
**NGOs in Conflict -
an Evaluation of
International Alert**

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and Lennart Wohlgemuth**

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Preface

This study has been commissioned by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs on behalf of the five main donors supporting the work of International Alert (IA): Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Novib.

Data collection for the study commenced in May 1997 and has been carried out by Gunnar M. Sørbo (team leader, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen), Joanna Macrae (Overseas Development Institute, London) and Lennart Wohlgemuth (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala). The evaluators have been assisted by Mark Duffield (University of Birmingham), Siri Lange (Chr. Michelsen Institute), Philippa Atkinson (London) and Bente Bingen (Colombo) who have all worked on assigned topics (see annexes). While none of these individuals is responsible for any of the views expressed in the main report, we have benefitted much from their contributions.

During the assignment, we also received much assistance from the staff of International Alert, both at London headquarters and in the field (related to programmes in Burundi, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka). In the process, we tried to share our findings as much as possible with IA staff and received important feedback which, in various ways, affected the final product. The comments made by IA on the draft final report (submitted in August 1997), were shared with donors. We are grateful to IA for the generous assistance provided to the evaluators. IA's response to (a) the recommendations of this report as well as (b) the Sierra Leone Case Study has been annexed to this report (Annex 6).

We would like to thank the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the donor consortium for a difficult and inspiring assignment and the support extended throughout the study period. Two meetings have been held with the donors, one in Copenhagen during the early stages of the review process, and one in Bergen discussing the draft final report. The study has depended on the contributions of numerous persons who gave of their valuable time, taken from already overburdened schedules, to provide information, analysis, interpretations and explanations, and patiently subjected themselves to being questioned. Without their assistance this report could not have been completed. Finally, our thanks go to the Chr. Michelsen Institute for providing institutional support, particularly to Inger A. Nygaard and Marianne Serck-Hanssen for their secretarial efforts.

Bergen, London and Uppsala
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GMS, JM, LW

Executive Summary

This report is an evaluation of International Alert (IA), a London-based international NGO which was founded in 1985 as a "standing international forum on ethnic conflict, genocide and human rights". Over the years, IA has grown into an increasingly operational organisation which works to prevent and resolve conflict through fieldwork and advocacy activities in different parts of the world. From having only a few staff members and a small budget in 1992, the organisation expanded rapidly during 1994-96 and had, in 1996, 50 staff and a budget of £ 3 million. In 1997, however, there have been major cuts leading to lay-offs and redeployment of staff. The evaluation is carried out on behalf of the major donors which are the governments of the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Norway along with Novib. The main purpose is to analyse and assess the work of IA and to make recommendations on future directions regarding its role and performance.

The expansion of IA and its increasing involvement with conflict prevention and resolution must be seen as part of a wider process whereby such activities have become an important and rapidly expanding area for aid agencies. Since the end of the Cold War, changes in the international system, including the outbreak and intensification of many internal wars, have increased opportunities for NGOs to engage in conflict. Their involvement is seen by many, particularly in the NGO community, as stemming from deficiencies within the existing official diplomacy system, which is regarded as circumscribed by political interests and national constraints. By virtue of employing the services of NGOs engaging themselves in conflict resolution, donor governments have accepted the case for private diplomacy.

It is difficult to evaluate conflict resolution. First, there is the issue of scale. That is, whether remedial work at the level of specific groups or individuals can impact on wider social and political processes. Second, there will often be a complex configuration of factors, at different levels, which serve, e.g., to create opportunities for negotiations and peace. It may, therefore, be hard to judge the extent to which any single organisation or political body exercised influence (whether primary or not) in such processes.

In this report, we have tried to assess the impact of IA's activities mainly through case study analysis. More specifically, we have considered IA's programmes in Sri Lanka, Burundi and Sierra Leone in relation to (a) the premises and understanding that formed the basis for IA's interventions; (b) IA's own objectives; and (c) the

claims made by IA itself in its own impact assessment report and other documents. This is done in Chapter Three.

Chapter Two is primarily based on material collected and interviews made at IA headquarters in London. A brief presentation of IA's history, objectives and profiles is followed by a review of (a) selected management and organisational issues; (b) finance; (c) training; and (d) advocacy.

