

Executive Summary

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

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

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

In this report, we have tried to assess the impact of IA's activities mainly through case study analysis. More specifically, we have considered IA's programmes in Sri Lanka, Burundi and Sierra Leone in relation to (a) the premises and understanding that formed the basis for IA's interventions; (b) IA's own objectives; and the
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claims made by IA itself in its own impact assessment report and other documents This is done in Chapter Three.

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

During a brief period, from 1992 until 1996, IA grew rapidly, largely due to innovative efforts, fund-raising ability and reputation of the present Secret General. It was recognised, however, that management systems and procedures had to be put in place if IA were to maximise the use of its resources. A report commissioned to evaluate the appropriateness of existing structures and procedures pointed out that IA must establish and communicate to all stakeholders a clearer vision of its strategic direction and role in an increasingly competitive

sector. Among the key recommendations, therefore, were for IA (a) to establish clear organisational aims and objectives, focusing on work in which it can demonstrate competitive advantage, and (b) to develop a coherent, organisational strategic plan (BDO review).

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

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

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

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

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

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

bipartisan approach to negotiations. mainly through working with a cross party group of parliamentarians.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(i) IA has, both through its numerous publications (most of them authored by Kumar Rupesinghe and Ed Garcia) as well as its advocacy work, contributed to making conflict prevention and resolution issues an important sphere of action among governments, IGOs and NGOs. In the NGO community, IA has largely inspired the entry of NGOs into this area of work.

(ii) Through many of its field programmes (e.g. in Sri Lanka and Burundi), IA has successfully contributed to the development of local peace constituencies which are involved at different levels in creating spaces for dialogue, building bridges and improving communication between conflicting parties (e.g. MP group in Colombo, CAP group and women's groups in Burundi). Through such work, IA has actively supported those who seek non-violent solutions against powerful advocates of violence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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