

Conflict management in Latin America



Cover photos:

Top line from left:

The Salvadorian Peace Agreement was signed in Chapultepec Castle, Mexico City. A handshake between the President of El Salvador and the guerrilla leaders confirms that the fighting is over.

Photo: AFP/PRESSENS BILD

Residents of Colombia's second largest city Medellin watch special forces patrolling the streets. Urban fighting has taken the lives of soldiers, rebels and police officers – all in plain view of the civilian population.

Photo: JAVIER GALEANO, PRESSENS BILD

Bottom line from left:

Voters line up to cast their ballots in Nicaragua's national elections in 2001.

Photo: JAVIER GALEANO/PRESSENS BILD

A guatemalan family who have been living as refugees in southern Mexico are on their way home after the signing of the Peace Accord.

Photo: AFP/PRESSENS BILD

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Experience from Swedish development cooperation

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Partner in a process

LATIN AMERICA IS a region characterised by conflict.

Bloody civil wars and armed struggles have raged in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Peru. And still today, Colombia is suffering the effects of a violent internal armed conflict. Behind these conflicts there is a long history of using violence and oppression to solve social and ethnic conflicts.

Latin America is, without comparison, the sub-continent with the highest levels of inequality in the world. This, in combination with a tradition of oppressing their indigenous peoples, continues to influence the social climate in many countries of the region.

There are also positive examples of peaceful solution of conflicts, including the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala. Through close, strategic cooperation, Swedish diplomacy and development cooperation have actively contributed to these peace processes. Sweden has worked to promote dialogue, to create meeting places, to protect vulnerable groups, to support the conclusion of broad agreements and to provide reliable guarantees for their implementation.

Cooperation with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), churches, trade and industry and other

actors has been a major ingredient of this process.

Experience from Central America shows that Swedish development cooperation can play an important role, even in complicated cases. The conflict and its causes must be placed centre stage in the light of the realisation that processes differ from country to country and period to period. Rather than extensive cooperation with one individual actor, success has been based on becoming a partner in a process for the benefit of peace, democracy and development.

This publication presents Sweden's activities in Central America as well as current activities to promote a future peace process in Colombia. The aim is to describe lessons learned from Sweden's experience as a development actor working for the establishment of peace and democratic development.



*Göran Holmqvist,
Head of Sida's Regional
Department for Latin America*

External actors can play an important role

		GUERRILLA	
		FIGHT	NEGOTIATE
GOVERNMENT	FIGHT	--	++ --
	NEGOTIATE	-- ++	++

THE PRISONER'S DILEMMA

In the matrix above both parties, in this case the guerrilla and the government, are faced with the choice between on the one hand continuing armed conflict, and on the other hand, a negotiated solution which would necessarily mean certain compromises. The results of each alternative course of action for both parties are represented by plus and minus signs.

At the start of this process both parties are at war. Both parties would, in fact, prefer a peaceful solution but they also want to win the war without having to make any compromises. The main point illustrated by the Prisoner's Dilemma is that in a situation of prevailing mistrust – where the parties are not able to make binding promises to each other – a negotiated solution becomes impossible in spite of the fact that both parties would benefit.

An external actor who reads the situation correctly can influence the preconditions for the parties to be able to find a way out of the dilemma.

THE CAUSES OF the Latin American conflicts discussed here can be traced to underlying social and economic factors. They have also been complicated and reinforced by external factors such as Cold War activities of the major powers in Central America and the narcotic production in, and export from Colombia. It is, of course, not possible for development cooperation or the international community to solve national conflicts by themselves. However international involvement can affect preconditions for peaceful conflict solutions.

A peace process often encompasses dilemmas which, simplified to the extreme, can be compared to the game theory "The Prisoner's Dilemma". Even if there is a peaceful solution that both parties have good reason to prefer, progress towards this point is prevented by the inability of the parties to trust each other.

The matrix provides a simplified

picture of an extremely complicated reality. There are never only two parties in a conflict, there are usually several and they are seldom well defined. Neither is a peace process achieved with a single round of negotiations but often moves along several tracks simultaneously. However, the basic challenge is well described in this diagram, i.e. how to overcome the basic mistrust that has been built up between the parties to a violent conflict.

Under given conditions, that are not always fulfilled, the international community can play such a role. The parties' vision of a negotiated solution can be strengthened.

Meeting places and dialogue opportunities can be created and mediation offered. The trust and security of the parties can be strengthened by independent verification of agreements. Backing up agreements and decreasing transition costs can make a negotiated solution more attractive to all parties. ●

The Swedish approach

BELOW IS A SUMMARY of what has been the Swedish approach in Central America and which continues as such in Colombia.

1. Strengthen vision of a negotiated solution, expand circle of actors

Parties in a conflict need a vision that a negotiated solution is possible. This is a major step for actors who are caught up in the military logic in which victory is the only alternative. Diplomacy and development cooperation can expose the parties to ideas on how a negotiated solution can be made possible. It is also beneficial to expand the circle of interested actors who contribute to the peace process. Within deve-

lopment cooperation this can be achieved by supporting constructive contributions from NGOs, churches, trade and industry, women's organisations etc. in the countries affected by the conflict.