During a brief period, from 1992 until 1996, IA grew rapidly, largely due to the innovative efforts, fund-raising ability and reputation of the present Secretary General. It was recognised, however, that management systems and procedures had to be put in place if IA were to maximise the use of its resources. A report commissioned to evaluate the appropriateness of existing structures and procedures pointed out that IA must establish and communicate to all stakeholders a clearer vision of its strategic direction and role in an increasingly competitive sector. Among the key recommendations, therefore, were for IA (a) to establish clear organisational aims and objectives, focusing on work in which it can demonstrate competitive advantage, and (b) to develop a coherent, organisational strategic plan (BDO review).

IA has taken a number of steps to make the necessary improvements. This applies particularly to procedures, routines, increasing staff participation, staff development and changes to the organisational structure. A clearer vision of its strategic direction and role in an increasingly competitive environment is, however, still needed, requiring a considerable effort.

The accounting and budget systems have been considerably improved in the past year and appear to fulfil necessary requirements for a good internal control system. Currently, considerable efforts are made to control expenditures in a situation of reduced funding and scarce resources. Regarding IA's *income and finance*, it is noted that five donors contribute close to 60 per cent of total funds. In the past four years, these five donors (Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Novib) have put collectively more than £ 5 million into IA. Most funds are earmarked for specific programs of activities and only a small portion is unrestricted core funds. It is important that IA continues its efforts to (a) broaden the funding base and (b) secure sufficiently stability in terms of funding.

Training is carried out as a component within most of the programs of IA and as a separate activity by itself. It is recommended (i) that IA should not involve itself in conflict resolution training on any large scale as a separate activity, and (ii) that it be done in close cooperation with local and other partners. While training can be important in a peace building process, it should be part of a medium - or long term strategy rather than an activity of its own, i.e., be integrated into other, complementary programmes of IA. It should also be exclusively planned for each particular conflict in question and tailor-made to address the particular situation

in a given country. This is in line with current thinking at IA's Resource Development and Training Department.

One of IA's main achievements has been in the area of *advocacy* and a separate department was set up in 1995, aimed at promoting policy changes amongst key international organisations towards sustainable peace and conflict prevention. In the view of the evaluators, there is currently less need for generic advocacy to promote policy changes regarding preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention among international organisations and Western governments. IA should concentrate on working with targets in the development and operationalisation of prevention policies rather than raising the issues in general. In particular, there would seem to be a need for advocacy and lobbying around critical issues of political, social and economic justice which are at the core of most internal conflicts in the world. Advocacy projects should be carefully planned and IA should seek sustained and in-depth cooperation with other institutions whenever this is possible.

Sri Lanka. IA has been engaged in Sri Lanka since 1985 and its priorities and programme have evolved with changing circumstances. From trying mainly to build strategic constituencies for peace at the time when a peace agenda was not on the cards, IA shifted its focus towards trying to build communication channels between the government and LTTE during 1994-95. When negotiations broke down, the process was reviewed and priority given to (a) creating space for dialogue and negotiations, and (b) helping to create, in the South, a bipartisan approach to negotiations, mainly through working with a cross party group of parliamentarians.

IA has struggled to implement and follow up on some of the activities directed towards the media, the military and the business community. The organisation, however, has successfully organised three meetings for parliamentarians in Crete, Northern Ireland and the Philippines. While particularly the last seminar generated considerable criticism in Colombo, it is recommended that IA proceeds with its contacts with the group on a low-profile basis as a durable peace can only be achieved if the polity and people of the South are behind any peace initiatives being carried forward.

The evaluators question the wisdom of the high profile held by IA in Sri Lanka at the present time, although it is recognised that this is not easily controlled given the peculiar character of Sri Lankan politics as well as the role of the country's media. The Sri Lankan attitude to NGOs as well as international agencies remains largely ambivalent, particularly when it comes to what is regarded as interference and meddling in internal conflict. For IA, this problem is compounded by the fact that its Secretary General is a Sri Lankan who has played a part in the past in the island's political life. Such perceptions are part of the political realities which IA must relate to and confront.

