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Swedish cooperation
with El Salvador 1979–2001

An extraordinary relationship



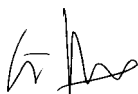
This study is an attempt to document more than 20 years of Swedish support to the process of peace and democratisation in Salvadoran society – a process that has been as dynamic as it has been complicated and extremely tragic – but, at the same time, full of hope. One of the most brutal armed conflicts in the history of Latin America ended peacefully, by means of negotiation. This is in itself a victory considering the initial, extremely divergent positions of the parties involved.

As an external actor, Sweden worked to promote and strengthen Salvadoran and regional actors, particularly those who were working for a negotiated solution to the war. We are proud to have extended our modest support in this direction. We are particularly satisfied with the characteristics of the Peace Accords, as they constituted not merely a technical agreement intended to end hostilities, but also a dazzling attempt to rebuild the Salvadoran nation.

The authors have carried out a praiseworthy task and have identified an impressive amount of information gleaned from a multitude of different actors. The study fulfils our expectations: it is an independent and, at times, critical review of Swedish support, describing the different events and phases of the Salvadoran peace process. It also shows how Swedish support succeeded in adapting to the vibrant and ever changing realities of the conflict without losing focus on the issues at hand. Yet another aspect is the report's reflections on the goals and tasks that have yet to be carried out.

This study is hereby presented to the public. It is primarily written for the people of El Salvador and Sweden, but it is equally the property of all those individuals and societies who formed relationships with, and showed interest in, this particular region of Central America.

Stockholm, August 2004



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Head of the Department for Latin America
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Cover photo:

The FDR-FMLN leaders Héctor Oqueli and Ana Guadalupe Martínez visited Sweden on several occasions during the civil war in El Salvador. They had a close relationship with the Swedish Government and directly with Prime Minister Olof Palme. The photo shows the three at a peace conference about El Salvador. Olof Palme was assassinated in Stockholm in 1986. Héctor Oqueli was murdered in Guatemala in 1989.

Photo: Ulf Anéer

Published by the Department for Latin America, Sida

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Translation from Spanish to English: Agneta Gunnarsson & Anna Tibblin

English editing: Anne Froude

Production: Context & Press Art

Printing: Edita, 2004

SIDA 4133en

ISBN 91-586-8411-5

A journey in time

The Team's mission has been to document and analyse Swedish support to El Salvador during 1979–2001. It has been a fascinating task and a most interesting journey in time and space. We have travelled back more than two decades, but also examined present day El Salvador. We have studied the institutions created by the Peace Accords, but we have also visited the once symbolic village of Tenancingo.

We would like to express our deep, sincere gratitude to all of those individuals who shared their time and knowledge with us, thus making our mission possible. Special thanks are directed to the members of the reference group in El Salvador who contributed their valuable experience.

Over these last 25 years, the close relationship between El Salvador and Sweden has resulted in know-how, contacts and bonds of friendship on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. These ties constitute the foundation of new relationships and challenges that will continue to develop.

We would like to complete this prologue with a quote from Lars Franklin, one of the people who played a vital role in Swedish support to Central America. In 1994, he summed up his then 17-year relationship with El Salvador in the following words:

“Insecurity and hope, sorrow and happiness have accompanied me. /.../ Knowing that the causes that started the war still remain to be resolved, at the same time as the Salvadoran people have come out of the crisis heads high, makes me want to prolong my journey. The problem is, as always, to decide how the mission should be defined so that it can be adapted to the budget of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. What was really the mission and when does the journey end?”

Lars Franklin died in 2001. For many his spirit is still present.

Stockholm, San Salvador and Atlántida, August 2004

Agneta Gunnarsson, Roberto Rubio Fabián, Lilian Sala
and Anna Tibblin

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Introduction

Two decades of cooperation

Until 1979 interaction between El Salvador and Sweden was limited. The Swedish Ambassador at the time analysed possible means of promoting Swedish exports to the distant Central American republic. Every now and then a report concerning electoral fraud or human rights violations reached the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

In October 1979, a group of young officers staged a coup and a civilian-military junta took over Government in El Salvador, aspiring to address popular unrest. However, the leftist junta members soon pulled out in protest against continued repression and military rule. It was within this context that the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), a coordination of five guerrilla organizations, was formed in 1980. The political wing of the opposition was organised within the Frente Democrático Revolucionario (FDR).

