

## International Non-Governmental Organizations and Conflict Resolution

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### Abstract :

The importance of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) in the field of conflict resolution has intensified over the past 20 years since they have become major actors in the international response to humanitarian emergencies, violations of human rights and in the efforts to peace-building in the societies affected by conflicts. This essay explores the role of INGOs in resolving international conflicts. Based on conflict resolution theoretical literature, it tries to understand the methods and functions of informal actors and INGOs in particular, in the field of conflict resolution.

**Keywords:** International Non Governmental Organizations, International Conflicts, Conflict Resolution, Mediation and Negotiation.

### ملخص:

على مدى السنوات العشرين الماضية، زادت أهمية المنظمات الدولية غير الحكومية في مجال حل النزاعات. إذ أصبحت أطرافاً فاعلة رئيسية في الاستجابة الدولية لحالات الطوارئ الإنسانية، في انتهاكات حقوق الإنسان وفي الجهود الرامية إلى بناء السلام في المجتمعات المتضررة من النزاعات. يستكشف هذا المقال دور المنظمات الدولية غير الحكومية في حل النزاعات الدولية استناداً إلى الأدبيات النظرية في هذا المجال. كما يحاول فهم أساليب ووظائف الفاعلين غير الرسميين والمنظمات الدولية غير الحكومية، بشكل خاص، في مجال حل النزاعات.

### كلمات مفتاحية:

المنظمات الدولية غير الحكومية، النزاعات الدولية، حل النزاعات، الوساطة والمفاوضات.

## Introduction:

International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) are increasingly involved in decisive international affairs. There are some debates in the field of Conflict Resolution and more and more scholars suggest the important role of INGOs.

As a consequence of both their growing numbers and resources and the variety of functions they fulfill, INGOs are fast becoming a vital component in the international response mechanism to humanitarian crises, especially in situations of conflict. Operational INGOs are going beyond their traditional relief objectives of providing food, water, sanitation, and emergency health measures, to serving as a substitute for local government, encouraging the growth of civil society, and using Mediation and Negotiation skills to bring antagonists together as part of a Peace Process.

This paper aims to explore the role and approaches of international non-governmental organizations in the resolution of international conflicts and the effectiveness of their strategies in the context of international conflicts in general, through the following elements:

- 1- Defining international non-governmental organization.
- 2- The emerging role of international non-governmental organizations in international relations.
- 3- Functions of international non-governmental organizations in Conflict Resolution.

### 1- Defining International Non-governmental Organization:

International non-governmental organization usually refers to all forms of international organization that arise without formal agreement between governments. It therefore does not include in its membership States, but rather is a union established by the initiatives of private individuals, whether natural or legal.

It is distinguished from multinational companies as not-for-profit and operates at all local, national and international levels. Its activities extend to many political, economic, social, humanitarian and environmental fields.

The most important definitions of international NGOs are:

#### - Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC):

"Any organization not established by agreement between governments" (Resolution 288 (XX), 27 February 1950), "including organizations accepting members appointed by government authorities provided that such membership does not prejudice the freedom of expression and views of the Organization". (Resolution 1296 (XLV) of 25 June 1968)<sup>1</sup>.

#### - Union of International Associations (UIA):

"Organizations that created by private individuals legally or by organizations that do not participate or represent any government, the United Nations first coined this term, which is often used to refer to non-profit organizations working in both national and international scales"<sup>2</sup>.

#### - Arabic Encyclopedia:

"Unlike multinational corporations, international non-governmental organizations are non profit societies or associations, constituted by natural or legal persons, public or private, with common interests, for humanitarian, environmental, ideological, social, health, sports or political purposes. To express solidarity that transcends the borders of a State, between persons acting voluntarily and not involving states in the legal structure of such associations"<sup>3</sup>.

## **2- The emerging role of international non-governmental organizations in international relations:**

The end of the Cold War and the development of globalization in international relations have led to increased interest in the study of transnational relations and the influence of non-State actors or non-governmental actors on global politics (Koehane and Nye 1979, 2002). Some specialists are talking about the emergence of a "global civil society" because of the increasing number and role of international NGOs and their impact on inter-state relations. Thus, the analysis of international relations and theorizing the contemporary international system cannot be conducted without taking into account the impact of these new phenomena.