2. Create opportunities for dialogue

Dialogue is a precondition for a negotiated solution. Creating meeting places for the parties in a conflict is a task for diplomacy, which can also be supported by development cooperation inputs. The circle of actors involved in any conflict is complex and meeting places must be created at many different levels and contexts. Formal negotiations require a proper negotiation format

A PEACE PROCESS IN THREE PHASES

Experience from Swedish development cooperation in Central America and from Colombia today relates to the various phases of a peace process. The matrix below shows development from open warfare to a negotiated solution and peace agreement and gives examples of objectives and operational areas for development cooperation within the various phases. It should, however, be noted that these phases tend to blend together and that the situation is never static.

PHASE 1: CONFLICT MANAGEMENT DURING ONGOING ARMED CONFLICT

Objectives: to introduce a vision of a negotiated solution, to establish a peace agenda, define a negotiation format, expand circle of actors, increase respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, protect internal refugees.

Inputs: incentives for negotiations, dialogue creation, meeting places, support to the civil society and popular participation, establishment of mechanisms for an agenda, support to human rights and internal refugees.

PHASE 2: CONFLICT MANAGEMENT WHEN NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BEEN INITIATED

Objectives: to play the role of facilitator to establish sub-agreements on human rights and international humanitarian law, verification of progress, proposals for political instruments, strengthen security for parties.

Inputs: incentives for negotiations, dialogue creation, meeting places, support for UN as mediator, expertise on human rights and international humanitarian law, recruitment of observers, support to civil society organisations and other actors, conditional support to peace accord, support for human rights and internal refugees.

PHASE 3: PEACE REINFORCEMENT – WHEN PEACE ACCORDS SIGNED AND IMPLEMENTATION INITIATED

Objectives: the implementation of peace accords, independent international verification, reconciliation activities.

Inputs: support for implementation of agreements, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of soldiers, truth commission, support to civil society organisations and other actors, inputs for good governance, reform of police and military forces.

in which external participation in the form of mediation by, for example, the UN or groups of friendly countries, can play a key role.

3. Contribute to security, reinforce agreements, strengthen respect for human rights

In order to create stability for concluded agreements it is necessary that verification be carried out by a party who combines impartiality with legitimacy and the ability to put power behind words. The most obvious choice for this role has been the UN. Strengthening this organisation within the peace processes has also been used as a development cooperation strategy.

The peace agreements in Central America have been achieved via several sub-agreements; a process which, step by step, has led to the final negotiated peace accords. A lesson learned has been that the negotiation climate is improved if agreements to improve the security of the parties are made fairly early on in the process; agreements on respect for human rights can fill such a function.

4. Back up agreements, support a broad peace agenda

The way towards a negotiated solution can be facilitated if the inter-

national community contributes to transition costs. Projects that facilitate the integration of demobilised soldiers into society fill such a function. By using conditionality for its support, the international community can strengthen incentives to reach an agreement.

The peace accords in El Salvador and Guatemala deal with many issues linked to the causes of the conflicts. This has led to the peace accords also becoming long-term platforms for development cooperation, in which space is created to allow the dismantling of several of the countries' structural development barriers.

5. Seek coordination between diplomacy, development cooperation and Swedish civil society

Swedish diplomats, civil servants working within development cooperation and representatives of Swedish NGOs and the Swedish private sector all have contact networks that should be utilised in a peace process. The fact that there is an established Swedish broad-based approach to issues such as democracy, human rights and other basic human values forms a national asset, which can be utilised when Sweden is working for peace in other parts of the world. ●

Central America

– an example of regional conflict management

THE ARMED CONFLICTS that plagued Central America during the 1980s left no country untouched. Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua were directly involved in civil wars while Belize, Costa Rica, Mexico and, to a certain extent Panama, received refugees from these countries. Honduras bore the double burden of both large-scale flows of refugees and the presence of the Nicaraguan Contra guerrillas in the country.

The relationship between the countries was extremely complicated. Nicaragua was isolated and the regional integration process that had begun during the 1960s, totally broke down. It became obvious that cooperation between the countries was essential to untie the knots in their relationships, however in order to make progress external support was necessary.

In 1983, the Contadora Group – a group of like-minded countries consisting of Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela – took the initiative for a series of negotiations aimed at finding a solution to the conflicts in Central America. This initiative led to the Esquipulas Accords of which the second, and perhaps most important, agreement was signed in 1987.

Common undertaking

These accords cemented a common undertaking by the countries of Central America to work for reconciliation, solution to armed conflicts by negotiation and the strengthening of political and economic cooperation.

Several Latin American and European countries supported the process, while the USA took a critical standpoint. At this point in time the USA was providing extensive support to the Contras in Nicaragua and to government troops in El Sal-

vador and Guatemala. Sweden played a prominent role and the support provided in the Contadora process was followed by extensive development cooperation.

