patterns of coexistence. This again must take place not only at a high political level, but among ordinary people in every village and town.

I have often seen that the NGO sector can contribute a great deal in this respect. NGOs can act as facilitators between groups that have

become polarized through conflict. At the grassroots level voluntary groups have been able to encourage old enemies to work on joint projects, arranging dialogues and thus help to resolve disputes at the local level

14. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, what lessons have we learned from our experience in attempting to facilitate peace in intra-state conflicts on different continents and under different circumstances?

First, and most basically, there will be no real peace if the parties themselves - both the leaders and the populations at large - are not willing to make an effort to achieve peace. Real and lasting peace cannot be imposed from abroad. This kind of commitment to peace by the parties themselves now seems finally to have emerged in Guatemala. The reason there is still no real peace in Bosnia, Sudan or Sri Lanka is that at least one of the parties is not yet interested in pursuing peace on terms that appear logical to the outsider.

Secondly, even when conflicting parties are willing to make peace, an inadequate mediation machinery and an absence of unobtrusive contact channels may thwart the most noble ambitions. In the Middle East as in Guatemala the agreements that are made came after years of continual, low-key contacts and tailor-made facilities were available to the parties.

Thirdly, international diplomacy is surprisingly unprepared in terms of providing the personnel, expertise and material support necessary for the effective facilitation of a peace process. The strength of the Norwegian model of co-operation between governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations and academic institutions lies in the fact that it has increased our ability to provide immediately the appropriate tools for a mediation process. Such tools may range from experts on the separation of military forces, through constitutional lawyers to emergency relief personnel and financial assistance.

There is, in short, a scope for creative triangulation of Governments, United Nations and NGOs. Countries like Norway is certainly willing to play an active and constructive role in conflict resolution in partnership with the UN and its members. Our experience shows that there are important advantages in government and NGO cooperation. Although both governments and NGOs can operate effectively on their own in intra-state peacemaking efforts, there are numerous occasions where co-operation between the two become mutually beneficial.

Maybe only one in 100 efforts to create peace will be successful. Still it will be worth the effort.