The guerrilla offensive of January 1980, the brutal abuses carried out by death squads and the dead bodies found on the outskirts of the capital at dawn each day, provided El Salvador with front-page coverage in Swedish newspapers. By then, the first Swedish NGO, Diakonia, had begun to channel humanitarian assistance to the country.

Shortly after the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in March 1980, the Socialist International pronounced itself against the violence in El Salvador and US involvement in the conflict. In the United Nations, Sweden voted in favour of a General Assembly resolution demanding respect for human rights and an end to arms shipments to El Salvador. In 1981, the Swedish Parliament declared in favour of a negotiated solution to the conflict.

In summary, these were the main Swedish strategies during the war and for most of the negotiation process.

During the course of the armed conflict, Sweden also received political refugees from El Salvador, promoted the

repatriation of refugees and displaced persons and supported Salvadoran politicians from the smaller-scale, centre parties.

After the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) initiated support directly to the peace and democratisation process in El Salvador. A large part of the contribution was channelled through the UN development programme UNDP, that coordinated support for the implementation of the Peace Accords, and other UN bodies.

For the Swedish NGOs, peace also meant drastic change. From distributing humanitarian assistance, they gradually moved on to more long-term development issues, such as strengthening of local democracy and promotion of children's rights.

By the millennium Swedish development cooperation had, in part, started to seek new routes forward. Housing and humanitarian assistance for reconstruction after the earthquakes in 2001 soon became the largest areas of support.

A new chapter in the relationship between El Salvador and Sweden will be written when grant-based cooperation is phased out in 2005. Swedish support will continue in the form of technical assistance and through NGOs.

Objectives

This study has three objectives:

1. To document Swedish support to El Salvador during the period 1979–2001.
2. To analyse the overall effectiveness and strategies of this support and answer a number of questions regarding relationships between Swedish actors, cooperation with Salvadoran counterparts and the roles that were played by the different actors.
3. To sum up and present lessons learned from Swedish support to the peace process in El Salvador that could be of use in similar contexts.

The organization of the report

This report is divided into three sections:

- Documentation of Swedish support to El Salvador 1979–2001. In order to facilitate reading and general understanding it has, in some cases, been necessary to break over-all chronological order in order to portray specific events.
- A general analysis of the effectiveness of Swedish support and other aspects highlighted in the Terms of Reference as well as other issues considered relevant.
- Lessons learned from the different phases of Swedish cooperation with El Salvador.

Authors

This study was carried out by a team of four: Agneta Gunnarsson and Anna Tibblin, journalists and consultants at the Sweden-based consultancy company Context; Roberto Rubio Fabían, Executive Director of the Salvadoran development NGO Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo (FUNDE); and Lilian Sala, journalist and consultant based in Uruguay.

Agneta Gunnarsson was team leader.

Thomas Alveteg, consultant in Great Britain, organised a seminar in Stockholm on Swedish support to the peace process in El Salvador. Ricardo Córdova, Executive Director of the Salvadoran NGO Fundación Guillermo Ungo (FUNDAUNGO) carried out a preliminary study in different Salvadoran archives. Emma Gustafsson, trainee at Context, carried out an analysis of how El Salvador was portrayed in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* 1979–2001. Patricia Valdés, consultant in El Salvador, provided valuable help in locating interviewees and with other logistical support.

Methodology

There are basically four methods that can be applied in this sort of investigative study: study and analysis of written documentation, interviews, surveys and observation.

An extensive archives study was carried out, mainly in the archives of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, in those of Sida as well as at the Swedish National Archives. The material gathered was subsequently systematised, constituting an important point of departure for later interviews and when writing the empirical part of the study.

Archives searches were also carried out in El Salvador; at the UNDP country office, at different documentation centres and also in the archives of the Swedish NGO Diakonia in San Salvador. In general terms, these local searches yielded few results. One reason is the varied quality of the archives, but more importantly, it was difficult to find documentation relevant to Swedish support. For this reason, the study is primarily based on documentation found in Swedish archives.

The majority of the archives material used is not accessible without a specified search. In the archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, for example, documents have to be searched according to year and title. Additionally, a large proportion of the archives material is confidential, even after the signing of the Peace Accords.