Burundi. IA started its activities in Burundi in 1995, in close liaison with the UN Secretary General's Special Representative (SRSG). The aim of the programme is to help prevent escalation of the conflict, and to contribute effectively to a process of achieving a just and peaceful resolution of the crisis in Burundi. IA's activities have been directed at different levels and include working with an elite group (CAP) that emerged from one of three study tours to South Africa, and activities to strengthen the peace-building capacity of the Burundian Women's Movement.

IA has succeeded in making itself well established as a small, neutral NGO. By co-operating with other partners and in particular with the SRSG, and by an approach of listening and learning, IA is today accepted and appreciated by all main actors on the Burundi scene. The analyses made by the IA Burundi secretariat on political developments in the country are well worked through and generally accepted. The choice of activities seems to be in line with those analyses and results notably fulfil the immediate project objectives. However, the ultimate objective of the different actors on the scene, namely a breakthrough in the efforts to reach a sustainable peace, is still far from being met.

Sierra Leone. While originally planned as being based on a multi-track approach, IA's interventions in Sierra Leone came almost exclusively to focus on the negotiations leading to a peace agreement in November 1996. While IA played an important role in the different events and processes leading up to the agreement, it has been subject to a number of serious allegations regarding its involvement.

IA's engagement in the hostage release process was defining for the organisation and its relations with other international actors. The circumstances surrounding this process left IA vulnerable to accusations of being unprincipled. Such perceptions continued to affect IA's work related to the Sierra Leonean conflict and led to mistrust and suspicion that the organisation was not neutral nor transparent, but working as advisors to the RUF.

Our criticism of IA in Sierra Leone is not that it engaged itself. IA was one of the few bodies arguing that the RUF had a significant political agenda and clearly influenced the RUF to move towards negotiations and peace. Rather, our criticism is that IA operated with sufficient lack of clarity and transparency which, in the end, both exposed the organisation to criticism and constrained its operational capacity. While IA admits to having made mistakes in the Sierra Leone conflict, it does not yet seem to have been able to articulate clearly the lessons learned by clarifying sufficiently key policy issues regarding, e.g., neutrality, consent and dealing with non-state military forces.

IA's priorities and forms of engagement have evolved with changing circumstances. Among NGOs, IA was among the first to become engaged in conflict resolution and has been a leading advocate for claiming that NGOs have

a number of comparative advantages which can prove invaluable in conflict situations. In the view of the evaluators, IA's main achievements have been in the following two areas:

- (i) IA has, both through its numerous publications (most of them authored by Kumar Rupesinghe and Ed Garcia) as well as its advocacy work, contributed to making conflict prevention and resolution issues an important sphere of action among governments, IGOs and NGOs. In the NGO community, IA has largely inspired the entry of NGOs into this area of work.
- (ii) Through many of its field programmes (e.g. in Sri Lanka and Burundi), IA has successfully contributed to the development of local peace constituencies which are involved at different levels in creating spaces for dialogue, building bridges and improving communication between conflicting parties (e.g. MP group in Colombo, CAP group and women's groups in Burundi). Through such work, IA has actively supported those who seek non-violent solutions against powerful advocates of violence.

On the negative side, the lack of a clear and transparent strategy has made IA seemingly unpredictable in what it is doing and where it is going. This has been particularly highlighted by its involvement in Sierra Leone. In the report (Chapter Four), we elaborate on some of the areas which we believe are important for the organisation to confront and articulate clearly when developing a strategic plan for the future such as the importance of analysis, ethical issues and principles, cooperation and partnerships, and a number of management and organisational issues. We also recommend that IA establish greater clarity regarding the niche it intends to occupy in the broad area of conflict resolution.

