Extending The Humanitarian Mandate: Norwegian Church Aid’s Decision To Institutionalize Its Commitment To Peace Work

Mary B. Anderson

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This document was developed as part of a collaborative learning project directed by CDA. It is part of a collection of documents that should be considered initial and partial findings of the project. These documents are written to allow for the identification of cross-cutting issues and themes across a range of situations. Each case represents the views and perspectives of a variety of people at the time when it was written.

These documents do not represent a final product of the project. While these documents may be cited, they remain working documents of a collaborative learning effort. Broad generalizations about the project’s findings cannot be made from a single case.

CDA would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals and agencies involved in donating their time, experience and insights for these reports, and for their willingness to share their experiences.

Not all the documents written for any project have been made public. When people in the area where a report has been done have asked us to protect their anonymity and security, in deference to them and communities involved, we keep those documents private.
"Every morning, I would climb to the top of the hill behind my house and look to see if the Norwegian flag were still flying over the NCA compound. When I saw it there, I would decide it was safe to stay in the area another day.” Quotation from a village leader in a war torn country.

"NCA is like a man who holds a ball of fire in his bare hands and tosses it back and forth from one hand to the other to cool it.” Quotation from a religious leader in another warring society.

I. Introduction: The Focus of this Case

In 1999, the General Secretary of Norwegian Church Aid recommended, and the Board of Directors approved, the establishment of a new Department of Policy and Human Rights positioned within the agency to report directly to the General Secretary and to serve as the locus for NCA's increasing involvement in peace and human rights work. This decision represented an explicit and proactive step to expand NCA's mandate beyond humanitarian and development assistance, to include peace-making, advocacy and human rights/human security. The move was supported politically and financially by the Norwegian Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) under what is referred to as "the Norwegian Model" whereby official (Norwegian government) and unofficial (Norwegian NGO) activities in conflict-ridden societies are linked to support peace-making.

The decision of NCA to enlarge its mandate and alter its structure to pursue these additional activities is a striking example of a broader recognition, on the part of many humanitarian and development assistance agencies, that their work in conflict areas poses both special challenges and special opportunities.

NCA was active in the Local Capacities for Peace Project and utilizes the LCPP framework to analyze and improve its ongoing assistance work in several of its field sites. In addition, NCA field and headquarters staff have taken active roles in seeking and promoting peace between conflicting groups in several of the areas where they have field programmes. NCA's work in both Guatemala and Mali is widely acknowledged to have contributed to the peace and post-conflict reconciliation processes in those countries. (These NCA peace activities have been well documented, analyzed and evaluated in several documents.)

This case study, compiled for the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) Project, focuses on the decision by NCA to extend its mandate to include explicit peace work. In the pages that follow, we first review the history of NCA's involvement in peace work. We then describe the way in which NCA institutionalized this aspect of its work and explore the rationale for doing so. In the next section, we reflect on how staff and others assess the advantages (and possible drawbacks) of NCA's increasing involvement in peace work and, finally, we review a range of issues suggested by NCA's peace activities. Some of these are of general importance to all aid agencies; some are of general importance to all agencies that work on conflict; and some are particular to the arrangements and organizational forms pursued by NCA in working on peace and conflict.

The case is based on written documents of NCA and others; interviews with field staff from several of the sites where NCA has played an active peace-making role; interviews with headquarters staff
involved in support of the field operations and in the decision to institutionalize peace work within NCA; interviews with Norwegian Foreign Ministry staff and staff of other Norwegian peace organizations; and conversations with local people from some of the country sites where NCA is actively involved in peace work today. Each of these people contributed extremely valuable insights and ideas that form the basis for this case study. However, in order to protect the confidentiality of some of the interviewees for whom this was a concern, none of these individuals is quoted or referred to by name. In addition, because NCA is currently involved in several regional peace efforts where publicity could be damaging to its effectiveness, we specifically discuss only two areas where NCA has done peace work (Mali and Guatemala), and we refer to all others in general without naming locations. However, all of NCA's peace involvements are included in the analysis of its approaches and effectiveness and in consideration of the issues raised by this explicit change in its way of working.

II. The History of NCA's Peace Involvements

Founded as a humanitarian assistance agency in 1947, Norwegian Church Aid has often moved into longer-term development assistance once the crisis that prompted emergency aid has ended. In addition, when war has broken out in a country where NCA has had a long-term development programme, staff have taken on activities explicitly directed toward ending conflict and achieving peace. In Mali and Guatemala, NCA's peace work gained wide recognition, both within those societies and in Norway (and beyond), as having had an important impact on the successful reestablishment of peace.

At the end of the Cold War, three factors influenced NCA's willingness to become more proactive in conflict work. First, NCA (and many other aid agencies) found their ongoing aid programmes increasingly affected by local conflicts. Second, NCA was more and more often asked to help with peace-making or conflict resolution by people in the conflicting societies or by others who perceived NCA as an effective peace agency. And third, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs began actively to encourage the humanitarian and development assistance NGOs whose programmes it supported to engage, also, in conflict resolution.

NCA's early peace work grew "organically" out of its long-term field work. Through many years of working with people in the two countries where they first became active peace advocates (Guatemala and Mali), NCA had established credibility and loyalty across a wide geographical (Guatemala) and/or political (Guatemala and Mali) spectrum. People both at the top and at grassroots levels "trusted" NCA staff as friends who provided help in difficult times. Because of years of work, some NCA staff had long-standing and deep personal relationships with individuals who held influential governmental positions, with leaders at regional and village levels, with rebel or guerilla leaders, with military leaders, with local staff, and with beneficiaries of their assistance. Through these contacts, NCA had access to (and trust from) people who were actively involved on opposing sides of the conflicts.