International non-governmental organizations have gradually become important actors in international relations. At the international level, the involvement of these organizations has increased, particularly in fields such as development, environment, disarmament, humanitarian assistance, human rights and the promotion of democracy in many countries. Recently, the number of international non-governmental organizations working on prevention and conflict resolution has increased<sup>4</sup>.

Because of the shortcomings of traditional diplomacy in the field of Conflict Resolution, the role of international non-governmental organizations has become increasingly important because they have certain characteristics that enable them to play a positive and useful role in Conflict Resolution:

- Possession of significant financial resources (important budgets, proper bureaucratic organization) and human resources (experts and high level technical staff) compared to local organizations.

- Close relationships with local actors in conflict zones, making them more aware of the conflict.

In the post-Cold War period, new complex situations emerged: the destruction of the national economy of countries, especially the monetary and banking systems, the absence of food security and the corruption of the state apparatus. The risk of this type of social collapse has increased with the emergence of local and regional violent entities seeking to compete with the State that already faces complex problems<sup>5</sup>.

These situations impose difficulties for the peacemaking process because of the presence of unknown and unstable local actors, making the process of negotiation and mediation more complex.

In these new circumstances, international non-governmental organizations can provide more than traditional humanitarian assistance. Their experience in the field of conflict and their close relationships with domestic actors make them possible intermediaries between parties to conflict. In countries where States have collapsed, international non-governmental organizations, together with religious authorities and representatives of international organizations, become the only elements of peace that can provide order<sup>6</sup>.

## **3- Functions of International Non-Governmental Organizations in Conflict Resolution:**

The involvement of international non-governmental organizations in conflict resolution activities is not a traditional issue. It is often agreed that these informal actors should be more involved in these activities, whether through the training of local organizations, defending the issues of peace or lobbying and educating<sup>7</sup>.

Similarly to local NGOs, International NGOs are performing the functions of the parties to conflict. According to Jean-Luc Marret, international non-governmental organizations can address practical problems such as demining, return of refugees, reorganization of the distribution of collective public property such as water or electricity, health system, rehabilitation of agricultural production<sup>8</sup>.

NickLewernotedthattheseorganizations have worked for manyyears in areas of naturaldisasters and violent conflict in providinghumanitarian assistance and working for rehabilitation and sustainabledevelopment<sup>9</sup>.

In the field of Conflict Resolution, Lower states that the functions of international non-governmentalorganizations are:

-Facilitating communication, understanding and confidence building between parties to the Conflict.

-Building communication and coherentstrategiesamong groups.

-Ensuring communication and understandingbetween local organizations, host government and population<sup>10</sup>.

For David Baharvar, international non-governmentalorganizations should focus their efforts on:

- Capacity building for local organizations.

- Training in dispute resolution techniques for individualsfrom all parties to the conflict.

- Consultations and dialogue<sup>11</sup>.

However, these researchers and othersbelievethat international organizations, because of theirspecificity and the level of theircapabilitiescomparedwith local organizations, canplayotherfunctions in Conflict Resolution:

- **Early Warning Function**, because of its close relationshipwith local actors. International non-governmentalorganizations are wellplaced to exercisearly warning function by informing the international community of the potential for tension and conflict in a country<sup>12</sup>. The presence of suchorganizations in conflict zones and theirknowledge of conflict circumstances draws the attention of members of the international community to be sensitive to the situation in these areas and the need for mediation efforts to avoidescalation of the conflict. It canalsoprovide information about the conflict to mediators.

In thiscontext, international organizationscanplay an important role in monitoring humanrights violations, as theycan document eventsthatcan lead to violent conflict by gathering information in areas of tension<sup>13</sup>.

-**Lobbying governments**, international NGOs can put pressure on the process of passing laws to serve peacefulactivities in the conflict zone<sup>14</sup>.