NGOs can perform a number of potentially constructive roles in crisis situations, including intercession/good offices work and mediation to prevent violence. There is, however, only very limited space within which an NGO can operate at the highest level of political negotiations, and the opportunity arises often by chance. This normally happens when a particular organisation is called upon and widely accepted, is able to operate in close and transparent partnerships with other organisations (like the UN, other IGOs or governments) and is seen to have general as well as country-specific expertise and competence to offer. Based on such considerations, it is not advisable that IA should define mediation as its particular niche. Rather, we feel that the organisation should give priority to the following areas:

- (a) IA should strive to *create spaces for dialogue*, not primarily by facilitating negotiations but by helping to develop local peace constituencies at different levels. In this area, IA should help empower such constituencies through the transfer of skills, knowledge and resources.

- (b) IA should be engaged in *advocacy and lobbying around critical issues of political, social and economic justice*, i.e. flag its solidarity and human rights profile as part of its input into long-term processes of conflict management and resolution. In this work, projects and target groups should be carefully selected and IA should seek cooperation with other institutions whenever this is possible.

- (c) We would encourage *efforts towards geographic concentration*. Given that the origins and contours of intra-state conflict differ substantially from country to country, due to historical, cultural, political and regional factors, interventions in any country requires considerable competence. In this sense, IA is not, at the moment, a "knowledge-based" organisation to the extent one would wish to see it. It makes sense, in our view, to concentrate efforts on a limited number of countries, within only a few sub-regions, and to build competence as well as strong, long-term partnerships in the respective areas of work.

The evaluators have noted that IA has drawn up an agenda that will guide future planning and follow up to this evaluation, very much in line with the above recommendations.

At the end of the report, a limited number of issues is briefly raised for donors in particular, regarding policy coherence, the need for developing criteria for appraising projects in the field of conflict resolution, and the need for system-wide evaluations of the international conflict management systems to ensure accountability and assess further the comparative advantage of different actors, including NGOs working in this sphere.

Chapter One: Introduction: Context and Approach

Background

This report is an evaluation of International Alert (IA), a London-based international NGO which was founded in 1985 as a "standing international forum on ethnic conflict, genocide and human rights". Over the years, IA has grown into an increasingly operational organisation which works to prevent and resolve conflict through fieldwork and advocacy activities in different parts of the world. From having only 2 staff members and a small budget in 1992, the organisation expanded rapidly during 1994-96 and had, in 1996, 50 staff and a budget of £ 3 million. The evaluation is carried out on behalf of the major donors which are the governments of the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Norway along with Novib. The main purpose is to analyse and assess the work of IA and to make recommendations on future directions regarding its role and performance.

Over the last year or so, IA has been subject to serious allegations in connection with its involvement in Sierra Leone which the organisation itself has celebrated as its main achievement. Some of its activities in Sri Lanka have also become increasingly controversial, particularly in the eyes of Sinhalese hardliners. Because of such developments, and because this may be one of the first serious attempts to evaluate a conflict prevention NGO, we have felt the need both (a) to have a good grasp of the larger aid and development context within which IA's activities take place, and (b) to make our own approach to the assessment of IA as explicit as possible from the outset. As part of our assignment, therefore, we commissioned a discussion paper from Mark Duffield of the University of Birmingham entitled "Evaluating Conflict Resolution - Context, Models and Methodology" (Annex 1). We were also assisted by Siri Lange (CMI) who collected information and presented an overview and selected profiles of some key NGOs working with conflict resolution (Annex 2).

The Larger Context

The expansion of IA and its increasing involvement with conflict prevention and resolution activities must be seen as part of a wider process. Conflict prevention and resolution have in the past few years become an important and rapidly expanding area for aid agencies. This is related to the fact that the number of internal wars, or at least what we might call smaller wars, have been increasing, particularly since the end of the Cold War. Today, almost all armed conflicts in

the world are some variation of internal or civil confrontation. In contrast, interstate war has been in long-term decline. While the conduct and cessation of interstate wars have usually been governed by conventions and political treaties, internal wars are problematic in relation to existing international rules and conventions.

Such differences have created space for NGOs. They have become more and more involved in conflict prevention and resolution activities. This involvement is by many, particularly in the NGO communities, seen as stemming from deficiencies within the existing system. Official diplomacy is regarded as circumscribed by political interests and national constraints. In contrast, reflecting earlier ideas of NGO comparative advantage in the development field, non-governmental bodies are closer to the grass roots, are better informed, can more easily build trust, are flexible, and so on. In other words, NGOs are well placed to play an "unofficial diplomacy" role.