NCA's Approach to Peace Work

NCA staff cite the experiences in Mali and Guatemala as forming the "NCA approach" to peace work. The two cases are very often spoken of as if they embody a single approach, though, as the brief histories below show, there are as many differences as similarities in them.
Guatemala:

In Guatemala, NCA began its work in response to the 1976 earthquake. When the emergency ended, NCA remained in Guatemala providing development assistance through the large Protestant church network across the country. This work was inevitably affected by the difficult and worsening human rights situation resulting from a prolonged civil war between the conservative military government and a number of guerilla groups fighting for democratization and economic justice.

A number of factors, primarily regional within Central America, led gradually to an opening for negotiated peace within Guatemala.¹ NCA became directly involved in peace activities when the Lutheran World Federation initiated a process of negotiation between the Guatemalan conflicting parties — guerrilla forces and the government and military. LWF gained the agreement of the Norwegian government to hold a first meeting of these groups in Oslo, and NCA staff in Guatemala were drawn into the preparations, making contacts with various people — particularly in the government and army — to encourage them to participate in the meeting. This was possible because of NCA's long presence in Guatemala and the ability of its staff to cross the boundaries between the sides in the conflict.

The meeting, which resulted in a formal agreement to continue negotiations on substantive issues, was followed by several years of uneven, often difficult, negotiations. These occurred at both official and unofficial levels. NCA was a major force in convening a number of meetings that included a broad spectrum of civil society (referred to in the CMI/PRIO Report as "back channel"). While many other actors made significant contributions to the eventual peace accords in Guatemala, NCA was considered an active, and productive, force in the process. Much of the credit for this involvement is accorded a particular strong and able NCA staff person who, through his personal relations, was able to maintain the necessary broad contacts and to keep people engaged in talking even when there were severe setbacks.

Mali:

In Mali, NCA's role also began in response to an emergency. In 1984, NCA began to provide drought assistance in northern Mali primarily, though not exclusively, to the Tuareg nomadic group. When the crisis was over, NCA recommitted its staff and resources to the support of long-term development, focussing on food production, environmental security and rehabilitation, empowering local groups and

¹ The details of these historical and regional processes are covered in many documents. One brief and useful exposition can be found in Gunnar M. Sorbo, Wenche Hauge, Bente Hybertsen and Dan Smith, "Norwegian Assistance to Countries in Conflict: The Lessons of Experience from Guatemala, Mali, Mozambique, Sudan, Rwanda and Burundi," A Report Submitted to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Christian Michelsen Institute in Cooperation with the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, December 1998, pp. 10-16.
When the violent rebellion broke out in 1990, NCA chose to stay in Mali although most other major aid agencies withdrew. Thus NCA became virtually the only "outside" agency operating in the North during this period. In May 1992, five NCA employees (who were Tuareg) were executed by the army (accused, by some, of being "rebel leaders or collaborators"). NCA still chose to remain in Mali and to continue its development work. Because of the location and focus of this work, however, and because the Norwegian NCA Resident Representative became active in protecting Tuaregs who were threatened by government forces, NCA was widely accused of supporting the rebel cause rather than being impartial in the conflict.

When a new Norwegian Resident Representative arrived in Mali in 1994, he decided to live in the capital city of Bamako rather than in the North and to use his position as Honorary Consul for the Norwegian government to establish contacts with many government officials. He also launched an extensive public relations campaign to re-explain and re-interpret NCA's commitment to development. He eschewed peace work within Mali and avoided any actions that could be interpreted as supporting the rebels' cause.

Subsequently, when the next Resident Representative was appointed, a small group (apparently only two people) in NCA headquarters in Oslo and the new Resident Representative in Mali determined that they should now take an active role for peace-facilitation within Mali. These individuals (all with experience and contacts in Mali), undertook a strategy to build up "informal contacts, networks, and personal communications with major actors in the Malian conflict, key and influential members of the community in the North, as well as local notables." They were very careful to carry out these activities quietly and without any public knowledge (including, within NCA/Oslo except for "principled agreement" from the Board) and were able to involve three central persons in the conflict, all of whom had held important staff positions in NCA previously. Two of these were rebel leaders; a third held a ministerial post in the Malian government. Through personal telephone calls and visits, they helped facilitate discussions among these contending forces.

A few years later, NCA took on a more public role in peace support by hiring, as a six-month consultant, an individual whose name has now become synonymous with NCA's Malian Peace Initiative. This man had worked as NCA's Resident Representative in Mali during the years between the drought crisis and the rebellion when NCA had supported a large development assistance programme. As he points out, this history served him well when he returned to initiate the field-level peace work because he was associated with a period in NCA's history in Mali that was widely viewed as generous, far-reaching and highly productive. As a result, he was well known and respected across Malian society. In addition, since that time, he had maintained close personal contacts with a number of

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2 The material for this section is drawn both from the CMI/PRIO Report cited above and from J. 'Bayo Adekanye, with Gunnvor Berge, Malvern Lumsden and Inger Skjelsboek, "Norwegian Church Aid's Humanitarian and Peace-making Work in Mali," PRIO, Evaluation Report 6.97 for the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo, October 1997. A excellent summary of the conflict in Mali can also be found in this document.

3 Ibid., p. 23.

4 This phase of NCA's peace work in Mali is often referred to as the Kare Lode Initiative (see J. 'Bayo Adekanye, et al., p. 23, and Gunnar M. Sorbo, et al., p. 20).
his former Malian associates.