The team has, however, gained access to all archives material, including classified documents. Following Swedish legislation on confidential sources, some details have been deliberately left out while writing this report. The authors

have not found that this influenced the overall contents of the study.

As these non-published archives sources are not immediately accessible and in order to limit the number of text references, they have been noted in the literature list at the end of the study. Footnotes in the text have only been used to refer to books, evaluations, press communiqués and other accessible materials.

More than 100 interviews were carried out, mainly in Sweden, El Salvador and Colombia, with individuals in key positions as well as with people with specific knowledge on issues of interest.

The interviews were semi-structured, based on open-ended questions from the Terms of Reference, the information gathered when analysing the archives sources and from other interviews. A list of people interviewed is found at the end of the study.

The observation method was especially useful in order to establish the “feature stories” that have been inserted into the descriptive section of the report.

In order to study how Swedish media portrayed El Salvador, the team chose to look more closely at the reporting carried out by Sweden’s largest daily newspaper, Dagens Nyheter. Between 1979 and 1991 the selection of articles has been random. As of 1992, however, all articles are digitally archived, making it possible to study all published texts up to 2001. The study included in total some 150 newspaper articles.

Considering the complexity of the issues to be covered, questionnaires were not applied as a method in this study.

In November 2003, a seminar was organised in Stockholm bringing together individuals possessing key knowledge about Swedish support to the peace process in El Salvador. The objective was to collect facts as well as ideas on how to continue the task of documenting Swedish support.

The team worked together with a reference group in El Salvador, consisting of Salvadoran personalities with experience and knowledge of Swedish involvement in the country.

The team met with the reference group on three occasions. The first meeting, held in December 2003, consisted of an open discussion. In the second meeting, in February 2004, the discussions were structured in a seminar dealing with certain aspects. In the third and final meeting, in May 2004, the participants analysed and commented on a draft of the study.

The triangulation method was applied in order to check the validity of sources and to reconstruct events. This was mainly carried out by studying documentation from different sources and comparing information gathered with that provid-

ed in interviews. Standard criteria for assessing the reliability of sources were used.

The current study is a documentation, not an evaluation. Nevertheless, in order to facilitate an analysis of the effectiveness of the support, the team tried to identify implicit and explicit goals within Swedish support. The analysis was then based on how well the different forms of support met these goals.

In most cases it was not possible to identify a direct causal relationship. One important reason for this is that Sweden generally worked together with other countries, UN organizations and other actors in, for example, their diplomatic efforts and in development cooperation.

Moreover, support to El Salvador has been both complicated and multidimensional, making it difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate in terms of simple causality. Instead, it was necessary to make a qualitative analysis of the importance of the actions carried out by the different actors and the effects of their mutual efforts.

Limitations

Initially, it must be emphasised that this is a study of Swedish support to El Salvador 1979–2001 and not a study of international support as a whole. Consequently Swedish support has, for obvious reasons, received disproportionate importance in the description of events presented here.

An analysis and documentation of international support as a whole would have resulted in a totally different kind of report, where the Swedish contribution would have received considerably less attention. However, those who read will note that Sweden, whether dealing with humanitarian assistance, diplomacy, politics or support to the peace process and democratisation, acted within an international context. Most chapters also provide information on relationships with other actors.

The fact that certain documents were not found in the archives limited, in some cases, opportunities to document events. On several occasions important letters or reports that should have been registered in the archives were not to be found.

Another limitation was human memory. In general, people tend to forget details surrounding events that took place ten years previously. This is even truer for things that happened 20 or 25 years ago. For this reason and despite their limitations, the archives have been invaluable in order to gain a fairly comprehensive picture of events. The interviews mainly

served to provide personal assessments and details, for example on Swedish actions and their importance in relationship to specific developments.

Attempts to document the size of the support in figures caused several difficulties. In some cases, there was a lack of continuity in financial reporting. This was the case regarding the amount of humanitarian assistance received by El Salvador during the 1980s.

In other cases, such as that of the total amount of development cooperation during the 1990s, the amounts that are presented in the different documents do not coincide with those found in the Sida database. Delays, variations in exchange rates and repayments are some logical explanations for the differences. These problems, however, made it quite meaningless and far too time consuming to attempt to calculate exact amounts.

