NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, EARLY WARNING, AND PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY

by

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PREFACE

Tutsi and Hutu are attacking each other again, this month in northern Burundi. Absolute fatality counts are comparatively low, given what they have been in Burundi, and what they were in 1994, in neighboring Rwanda. They have not yet reached the atrocity levels of the Sudan, or Bosnia, but, in sheer number, they approximate the deaths this month in the renewed civil war in Sri Lanka.

The globe is awash with ethnic and religious conflict. Nearly 50 million persons have lost their lives in the maelstrom of intergroup bitterness since the end of World War II, at least 5 million since 1990. During that same period there were about 150 civil wars and war-like intrastate battles. And they continue in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, and even in Oceania.

How to staunch these continuing hostilities was the fundamental question behind an urgent meeting summoned by the World Peace Foundation and the Program on Non-Governmental Organizations of the Harvard Institute for International Development. Could non-governmental organizations (NGOs) contribute to peace? Could their efforts improve the world's ability to contain ethnic and religious violence through the exercise of preventive diplomacy? In particular, could NGOs contribute to the early warning of conflicts, and thus to early action which would reduce their heat and potentially prevent killings?

The following Report summarizes the discussions and conclusions of that meeting, which took place in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in April 1995. Convened exactly a year after the massacres in Rwanda, amid continuing troubles in Burundi, and during the lull before the continuing storm in Sri Lanka, it explored the role that NGOs had played and could play in reducing ethnic and religious conflict in troubled countries. Local and international NGOs made and were making a difference in Burundi, Guatemala, Macedonia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and the Sudan -- our case studies. But in each case the influence that local and international NGOs had exerted or were exerting depended upon the heat and immediacy of the battles in their particular locales. Intervening to reduce hostilities in the Sudan, or in Guatemala, employed skills which were similar to, but not exactly the same as the peace-building interventions in South Africa and Sri Lanka, and the ongoing pre-conflict attention which NGOs were giving to tensions in Macedonia and Nigeria.

Preventive diplomacy represents a host of efforts on the part of both local and international NGOs, sometimes in concert, often not.

Likewise, early warning, we discovered, embraced a kaleidoscope of early, not-so-early, and belated bellringings. In Rwanda those signals were heeded only far too late. In Macedonia and Burundi, early warning has been ample. It is early action of an effective kind that has not always followed the warnings -- not in Rwanda, possibly not now in Burundi, and perhaps not in the coming days and months in Nigeria.

The meeting in Cambridge was devoted both to theory and to practice, as well as to drawing out the lessons of the cases for preventive diplomacy and early warning. The participants in the discussions were drawn from the ranks of relief and human rights NGOs, both local and international; from diplomatic ranks; from the academy; from the press; and from foundations with interests abroad. (Appendix 1 lists the participants.)

The meeting's deliberations were focused on nine sessions, two focusing on the theory of preventive diplomacy and early warning, the others on the case studies and on conclusions and recommendations. Revised versions of the papers prepared for the conference will be published early in 1996 by the World Peace Foundation and the Brookings Institution Press.

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-- R. I. R.

INTRODUCTION

Where there is trouble, there are non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Today's global trouble spots are increasingly defined not by natural disasters but by manmade ones, the products of ethnic and religious furies unleashed. So more and more local and international NGOs find themselves working in the midst of simmering conflicts or open war. As noncombatants on the frontlines, they often have unique access to information and close connections to warring groups. If alarm bells can be sounded early, NGOs are well placed to ring them. If community passions can be curbed, NGOs may serve as trusted counsellors of calm.

Complex emergencies offer new opportunities for NGOs to extend their missions into peacemaking. But they also impose complicated new demands. NGOs now need to rethink their goals, retrain their staffs, and adjust their working methods to accommodate fast-changing, even dangerous conditions. Cooperation and consultation among local and international NGOs, between governmental and non-governmental actors, and with multinational peace-monitoring and peacemaking organizations like the United Nations, has always been desirable. In war zones, it is essential.

Not all NGOs can be expected actively to pursue conflict prevention or resolution. These are not tasks for well-meaning amateurs but new disciplines requiring specialized skills. But NGOs also do not have the luxury of opting out of local disputes. Even technical projects can no longer be designed without taking account of the political and social currents swirling around them. Yet, few fieldworkers arrive on the scene equipped to understand local tensions or are capable of detecting signs of imminent upheaval. Sometimes, well-meaning NGOs of all kinds inadvertently exacerbate conflict rather than easing it.

This difficult new reality was the subject of structured discussions over several days at Harvard University in April 1995. The World Peace Foundation and the Program on Non-Governmental Organizations of the Harvard Institute for International Development sponsored the meeting (supported in part by the United States Institute of Peace) and invited local and international NGO leaders, and other practitioners, peacemakers, peacekeepers, and academics to explore the comparative advantage of NGOs as conflict preventers and conflict alleviators. The participants debated whether early warning made a difference to the fruitful conduct of preventive action, how early warning could be converted into effective early preventive action, and

whether it made sense for local NGOs to be linked together, for the purposes of preventive diplomacy, into a formal or semi-formal early alarm network.

One of the objectives of the conference was to enhance communication between local and international NGO leaders; another was to provide a comparative framework for cross-national discussions among leaders of local NGOs. The local NGOs represented at the Cambridge meeting were explicitly focused on human rights or conflict resolution. The international NGOs, by contrast, were predominantly relief and development agencies, now increasingly involved in crisis management issues. International human rights NGOs also attended.

When the meeting at Harvard opened, the first wave of genocidal killings in Rwanda was exactly a year old. Hundreds of Burundian Hutu were being murdered by Tutsi each week. Vicious scores were still being settled in Rwanda, and the slaughter at Kibeho in Rwanda was several weeks ahead. There was a truce in the long-running civil war between Sinhalese and Tamil in Sri Lanka, but that ceasefire was soon to break down. The civil war in the southern Sudan continued, more than 1 million lives having been lost since 1983. In Europe there was no end in sight to ethnic strife in Bosnia. And the attacks within Croatia were soon to resume.

Ethnic, religious, and cultural fratricide served as the context of the meeting. Thirty civil wars and twenty complex humanitarian crises have been erupting every year since the end of the cold war released long-suppressed rivalries and hatreds. About fifty million people have been forced to flee their homes during the past ten years, including twenty million refugees who fled across borders and thirty million people displaced within their own countries.

Europeans continue to kill Europeans, Asians kill Asians, and Africans kill Africans. But there are states and regions where preventive diplomacy has avoided, limited, or restrained internecine hostilities. There are situations in which early warning was timely, but no one listened. There are other places where early warning was converted into effective action. Not all of Europe, Asia, Africa, or Latin America is tense and inflamed by ethnic and religious animosity, and in some of those situations NGOs, local and international, helped to bring conflicts back from one or more brinks. What lessons could be learned for the future of early warning, early action, and preventive diplomacy more generally?

Theoretical examinations of these concepts, and a cautionary survey, provided the framework for a discussion of eight case studies: Sri Lanka, Macedonia, Guatemala, the Sudan, Nigeria, Rwanda, Burundi, and South Africa. The case studies represented a combination of failures and successes, of trials and errors, and of different and significant lessons for enhancing the effectiveness of early warning, early action, and preventive diplomacy.