NCA's approach to peace building in this period in Mali concentrated on supporting local intercommunity meetings designed to bring people together who, often, were in conflict over resources or other local issues. NCA's role was to support the organization of such meetings by establishing a committee that made all the arrangements for the events and providing financial resources to cover associated costs. The purpose of these meetings was to encourage local communities to establish immediate, practical and transparent methods for resolving local intergroup conflicts without violence. Over time, 37 such meetings were held and a great number of local conflicts were peacefully handled. This process built on trends already underway within Northern Mali in that several communities had organized and held such meetings, with some success, prior to NCA's decision to take on this initiative. NCA's involvement, however, greatly expanded the number of individuals and entities who became involved in these local conflict resolution activities and who, thus, became active pursers of alternative methods for resolving tensions.

Guatemala and Mali: Similarities and Differences in NCA's Approaches

The similarities in NCA's peace work in Guatemala and Mali are obvious. Both grew out of years of field work in humanitarian and development assistance. In both, the role of a special individual was crucial for the establishment of deep personal relationships with a broad range of local associates and for the power of a personal "witness" for peace. These two strong and religiously committed personalities were able to engage people who might otherwise have been reluctant to take part in active pursuit of peace and to maintain their engagement even in the most difficult times. Finally, in both cases, NCA was widely acclaimed for its tenacity. Though peace processes were uncertain, intermittent and, at some times, overwhelmed by other forces, the credit afforded NCA for effective work in both of these countries is based, to a large extent, on the fact that they simply persisted.

The two examples also embody differences because "different situations require different strategies."\(^5\) Whereas NCA peace work in Guatemala began at the top levels (recruiting people to engage in the negotiation meetings in Oslo), the primary focus in Mali was on intercommunity, grassroots meetings. The former effort focussed on getting a cease fire agreement and subsequent substantive negotiations among the leaders of the groups in conflict; the latter democratized the achievement of peace, assuming that true peace could only be established when local communities, where the conflicts played out, were able to find ways to solve disputes without resorting to fighting. These differences resulted from and reflected differences in the circumstances of the wars, the stages in the wars when NCA intervened, and the opportunities which presented themselves. In Guatemala, NCA was responsive to an invitation from LWF to become actively involved in peace-making; in Mali, NCA staff initiated the off-the-record interventions among conflicting parties without invitation but took up the intercommunity meetings in response to external and local requests.

Beyond Guatemala and Mali: NCA's Other Approaches to Supporting Peace

Following the experiences in Guatemala and Mali, NCA has become directly involved in promoting

\(^5\) Quotation from an NCA staff person.
peace in several other locations. At the time of the writing of this case, NCA was actively involved in peace work in four countries other than Mali and Guatemala. In two of these areas, NCA has had a long field presence with some Norwegian staff in situ; in one, it has provided humanitarian assistance only briefly and has had no Norwegian staff in the field; and in one, it has had no field presence. In addition, staff were considering invitations to work in two other countries where they had no deep or long-lasting field presence.

In two of these sites, NCA has worked closely with the Norwegian Foreign Ministry in variants of the Norwegian Model. In two, NCA's work has been connected to interreligious bodies and concentrated on engaging religious leaders from all sides of a conflict in peace dialogues. In the two potential locations, the initiative for NCA to get involved came from religious entities either within the region in conflict or from an international body; in these, if NCA were to decide to become engaged, they would also concentrate on promotion of interreligious dialogues.

Meetings:

In each of these conflict regions, NCA has arranged meetings for people on different sides of the conflicts to talk with each other and, NCA staff hope, then to take peace initiatives within their societies. In two of the areas, the groups with whom NCA works are religious leaders; in one, they support a dialogue programme for other groups within civil society; in one, they focus on organizing meetings at the grassroots level.

When its focus is on high-level interreligious dialogue, NCA has arranged these meetings in a location in Norway and included (according to the Norwegian Model) appropriate, high-level Norwegian government officials. In one case, meetings have been held in Norway that include a broader range of civil society groups (not unlike the meetings hosted by NCA in Norway and elsewhere to encourage dialogue among Guatemalan groups).

The purposes of such events are broadly stated. Where there are no other venues for people from warring sides to meet, NCA staff feel that simply getting people together is valuable. They also see these meetings as providing a basis from which to encourage participants to assume responsibility for shaping events, through, for example, meeting with their governmental leaders (who are waging war), educating and appealing to their relevant constituencies, or personally taking a public stance for peace.

These ongoing involvements (like the work in Guatemala and Mali) have been centered on dialogue. NCA staff believe that when people in conflict have no avenues for constructive interaction, NCA can promote peace through providing venues and safe structures for such interactions. They believe that talking can help reduce conflict, produce areas for common action and/or promote reconciliation.

A Case in Point

Descriptions of what actually happens at these meetings remain vague (partly because participants are usually assured that their substantive discussion are off the record). NCA staff report (and this is supported by interviews with participants in NCA sponsored meetings) that they "only ask questions." (See below in Section IV for more discussion of NCA's questioning style.)
However, in our interview, an NCA staff person outlined the approach taken with religious leaders in one series of meetings by quoting some of the types of questions he asked. Quoting his words exactly, we are able to classify the questions, and their sequence, to get a more precise indication of how NCA works.

Following are his questions [with our classification in brackets]:

1. "If you move into the political realm, what is your comparative advantage? Is that not best left to the politicians to handle?" [NCA discourages participants in its meetings from trying to do the "official" negotiation over political disputes.]