UN played important role

The UN's Development Program, UNDP, took the initiative for an extensive program for reconstruction and development in Central America (*Plan Económico para Centroamérica, PEC*). The efforts to solve the refugee problem, which were led by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, proved to play an important role for relationships between countries. The process was directed by an international dialogue (*Conferencia Internacional sobre Refugiados Centroamericanos, Cirefca*). The results also influenced the preconditions for the national peace processes that had begun to emerge in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Cirefca was a practical expression of efforts to broaden participation in the peace process. Through the meetings and fora which were created there, actors that previously could not have been in the same room at the same time were brought together to solve the refugee problem. Internal refugee issues were placed on the agenda and refugees themselves were able to participate for the first time. PEC, but perhaps primarily Cirefca, laid the foundations of the central role that the UN would come to play in the peace processes in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Another important element was the cooperation initiative between the health ministries of these countries and inputs for development of primary health care that were run by the Pan-American Health Organization, PAHO. ●

El Salvador

– peace accord opens for reforms

DURING THE 1970s, as a result of extensive election fixing and increasing frustration over unfulfilled reform promises, popular resistance grew against government policies. Increased military repression sowed the seed of armed struggle.

Civil war broke out in earnest in 1981 and lasted for twelve years. This period was characterised by violence and violations in which almost 80 000 people, mostly civilians, lost their lives. Considerable military forces were built up; the Government received massive military assistance from USA, while the FMLN guerrillas (*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*) found support in Nicaragua and Cuba.

The end of the Cold War and the realisation that no military solution was in sight provided the incentive for both parties to attempt peaceful solutions. Negotiations were initiated as early as 1984 between the Christian Democratic government and FMLN. However, it was not until 1990, soon after the November Offensive by the FMLN, which seriously shook up the government forces, and under the auspices of the newly elected Arena Party government, that negotiations moved into a more intensive phase.

Human rights agreement

A number of initiatives were already underway or prepared during this period. This contributed to creating the vision that a negotiated solution was possible, at the same time as an increasing number of actors were drawn into the process. The partial agreement which was concluded in June 1990 concerning protection of human rights and UN verification was decisive as it created security for the parties. The national dialogue introduced by the Roman Catholic

Church, as well as the fact that refugees had already begun to return on a large scale under the protection of the Esquipulas and Cerecra processes, placed added pressure on the parties. Active Swedish diplomacy played a vital role – both before and during the peace negotiations.

With strong commitment and pressure from the departing UN Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuellar, the parties were able to reach an agreement in January 1992 and the final peace accord was signed. This marked the end of an intensive negotiation process in which the international community, not least in the form of the UN, played a decisive role. Sweden participated together with a group of like-minded countries (Colombia, Mexico, Spain and Venezuela) in order to actively support UN in its work and to create opportunities for dialogue between the parties.

A country divided

In spite of the fact that this peace agreement had potential long-term consequences for the entire Salvadorian society, it was negotiated by no more than two power elite groups. It is true that both enjoyed extensive political support, but neither had the majority of the population behind them. This fact, together with the mistrust that prevailed throughout the entire Salvadorian society, made great demands on participation and national acceptance if the reforms were to be implemented in a sustainable fashion.

It is also apparent that there have been considerable internal conflicts in both of the parties involved. This is especially clear on the Government side where parts of the Arena Party felt that the

EL SALVADOR'S PEACE ACCORDS

These peace accords are extremely extensive and are formulated as a reform agenda, consequently they also form the basis of national reconciliation, modernisation and the democratisation of the country.

The following areas are covered:

- Demobilisation of FMLN and its transformation into a political party
- Decrease and restructuring of national defence forces
- Establishment of a civil police force to replace the previous police forces controlled by military powers
- Reformation of the election system
- Reformation of the legal system and introduction of an Ombuds Office for Human Rights
- Establishment of a Truth Commission
- Creation of a forum for national consultations and consensus building concerning economic and social issues
- Integration of guerrilla and government soldiers into civilian life through allocation of farming land

In addition, the parties agreed that UN would be awarded the mandate to verify that the agreement was followed and to mobilise and coordinate international development cooperation to assist its implementation.

SWEDISH SUPPORT TO THE PEACE PROCESS IN EL SALVADOR

The most important Swedish activities in support of the implementation of the peace accord included:

Demobilisation and integration of soldiers:

Sida provided humanitarian assistance in the form of temporary housing, food and basic health care. Other elements included vocational training, specialist health care, allocation of agricultural land and the construction of housing. However, at the same time as it was important to make civilian life attractive in order to encourage military personnel to leave their armed activities, it was also vital not to benefit the ex-soldiers too much – especially in contrast to the poorer rural populations. Consequently the support also included several other target groups.

Integration of returning refugees:

In cooperation with UNHCR and Swedish Diakonia, support was provided to housing construction and local development projects. Internal refugees were also included in this support.

The election process:

Swedish support was extensive and decisive within many different aspects of the election process. Sweden assisted the preparations of the government election agency for the implementation of the 1994 election and also contributed with international election observers. UNHCR was supported in its task of issuing ID documents – a basic precondition for election participation. NGO activities for training of the electorate also received assistance. The aim of the Swedish support was to create equal opportunities for all voters to participate in the election process. The 1994 election – the first genuinely pluralistic election in the history of the country – was regarded as an important gauge of the continued success of the peace process.