The discussants, both those who had been invited to prepare papers beforehand and those who brought direct field experience to the conclave, were joined by academic and practical synthesizers of broad experience with the prevention and amelioration of ethnic and religious conflict throughout the world. The case study presenters, by design, were for the most part local or indigenous NGO leaders and international NGO practitioners from those same conflict-ridden states.

THE NATURE OF PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY AND EARLY WARNING

Conflict comes in many guises. Would-be peacemakers need to define the challenges before prescribing the cures. The most critical distinctions are between two kinds of crises: those likely to blow over and those likely to blow up. The first kind includes quiet, chronic crises that do not normally attract international notice and that indigenous NGOs manage every day. The second encompasses violent outbreaks that require diplomatic or military fire-fighting. Violent crises also range in intensity from street battles to genocide. Although finely-grained definitions are desirable because they may increase predictive value, they may also lead to premature intervention.

Preventive diplomacy is the use of coercive or non-coercive means to avoid, deter, deflect or reduce conflict. It takes three main forms:

• Conflict prevention -- averting disputes between states and other parties;

• Conflict containment -- preventing the horizontal and vertical escalation of hostilities;

• Post-conflict conciliation -- preventing the re-emergence of disputes.

Among the techniques of preventive diplomacy are:

• Peace building -- the removal or reduction of conditions fostering violence between or among groups or states;

• Preventive deployment -- the interposition of military or observer forces between contending elements;

• Mediation -- resolution of disputes before hostilities emerge, or afterwards.

Early warning is sounding alarm bells at the right time and in a salutary and appropriate manner. At its most effective, it alerts local and international communities to the likely onset of violence between or among groups or states. It has at least three components: information (which must be accurate); analysis (which must be dispassionate); and communication (which must be accessible and

clear). Even so, the concept of early warning is messy, fuzzy, and ambiguous. What if nobody is listening? Or what if people respond and the tocsin turns out to have been sounded prematurely or erroneously?

Early warning, at its most refined, is the apex of an array of indicators, each of which has been assessed, calibrated, and re-calibrated. Detecting early warning indicators and weighing their importance requires judgment and experience. As UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has observed, vital indicators are often hidden within an immense volume of inconsequential material.

Yet, when early warning is reliable and persuasive, it can encourage decision-makers to take preventive measures in a timely fashion. Making warnings public increases the transparency of a crisis and creates public expectations and pressures that can encourage governments and international bodies to deter disasters. But publicity can also raise tensions and sometimes lead to the very outcomes that the warnings were intended to avert.

Early warning and conflict prevention are, above all, about politics. Reports of intra-national hostilities are invariably filtered by politicians seeking to manipulate them for partisan ends. NGOs can serve as valuable independent sources of facts. Yet, the tenser the confrontation, the likelier it is that NGO efforts to gather information will be viewed as interference. Issuing early warnings can also compromise NGOs' service missions and put fieldworkers at risk.

There are many ways that NGOs respond to early rumblings of conflict: they serve as silent witnesses, thus preserving their neutrality; they are annoying witnesses or bell-ringers; and they are political witnesses, with a mission to arouse an external response. Indigenous NGOs are the more capable of detecting early warning signs; international NGOs are best placed to encourage external intervention and to channel resources to local partners.

Human rights and famine monitoring provide two models of early warning. Human rights violations are often the first signs of abuse of power and the exacerbation of tensions. So calling attention to them is one way of sounding warning about potential violent conflicts, refugee flows, and internal displacements. In famines, media reports of early indicators raise public expectations and put pressures on governments to act. The more open, the more democratic the state or

region, the easier it is for early warnings to be raised, and the more likely that they will be heeded.

The relevance of famine, or even human rights alerting mechanisms, for conflict warning is limited, for two reasons: famines and human rights abuses can be defined by well-established standards whereas the work of identifying conflict indicators is just beginning; and, unlike human rights violations, which can be investigated by fact-finding missions, monitoring conflicts requires a long-term presence on the ground and a broad political mandate.

Conflict-prone societies can be identified by key background factors: unequal access to entitlements, social cleavages, and historical grievances. But the presence of one of more of these factors does not inevitably lead to violence. Social stresses are often tolerated so long as political institutions are seen to be legitimate and even-handed. The breakdown of political legitimacy is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the slide of a society into turmoil. That is why democracies do better than autocracies at containing conflict.

Assaults on democratic institutions such as a free press and an independent judiciary, and on democratic freedoms such as free speech and unimpeded travel, are telltale signs of an incipient crisis. Although different communities have different breaking points, the intensification of intergroup hostility tends to follow certain patterns. Signal flares to watch for include: statements of extreme threat; ritual acts to promote group unity and legitimize violence; dehumanization of opponents; and the redefinition of political divisions in emotionally-charged ethnic, religious, or tribal terms. Accelerators like propaganda, misinformation, rumors, or symbolic violence intensify the impact of triggering events.

Hostilities may be precipitated by an individual who manipulates or articulates ethic sentiment or by an event such as an assassination of a prominent leader. The start of a destructive spiral is indicated by breakdowns in communication; increasing rigidity of positions; rising levels of hostility; and casting the conflict as a zero-sum game. Other indicators of escalation are fewer or shorter pauses between incidents; increasingly frequent demonstrations; the training or arming of fighting units; and empty streets.

Once negative mechanisms have been activated, the only viable measure of conflict prevention may consist of creating a stalemate to

buy time. For conflict management to work, there must at least be some open communications channels, some flexibility of positions, and some acceptance of a rival's legitimacy.

Field diplomacy, a new and untried form of intervention, may assist in the deescalation of conflict in the new era of hostilities. Field diplomacy involves sending non-governmental teams to regions of antagonism for extended periods in order to stimulate and support local initiatives for peace building and, if necessary, for early warning. The aim of field diplomacy is to create a network of trusted persons to monitor the ongoing conflict and to create a favorable climate for creating solutions.

Each conflict is unique. Nevertheless, there are categories of preconflict conditions into which NGO and other observers on the ground can sort indicators and precursors. Long lists of generalizable indicators are obviously useful; even more helpful, the conferees agreed, were hierarchal rankings of those same indicators. What are the most reliable indicators of incipient crises? How should NGOs sort the several varieties of warning signs? What are the most sensitive and the most telling precursors, especially in potentially genocidal situations?

Representatives of NGOs, especially those focused primarily on relief but constantly thrust into conflict situations, thirst for such guidelines. This need for clear frameworks, and for training, was emphasized by a survey of international NGO operations in conflict situations across the globe. It concluded that international humanitarian NGOs had performed poorly in conflict situations, sometimes exacerbating hostilities that they were intent on ameliorating.

In Bosnia, for example, the documentation of war crimes and human rights abuses has hardened attitudes and reinforced grievances on both sides. Serbs are more certain than ever that they are universally misunderstood. This, in turn, makes them all the more unwilling to negotiate; having been portrayed as monsters, they are convinced that they cannot get a fair deal.