2. "What can you bring to this conflict from the perspective of your religious leadership position?" [NCA encourages people to act from their own base and emphasizes religious values as the basis for peace.]

3. "Do you fall into using language or interpretations of events that are based on your side's propaganda? Or, are you careful in your own communications with your congregations to avoid demonizing and stereotyping?" [NCA encourages participants to translate religious values into their daily actions.]

4. "How can you encourage your constituencies to move away from warfare and conflict? What practical actions can you take, as a group, to encourage this across lines?" [NCA encourages participants to take direct action within their spheres of influence and to do so, jointly, with participants from the "other side" of the war.]

5. "What positions or representations can you make to your respective governments to encourage, or force, them to pursue a cease fire?" [NCA encourages participants to translate personal action and civil spheres of influence into political action.]

In summary, NCA's approach is to question participants in a dialogue session in a sequence that de-emphasizes their roles in the politics of conflict and pushes them to examine how their religious values are, or are not, being applied. They encourage religious leaders to find a common moral platform that transcends the politics that divide them and that stresses the values of human rights and human safety.

III. NCA's Organizational Structure for the Department of Policy and Human Rights

In 1999, NCA established a Department of Policy and Human Rights to institutionalize its work on peace and human rights/human security. There was much discussion about the name of this Department. Some argued that it should include explicit reference to peace; others, who prevailed, felt that peace is conceptually subsumed under human rights and that including another word would make the title cumbersome.

The creation of the new Department was possible, in part, because of the interest and availability of a well-respected, senior staff member who became its first Director. In addition, this individual was
named Deputy General Secretary of NCA, signaling his seniority and responsibility. The Department for Policy and Human Rights was located in the organizational structure of NCA to report directly to the General Secretary. In addition, it was physically located on the same floor with, and close by, the office of the GS, ensuring daily, informal and inevitable interaction between the two offices.

Work within DPHR is organized around four areas: Peace, Human Rights and Human Security, Advocacy, and Strategic Planning. Staff have been hired in each of these areas, though work is organized so that people can assume responsibilities across areas. Peace and Human Rights/Human Security constitute the substantive areas of work. Advocacy staff are responsible for public outreach and argument on issues of peace, human rights and other NCA concerns. The Strategic Planning work is focussed inward on NCA's internal structure and programming priorities.

The inclusion of these four areas within the Department is as much a result of accident and convenience as it is of design. Advocacy and Strategic Planning staff had, previously, reported directly to the General Secretary. When the decision was taken to institutionalize peace and human rights work, the creation of a high level department which could house all the elements of programming that should relate directly to top management made sense. Furthermore, much of the advocacy work relates to the programme efforts in peace and human rights, and the organization's strategic planning is clearly implicated in ensuring that the new aspects of work are well integrated and managed in relation to the other, ongoing work of the agency.

With the initiation of the new Department, there was some concern about how to encourage and facilitate its interaction with the NCA's operational programs. To some extent, other program staff see the new effort as an "add-on" and, if they are expected to become involved, as an extra time burden and distraction from their "real" work. Staff of the DPHR accept responsibility for overcoming these misgivings, knowing that they must demonstrate the value of their work as it affects other programs in order to gain the involvement and support of their colleagues in other programmes.

Six months after the establishment of the DPHR, some of the staff in the operational departments (International Programmes and Information) were becoming informally and formally connected with DPHR work. One person working in the Information Department on Press and Media Relations had begun to coordinate closely with the staff in the advocacy area of DPHR. Similarly, a staff person in Information, responsible for Cultural Programs, had been assigned to work 60% of his time with his original department and 40% with the DPHR. Most inter-departmental communication and cooperation, however, remained informal and ad hoc, dependent on the friendships and histories of the Director of the DPHR with his colleagues across the agency. As new staff who do not have these histories of relationships assume important positions in various sections of NCA, more of these collaborating mechanisms will need to be formalized if the peace and human rights foci of DPHR are not to become isolated and "specialized" functions, turned over only to the staff who carry the functions in their titles.

On the assumption that peace, advocacy and human rights work must be "responsive" to external events, the DPHR staff are required to develop annual work plans that account for 70% of their time, leaving 30% of time "unscheduled" in order to be able to respond to crisis events, suddenly-emerging opportunities, or requests for help. This 30% is also envisaged as providing an opportunity for DPHR
staff to initiate and facilitate cross-department processes (within NCA), to work with other organizations and to accomplish some of the unspecified internal departmental administrative activities that are difficult to quantify.

IV: The Rationale and Expectations for NCA's Peace Work

NCA Staff/Foreign Ministry Rationale for NCA's Peace Work

NCA is motivated to engage in peace work out of its Christian base. A further motivation has arisen, in many of its past involvements, from the close relationships established by field staff with their local associates and friends. When war breaks out in a region where they are committed to individuals and groups, they cannot walk away from those people or the issues that divide them. Furthermore, war interrupts and distorts NCA's development work and this, too, is given as sufficient rationale for engaging in the work to end (and prevent) warfare.

NCA staff cite five attributes that position them for effective involvement in supporting peace activities within conflictive societies. These are:

1. A history of providing humanitarian and/or development assistance that gives NCA broad-based, grassroots and high-up governmental (and, sometimes, military) contacts. In the countries where NCA first undertook an active role in peace work, they did, indeed, have a history of long-term assistance work. In two of the four conflict areas where NCA had peace programmes underway as this case was written, NCA had provided humanitarian and development assistance for some years. (However, in one of these regions, the work was focussed entirely on high-level interreligious dialogue and most of the local participants involved in these dialogues who were interviewed either were unaware of the previous history of assistance or, if aware, did not feel that it had any importance for the subsequent peace work.)