By virtue of employing the services of NGOs engaging themselves in conflict resolution, donor governments have tacitly accepted the case for private diplomacy. Aid has, as already in so many other fields, also here become "privatised", which has led to NGOs attempting to create a growing role for themselves, not only in providing aid in complex emergencies but also in relation to trying to mitigate and resolve conflicts. A Prevention and Management of Conflicts directory published in the Netherlands in 1996 lists 288 organisations world wide (private as well as public), without claiming to be exhaustive. Lange's more limited overview and selected profiles made for this review of some key NGOs working in this area, reveal that most of the organisations in this area depend heavily on donor funds. Some of them are quite big in terms of staff and budget, and, while there is variation in terms of geographical focus, philosophy, methods and funding sources, there would seem to be considerable overlapping, which, i.a., indicates the emergence of an increasingly competitive aid market.

Below follows an attempt to capture important aspects of the current debate taking place on this important issue. This section draws heavily on Duffield's background paper to set the context within which IA is working (see Annex 1).

According to Duffield, conflict resolution is the promise of social engineering on a grand scale. It is also a good example of the manner in which the theory and practice of development has radically changed, from a focus on inequality, economic growth and resource redistribution as main issues, to concerns with how people cope with their situations and the means by which they can be supported in mitigating the risks and stresses involved. The onus is on changing the way people do things and what they think. Rather than being different, conflict resolution represents an extreme form of this paradigm, given its ambitious aim of attempting to modify behaviour as a means of avoiding political violence.

There are several factors which underpin the international framework within which conflict resolution operates. There has been a trend to regard underdevelopment and, more recently, the transition to liberal democracy, less as a malfunction of the international system and increasingly an internal problem of domestic institutions and social relations in the countries concerned. Many would argue that the demise of alternative international political projects (Third Worldism, International Socialism) has been a necessary prerequisite for the emerging view of political instability and "failed states" as a consequence of predominantly domestic factors such as poverty, environmental degradation and lack of democracy. In this perspective, support for human rights, civil society and democratisation is now identified as an essential complement to structural adjustment programmes in the economic sphere.

Development problems were increasingly redefined in terms of internal failings during the 1980s. The practical application of this redefinition, however, has largely depended on the end of the Cold War. Since 1989, a crucial aspect of this application has been a new found ability of the UN, IGOs and NGOs to work on all sides in situations of unresolved conflict and political crisis. Prior to this, concerns about sovereignty and non-interference had precluded such intervention as a widespread option. Aid mainly flowed through the medium of recognised governments and cemented Cold War alliances.

As a result of these changing circumstances, it is commonly argued that international intervention, sometimes with military support, has quietly become a *de facto* norm in response to large-scale refugee flows, famine or genocide/mass killings. In the process, the principle of state sovereignty has also been increasingly challenged, as in the case of Northern Iraq where safe havens for Kurds were established.

Development and security concerns within Western aid policy have increasingly coalesced around the issue of civil society. The development aid community is increasingly converging around the idea that the primary aim of development is the creation of a strong civil society. In so far as such a structure embodies plural and democratic values, civil society is also a source of stability and security. Civil society is also regarded as capable of playing an important conflict resolution role, e.g., by allowing confidence building measures to be pursued.

By largely equating civil society with NGOs, one approach to conflict resolution is suggested. On a more general level, however, the shift of the aid regime from an inter-state resource transfer model to one which focuses on the quality of internal relations, has been accompanied by, and largely depended on the privatisation of aid. Some even argue that without a major expansion of NGO activity, it is difficult to see how the prominence given to civil society could have been achieved. For donor governments, sub-contracting aid functions to NGOs

establishes an arms length relationship with agencies attempting to modify internal behaviour and attitudes.

The enlargement of the aid market has been synonymous with the expansion of NGO projects, and the post-Cold War ability to work in situations of ongoing conflict has been a major contributing factor to this growth and the increasing complexity of contractual relations involving also NGOs with UN, EU and other IGOs. Not only have IGOs become major conduits of NGO funding, they have also become more operational in their own right.