The best known example of counter-productive aid is in the Rwandan refugee camps in Goma, Zaire, where relief supplies were commandeered by Hutu killers and used both to hold civilians hostage and to rebuild their military prowess. Bosnia is another setting where a relief effort can be seen to be prolonging war by introducing

supplies that are siphoned off to support fighting factions. These two cases underline a widely applicable principle: that when outside resources are brought into an environment of scarcity and inter-group hostility, they seldom reduce tensions and more often become a further cause of contention. But here, too, a moral dilemma arises: should civilians be allowed to starve if feeding them means also strengthening their killers?

When international NGOs negotiate with warring parties to grant safe passage for relief supplies, doing so can have negative side-effects: it gives armies time to rest and regroup; and it legitimizes their claims to control access to life-supporting materials. When NGOs hire armed guards, as they did in Somalia, they take an additional step toward accepting the legitimacy of military might.

As grassroots workers, NGOs are in a position to spot warnings of disaster as well as signals of hope and deescalation. Often, positive and negative indicators occur simultaneously. NGOs need to be alert to such complexity and to seek opportunities to accentuate positive developments by exploiting local stocks of social capital, such as local peacebuilders.

For local people to attempt to stem the tide of ethnic rivalry is difficult and dangerous. NGOs can help to create supportive space for independently-minded individuals who feel silenced by political pressures but are nonetheless ready to take a stand. Local NGOs and international NGOs can both sound the early warning bells. In that way, and also by assisting and empowering local peace-preventing individuals, they can contribute significantly to the deflecting, if not the avoidance of further hostilities. Empowering peacemaking forces is one of the ways in which NGOs can become peacemakers themselves.

Eight humanitarian crises in four continents were examined for lessons applicable to preventive diplomacy, early warning and early action, and peacemaking. In only one of the cases studied--South Africa--was major conflict actually averted, though black-on-black violence continued after blacks and whites had entered into negotiations for a multiracial government. Warning lights are on in Nigeria and Macedonia, where violence could erupt at any time. In the Sudan, Guatemala, Rwanda, and Burundi, violence has been chronic for years; all four are studies of the failure of the international community to react, despite warnings issued both early and late. The most notable partial success story is in Sri Lanka, where local human rights groups brought in international agencies to avert a humanitarian disaster that might have resulted from a long-running ethnic war.

The record of NGO effectiveness in these eight conflict zones is mixed. Warnings were duly conveyed and reconciliation attempted. But nowhere did NGOs have the capacity to compel a response from internal powerholders or an intervention from outside. If issuing warnings without an assurance of action is not only futile but dangerous, should it be attempted at all?

Five of the cases consist of NGOs operating actively and attempting to intervene effectively in zones of continuing ethnic civil insurgency. In the other three, NGOs are attempting to minimize or avoid the imminent outbreak of or a renewal of hostilities between antagonistic rivals.

The Five Continuing Ethnic Insurgencies:

Rwanda

"We knew," says Alison Des Forges of Human Rights Watch. The problem in Rwanda in 1994 was not one of not knowing, but of not acting. Human rights activists in Kigali alerted foreign partners days (even weeks) in advance that a catastrophe was coming, though not even on-site Cassandras could predict the precipitating event--the murder of the country's president in an air crash--or the scale of the killing that followed. What should have been more predictable was the disbelief and unresponsiveness exhibited by the rest of the world.

The cataclysm, in which up to 1 million people died and another 2 million were displaced, was the climax of more than four decades of Hutu-Tutsi hostility. When Rwanda became independent in 1962, minority rule by Tutsi chiefs gave way to Hutu majority governments. Many thousands of Tutsi went into exile in neighboring countries. An abortive Tutsi invasion in 1990 was followed by widespread arrests. In August 1993, an internationally-mediated peace accord between the Hutu-led government and Tutsi rebels (attacking from Ugandan bases in the north) was signed and a tiny UN peacekeeping force dispatched.

When Hutu extremists began their killing spree in April 1994, Tutsi exiles invaded again. This time they succeeded in seizing power, setting off a massive flight of Hutu refugees and one of the world's largest, messiest, and most controversial relief operations.

Before Rwanda became synonymous with genocide, it had been a favored child of international development agencies for at least a decade. When repression intensified after the 1990 invasion, local human rights groups started up and collaborated with international NGOs. Relations became close and were based on mutual trust and credibility: "It was like crying on the shoulders of friends," says Monique Mujawamariya, a Kigali-based local NGO leader. She chose seven foreign partners as the most reliable outlets for her disaster warnings, dropping several dozen others whom she regarded as less than fully committed to her crusade.

Mujawamariya and her NGO colleagues investigated and publicized atrocities committed by government forces and escorted foreign ambassadors to massacre sites. Sometimes, with the help of humane policemen, she managed to warn prospective victims and save them. Most of the time before April 1994, the aim of her human rights monitoring was to pressure foreign governments into restraining the Rwandan (Hutu-run) regime.

But there was no reaction until an international commission produced a report on human rights abuses in March 1993. Then the United States redirected its financial aid away from government agencies and channelled it instead through NGOs; Belgium withdrew its ambassador. (The killings stopped when the commission arrived in Kigali, and resumed within hours after its departure.)

Diplomatic pressure helped to bring about the Arusha agreement in August 1993 between the Hutu-led government and the Tutsi rebel

army, but that concord was quickly repudiated by extremists. The assassination of the Burundian president in October 1993, and the massacre of 50,000 Tutsi that followed, evoked no international intervention.

That failure to act sent a message to Rwanda's Hutu militants. They began preparing for a further bloodbath: training militia; distributing arms; and broadcasting hate propaganda. They adjusted their tactics in response to foreign pressures, shifting from using state radio to using a private station for their propaganda, and from using the army to using the militia for their killing instruments. They tested international reactions with political killings in early 1994. Again, there was no perceptible response.

The UN Human Rights Commission, presented with a report on Rwandan atrocities, told Human Rights Watch/Africa that it already had too many African countries on its agenda; come back next year, it said.

In March 1994, Mujawamariya knew that the apocalypse was at hand. She sent her children out of Kigali and warned friends and colleagues to leave. (Three later died with air tickets in their pockets.) Although she was aware that preparations were being made, she still had trouble herself coming to terms with the unimaginable reality of impending genocide. On March 24, 1994, she dictated a three-page fax on the impending catastrophe to Africa Watch, then held it for two days because she worried that it was too alarmist. When the Human Rights Watch director for Africa telephoned on March 28, again Mujawamariya had second thoughts: "We all fear looking ridiculous; if hysterical fear is heard with skepticism, it is difficult to cope." Africa Watch took Mujawamariya's message to Washington, the latest of many that winter. On April 7, it was the turn of Africa Watch to feel distraught at not having recognized a true prophecy of doom.

About 2,500 UN troops were in place when the killings began. But they were used only to supervise the evacuation of foreign nationals, including international NGO workers. Then the troops themselves were withdrawn by the UN, lacking a Security Council mandate. Troop commanders later said that it would have taken no more than 200 men to have saved at least the orphans of Kigali.

African NGOs pleaded with the OAU and with African governments to intervene. The United States promised logistical support, but for three

months the Department of Defense and the State Department haggled over how much the logistical items would cost, and who would pay for them.

Africa Watch bombarded the Security Council with warnings and pleas. Eventually, it was invited to brief members privately. The Council then voted to send UN troops back to Rwanda, but it was months before they were actually despatched.