In the other two regions where NCA was engaged in peace work, the agency had taken up these initiatives without any long-term, on-site assistance experience. The rationale for entry in these situations was related to NCA's religious identity; in both cases, church bodies had invited NCA to become actively involved in peace.

As the rationale for entry differs, NCA's approaches in such situations are also quite different from those where a long-term history of assistance forms the basis of friendship and trust. In these situations, NCA staff report that they must "do an active analysis of societal and political forces" in a much more sophisticated and well-informed way than had been important when they had a history in the country. They are required, these staff people note, to act more explicitly like "diplomats."

2. A basis of trust: NCA staff feel that an important asset derived from their long-term humanitarian and development work, has been the high degree of mutual trust which they were able to develop across a broad spectrum of society through their aid programmes. This work, they feel, has proven to many people at many levels that NCA truly "cares about" the people's welfare.

Again, though this may have been true of past NCA work, it does not form the basis for the more
recent work that is not based on long-term relationships. Still, NCA has been invited to take on conflict work in areas where they have not had programmes precisely because they have a reputation for being trustworthy (and effective). The challenge under these circumstances is to find ways, early in the development of new relationships, to demonstrate that such trust is justified.

3. The absence of any political "agenda": NCA staff note that they are respected and trusted because they have no vested interest in the particular political outcomes where they work for peace. Coming from a small country where the foreign policy is considered "benign," they are seen as — and actually are they claim — unbiased and fair.

However, while many staff and MOFA officials comment on NCA's disinterestedness as an asset, the experiences in Mali and in Guatemala show that NCA's "politics" were a bit more complicated than this. For example, in Guatemala, though one of Norway's contributions to the peace process lay in its ability, and willingness, to engage the military in negotiations, NCA nonetheless were clearly promoting dialogue and negotiation around the political goal of democratization and participation for the most marginalized groups in society. In Mali, NCA was accused by some (including staff within NCA itself) of having "started the war" through which the Tuareg asserted their rights vis a vis central government and other dominant groups. This was because NCA's development work had focussed on supporting grassroots organization among this marginalized group and this was seen by some as having been important in instigating their ultimate rebellion and the conflict that resulted. Again, NCA maintained excellent personal contacts across different spheres of Malian society, including within the Malian government. But it clearly "stood for" certain kinds of political solutions to the problems in that country. Thus, although NCA's "agenda" was clearly to achieve peace, it was committed to achieving this peace on the basis of democratic values and inclusive social and economic arrangements. As one NCA staff person said, "We feel that there are fundamental conditions that are necessary for development. These are peace, democracy and a well-functioning civil society. We come from a country which has all three and we feel we should not be shy about our society's model. We are proud of how our society functions. We think others can learn from this."

4. NCA's identification as a church organization, motivated by its religious faith and its staff's identification as "men" of God: Somewhat paradoxically to point #3 above, NCA staff also note that the fact that they are religiously grounded and motivated is a plus in terms of the confidence and trust they enjoy. Their record of working in Muslim areas supports this view. In spite of NCA's explicit Christian-ness, the staff have been able to establish excellent relations with people of other religions who, themselves, attest to the fact that they appreciate and trust NCA precisely because of its religious base. This is true in spite of the fact that some of the NCA field staff who have been most directly involved in peace roles have been evangelical ministers (whose purpose, as one put it, is "to establish Christian churches"). Clearly, these staff people have been able to separate their roles sufficiently that they are never accused of proselytizing, and they have established cordial relations based on mutual respect of religious beliefs (though they differ).

In one situation, a female staff person of NCA who is, herself, an ordained deacon in her home church donned her church attire (a collar) when she first went to meet the head of a prominent denomination in her field site. Though this man did not approve of female ordination, he was touched by what he perceived as her honoring of his religious role (which is exactly what she had intended) and this became
the basis for their relationship which, subsequently, became central to NCA's peace work in the region.

5. "The Norwegian Model": For some years, the Norwegian Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) has encouraged the Norwegian aid NGOs to take an active role in promoting peace and reconciliation. The "Norwegian Model" is the form by which the Ministry works in concert with and supports NGOs in such efforts, providing special funding for their peace-related efforts and engaging politically with them where such engagement is useful.

As Ministry staff explain it, peace supporting activities need to proceed at various levels. The Norwegian NGOs are well positioned to engage people on the ground at the grassroots levels (because of their aid programmes), and to organize meetings of civic leaders. The Ministry is able to engage at the highest political levels and, sometimes, at somewhat lower levels of official leadership. When these two approaches and access to these various levels of society are brought together, NCA and Ministry people believe they may be more effective than either could be if acting alone.

Furthermore, Ministry people note that they are in a position to know of all the official and semi-official efforts underway in any conflict to help resolve it. With this information, they are in a better position to ensure that NGO activities do not "get in the way" or contradict the potential effectiveness of higher level activities. The Norwegian Model allows close coordination of multi-level actions for peace.

Finally, as both NCA and Ministry staff pointed out, because many people in conflict areas are aware of the close connection of Norwegian NGOs and the MOFA, they recognize that their collaboration with NCA (and other NGO) efforts provides an avenue for them to gain access to Norwegian funds and political backup for their own efforts.

Perhaps the most famous application of the Norwegian Model was the success in engaging Palestinians and Israelis in the Oslo Accords through a joint effort of one Norwegian NGO and the MOFA. Following this, the "Norwegian Model" has become a part of the normal vocabulary of Norwegian aid agencies.