The legal system and respect for human rights:

The civil police force created by the peace accords was supported with equipment and with Swedish police instructors staffing the newly established Police College. Most instructors were from other countries as existing, national teachers were considered tainted by history. The Truth Commission, its preparations and winding up activities, also received Swedish support. Sida also contributed substantially to the newly established Ombuds Office for Human Rights and to NGO activities concerning the recording of human rights violations and lobbying. A characteristic worth noting has been the interaction of practical development cooperation inputs and Swedish diplomacy throughout the process. Development cooperation has created opportunities and provided legitimacy for the diplomatic dialogue, which, in turn, has contributed to the preconditions for the implementation of development cooperation.

peace accords had been forced upon them.

The peace process included a number of inherent inconsistencies and risks. However, at the same time, it formed a unique historical and political conjuncture in which a number of positive circumstances, during a limited window of opportunity, created exceptional openings for international development cooperation. It is an awareness of this possibility that has been the guiding light for Swedish development cooperation with El Salvador.

Most of the members of the international donor community have realigned their development cooperation in order to back up the peace accords. This is especially so in the case of the UN system and some bilateral donors such as Sweden. USA's cooperation has also changed, if at a slower pace.

However, the major actors who set the tone, such as the multilateral banks, have been slow to adapt their inputs to the peace accords. In a situation where the peace accords have still not been implemented in practical terms, the banks have often chosen to listen only to the government side and therefore missed the urgency of

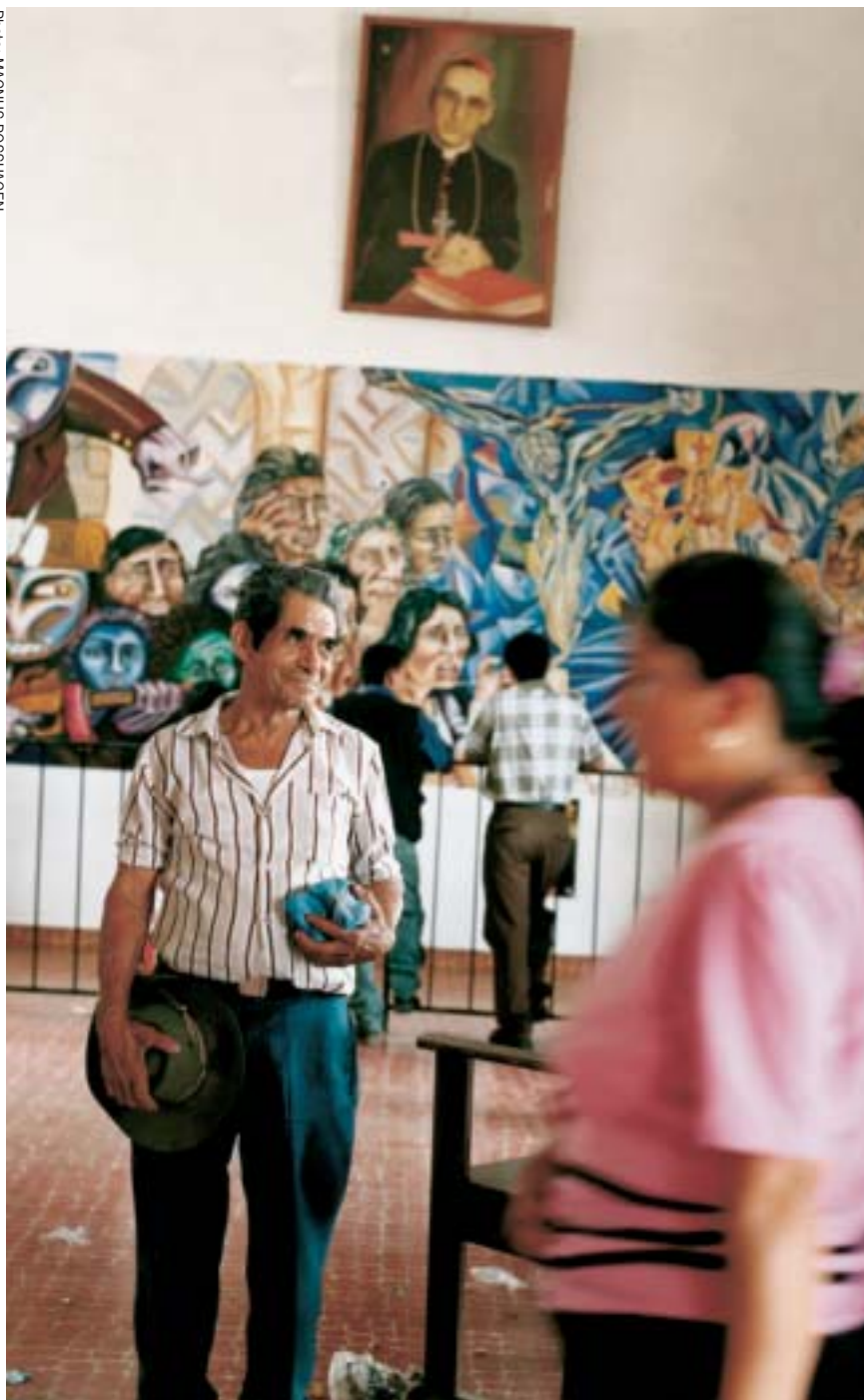
strengthening national cohesion.

From 1992, the important inputs made by Swedish diplomacy during the negotiations process in order to create dialogue and meeting places for the parties were complemented with extensive development cooperation inputs mostly aimed at supporting the implementation of the peace accords.