Africa Watch now regrets that it did not try harder to rally public opinion. Sympathetic U.S. officials told them: make more noise, we're not feeling the heat.

Rwanda is a "dream" laboratory for the study of the pathology of NGOs, said Christian Hennemeyer of Catholic Relief Services in Rwanda: "All that knowledge, hard work, and goodwill counted for exactly nothing." The point, he continued, is that "information does not equal action." But neither did it equal preparedness for disaster. In April 1994, Hennemeyer said that there had been "an atmosphere of tempered optimism" among the fifteen international NGOs on the ground, all of them providing relief services or doing development work with local partners.

When the explosion came, all NGOs, foreign and domestic, closed down Rwandan-based operations except for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) soon restarted relief work out of Burundi. The other NGOs disappeared from the scene during April and May and resumed relief activities in June from Uganda. The vast majority were unwilling to work in the chaos that was Rwanda.

Today, about 170 foreign NGOs are registered in Kigali, where they have supplanted the state in providing medical care, agricultural support, and social services. Too many do not know when or how to let the state resume its functions. Rwanda has become a milch cow for NGOs -- an enormous fund-raising opportunity. Most potent for inducing donations are stories about and photographs of abandoned children and the sick. Not enough NGOs are skilled at delivering food aid to large populations; not enough know how to do agricultural rehabilitation.

Amateurs also predominate in the human rights field. National NGOs are better qualified, but many of their leaders and workers fled or were

killed. Local NGOs tend to be dependent on single charismatic figures; if that person goes, the agency collapses. When local NGOs return, they often find their niches filled by international agencies. Thus the more capable locals are inundated with foreign money and mandates.

"Everyone is lost and confused in Rwanda," says Charles Petrie of the UN's Department of Humanitarian Affairs. "We are marginal actors, at best modifying the course of events. We are supporting the killers in their contention that they are victims and reinforcing the Tutsi in their perception that they are alone. Under the guise of neutrality we're politically naive and doing more harm than good."

Burundi

Burundi is another Rwanda waiting to happen. This "faux twin" next door, with a similar ethnic mix, experienced a forerunner of the Rwandan massacres in the autumn of 1993: the first-ever Hutu president was murdered and vengeance killings by both Tutsi and Hutu left 50,000-100,000 dead. The assassination and its timing were not anticipated, but ethnic strife and violence had been a feature of Burundian life for decades. A massacre in 1972 had claimed 100,000-200,000 victims and decimated the Hutu elite.

Since the bloody autumn of 1993, tension has remained high, punctuated by frequent outbreaks of murderous violence and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. In 1995, a coalition government barely functions and exerts little control over the Tutsi-dominated army.

A dozen international NGOs, some long-time veterans of Burundi like CRS, and some quick-response groups like MSF, have concentrated on emergency relief. The UNHCR, UNICEF, the World Food Program, and WHO are also active in Burundi. The indigenous NGO sector is weak, although Caritas Burundi and the Burundian Chapter of the Red Cross have been active.

Coordination, division of labor, and information-sharing among NGOs and UN agencies, has been good. CRS reports that, through a policy of strict neutrality in allocating aid, it has managed to avoid charges of ethnic favoritism.

The volatile political situation is monitored by a UN special representative, an OAU observer mission, a delegate from the

European Union and diplomats from the United States, France, and Belgium. In the expectation of another cataclysm, the international press is also watching Burundi closely; violent incidents are widely reported.

International NGOs are not actively involved in ethnic reconciliation or conflict prevention in Burundi except as a byproduct of their humanitarian work. They have no influence on the army or the warring militias who are responsible for most civilian casualties. But, along with the rest of the international community, they act as "annoying witnesses," calling attention to an ongoing crisis.

CRS is supporting a pilot reconciliation project of the Burundi Catholic Church, at both parish and national levels. Search for Common Ground is proposing to sponsor town meetings across the country.

The Office of the Special UN Representative has taken the lead in promoting negotiations among Burundian politicians. But the church has also been active in urging talks between the majority coalition and the opposition; two Catholic bishops, one Hutu and one Tutsi, serve on a mediating forum which helped to put the present interim government in place in October 1994.

Continuing mediation and negotiation have been required to hold this fragile mechanism together. Extremists have remained outside the political process and are often the cause of breakdowns and killings.

Burundi is an example of a sudden-onset emergency followed by an ongoing crisis or mature emergency. It is in need of continuous response and monitoring. Many of the people who were displaced by the October 1993 spasm have been helped to resume normal lives, but new victims are constantly being generated. The country is also home to hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees. Their recent attempt to flee once again into Tanzania caused further disruption. Fear is pervasive among both refugees and the local population.

The central question in Burundi is whether there will be another violent upheaval and, if so, whether the outside world will intervene. Africa Watch, sensing more official international responsiveness in the wake of the Rwandan disaster, believes that concerted world action is not ruled out. African governments may be willing to rush into Burundi in

an emergency. (Africa now provides ninety percent of the peacekeepers in Rwanda.)

For now, Burundi is a subject of seminars. African parliamentarians are working with the National Democratic Institute and other NGOs to avert disaster. International NGOs and others also participate in a Washington-based Burundi Policy Forum. There is an International Working Group on Burundi in London.

The Sudan

Civil war has convulsed the Sudan, Africa's largest state, for most of the past four decades. The African Christian peoples of the south, claiming forty years of discrimination, seek autonomy or independence from the Sudan's Arab and fundamentalist Muslim government. More than 1 million southerners have died, and 1 million have been displaced in the bitter conflict. The southern way of life has largely been destroyed, and malnutrition and famine have become commonplace.

By 1991, after a struggle renewed in 1983, the rebel movement controlled most of southern Sudan. But then the Southern Peoples Liberation Movement split along ethnic lines, and another destructive conflict erupted. In 1994 and 1995, the Sudanese army took advantage of battles between the southern Dinka and Nuer factions of the Movement to regain large swathes of territory once held by the united rebel army.

For NGOs, the Sudan represents a chronic and complex humanitarian emergency. Occasional months of relative stability have been followed by longer periods of acute turmoil. Throughout, Western NGOs have rushed in to deal with food crises, beginning in 1984, when the northern government could not and would not cope. International NGOs took over the relief effort and set up an early warning system to detect signs of starvation. Spearheaded by church-based groups, NGOs then expanded into conflict-torn areas of the south, where they became conduits for information about the progress and destruction of the war.

Fighting escalated sharply in 1987, when northern tribal militia were inducted to fight for the government and were armed with AK-47s. A brief interval of civilian rule ended in 1989, when the present Islamic extremist ruler, General Omar al-Bashir, took power as a result of a

Libyan-financed coup. Bashir's junta is responsive to the guidance of Hassan al-Turabi, a cleric of deep fundamentalist fervor.

Since 1989, international NGOs and UN agencies have worked in the southern Sudan under the authority of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) and, more recently, the Nairobi-based Operation Lifeline Sudan, Southern Sector, both of which provide famine relief, and attempt to guarantee access to needy civilians. International NGOs have tended to operate in an emergency relief mode, although in recent years a larger share of their funds has been devoted to supporting local food production, promoting barter trade, and rebuilding the southern Sudan's infrastructure.