For NCA specifically, the Norwegian Model has been the mechanism by which they have been able to promote dialogue meetings. Believing that such meetings were apt to be more productive if held outside the regions of conflict, NCA has hosted them in and around Oslo. The MOFA has been helpful in arranging travel documents, honoring the participants by having high level Ministry representatives meet with them and in providing funding.

The Field/Recipient/Beneficiary perspectives

As noted above, individuals in field sites where NCA is actively involved in peace work were also interviewed. While they agreed with some of the above analysis by NCA staff and Norwegian Foreign Ministry regarding the advantages brought by NCA to peace work, they expressed their confidence in this work in interestingly different ways.

1. Basis for work: For example, they differed in how much importance they assigned to NCA's humanitarian and development assistance record as the foundation on which their peace work could be
built. In some cases, they were not even aware of the range and longevity of NCA's material assistance in the region.

2. Sincerity and commitment to peace: Rather, they consistently emphasized words such as "sincerity" and "commitment." As evidence of these two attributes, the local leaders cited times when NCA staff had taken the initiative to encourage them to engage in dialogues and peace activities, rather than waiting to be invited. They cited the consistency and determination of NCA staff "not to let us be too comfortable" and to "stay with us even when we are not moving very much." Several used the expression that "our pain is their pain" to indicate how they assessed NCA staff's sincerity.

3. Heavy investment of time and money and political clout: Local people also commented on the importance of NCA's commitment of significant time and resources to peace processes. They were impressed, for example, that they were flown to Oslo for dialogues as first class (rather than economy) passengers; that they were lodged in very nice and well-appointed venues; that they were not required to stand in line and present their passports upon arrival but given VIP treatment by immigration officials. These material things were appreciated because they were taken as symbolic of the commitment of NCA and the Norwegian government to helping solve the conflicts in their areas.

Similarly, many stories were told of the amount of time and energy given by individual NCA staff to attend to the personal needs and functional support of local peace activities. During one Oslo-based dialogue involving high level church leaders, one participant developed a medical problem. An NCA staff person shuttled him to and from a doctor's office on five different occasions, thus solidifying a personal relationship that reinforced the organizational commitment of this leader to the pursuit of peace work with NCA. In another situation, an Oslo-based NCA staff person was able to get the then General Secretary to set aside a small fund (US $15,000) which he could use, without review, at his own discretion for the support of peace activities. With this, he was able to bring several local people to Norway, he hosted them in his home and treated them "as my sons" when they were there and, thereby, greatly increased their commitment not only to him individually but also to the peace processes that NCA was supporting.

These kinds of individualized attention and caring described by the local participants in NCA initiatives provided, by their own accounts, a basis on which NCA staff could, then, be proactive in encouraging them to take new actions. That is, because NCA staff were so forthcoming with their own time and energy and resources, their efforts to "push" local people to take more risks and greater initiative in the pursuit of peace were acceptable. These apparently small or superficial elements of the organization of the peace work established a kind of moral pressure on local people, making them also want to match the NCA commitment in their own graciousness, generosity of time and engagement in the work.

4. Persistence: Local peace makers also noted that NCA was tireless, reliable and persistent. They "never give up on us" and they "always come when we call them," said several interviewees. It seemed important to these individuals that they could count on NCA's not getting discouraged and not withdrawing its attention or its resources. (This needs to be weighed alongside the comments of one MOFA staff person who felt that such constancy might allow participants in the NCA programmes to dally in their pursuit of peace, not to feel as much urgency as they should. This individual questioned when simply holding more meetings was, or was not, justified. How many times, he asked, is it
worthwhile for people to be brought together for dialogue? When is enough enough?)

5. Facilitators, not leaders: Local counterparts in NCA's work were very clear that "NCA did not lead, they only facilitated our work." "We control our process entirely," said one. They "never push" but, said another, "they leave us not so comfortable." "They only ask questions; they never suggest."

In discussion, however, these local leaders noted that the kinds of questions asked by NCA were ones which did push their thinking. For example, NCA staff were able to open new avenues for dialogue for the conflicting sides by such questions as: "I do not understand this situation so clearly. Can you help me by explaining why it is that . . . ?" In some situations, also, local participants remembered NCA staff actually suggesting options for new activities that they should undertake, but always in the form of questions (e.g. "Would it be possible for you to do . . . or . . . ? What would be the possible outcomes of such initiatives?) That is, both NCA staff and local counterparts agreed that the former, as outsiders, were able to push and probe as "innocents" in the situation, raising issues (asking questions) that local people would not have been permitted to raise.

While everyone was aware of the importance of the "innocent" question, local people also repeatedly noted how well informed NCA staff were about the issues. "They understand the situation very clearly." "The fact that they do not take sides is not because they don't get it."

6. Trustworthy: Finally, the local participants in NCA peace initiative stressed how important it was that NCA staff were "trustworthy" and "transparent." That is, they felt confident that they always knew what NCA staff were doing, what they were saying to "the other side," and what their own goals were. "We hold the press conferences; NCA never does." "When we were in Oslo, our meetings were completely off the record. NCA did not bring us there for their own glory." "They do not build their reputation on their work with us."

Expectations for NCA's Peace Work

Expectations about the impacts and outcomes of NCA's peace work vary. In general, NCA staff name modest expectations. They hope to support existing dialogue among people who are separated by conflict; they hope to engage more people in peace building. In Mali, while the goals and expectations were also stated modestly, there was a clear strategy that involved building a village-based system for political expression of previously marginalized communities, and establishing locally-controlled systems for resolving local conflicts. The strategy was a cumulative one; work in each village was conceived as part of an overall regional effort. While work proceeded village-by-village, NCA intended from the beginning that many villages would ultimately be involved and, thus, there would be a growing movement of village control and a growing impact of grassroots involvement in political affairs.