Regarding humanitarian assistance during the conflict, there was no uniform or generally registered financial reporting until the signing of the Peace Accords. It has previously been stated on different occasions that this support totalled MUSD 34. The team's study of documentation from the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance however shows that the total sum was larger and exceeded MUSD 45.

The total amount of development cooperation channelled by Sida to El Salvador after the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992 and onwards, also differs from one document to the next. For this reason, the study chose to use only those figures presented by the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD, DAC.

The study provides information on the volume of Swedish support during 1992–2001 as well as on the amounts provided by the largest donors during this period. It should be mentioned, however, that the support provided by some of these donors, primarily that of the US and Japan, was mainly aimed at the construction of infrastructure. It is questionable if this should be referred to as support to the peace process.

All amounts in Swedish kronor (SEK) have been converted to USD according to the exchange rate applicable during the year or period referred to.

It has not been the Team's mission to assess the efficiency of the Swedish support in terms of cost. In some specific cases, however, such aspects have been found significant enough to portray within the scope of the overall documentation. In these instances, the term cost-efficiency has been used. When referring to goal fulfilment of Swedish cooperation, the term effectiveness has been used.

Time is always a limitation; there are other archives, people

who could have been interviewed and documents that could have been read. Despite this, the team considers that Swedish support to El Salvador 1979–2001 is extensively documented in this study.

The story of Swedish-Salvadoran cooperation

Brief history

EVENTS IN EL SALVADOR	EVENTS CONCERNING SWEDISH COOPERATION
	1977 • The Swedish section of Amnesty International initiates support to El Salvador
	1978 • The Committee for Humanitarian Assistance is founded
1979 • The regime of general Romero is overthrown in a coup by a group of young military officers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FDR and FMLN are founded • The Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Arnulfo Romero, is murdered • The Socialist International criticises repression in El Salvador • More than 300 civilians are killed when fleeing military fire over the Sumpul river, heading for the border to Honduras 	1980 • Sweden supports the first UN resolution demanding respect for human rights and a stop for arms deliveries to El Salvador • The Swedish NGO Diakonia opens a Central America office in Costa Rica • Opposition leaders Guillermo Ungo and Enrique Álvarez Córdoba visit Sweden; Álvarez is assassinated shortly afterwards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva decides to send a special rapporteur to El Salvador • FMLN launches a military offensive that backfires • More than 1 000 civilians are massacred in El Mozote • The Franco-Mexican declaration is passed, calling for peace negotiations and recognition of FDR-FMLN 	1981 • Swedish NGOs begin support to ASESAN; as of 1983 this support is channelled through Diaconia El Salvador • FMLN establishes diplomatic representation in Sweden
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elections are held for a constituent assembly, characterised by ballot rigging and other problems 	1982 • AIC, later renamed the Olof Palme International Center, commences support for the Salvadoran organization CIAS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presidents of the Contadora group sign a declaration recommending a peaceful solution to the conflicts in Central America • A new constitution is approved 	1983 • The first Swedish ecumenical delegation visits Central America; soon afterwards the Central America Group is founded in Uppsala • Solidarity organizations are brought together in Coordination for the People of Central America (SAMCA)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presidential elections are held and the Christian Democrat José Napoleón Duarte is elected • The first official meeting between the Government and FDR-FMLN takes place in La Palma 	1984	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sweden begins to receive political refugees from El Salvador
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guerrilla leader Nidia Díaz is captured by government forces • President Duarte's kidnapped daughter is released; in exchange, the Government releases 21 political prisoners and 110 wounded guerrilla soldiers 	1985	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swedish support to the resettlement and reconstruction of Tenancingo is initiated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central American presidents sign the first Esquipulas Agreement • An earthquake leaves 21 200 dead and wounded and a large part of the population in the capital without housing 	1986	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for a regional programme in Central America is initiated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central American presidents sign the second and most important Esquipulas Agreement • More than 4 000 refugees from Mesa Grande in Honduras return to El Salvador 	1987	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The campaign Operation Day's Work by the Swedish school pupils' organization raises considerable funds to build schools in El Salvador
	1988	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The campaign El Salvador Shall Triumph is founded in Sweden
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alfredo Cristiani (ARENA) is elected president • The International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) is held in Guatemala • The FMLN carries out the largest guerrilla offensive of the war • Army troops murder six Jesuit priests at the Central American University (UCA), together with their housekeeper and her daughter • Central American presidents ask the UN Secretary General to act to reinstitute peace talks in El Salvador 	1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swedish diplomats take several initiatives to promote a more active role for the UN in the negotiations • Sweden acts as messenger between the FMLN and the US administration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiations are initiated between the Government and the FMLN with Álvaro de Soto as mediator • An agreement on human rights, the first of three Peace Accords, is signed between the Government and the FMLN 	1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sweden organises and finances a meeting in Geneva concerning human rights