During the first four-year period when the UN verification mission Onusal (later Minusal) was still active and a practical schedule for the implementation of the peace accords was followed, the major part of the Swedish support was channelled through the UN system, especially through the UNDP. However, as the peace agenda became less clearly defined, an increasing part was channelled through Swedish and local NGOs.

Peace most important

Since the peace accords were concluded in 1992, they have provided the most important guide for Swedish development cooperation. As the leading role played by the UN system has decreased and the priorities of the peace accords have been reflected in government policies to a decreasing degree, Swedish



The civil war in El Salvador lasted for twelve years, during which period 80 000 people lost their lives. One of the many victims was the country's Archbishop, Oscar Romero, who also became one of the country's true martyrs. Here his portrait watches over a mural painting, commemorating the victims of the war.

development cooperation has explored partially new routes. Inputs to strengthen popular participation and democracy at local level have increased. Projects that have been continued and are linked to the core of the peace accords include the civil police force, the Ombuds Office for Human Rights and NGOs working to promote human rights.

The peace accords have been partially implemented. The cessation of armed conflict, the transformation of the military authorities, the new civil police force, im-

proved respect for human rights and increased political pluralism are all invaluable improvements.

However, a number of threats to continued peaceful and democratic development remain. The high level of violence and crime in combination with unsolved problems within the legal system appear to be specially threatening. Another unsolved issue from the peace accords is the election system, which has only been partially reformed. In addition, economic and social inequality and vulnerability still prevail. ●

GUATEMALA'S PEACE ACCORDS

The Peace Accords cover the following areas:

- Respect for human rights and strengthening of institutions for human rights
- Resettlement of refugees
- Establishment of a Truth Commission
- Indigenous peoples' identity and rights
- Socio-economic aspects and land issues
- Strengthening of the organised civil society and definition of the role of the army
- Integration of members of guerrilla forces into society and transformation of URNG into a political party
- Reform of constitution and electoral system
- Agreement on implementation, fulfilment and verification of all agreements

Guatemala

– previously excluded groups become actors

AFTER A DECADE OF GOVERNMENT by a reformist, democratically elected president, a group of exile Guatemalans, with the support of the USA, carried out a coup in 1954. This was the beginning of more than three decades of military control. Oppression and the unequal distribution of the country's resources created all the preconditions for the guerrilla movement that began operations in the 1960s.

The Guatemalan civil war lasted 36 years and caused the deaths of more than 150 000 people, 50 000 people disappeared and over a million became refugees. Most violations were aimed at the indigenous peoples in rural areas. The term genocide was used by the Truth Commission.¹

The Esquipulas Accords, the democratically elected government that took power in 1986 and international pressure created the preconditions for the initiation of negotiations between the Government and the URNG guerrillas (*Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca*).

Peace negotiations were underway for ten years at varying degrees of intensity. Real progress came in connection with the end of the Cold War. The international spotlight was turned to the situation of the indigenous peoples after Rigoberta Menchu was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992. However, it was not until the change of government in 1996 that a new dynamic entered the peace negotiations.

The Esquipulas and Cerefca processes laid the foundation for increased dialogue between the various actors in Guatemala. Even if the formal peace negotiations were held between the government and the guerrillas, different sectors of the organised civil society contributed via various fora such as CNR

(*Comisión Nacional de Reconciliación*) and ASC (*Asamblea de la Sociedad Civil*), and produced concrete information on which to base the peace accords. These dialogue activities were supported via Swedish NGOs and achieved their aim, which was to broaden participation in peace negotiations.

Return of refugees

The Cerefca process led to agreements that regulated the return of refugees. Through Diakonia, Sweden supported organisations of both internal and external refugees in order to guarantee their influence and participation in issues concerning their resettlement and integration. During the peace negotiations, Sweden contributed to the dialogue between the parties by facilitating and enabling URNG's participation in the negotiations. Sweden also supported international exchanges for the armed forces, the private sector and union organisations.

Between 1994 and 1996, a total of twelve sub-agreements were signed which together form the peace accords. In the first agreement, the UN Secretary General was asked to appoint a mediator to supervise continued negotiations and to make proposals for speeding up the process. The UN thereby received a mandate to actively participate in the peace negotiations. The final sub-agreement was signed in December 1996.

After the signing of the peace accords a Peace Commission (*Comisión de Acompañamiento*) was formed which included representatives of the government, the URNG, some prominent citizens and the UN Mission for Verification of the Peace Accords, Minugua. The Commission is a forum for the solution of problems in the imple-

mentation of the peace accords and receives international support from several countries including Sweden.

Minugua has been in action in Guatemala since 1994 and was established almost two years before the final peace accord was signed, which is innovative for a peace mission. Minugua's mandate is to follow up the peace accords, including the recommendations of the Truth Commission. Sweden has been one of the UN mission's most important donors.

The Guatemalan Peace Accords form a national platform for structural social reform. This is an extensive set of agreements and when the original schedule ran out in December 2000 only a little more than one third had been fulfilled. According to the new schedule, all changes stated in the Peace Accords will be implemented by 2004.