The mid 1980s represented a major change in the nature of aid flow. Until this period, government to government development assistance was the predominant pattern. Increasingly, however, donor governments have channelled development and humanitarian assistance through NGOs. Not only has the number and scale of NGO operations grown, a type of competitive aid market has emerged where none existed before.

This aid market is a two way process. To varying degrees NGOs are dependent upon government and IGO funding. At the same time, however, growing access and control of information has strengthened their advocacy role in relation to aid policy. Indeed, NGOs have been at the forefront in pushing for human development and the reorientation of aid towards civil society issues. Donor governments have generally accepted the NGO critique of state led development and shifted much of their funding away from recipient governments and toward NGOs.

While the relation of NGOs to governments is essentially a critical one based on attempts to define, maintain and expand their role, the case for private diplomacy has also been accepted by donor governments. However, it would appear that institutional deepening is developing more between NGOs as opposed to political linkages between NGOs and donor governments. Generally, though, we are seeing a multi-level process, involving the expansion of NGOs, growing connections between them, the development of new forms of subcontracting and partnership linking NGOs, IGOs, donor governments, commercial companies, and so on.

Despite different activities and operational models, conflict resolution, in Duffield's view, rests on a relatively narrow conceptual base. He questions several of the core assumptions on which the basic model is based. While the social background to internal war is regarded as stemming from scarcity issues such as impoverishment and lack of democracy, the actual practice of conflict resolution is often insufficiently concerned with issues of large-scale redistribution. Geared toward engineering behavioural and attitudinal change, it is shaped more by a socio-psychological model of instability. Conflict is seen as originating at the level of disagreements or communication breakdown between individuals and groups. From this perspective, conflict is essentially irrational. Internal war is also

typically seen as a cyclical phenomenon, and this conception informs the view that conflict resolution should develop techniques and approaches that are appropriate for each stage (escalation, stalemate and decline). Intervention becomes a means of restoring order and balance disrupted by conflict.

Following the analogy with disease, early intervention prior to open conflict developing is seen as having more chance of success (and being less expensive) compared to later involvement. Support for conflict early warning systems is, therefore, an important part of conflict resolution, the general approach being similar to that which developed in the mid 1980s in relation to drought and famine.

The basis of much of the early warning activities has also been questioned, particularly in view of the poor history of Western response to known humanitarian threats. Early warning rests on the assumption that donor governments will react when told. The problem is seen as being a lack of information. Information, however, did little to prevent several years of systematic and gross human rights abuse in Bosnia, nor did it lead to quick and decisive action in Rwanda. Some argue that in terms of donor response, it may be better to regard internal conflict as representing a series of "wars of choice" for the West. Rather than collecting more information, perhaps a realistic approach to "early warning" would be to analyse the framework of choice and political calculation that currently defines and informs Western interest.

A very important discussion concerns the question whether the conflict resolution model also supports more direct psychological interventions, either by arranging appropriate conferences and workshops that bring people from different ethnic groups or countries together, or through training in conflict resolution skills. Such training is often based on clarifying mistaken perceptions and providing psychological and interpersonal tools for defusing potentially tense situations. According to Duffield, conflict resolution training tends to locate the origin of political violence at the level of flawed perceptions and communications breakdowns. Its logic is that conflict and its associated abuses are somehow all a mistake, which means that perpetrators and victims of violence are similarly affected by distorted views, and that, in a sense, we are all as bad as each other, everyone becomes a victim.

Organisations attempting to regulate conflict are, by definition, also taking it on themselves to adjudicate over internal processes of social and political transformation. If one takes at face value the aims of conflict resolution, it represents social engineering on a massive scale. The dilemma might be and sometimes is that such engineering is based on questionable suppositions; but also that conflict resolution may lack an ethical or political framework sufficiently capable of distinguishing between just or unjust claims. Within this vacuum, all that can be done is to declare an opposition to harsh or coercive violence.