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two partial Peace Accords are signed, one in Mexico and another in New York • The ONUSAL Mission is installed in El Salvador • Constitutional reforms necessary before the signing of the final peace accords are carried out 	1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 400 residence permits are granted to Salvadoran refugees in Sweden, the largest number ever during the armed conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Peace Accords are signed in Chapultepec, Mexico • The Ad Hoc Commission investigates violations committed by the army and submits its report to the UN 	1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Committee for Humanitarian Assistance is dissolved • Sweden approves MUSD 8 a year, for three years, in development cooperation to El Salvador
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Truth Commission submits its report; a general amnesty impedes the implementation of its recommendations 	1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swedish support for the National Academy of Public Security and the National Police is initiated • Save the Children Sweden and Diakonia move their regional offices to San Salvador
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Armando Calderón Sol (ARENA) is elected president in the “elections of the century” • Diaconía El Salvador is dissolved 	1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swedish support to the Ombuds Office for Human Rights commences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNDP recruits a new Resident Representative 	1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sweden enters the European Union • The Swedish Government approves a strategy for development cooperation with El Salvador • Sweden's relationship with the UNDP office begins to deteriorate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace Accords are signed in Guatemala 	1996	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative Assembly and municipal elections are held 	1997	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hurricane Mitch leads to heavy flooding and other damage • The Ombuds Office for Human Rights is paralysed by a crisis 	1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sweden, other donors and NGOs act to save the Ombuds Office for Human Rights • Sweden decides to finalise support to the fund for wounded and disabled war victims
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Francisco Flores (ARENA) is elected president 	1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FUSAI becomes the largest Sida counterpart • The Consultative Group Meeting for the Reconstruction of Central America after Hurricane Mitch is held in Stockholm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative Assembly and municipal elections are held 	2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The finalisation of Swedish development cooperation is scheduled, however a new strategy establishes that it will continue until 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The country is struck by devastating earthquakes 	2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sida allocates MUSD 9 in humanitarian assistance

During the war
1979–1985

People in place

– and political support

The revolution in Nicaragua and recently awakened Swedish interest in Central America. Ronald Reagan was in the White House and a group of European social democrats – Olof Palme, Willy Brandt, François Mitterrand – sought to become a political counterweight. These were some of the reasons behind Sweden's initial support for El Salvador – but the real key was the people.

In December 1980 three young Swedes met at the Amstel Hotel in San José. They were the recently married couple Pelle and Anki Sundelin who were on their honeymoon en route to Costa Rica. The third person was Anders Kompass. The trio's mission was to open the Central American office of the Swedish NGO Diakonia.¹

Anders Kompass had been in El Salvador together with the Director of Diakonia, Per Arne Aglert, in March the same year to present the organization's peace prize to the catholic Archbishop, Monsignor Oscar Romero. Two weeks after receiving the prize, the Archbishop was murdered while holding Sunday mass.

Civil war drew closer. Violence and political unrest forced people to flee their homes and humanitarian needs were increasing rapidly. Diakonia was already working in South America; the time had now come to expand to Central America.

"I continued to travel to El Salvador and met with nuns, people from church congregations and others. At first they were suspicious, but the peace prize to Monsignor Romero meant a lot. All doors were opened when people understood that I had been his friend", says Anders Kompass.

¹ Diakonia, until 1984 named Frikyrkan hjälper, is a Christian development organization composed of six of Sweden's churches; Interact, The Methodist Church in Sweden, The Swedish Alliance Mission, The Swedish Baptist Community, The Swedish Salvation Army and The Mission Covenant Church of Sweden.