The Peace Accords form the basis of Sweden's development cooperation with Guatemala. Sweden has, together with the international donor group, provided active support to the peace negotiations as well as the implementation and follow-up of the accords. After the peace accords were signed Sweden, as did many other donors, altered the course of its development cooperation from humanitarian activities focusing on human rights to more long term support aimed at reinforcing the peace process and strengthening democracy.

Dramatic progress

Activities connected with the return of refugees, demobilisation and the Truth Commission have

been implemented with considerable Swedish support and good results. The integration of returning refugees and demobilisation of soldiers have, however, suffered severe delays due to lack of political acceptance and of agreement among the actors concerned.

The peace and democratisation process in Guatemala has moved slowly, while at the same time, the progress that has been made is dramatic as compared to the initial situation. The peace accords and international development cooperation have been decisive for the promotion of the participation of indigenous peoples. For the first time in history representatives of indigenous people could meet government over the negotiating table.

However much remains to be done and there is a substantial risk that the process will cease if peace and democracy do not result in economic improvements for the majority of the population. The parties who signed the peace accords are weaker now than they were then. In fact it is often said that the peace accords have no parents. Weakness and division has also afflicted many of the civil society organisations that actively participated in the peace negotiations. Many of these organisations have not been able to identify a new, peacetime role. ●

1. In accordance with the peace accords a Truth Commission was also established, CEH (*Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico*), which presented its report in 1999. One year previously the Catholic Church had presented its report REMHI (*Informe para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica*), which contained extensive witness statements on human rights violations during the civil war. Both these reports state that the population of Guatemala, primarily its indigenous peoples, were exposed to inhuman terror and massacres during the war years. Both CEH and REMHI received support from Sweden.

SWEDISH SUPPORT TO THE PEACE PROCESS IN GUATEMALA

Sweden's support to the peace process has primarily been channelled through the UN system and Swedish NGOs as follows:

- Via UNHCR, Sweden supported refugee resettlement and issuing of ID documents to returning refugees.
- Via UNDP, Sweden provided extensive support to the reform of the legal system, integration of returning refugees and demobilisation of soldiers. Women's and indigenous peoples' organi-

sations, land surveying and state institutions responsible for the implementation of the peace accords were also afforded support.

- Via Minugua, support was provided to the new civil police force and to Parliament for its activities aimed at establishing legislation in accordance with the peace accords.
- Through the Organisation of American States, OAS, support was provided to conflict management and the dialogue between Government and organised civil society.

- Sweden also supported the Swedish Fellowship of Reconciliation, which contributed an international presence in the form of volunteers in resettlement villages. Cooperation between the UNDP, the UN Volunteer Program, UNV and Forum Syd was initiated in which Swedish and Guatemalan volunteers were placed in organisations and state institutions with direct connection to the implementation of the peace accords, especially at local level.

Nicaragua

– peace despite lengthy negotiations

THE ARMED CONFLICTS OF THE 1980s in Nicaragua were extensive and – it would prove – a long process was necessary to put an end to them. At its height the Contras guerrilla force amounted to 20 000 men, which is larger than any other guerrilla group in Central America and Colombia.

In the Esquipulas Accords, Nicaragua undertook to organise free elections and to attempt to reach a negotiated solution to its domestic conflict. In contrast to El Salvador and Guatemala, however, negotiations were not held in a combined manner but were held at different stages and with different parties involved. Negotiations between the Sandinista Government and the political opposition were initiated in 1988 and led to general elections in 1990.

The elections resulted in an unexpected loss for the Sandinistas who, at short notice and in an unplanned fashion, were required to hand over government. After the elections, a hasty agreement was drawn up between the Sandinistas and the new government coalition covering how the transfer was to take place.

Split participation

The Nicaraguan opposition's military branch – the USA-supported Contras – did not participate in the political negotiations which led to the elections and the later agreement. They questioned these agreements on essential points. Negotiations were initiated between the Sandinista Government and the Contras as early as 1987 but no agreement was ever signed.

The 1990 elections took place while the Contras were still mobilised and it was the new, non-Sandinista Government who actually concluded the demobilisation

agreement. The Sandinistas, in turn, did not take part in these negotiations and questioned their result. In practice, however, these demobilisation agreements were only partially successful and renewal of negotiations was necessary since some demobilised soldiers continuously took up arms.

These newly formed armed groups acquired the character of more or less isolated bands of robbers rather than a politically motivated movement. The previously Contra-dominated northern part of Nicaragua continued to be plagued by violence and lawlessness. A high humanitarian price was paid in the form of recurring fire fights, kidnappings, murders and blackmail. It was not until the end of 1990 that there was peace in the area.

During the 1990s Nicaragua underwent a transition at several levels; the challenge of moving from war to peace, establishing a functioning market economy and setting up a democratic system which was acceptable to all political forces in the country. Seen in the light of the difficult starting situation in 1990, important progress has been made within all these areas in spite of problems encountered along the way.

The role of the USA

Nicaragua differs from El Salvador and Guatemala not only regarding its undefined negotiation format, less powerful peace agreements and long drawn out demobilisation process, but also in its lack of an international verification agency. It was the OAS, rather than the UN, that was assigned the role of supervising demobilisation but not, however, with the same clear mandate as that of the UN in neighbouring countries.