In one setting where NCA is now actively working, the local counterparts note that, in the early days of NCA's initiative, they (the local people) expected that their role could literally end the war. As fighting continued and each side became increasingly entrenched in its belligerence, however, expectations for the NCA-supported dialogue have lessened. Now, participants (and NCA) see the value of the effort as residing in the future — when a cease-fire is achieved, this dialogue effort will help form the basis for
reconciliation between the two peoples.

One Norwegian Foreign Ministry person observed that NCA's effectiveness could be measured in getting people together who have no other opportunities for meeting. This person said, "Simply meeting is a success; then, meeting again is a success; and then, continuing to meet is a success." That is, a first meeting can be judged as a major input when no other opportunities exist for meeting. Then, a decision to meet again indicates success in that it reflects a value which participants found in the first meeting and a willingness to stay engaged with the "enemy." Finally, a decision to continue to meet reflects a further commitment on the part of participants who, in spite of set-backs in the joint discussions, know that their best hope lies in not cutting off connections.

Expectations about NCA's Institutionalization of its Peace Work

Expectations about the establishment of the Department for Policy and Human Rights, however, are clearly articulated. NCA expects this Department to provide a basis for systematizing both their programmes dealing with peace and human rights and their learning about what is effective (or not). Through the process of institutionalizing their work in these fields, NCA will be able, staff believe, to improve its peace and human rights work and to have a more profound and lasting impact on the achievement of peace in conflict-ridden societies.

V. Issues Raised by the NCA Experience

1. Relation of Peace Work to Humanitarian or Development Assistance

Though many within NCA (and other aid NGOs) believe that they are justified in taking up peace work precisely because of their concern for people's lives (manifested through their assistance work), more than half of NCA's current peace work is unrelated to humanitarian or development assistance programming. Furthermore, recent experience would suggest that NCA will be increasingly invited to play a peace-making role in countries where it has no long-standing aid programme. This could have several important implications for NCA's future peace work:

   a. It poses a direct challenge to the rationale most often cited by NCA staff (and many in the MOFA) for NCA's getting involved in this field, namely their long-standing relationships of trust across a broad spectrum of society and among all sides of warring groups.

   b. It lessens the importance of linking NCA's DPHR with the other operational programmes since, it may turn out, most peace work will occur in countries where these programmes are not active. This may have intra-agency implications.

   c. It suggests that new approaches and skills will be needed to engage successfully in future peace work where there is no history of long-standing relationships. First, NCA staff will arrive on the scene of new conflicts where they intervene without deep knowledge of the society. Second, they will be more apt to be seen, at least at first, as "outsiders" and, thus, have to "prove" their knowledge of the nuances of the conflicts as well as their trustworthiness. Third,
these staff will not have the range of relationships with local people on which to rely for advice, direction, interpretation and support.

d. It suggests that some of the lessons NCA learned from its experiences in Guatemala and Mali are not relevant to, and therefore do not form the basis for, its future peace work. That is, the strategies used by NCA to engage a broad base of grassroots and middle level society will not be relevant where they do not have these broad contacts. On the other hand, NCA's experiences in arranging and following through on dialogue sessions in these two countries may be functionally useful, even when the basis for engaging people in these dialogues has changed.

2. Reliance on Individual Personalities or "Luck" vs. Careful Planning and Development of Informed Strategies

NCA's experiences in Guatemala and Mali are so closely identified with the personalities of the strong individuals who directed or managed them that there is a tendency to identify their programmatic success with the "luck" of having these individuals in place. Even these men sometimes speak of the luck they had when some event worked well. This raises questions in three areas:

1) What are the qualities of an effective agent for peace and can these be identified and taught to others or are they inborn and, thus, un-teachable?
2) What strategies and approaches did these men use to accomplish what they accomplished and can these be analyzed and systematized so they form the basis for future, effective peace-making strategies?
3) How will NCA develop or identify its future peace staff given the fact that: a) NCA is now placing fewer Norwegian field staff in operational programmes, and b) the effectiveness of the staff involved in Mali and Guatemala is attributed, in large part, to their ability to establish good personal relations in the field over extended periods of time.

3. Planning and Organizing the "Personal" Elements of Peace Work

In interviews, local people involved in NCA's peace initiatives consistently highlighted the importance of the personal things NCA staff (and the Norwegian government) did for them (the first class tickets, the exceedingly pleasant meeting venues, the trips to the doctor, etc.). To what extent are these centrally important symbols of NCA's commitment to peace that allow them to "push" local people harder to seek peace; or do they, perhaps, add to the participants' "comfort" in engaging in peace work in ways that undermine incentives actually to achieve peace? How would we know which is the more important impact?

4. Fame, Honor and Peace Work

When individuals take risks and devote much time and energy to an ideological goal (cessation of war/achievement of peace), others notice and laud their nobility and sacrifice. And, quite often, they deserve all the praise they receive.

However, the identification of peace activities with individuals, especially individuals who are from
societies other than the one which is at war, has real drawbacks. (These ideas come from many people I interviewed, including of course, the individuals whose names are often associated with NCA's peace initiatives. They were no more comfortable with this process than those who were not known or acknowledged!)

There is a potential damaging effect within any agency if staff competition — or jealousy — were to develop around peace work. This could be of particular concern in agencies that began with another mandate (humanitarian or development assistance) and later assumed important peace roles.