Indigenous NGOs were created only after 1991, to assist the shift from relief to development. Both the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA), the mainstream SPLM's humanitarian agency, and the Relief Association of Southern Sudan (RASS), of the SPLA-United, were identified by the OLS as the principal bodies charged with coordinating and facilitating aid in southern Sudan. Both are still structurally weak, and are partisan and vulnerable to local pressures. Local NGOs have weak absorptive capacities: one newly-formed NGO received $500,000 in two years from donors and international NGOs and spent most of it in Nairobi.

The few international NGOs working in the southern Sudan before 1991 knew that the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) was a ruthless, autocratically-led movement that was sowing discontent among local people. However, they did not foresee the violent internecine struggle that ensued. After the split that year, some southerners blamed relief agencies for having provoked it by linking Dr. John Garang, the American-educated leader of the SPLM, to Mengistu Haile Mariam, Ethiopia's ousted Marxist dictator. Others accused NGOs of offending the dignity of the northern Sudanese by eroding their sovereignty. Yet, the presence of foreigners in the south may well have prevented an extermination campaign.

Arguably, the most successful act of external mediation has been that by the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD). Its peace initiative brought together presidents from four of the Sudan's African neighbors in 1990, in an abortive attempt at mediation.

Among non-political groups in the southern Sudan, Roman Catholic and Anglican churches have the best ties to the two insurgency movements, although the ethnic divide between Dinka and Nuer is also reflected in the church. Local churchmen have quietly sought to bring the warring factions together.

In late 1991, the churches joined Kenyan-based peace groups, such as People for Peace in Africa, the National Council of Churches in Kenya, the Nairobi Peace Initiative, and the Mennonite Central Committee in sponsoring reconciliation talks in Nairobi. Regionally-based churches provided objectivity, Sudanese churches provided local knowledge, and international NGOs helped with funding. But the talks failed and, three years later, the wars go on. Recently, the Sudanese churches have started a program of community dialogues, led by the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC).

Most NGOs and churches participate in coordination forums at the local level and also cooperate with the humanitarian wings of both fighting factions in promoting reconciliation. The SPLM, the larger rebel group, manages camps for the displaced and, until recently, controlled much of the humanitarian aid in the southern Sudan. In such settings, relief cannot be insulated from politics.

Sri Lanka

For a dozen years, civil war has raged in Sri Lanka between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a radical Tamil secessionist group, and the largely Sinhalese armed forces. The struggle has left more than 30,000 dead, and displaced more than 1 million people. Most of the fighting has taken place in and around the Tamil base area on the northern Jaffna peninsula, but terrorist strikes in Colombo, the country's capital, and elsewhere, have killed hundreds of people, including a Sri Lankan president and half a dozen other Sinhalese political leaders. In 1991, LTTE assassins crossed the Palk Strait separating Sri Lanka from India to murder Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu, home to 50 million Tamils.

Sri Lanka's is not a story of conflict averted or even conflict contained. But Neelan Tiruchelvam, a leading civil rights campaigner, argued at the Cambridge meeting that both human rights abuses and his country's humanitarian crisis would have been far more acute without the intervention of local and international NGOs. Imaginative and

constructive cooperation between local and international human rights organizations prevented severe deprivation among Tamil civilians on the Jaffna peninsula by enabling the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to deliver relief supplies to the people of that isolated enclave. The ICRC also facilitated a realistic approach to peacemaking by providing a conduit for communications between the two contending sides.

Sri Lanka was the first country in Asia with a true two-party democracy and elections that brought about peaceful transfers of power. But majoritarian democracy also helped to widen the island's ethnic divide between the Buddhist Sinhalese majority (seventy-four percent of the population) and the Hindu Tamil minority (seventeen percent). In 1956, Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike, father of the present president, stirred up both Sinhalese nationalism and Tamil resentment with a vote-seeking ploy of declaring Sinhala the country's only official language.

Since then, communal tensions have erupted sporadically, and Tamil protests over discrimination in employment, university admissions, and the use of their Tamil language, have become progressively more militant. In 1983, after the largest-ever communal bloodbath in Sri Lanka, when as many as 3,000 Tamils were said to have been killed, and nearly sixty percent of the Tamils living in Colombo were turned into refugees, the LTTE set out to eliminate less extreme Tamil factions, cut off Jaffna from the rest of the country, and launched a war of unbridled secession.

Three local human rights NGOs began actively documenting abuses and pursuing political solutions in the late 1970s. Even before the onset of all-out war, they proposed constitutional adjustments and alerted political leaders to the need to rectify ethnic inequities. They found minimal support in the Sinhalese community, however, for their activities.

Two other local NGOs provided legal aid to political prisoners and formed linkages with Amnesty International, Human Rights/Asia (Asia Watch), and the International Commission of Jurists, which publicized their findings. This led to a resolution on Sri Lanka in the UN Human Rights Commission in 1986, calling for peacemaking and inviting in the ICRC.

In 1987, international criticism jolted the Sri Lankan government into

signing an accord with India that promised political devolution and full civil rights for Tamils, and gave the go-ahead to an Indian army operation that was intended to put down the Tamil insurgency.

India's military intervention was a high-cost, high-casualty, atrocity-laden failure that hardened Sri Lankan government attitudes toward India and toward the Tamil rebels. Subsequent offers of foreign mediation were rejected. But international agencies performed critical services that local NGOs were barred from providing. The ICRC visited prisoners, traced missing persons, ensured the passage of food and medicine to Jaffna, and transmitted confidential messages between the Tamil Tigers and the government. Sri Lanka also became the first place where the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) extended its mandate to assist not only refugees but also peoples internally displaced.

None of this ICRC or UNHCR activity would have happened without the advocacy and documentation of local NGOs, supplemented for some time by local citizens' committees. But it also would not have happened if the Sri Lankan government had been wholly repressive and had not operated within at least minimal democratic constraints.

Imperfect democracy in which majoritarianism overrode protection for minority rights was a cause of Sri Lanka's civil war; it accentuated minority grievances and threatened their identity. Yet democracy also provided space within which NGOs could operate. In late 1994, the election of a new national government with a mandate to talk to the Tamil Tigers offered the best prospects of a peace settlement for over a decade. Both sides agreed on a truce, while government negotiators met LTTE representatives for talks about talks. Local NGOs seized the moment to launch a peace movement. But by mid-1995, despite government concessions, including a reopening of land routes to the north and a reconstruction effort in Jaffna, the peace initiative had failed. More than 350 government troops had been killed by LTTE attacks in violation of the ceasefire, and negotiations were stillborn. The civil war continued unabated. NGOs resumed their search for ways in which to intervene constructively.

Guatemala

Apart from a decade of reformist government from 1944-1954, which was ended by a U.S.-supported military coup, Guatemala's modern history is characterized by dictatorial rule. There have been two

phases of NGO activity punctuated by severe internal conflict: the 1976 earthquake and its aftermath; and the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, when a gradual democratization allowed the creation of an indigenous NGO network.

Before the earthquake, only a few North American and European NGOs had programs in Guatemala. Dozens more arrived to work on earthquake relief and reconstruction, among them Save the Children groups from seven countries. Breaking with a tradition of independent action, these seven fused their resources and staffs to form a Save the Children Alliance, known locally as Alianza, with the Norwegian representative as coordinator.