The Nicaraguan peace accords



had neither the breadth nor the overall support which would have made them a given point of reference for the continuing process. Consequently the international community did not become involved or play the role as a guarantor of peace in the same way as in other Central American countries. The fact that the USA was so deeply involved in the conflict was a complicating factor which certainly inhibited the UN from playing a stronger role in the peace process.

Independent analyses that com-

pare the peace processes in El Salvador and Nicaragua have indicated that the more limited role played by the international community as guarantors for the peace process in Nicaragua was one factor which explained some of its problems.² ●

2. O'Shaughnessy L.N. and Dodson M. (1999), Political Bargaining and Democratic Transitions: A Comparison of Nicaragua and El Salvador, *Comparison of Latin America Studies* 31, 99-127.

Local Peace Commissions support civil society with mediation and help prevent conflict at local level. Yanire Hoot works in northeastern Nicaragua. An important part of her job is to help local civil society with conflict resolution. Here she is speaking to Police Chief Rodolfo Amador, in the city of Waslala.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND DIPLOMACY TO SUPPORT PEACE

- Sweden conducted extensive bilateral development cooperation with Nicaragua as early as the 1980s with emphasis on productive sectors such as forestry, mining and agriculture. This development cooperation had not been designed or motivated based on a conflict perspective, instead it emphasised the importance of the country's independence in its increasingly serious conflict with the USA. From the European side, not least from Sweden, diplomatic efforts were made to promote a peaceful solution.
- In the 1990s, Swedish development cooperation changed direction in order to provide support for the transition process. The main

part of the cooperation aimed at building up democratic institutions and supporting economic reforms. Sweden was also a member of a group of like-minded countries who took on the dialogue creation and mediator role when internal conflicts threatened the process.

- Swedish development cooperation with Nicaragua during the 1990s also included extensive inputs to support local conflict management in the parts of the country where violence continued. A successful example is the establishment of local peace commissions – an attempt to support the capacity of the local civil society to mediate

and contain local conflicts. Support was also provided for the establishment of a functioning legal system in remote parts of the country, including a layperson corps to assist judges.

- The Atlantic Coastal Region has posed special conflict problems with its historical and ethnic dissimilarities to the rest of the country. Here Sweden has, within the framework of constitutional reforms for regional autonomy, contributed to the development of regional parliaments and newly formed municipalities.

Colombia

– the spiral of violence continues

COLOMBIA IS DESCRIBED AS the oldest democracy in Latin America. Since 1957, all its presidents have been democratically elected. At the same time the country has lived with a civil war for the last 50 years. This war has its roots in party political rivalry, dissatisfaction with agricultural policies, poverty, inequality, corruption and unaccountability.

Colombia is characterised by political, economic, social and cultural marginalisation of entire sectors of society. Occasionally this has been expressed in direct extermination of political enemies. For example, more than 3 000 politicians from the leftist party Unión Patriótica have been murdered.

In spite of this conflict, Colombia was a relatively stable country between 1960 and 1980, primarily in comparison to the other countries in the region. Since then however, violence for both political and criminal ends has steadily increased. The internal refugee situation has deteriorated to a level that is now affecting neighbouring countries.

As far as the drug trade is concerned, Colombia has moved from a situation where a small number of cartels dominated to a much more difficult-to-control picture involving a large number of actors. In addition, coca plantations have spread to such a degree that Colombia is responsible for an estimated 80 percent of world production.

Drug trade finances the war

The guerrilla groups that are still active include FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) and ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*) which were formed during the 1960s. FARC has historically found its support

among small farmers and currently enjoys a geographically widespread presence in Colombia. Numerically FARC's forces amount to 16 000-18 000 men. ELN consists of approximately 5 000 armed soldiers. Both groups finance their operations with activities such as kidnapping, blackmail and narcotics.

The paramilitary force, AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*), has its roots in private militia groups which were formed by large estate owners and others with financial interests in fighting the guerrillas in the 1980s. AUC today consists of approximately 10 000 men and finances its activities by drug smuggling among other illegal activities. The AUC is assumed to be behind 80 percent of the politically motivated deaths in the country and most of the forced evacuations that have caused a flood of internal refugees. There is no doubt that this paramilitary force operates with the goodwill of the army.

Constant violations

The armed conflict in Colombia is just now in a vicious circle with its own logic in which the fact that all the parties can finance their activities themselves merely adds fuel to the fire – and the civilian population are caught in the middle. People in rural areas are forced to live with armed attacks, massacres, kidnappings and forced evacuations. 30 000 people are killed every year, ten people are kidnapped every day, two million have been forced to flee during the last ten years and two million – out of a population of 40 million – have left the country.

All parties in the armed conflict commit human rights violations and break international humanitarian law. The lack of state instit-

THE OBJECTIVE – TO INVOLVE MORE ACTORS IN THE PEACE PROCESS

The overall objective of Swedish development cooperation in Colombia is a widely accepted peace process which will enable the underlying causes of the conflict to be addressed and sustainable peace to be established.

A country strategy has been adopted to guide development cooperation 2003-2007. Currently (October 2003) Colombia is in a phase of continued armed conflict with little hope attached to peace negotiation. Development cooperation inputs have been modified accordingly. Close cooperation between diplomacy and development cooperation activities is the basic strategy used to make support as efficient and effective as possible.