- **Mediation** is one of the functions of international non-governmentalorganizations. According to Jean-Luc Marret, the mediationapproach of theseorganizationstakesmanyforms:

- Can create forums of discussion and expression in which the parties willinformallydiscuss Ways to reduce tensions.

-Organizingeducationalcampaigns for citizens in countries of conflict on the principles of Peace, democracy and humanrights.

- Theycanalso use Conflict Resolutionmodels to achievepeacethrough Mediation or Negotiations.

Many of theseorganizations do not necessarilydevelopsuch an approach in the formalsense but attempt to provideappropriate solutions to immediate problems<sup>15</sup>.

- **Reconciliation**, according to Baharvar, the primarytask of international non-governmentalorganizations in the field of conflictresolution is changing the waysocieties deal withconflict and improving the reconciliation process. "Thereconciliationapproachgoesbeyondconflictresolution and peace-building approaches, not onlydealingwith the root causes of conflicts , And to carry out actions and activities to achievepeacewithin society, but seeks to makefundamental changes in the perception of the parties and in the social and cultural structures of the conflict society (conflict transformation)"<sup>16</sup>.

Finally, Nick Lewer suggests a practical framework for the role of international non-governmental organizations in Conflict Resolution. According to him, these organizations should form multidisciplinary teams to coordinate them, including experts in the fields of economic assistance, development, peace and conflict studies:

- Public Policy Team: Formulates the organization policies and strategies related to peace-building in the context of humanitarian action.
- In-country team: analyzes conflict, identifies potential topics and partners, consults scientific research centers and international and local organizations operating in the region.
- Working group at the level of population groups: working at the level of ethnic groups and local communities in order to identify the real needs, and peaceful activities appropriate to this level. It designs and implements projects, and conducts evaluation and control.
- Multi-level working group within the country, to ensure accountability, integration and transparency. It is a forum of both formal and informal actors<sup>17</sup>.

### Conclusion:

The approach of International Non Governmental Organizations is a more practical approach compared to other informal methods, as it is not limited to functions of conducting dialogue and training. In addition to establishing institutions to support peace initiatives, these organizations can overcome the field obstacles that impede peaceful activities. In many conflicts, INGOs have intervened several times to facilitate peace activities. The presence of international non-governmental organizations and their activities in conflict areas, as well as their knowledge of the parties and circumstances of the conflict, allows for conflict prevention, and usually drawing the attention of the international community to the potential for violence in conflict zones and providing information to international mediation efforts.

### Footnotes:

- (1) - <https://www.uia.org/faq/yb4>
- (2) - Ibid
- (3) - <https://www.arab-ency.com/ar>
- (4) - Connie Peck, *Sustainable Peace, The Role of the UN and Regional Organizations in Preventing Conflict* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), p.185.
- (5) - Jean-Luc Marret, *La fabrication de la Paix, Nouveaux Conflits, Nouveaux Acteurs, Nouvelles Méthodes*. Paris: F.R.S./Ellipses, Mars 2001. p. 100.
- (6) - Ibid, p. 100.
- (7) - Paul Van Tongeren, "Local Capacity for Peacemaking: Exploring the NGO Role." In *GIVE and TAKE*, A Journal on Civil Society in Eurasia. (Vol2, Issue1, Spring 2000), p. 14.
- (8) - Jean Luc Marret, op.cit, p. 101.
- (9) - Nick Lewer, "*International Non-Government Organizations and Peacebuilding, Perspectives from Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution*". Working Paper 3, Center for Conflict Resolution, Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, October 1999, p. 1
- (10) - Ibid, p. 17.
- (11) - David Baharvar, "*Beyond Mediation, The integral Role of Non Governmental Approaches to Resolving Protracted Ethnic Conflicts in Lesser-Developped Countries*", *Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution*, issue 4. 1, 2001. p. 35.
- (12) - Paul Van Tongeren, Op.cit, p. 13.
- (13) - Ibid, p. 14.
- (14) - Jean Luc Marret, Op.cit, p. 99.

- (15) - Paul Van Tongeren, Op.cit, p. 13.  
(16) - David Baharvar, Op.cit, p. 36.  
(17) - Nick Lewer, Op.cit, p. 22.