Alianza chose two areas for its post-earthquake work: a municipality of 42,000 people called Joyabaj and a neighboring rural area called Southern Quiche'. Both programs focused on strengthening the problem-solving capabilities of indigenous community groups rather than carrying out reconstruction directly. This focus was a matter of philosophy allied to practicality. "We had neither the resources nor the staff to rebuild the municipio," explained Tom Lent, of the Norwegian Save the Children group.

From the start, Alianza had a five-year phase-out strategy. In 1979, it expanded into two new areas. But within a year, in response to a growing activism among Mayan workers and farmers and a growing guerilla insurgency, a new cycle of official violence and repression began. In late 1980, Alianza was forced to close down its Joyabaj and Southern Quiche' programs after a local priest was assassinated and relatives of local staff members were killed by government death squads. Other international NGOs in the Chimaltenango region--Oxfam, Norwegian Church Aid, and World Neighbors--left the country. These were warnings that helped to move President Carter's administration to cut off military aid to Guatemala. But when NGOs and churches produced reports of further atrocities in the early 1980s, there was no international response.

Alianza stayed in Guatemala to work in other, less troubled regions. By 1983, it had evolved into a national NGO with 100 percent Guatemalan staff and directors. Ten years later, it had programs in many parts of the country. It is now playing a major role in Guatemala's NGO community.

The counter-insurgency campaign of the early 1980s left 75,000 dead

and 440 villages destroyed. The election of Guatemala's second civilian president in 1985 created a new climate in which NGOs had limited freedom to pursue labor issues, land reform, and human rights. Two kinds of NGOs sprang up: popular organizations, aiming at righting political and economic injustice; and Mayan groups, formed to promote Mayan rights and preserve Mayan culture. Mayan groups came together under an umbrella Council of Mayan Organizations. Human rights, labor, and peasant organizations set up a coalition called the Popular Action Syndicate (UASP) to mount demonstrations, lobby the legislature, share information and skills, and link up with international NGOs. Among its members are an urban human rights group, Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM), which documented disappearances and lobbied for the prosecution of those responsible; a widows' mutual aid organization, CONAVIGUA; a Mayan peasant organization (CUC), which occupied farms and fought for the dissolution of the army's feared Civilian Self-Defense Patrols (PACs); and another anti-PAC group, CERF, that took its charges against the PACs to the Inter-American Human Rights Court.

Among the targets of the PACs are NGOs. The military believes that NGOs sympathize with the insurgents. NGO activists hence have been harassed, threatened, and murdered. Demands for the abolition of PACs have been endorsed by the UN Commission on Human Rights, but civilian governments have not yet dared to curb the patrols. Still, under a third civilian president, elected in 1993, the space for NGOs to operate has been enlarged and democratic institutions, such as the constitutional court and the human rights ombudsman, have been strengthened. The executive has ruled that NGOs can no longer be described as "subversive".

Guatemala now has an estimated 700 local NGOs, mostly small, community-based groups. But severe limits on their ability to operate remain. A culture of distrust stops them from sharing with one another and with foreigners reports about potential violence. An erratic telephone system and electricity supply also prevents the timely transmission of information. International partners could help hard-pressed indigenous groups by providing vehicles, telephones, and fax machines. Amnesty International and Americas Watch keep in contact with Guatemalan counterparts, but verifying their reports is very difficult because of restrictions on travel and the continuing climate of fear.

In the absence of either humanitarian entrepreneurs or direct U.S.

Congressional or administrative interest, warnings about human rights abuses in Guatemala have failed to strike a responsive international chord, although the uncovering of evidence of collaboration between the Central Intelligence Agency and the Guatemalan military continues.

Until there is both greater mutual confidence among NGOs in Guatemala and a withdrawal of the military and their PACs from rural areas, it will be premature for NGOs to contemplate an early warning system. In other words, early warning will not be feasible until it is no longer needed.

The Three Preconflict Cases:

Macedonia

Ethnic tensions are running high in this former Yugoslav republic of 2 million people, so high that Violeta Petroska-Beska of the Ethnic Conflict Resolution Project in Skopje sees a possibility of conflict even more consuming than the struggle in nearby Bosnia. Yet, while fear of ethnic violence between Macedonian Slavs and Macedonian Albanians is becoming part of everyday life, the terrible example of Bosnia gives people pause. External threats to Macedonia's four-year-old nationhood from Greece, Bulgaria, and Albania exert a similarly sobering effect. Another explanation advanced to explain the preservation of today's fragile peace is national character: the same passivity and fatalism that has blocked the building of civil society in Macedonia seems to be retarding the escalation of ethnic disputes into violence.

Profound mutual mistrust has already led to an almost complete separation of the two main ethnic groups, the Macedonians (sixty-five percent) and the Albanians (twenty-three percent). This separation in turn lessens the likelihood of random clashes igniting a conflagration. Ethnic hostility in eastern Europe is often an expression of other post-communist discontents. It is rooted more in history than in economics; although Albanians are mostly poorer than Macedonians, even well-off Albanians feel discriminated against. Local NGOs, like all other institutions in this new nation, are divided along ethnic/religious lines; very few are currently working to lower tensions or restore trust. Those groups that are engaged in such work tend to be organizationally weak and under-financed. They welcome financial support from international NGOs but are wary of their intentions.

Mistrust is endemic in Macedonian society, as is an aversion to authority, both legacies of the communist years. The "Other" is automatically an object of suspicion. Foreigners are assumed to be pursuing hidden agendas or serving as agents of their governments, or both. NGOs may also be also tarred by association with the government, which has to approve their projects. On the other hand, those NGOs which receive official support for relief or humanitarian work are the best placed to promote democratic values. The sheer numbers of international NGOs that have crowded into Macedonia in the past two years constitutes an early warning of impending crisis.

Some NGOs are assisting local communities in order to foster a sense of local-level harmony and encourage civic participation. For example, CRS works in rural and mixed-population areas to improve school buildings and set up parent-teacher associations across ethic lines.

The government opposes any form of affirmative action. Local sensitivities would anyway mandate that NGOs avoid appearing to favor one ethnic group over another, even if such preferences were economically and morally warranted.

Search for Common Ground, an American NGO, tries to work around the ethnic divide by rephrasing or repackaging issues as rural-urban rather than Albanian-Macedonian. It attempts to persuade people of both backgrounds to listen.

The outside agencies with the most influence are the UN and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, agencies which have engaged in mediating ethnic conflicts and negotiating agreements between opposing communities.

In this suspicious setting, NGOs have had to collaborate in public, transparent ways so as to avoid charges of having hidden agendae. They also have had to be very careful about information-sharing, for example, with diplomats. Yet USAID-funded NGOs have no choice but to keep the local USAID director and the American embassy informed.

For NGOs in Macedonia, the advantages of formal information-sharing arrangements would not offset the risks, unless there were an assurance of responsive action; something no government would or could provide. Eran Fraenkel, director of Search for Common Ground in Macedonia, concluded that the most sensible course for NGOs was

to explore informal information-sharing, not only among themselves and with the local diplomatic community, but also with NGOs in neighboring countries that pose threats to Macedonia.