If peace activities come to be seen, in such agencies, as high-profile and "glamorous" while others are seen as routine, there could be a tendency for people to gravitate toward the more gratifying of these jobs and to let the other jobs slip (though they may, in the long run, be just as important in achieving programmatic goals.) NCA, and other aid agencies that take up explicit peace work, probably need to be attentive to this balancing of roles both for the staff assigned to "peace work" and in the relationships of these staff members with those who work in humanitarian and development assistance.

Another issue that arises with all active peace work is, when peace is achieved in any warring society, with few exceptions, the credit belongs very specifically to the people in that society who create the conditions for achieving that peace. Local people decry the public acclaim given to "outsiders" who hold press conferences about "breakthroughs" for which they take credit and they very much appreciate it when "outsiders" make no claims but give all credit to them. This came out, in this case, when local people spoke of their appreciation for NCA, in its current peace work, for not holding press conferences in Norway around the dialogue meetings, and for keeping a low profile in these events, etc.

5. Peace Work as Technical or Personal

Related to points #2 and #3 above is the issue of whether peace work is technical or personal. In interviews, one local NCA dialogue participant was very strong in his condemnation of "those agencies that come into our conflict and treat peace discussions as if they were technical, only about technical things. This approach very often only complicates matters by causing disputants to focus only on the small points for negotiation rather than the larger issue of how to achieve peace." (He contrasted this bad approach to the effective "personal" approach which he appreciated in NCA.) His comments referred to a situation where there is a dispute over land. He felt that the "technical peace makers" got everyone bogged down in negotiating each square foot of territory — as if this process could end the war — rather than dealing with the issues that allowed the dispute over land to escalate into war.

On the other hand, most peace agencies, including NCA, believe that there are "techniques" for mediation, negotiation, and dialogues. As we noted above, reliance on individual personalities rather than trying to identify specific characteristics and processes that are effective is a limiting approach to peace, and personalizing peace provides a distorted picture of how peace really occurs. The NCA case does not resolve this issue; more investigation is required to clarify the relationship between these elements of peace work.

6. Expectations concerning Success/Effectiveness
There seems to be a general tendency among agencies that work on conflict to have very modest expectations for the results of their work. NCA also exhibits this tendency. Perhaps this reflects appropriate modesty and/or wisdom about how much is actually possible under such circumstances. On the other hand, maintaining low expectations can provide a basis for justifying anything that is accomplished. That is, it can contribute to a situation in which, if anything at all is done, it is considered good and sufficient to justify the effort and cost.

The challenge is to develop realistic, appropriate criteria for effectiveness that can be judged, and agreed to, by all observers. A further challenge is to set goals that reflect serious positive contributions to peace-making, rather than accepting everything and anything that is done as adding to the overall climate for peace. NCA, and all other agencies working in this area, need to pursue these challenges seriously. (This is, of course, one of the most serious challenges for the RPP!)

7. Decisions to Stop/Withdraw Support

An issue that is seldom explicitly addressed but which is raised by the NCA experiences is that of when, and how, an agency should or can suspend its work. It is clear that participants in NCA's peace initiatives appreciated, very much, the assurances they had that NCA would not abandon them. They seemed to feel that, once an agency has taken responsibility for supporting a peace process, it must stay in that process until peace is achieved. The question is how might a decision to withdraw support affect efforts for peace? Are there any circumstances in which such a move would prompt more earnest efforts on the part of the local people, encourage more rapid ceasefires, or in other ways cause greater progress than is occurring with outside support/intervention? Again, the NCA experience does not provide answers to this question; more learning is required (also by RPP) in this area.

8. Collaborative Efforts/Networks of Agencies

NCA has been particularly good at connecting its work with efforts of other actors. The Norwegian Model encourages this across the governmental/nongovernmental line. In addition, NCA has worked closely with international and local church bodies in most of its peace initiatives. As an agency, NCA seems particularly adept at defining its particular role in relation to the activities undertaken by others that can support a broader effort toward peace.

More could be learned from the NCA experiences and those of others about the conditions which make such collaborative work, and such divisions of labor, effective. In the Guatemala and Mali examples, NCA undertook work that very much fit into ongoing trends, already underway in the regions, toward peace-seeking. In these two cases, NCA undertook a specific role within a larger context and, it is agreed, made significant contributions to peace that, quite probably, could and would have been achieved without their activities (though possibly less effectively and more slowly.) Of course, whether peace would have been achieved, or achieved in the same way, without NCA's work is speculative and hypothetical.

The question this raises has several parts: 1) what are the preconditions that must exist to make separate contributions add up in a larger process; 2) how can we recognize these preconditions; and 3)
what formal and informal arrangements are best for connecting the separate activities of different actors?

VI. Summary

NCA's work in conflict areas and its decision to institutionalize this work provides a rich story that highlights the multiple aspects that bear on peace work (staffing, who and with what skills; duration and history of local involvements; external forces; relations with other actors/division of labor; goals and criteria for effectiveness; technical/personal aspects of peace work, etc.). The story is, of course, an unfolding one which, over time, may both yield more insights and raise more questions! The decision by NCA to create a Department for its work in peace and human rights represents, also, a decision to increase its efforts, as an institution, to learn more about how efforts in conflict areas can be, or are not, effective. The openness of NCA staff and others involved in NCA's peace initiatives to the writing of this case history represents, also, their serious commitment to learning what to do to become more effective peace-supporters in the variety of places where they are challenged to work. For this, they should be honored.