The need for dialogue and the creation of meeting places is gigantic. With the aim of broadening dialogue and involving more actors in the process, Sweden is financing the following activities:

- The Reconciliation Commission of the Catholic Church which is promoting a dialogue with all armed groups with the aim of creating meeting places for the parties of the conflict.
- The Swedish labour market parties³ and their counterparts in Colombia. Seminars concerning labour market policies where the Colombian labour market parties meet with Swedish counterparts to exchange experience concerning dialogue, cooperation and negotiated solutions between the state, industry and unions.
- Inter-American Dialogue's Colombia Group, which consists of individuals possessing competence within conflict management, peace processes and diplomacy. The group works to develop and present incentives for the various actors in the peace process.
- Women's movement for peace, support to

one of the country's largest women's organisations with the aim of introducing Colombian women, their influence and participation into the peace process.

- A peace fund, together with UNDP. A partnership oriented cooperation with UNDP to support and initiate activities in promotion of the peace process. Among other activities at regional level, the fund contributes to demobilisation, alternative crops to coca and efforts to prevent recruiting of adolescents to the armed groups.
- Swedish NGO operations, Diakonia as well as Caritas and Civis work through partner organisations in Colombia in order to make the voices of the civil society organisations heard in the national debate and within the lobbying for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

3. International Council of Swedish Industry (NIR), LO and TCO.

utions in enormous areas of the country contributes to widespread lawlessness and unaccountability.

Peace negotiations have been held now and again with varying results. In the current phase of the Colombian conflict protection of, and respect for, human rights and international humanitarian law are important steps on the road to a peace process. Experience from El Salvador and Guatemala shows the necessity of strengthening human rights early in the process.

In Colombia this will be carried out through support to internal refugees via UNHCR, the International Red Cross (ICRC) and the country's Ombuds Office. The UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in Colombia receives Swedish support in order to monitor the human rights situation and provide advice and training for the Colombian state.

International presence

Sweden is consciously working to strengthen the role of the UN system in Colombia. This is expressed in the form of support to the UNHCHR and the UNHCR, the UN Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and the Secretary

General's Special Adviser for Colombia. In addition, Sweden has chosen to join the group of like-minded countries who work at close range to follow the negotiation processes with the aim of contributing to their future verification.

The conflict in Colombia has been long and difficult to solve. The openings, which appeared at the beginning of 2002, rapidly disappeared into an escalated conflict situation. Experience from the Central American peace processes shows the necessity of sustained and continuous strategic considerations so that the Swedish development cooperation will be able to influence the process in a positive direction.

Swedish diplomacy and development cooperation must continue to act in tandem in order to insert strategic pushes to move the process in the direction of a peaceful, negotiated solution. Sweden's work through the UN system and the EU is a vital element in these efforts. ●



Photo: MAGNUS ROSSHAGEN

Several elections have been held in El Salvador since the peace accords were signed. A number of reforms of the electoral system still remain to be carried out in order to meet the peace accord commitments.



Photo: MAGNUS ROSSHAGEN

One important task after the signing of the peace accord in Guatemala was to support returning of refugees and help create conditions for their reintegration into society.



Photo: MAGNUS ROSSHAGEN

Julio Cesar Gonzales works with the Peace Commission in El Naranjo in Nicaragua. His job is to help prevent local conflicts.

Future challenges

IN A TIME WHEN CONFLICT lines are drawn in an increasingly hostile fashion with less space for diplomacy and negotiated solutions, it is vitally important to show successful examples of peaceful conflict solution. International involvement, diplomacy and development cooperation can together play an important role in the promotion of peace and democratic development. Central America is a concrete example that deserves attention.

In the current debate, partnership with the "good" country is often described as some sort of ideal for the development cooperation relationship; a partnership based on common values emphasising democracy, human rights and poverty alleviation. Countries in crisis, countries trying to survive bloody conflicts – difficult countries – are a long way away from this ideal picture. Experience from Central America proves that it is possible to become a partner in a process for the benefit of peace, democracy and development.

This publication has shown that

strategically aimed development cooperation can, together with diplomatic activities, play an important role even during on-going armed conflicts.

Using experience

Sweden has, together with the international development community, played an important role both during the difficult conflict years and in the delicate peace and reconstruction processes in Central America. Lessons from these peace processes can also be applied and further developed in today's Colombia.

The future challenges are many and deal, among other things, with Sweden's opportunities to influence and attempt new modes of cooperation with the UN, the EU and international financial institutions.

Yet another challenge is to further develop relations with Swedish civil society in order to work even more strategically with a broad spectrum of Colombian actors for the promotion of a peaceful solution to the armed conflict. ●

Latin America is a region characterised by conflict. Bloody civil wars and armed struggles have raged in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Peru. And still today, Colombia is suffering the effects of a violent internal armed conflict.

There are also positive examples of peaceful solutions, for example in the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala. Through close, strategic cooperation, Swedish diplomacy and development cooperation have actively contributed to these peace processes.

This publication presents Sweden's activities in Central America as well as current activities to promote a future peace process in Colombia. The aim is to describe lessons learned from Sweden's experience as a development actor working for the establishment of peace and democratic development.

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