Petroska-Beska proposes a division of labor among NGOs, with local ones tackling ethnic conflict at the grassroots level, while international agencies focus on problems with neighboring countries and deal with the central government. She also urges international agencies to lend support, money, and training to local groups. Locals will judge foreign partners by whether they are truly independent of their governments. Trust has to be built up over time. She suggests that sustained action will be necessary to reestablish communication between the Macedonians and the Albanians and to dispel stereotypes and misapprehensions. Collaboration between indigenous and international NGOs would facilitate such a process.

Nigeria

Ethnic and religious divisions are sharper in Nigeria today than at any time since Biafra's secessionist war in the late 1960s. Those divisions are compounded by a collapsing economy, high levels of corruption, wholesale official abuses of power, and the snuffing out of democracy by the ruling military junta. Additionally and dangerously, these societal strains are for the first time being reflected in the ranks of the army. Ethnic violence capable of embroiling the entire country of 100 million may very well erupt first in the army and then spread to the rest of the nation.

Religious disturbances, as one variety of civil strife, punctuated the post-Biafran societal calm of the early 1980s, after the Iranian revolution inspired Shiite militancy in many Islamic countries. Followers of a fundamentalist Islamic preacher attacked the northern cities of Kano in 1980, and Kaduna and Bulunkun in 1982; religious riots in that last year in Bulutkutu spread to other cities. Over the next several years, religious uprisings in the north were frequent, deadly, and divisive. They gradually took on an ethnic coloring.

Although ethnicity exercises a pervasive influence on social relations in Nigeria, there were only occasional, localized ethnic clashes in the two decades after the Biafra war. But a political crisis, incited by the cancellation of the presidential election of 1993, has now turned into an ethnic struggle that pits northern Islamists allied to the military junta against southerners, many of whom are Christians or animists.

Nigeria has several active human rights groups, mostly Lagos-based, among them the Constitutional Rights Project (CRP), which pursues a lonely, non-political course. Some of the local groups do not even have working telephones and are in need of technical assistance and training. The local press is intimidated and self-censoring.

CRP and other local NGOs gave early warning of the government's anti-democratic intentions in the period leading up to the 1993 vote and then led massive demonstrations after General Ibrahim Babangida annulled the apparent victory of Moshood Abiola, one of two presidential candidates that he himself had handpicked. Protests continued after another military takeover later in the same year, by General Sani Abacha. Since then, as human rights violations have worsened, local human rights groups have adopted a strategy of "mobilization of shame," targeting foreign governments, oil companies, the UN, and the press in a campaign to embarrass the Nigerian government into restoring democracy.

Early this year, the CPR filed suit in the Lagos High Court, seeking to compel the junta to hand over power by January, 1996. Human Rights Watch/Africa, Amnesty International, and the International Commission of Jurists have echoed this call. Africa Watch is better at working the corridors of power than at mobilizing public opinion. This is what Transafrica Forum has now set out to do, rousing Americans, particularly African-Americans, about Nigeria, on the model of its crusade against the apartheid regime in South Africa. A roundtable of international NGOs is also focusing on Nigeria, including representatives of the AFL-CIO. But there is no sign yet of common cause between human rights groups and development organizations.

Human rights NGOs are urging international diplomatic intervention and a tightening of sanctions on Nigeria's military regime. The United States is said to be considering imposing an aid ban, tied to Nigeria's involvement in drug trafficking, but this could hurt USAID-dependent groups like CPR.

South Africa

Fratricide averted in the land of apartheid is a strong advertisement for NGO-mediated conflict resolution in ethnically conflictual situations. Vasu Gounden credits community organizations and NGOs with spearheading the first phase of what he calls a negotiation

revolution. At a time of brutal conflict between the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party and the allegedly Xhosa-led African National Congress (ANC), beginning in 1985, and accelerating in 1990, after Nelson Mandela's release from prison, the strategy of community organizations and NGOs was to mobilize public opinion at home and abroad, providing continuous early warnings of ethnic violence. They attempted to detribalize the conflict by involving a cross-section of the affected populations in the provinces of Natal and the Transvaal in grassroots movements of peace.

Between 1985 and 1994, about 50,000 Africans were killed in tit-for-tat attacks across ethnic lines and within ethnic communes but across political lines. The Freedom Party fought to establish itself provincially against the ANC, South Africa's historic leading anti-apartheid opponent, and nationally (with clandestine assistance from the white-officered South African police) to derail the ANC's pretensions to anti-apartheid hegemony in the lengthy runup from 1990, to national elections in 1994. Communities in Natal were riven by Zulu v. Zulu warfare. In the industrial and mining compounds around Johannesburg, the Freedom Party armed and fomented Zulu attacks on non-Zulu supporters of the ANC. Endless national and regional attempts at reconciliation foundered on the rocks of political rivalry. Only locally-based conflict resolution efforts were able to staunch the bloodshed and eventually foster reconciliation on the ground.

These local efforts, as well as the work of local NGOs whose sole but critical role was to note and record every intercommunal attack, led to the dispatch of international observers from the Organization of African Unity, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the United Nations. These observers monitored the factional struggle and interposed themselves between contending groups. They thus helped to reduce opportunities for conflict. The three local NGOs which tracked atrocities and recorded every death were often the only sources of news for South Africans as well as for foreign observers.

Once a National Peace Accord had been signed in 1994, NGOs took on the task of using the new mechanisms for mediation and democracy building. At the same time, NGOs continued providing early and late warnings of clashes in Natal between Zulu and Zulu.
In mid-1995, as the ANC and the Freedom Party quarreled anew about the level of autonomy in the KwaZulu-Natal Region and about promises of international mediation for resolving the conflict, Zulu once again attacked Zulu on the ground. Local NGOs renewed their

reconciliation activity at the community level.

The eight conflict situations and the experiences of local and international NGOs amid both those hot and those dangerously warm wars permit the drawing of lessons and generalizations about a host of peace-building issues.

Early Warning

Abundant early warning signals are available well before intergroup tensions develop into combat. Local NGOs know when antagonisms are escalating. So do well-placed international developmental NGOs, media representatives, embassies, multilateral agencies, and others active within a state or working along ethnic fault lines. Very few conflicts like those in the Sudan, Guatemala, Sri Lanka, or Rwanda burst into flames without a comparatively long period during which the necessary tinder is assembled and one or more sparks are applied. In Macedonia and Burundi, today, the ingredients of a conflagration are in place. And so is a sufficiency of early warning.

In almost all cases, cross-national channels of communication -- informal early warning networks -- are available. The ones in most active use connect indigenous and international human rights organizations. These networks work best when, as in Rwanda, they are based on relationships of familiarity and trust between individuals and institutions. In contrast, the culture of mistrust in Guatemala and Macedonia has made inter-NGO collaboration difficult. In such situations formal early warning systems may be neither feasible nor desirable. A better alternative may be a network of informal networks. Technology makes communicating early warnings rapid and easy, although there are times when news is blacked out, and instances in which people capable of providing early warning are suppressed or expelled.