There is a growing number of critics of conflict resolution, indeed, the new aid paradigm generally, who interpret increased Western involvement in the crisis regions as a new form of imperialism. Others suggest that the world appears to be dividing into strategic and non-strategic areas with the disengagement of effective Western interests in the latter. The privatisation of aid and the growth of NGOs, which have achieved their greatest autonomy in non-strategic areas, is a sign of this disengagement.

Rather than being a transitory problem in the creation of liberal-democratic structures, internal war can be seen as the emergence of essentially new types of social formation adapted for survival on the margins of the global economy. Internal conflict is part of a process of transformation and is internal to social structures and relations. Moreover, open violence is only one expression of the tensions and contradictions within a system at a given point in time. The absence of open conflict or peace is not, of necessity, an indication that those underlying antagonisms have been resolved. Peace can be a condition in which the same contradictions continue to operate and shape social and political discourse but in a different way. While open fighting might have a beginning and an end, the underlying conditions and relations that support it are structural and long-term.

While internal war is associated with impoverished regions and scarcity, scarcity itself does not cause or determine conflict. The more important factor is the manner in which those with influence approach and deal with its modalities. Whether the development path chosen is going to lead to political instability and internal war, depends on what strategies are chosen. Many poor countries, for example, are not unstable. Where insecurity does exist, however, rectification of the socio-psychological model of conflict is required.

As a pro-active response to scarcity, internal war is not the result of ignorance or some localised misunderstanding. It signals conscious political design and calculation. Regarding internal war as a rational and conscious process also allows questions of guilt and justice to be introduced. Not everyone is to blame. Internal wars have leaders and followers, extremists and moderates and, especially, winners and losers. As conscious political projects based on choice, their perpetrators are open to judgement. Regardless of its contents or methods, internal conflict can be an essentially rational process. If this is true, if conflict is symptomatic of practice and rational attempt to control and manage scarcity, it cannot be assumed that external aid is a panacea for instability.

The Challenge for Evaluation

Duffield's basic model is "good to think", in the sense that it draws out important implications of the premises on which it is based. However, when confronted with the complex world of the many NGOs working in the area of conflict resolution,

it does not of course represent an empirical statement on their activities and possible failings. Thus, e.g. many NGOs would strongly object to being accused of a lack of concern with issues of justice. It is, however, not difficult to agree with Duffield when he claims that it is difficult to evaluate conflict resolution. While interventions take the form of different technical activities, the aim is to influence wider social and political processes. It is this gap and the qualitative difference between the means and ends where the difficulty lies. There is no direct or unambiguous link between the technical competence of an agency in meeting immediate organisational aims and the significance of its activities for achieving wider social goals. This is because the link between institutional action and social environment is not of a technical nature. Organisational goals are mediated by economic, political and ideological relations with its surroundings.

There is also the issue of scale. That is, whether remedial work at the level of specific groups or individuals can impact on wider social and political processes. Training groups of people is one thing. Whether such activity can mollify societal instability or entrenched group hostility, however, is another. For many practitioners engaged in conflict resolution, the relationship between the two may be more an act of faith than proven certainty.

If one accepts the socio-psychological model of conflict being used, or at least has an interest in whether its claims are justified, impact evaluation becomes an exercise in monitoring behavioural change. This is extremely difficult. Instead, a methodology for assessing the impact of conflict resolution is more concerned with defining the interface between the organisation and its environment and isolating a number of key areas for critical social and political enquiry.

Evaluating International Alert

While the various issues raised above obviously have a bearing on this evaluation, it is important to distinguish between theory and practice. In general, the claims made by conflict resolution activists and their attempts to generate a comprehensive framework significantly runs ahead of what exists on the ground. We would also like to emphasise that IA's approach, as judged by its practice or the writings of its Secretary General (Kumar Rupesinghe) or other staff cannot simply be reduced to a version of the socio-psychological model. Duffield's basic model is "good to think", in the sense that it draws out important implications of the premises on which it is based. However, when confronted with the complex world of the many NGOs working in the area of conflict resolution, it does not of course represent an empirical statement on their activities and possible failings. Thus, e.g., many NGO would strongly object to being accused of a lack of concern with issues of justice.