Given ample crisis indicators, what is needed is not ad hoc, one-off warnings but continuous warnings sounded locally and internationally at every stage leading up to war, at every instance of violence, and at every institutional failure. For example, in Sri Lanka a major role of local NGOs was to call attention steadily, over many years, to the impact of majoritarian democracy on minority rights. In South Africa, continuous monitoring and recording of incidents of violence enabled patterns to be recognized and the local and

international press to be alerted in order to provide coverage as a form of unremitting warning. "It is silence that allows governments to pervert democracy, or ethnic groups to be slaughtered," concluded one of the conference participants.

Nevertheless, the tocsin of early warning will do nothing if it cannot be converted into timely early action. How many indicators predicting conflict are sufficient for action? And which ones should be paid heed? The early warnings were there in Rwanda. Many heard them. But no one acted, even after the warnings had proved correct and a tsunami of genocide had inundated the Rwandan countryside.

How to deliver early warnings so they will remain credible and how to magnify the strength of such signals so they will be audited widely, and in time, are critical questions. Instruments and mechanisms of rapid verification may well be required. But even more fundamental questions concern how best to transform early warning signals into instruments of conflict deescalation, and how early warning indicators can best inspire effective early action.

NGO workers in the field must evaluate the meaning and significance of ominous signals before passing them on to NGO headquarters, to embassies, or to the media. But should there be and could there be a further level of analysis away from the combat zones, in a UN or supraNGO headquarters? Humanitarian relief personnel worry that they lack the expertise professionally to weigh indicators and analyze their intrinsic merit. Several of the conferees asked if training might be required and whether some systematized method of evaluating early warning indicators could be developed and provided to fieldworkers. Or should fieldworkers confine their early warning efforts to passing raw data forward, leaving evaluation to experts? Few international NGO persons are equipped to make the necessary distinctions in the field.

Early Action

For early action to be effective, distinctions must be made among early warnings that require instant responses, those that require gradual responses, and those that need to be audited only. Prospective interveners need to have a clear understanding of the costs and benefits of action and inaction. Timing is all. It is critical to ascertain how rapidly antagonisms are leading to outbreaks of violence. No one could have predicted the crisis-triggering crash of an aircraft in

Rwanda, but had the world community observed the abundant warnings of impending clashes, effective preventive action might have been available in time to forestall genocide.

Reconciliation and Negotiation

Continuous promotion of reconciliation and mediation at multiple levels is essential. At the national and at intermediate levels reconciliation and mediation are critical between the government and its rivals and among the rivals themselves. At the local level, similar efforts can prove as or more helpful among members of the various rival communities and between local government and local communities. These efforts include the employment of other open mechanisms for the expression of grievances and informal or formal negotiations by both local and international persons of stature and experience.

Reconciliation often develops unexpectedly out of efforts at raising public awareness. Hostilities can often be avoided if latent antagonisms are somehow emptied of their ethnic content and public awareness is raised about the distortions of inflammatory propaganda. Countering such propaganda, be it ethnic or religious, is critical, even if always difficult and belated. Such efforts can take the form of implementing civic education, opening channels for the expression of local grievances, forming local associations, providing other community-focused possibilities for dialogue, and supporting lonely local peacemakers.

Risks and Dilemmas

NGO reputations for neutrality and objectivity, always in question because of the innate activism of NGO members, are subjected in crises to ever greater strain. NGOs all have to decide when, under what circumstances, how loudly, and at what cost to their other activities they should sound the bells of early warning. Even those NGOs whose efforts are solely devoted to delivering food and other relief supplies often find themselves compelled to make crucial political choices. Moreover, providing humanitarian relief sometimes means displacing governmental structures. Often, too, it can unintentionally open channels for the delivery of arms or the movement of hostile military detachments.

For these reasons, and for many others, the appropriate roles for NGOs in all aspects of preventive diplomacy and conflict avoidance need continuously to be assessed in light of the associated risks to the peoples and countries being assisted. There also needs to be a careful determination by NGOs and others in the field of the appropriate division of labor among the various kinds of NGOs, the UN in its many agencies and under its many mandates, other multilateral and bilateral peacemaking bodies, and local community groups.

As the case studies illustrate, virtually all NGO interventions in complex humanitarian crises are, by intention or default, political. In conveying early warning, NGOs are calling attention to political acts and demanding responses based on political judgment or will. They are also exposing themselves to political risks. But political virginity must at times be forfeited in order to save lives. Without making political noise, NGOs will not make themselves heard in a world already deafened by crisis overload and compassion fatigue.

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The Foundation also founded, and supports, the quarterly journal *International Organization*, published by MIT Press.

THE WORLD PEACE FOUNDATION

The World Peace Foundation was created in 1910 by the imagination and fortune of Edwin Ginn, the Boston publisher, to encourage international peace and cooperation. The Foundation seeks to advance the cause of world peace through study, analysis, and the advocacy of wise action. As an operating, not a grant-giving foundation, it provides financial support only for projects which it has initiated itself.

Edwin Ginn shared the hope of many of his contemporaries that permanent peace could be achieved. That dream was denied by the outbreak of World War I, but the Foundation has continued to attempt to overcome obstacles to international peace and cooperation, drawing for its funding on the endowment bequeathed by the founder. In its early years, the Foundation focused its attention on building the peacekeeping capacity of the League of Nations, and then on the development of world order through the United Nations. The Foundation established and nurtured the premier scholarly journal in its field, *International Organization*, now in its forty-eighth year.

From the 1950s to the early 1990s, mostly a period of bipolar conflict when universal collective security remained unattainable, the Foundation concentrated its activities on improving the working of world order mechanisms, regional security, transnational relations, and the impact of public opinion on American foreign policy. From 1980 to 1993 the Foundation published nineteen books and seven reports on Third World security; on South Africa and other states of southern Africa; on Latin America, the Caribbean, and Puerto Rico; on migration; and on the international aspects of traffic in narcotics. In 1994 and 1995, the Foundation published books on Europe after the Cold War; on the United States, southern Europe, and the countries of the Mediterranean basin; and on reducing the world traffic in conventional arms control.

The Foundation now intends to focus new energies and resources on a series of interrelated projects entitled Preventing Intercommunal Conflict and Humanitarian Crises. These projects proceed from the assumption that large-scale human suffering, wherever it occurs, is a serious and continuing threat to the peace of the world, both engendering and resulting from ethnic, religious, and other intrastate and cross-border conflicts. The Foundation is examining how the forces of world order may most effectively engage in preventive diplomacy, create early warning systems leading to early preventive action, achieve regional conflict avoidance, and eradicate the underlying causes of intergroup enmity and warfare.

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PROGRAM ON NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Harvard Institute for International Development established a Program on Non-Governmental Organizations in mid-1993 to serve two broad objectives. First, to tap resources at Harvard University to help strengthen the strategic and institutional capacity of NGOs working in developing countries and, second, to promote a better academic understanding of the role of the NGO sector in international development.

The Program has two major components: teaching and training plus research and documentation. Under the first component, the Program offers a course on NGOs at Harvard University as well as various training programs for NGO staff. Under the second component, the Program engages in collaborative research with NGOs on selected developmental issues and in collaborative documentation of selected NGO experiences. In addition, the Program runs various seminars and conferences on key development issues. To date, the Program has had two thematic foci: the role of NGOs in conflict resolution and the role of NGOs in promoting economic opportunities for low-income women.

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