At the beginning of the 1980s, increasing repression of the civilian population in El Salvador turned the country into the largest recipient of Swedish humanitarian assistance in Latin America. Here a military roadblock on the Pan-American Highway in San Vicente.

Photo: Ulf Anéer

During the armed conflict, Ana Eugenia Marín worked for different Salvadoran and international NGOs:

“In the most difficult years, at the beginning of the 1980s, there were almost only US organizations working here. Diakonia was one of the first European organizations. When somebody had been arrested or was reported disappeared, it was very important to take immediate action and spread the news, contact news agencies, embassies and so on”, she says. “Despite having their office in Costa Rica, Diakonia was very active in the different networks and they were always prepared to coordinate with others.”

For their first year, Diakonia had a budget of approximately USD 470 000 for work in Central America. Two years later, the amount had grown to MUS\$ 3.

“We were constantly requesting additional funding from Sida. We made more and more contacts at the same time as the needs just kept growing. The only limitation was our own capacity”, says Pelle Sundelin.

Quick decisions

Each project had to be approved by Diakonia in Stockholm. But decision makers lacked experience and knowledge about the region, so the assessments of those working in Central America were decisive. During these first few years, Sida also lacked proper experience; their knowledge was built up over time together with Diakonia.

The work situation often required quick decisions – and creative administration. On one occasion, Costa Rican banks had restricted dollar withdrawals at the same time as Diakonia had large project payments coming up. So Diakonia staff

simply flew to Panama, withdrew approximately USD 100 000 in cash and took the plane back.

The Diakonia office soon became a reference point for journalists, people working with NGOs – and political delegations from Sweden.

At Sida headquarters in Stockholm, Eivor Halkjaer was programme officer in charge of the recently initiated bilateral development cooperation with Nicaragua. The year was 1981 and all the documents concerning this country fitted into one binder. In addition to Nicaragua, she was also responsible for humanitarian assistance to Latin America. In a few years time, she would be in charge of all Swedish cooperation with the entire continent.

Humanitarian funding was increasing. Diakonia was in place and had started to establish proper contacts and gain on-the-ground experience – thus becoming a natural channel for the administration of Swedish support to El Salvador.



Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated during a Sunday mass in March 1980.

Photo: Ulf Anéer

A joint cause

In March 1980, the day after the assassination of Archbishop Romero, the International Secretary of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, Pierre Schori, was sitting in a conference room in Santo Domingo. The Socialist International had met to discuss developments in Central America. The final declaration from the meeting contained harsh criticism towards US foreign policy and the “institutionalised violence” in El Salvador.

The Socialist International expressed open support for the FDR in El Salvador, a coalition formed in January the same year, in which reformist political parties had, for the first time, joined forces with the revolutionary left. In a report from that meeting, Pierre Schori wrote that the European social democrats had an important role to play in peace efforts: “The international front is as important to us as the national one, says our friend Ungo. We will not fail their struggle for liberation.”

The head of FDR was Guillermo Ungo, whom Pierre Schori had known for more than a decade. Sweden thus possessed a natural dialogue partner. Pierre Schori had total support within his party and later, when the social democrats returned to government, from the Prime Minister Olof Palme himself. The political foundation of Swedish cooperation with El Salvador was therefore in place.

From the very outset, Swedish support to El Salvador had two characteristics: it was humanitarian and, to a greater degree, political.

Silent understanding behind humanitarian assistance

Sweden was early in channelling humanitarian assistance to El Salvador. But who was going to receive the support? This was discussed in a special working group: the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance. The meetings were held behind closed doors, the documents were classified. The members shared a silent, political understanding.

The Committee for Humanitarian Assistance was formed in 1978. The purpose was to discuss sensitive matters, primarily support to the anti-apartheid movement and, later, to the victims of military repression in Latin America. Depending on the amount of the funding, either Sida or the Ministry for Foreign Affairs took the formal decisions. The Committee consisted in part of officials from Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and in part of representatives of NGOs, social movements, political parties, researchers as well as one or two culture personalities.

Based on the broad political representation in the Committee, Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs were assured of support before decisions were taken, remembers lawyer Christian Åhlund, member of the Committee for a few years in the 1980s:

“The Committee was a special body, a kind of institutionalised hostage for projects that were at least potentially doubtful from the point of view of international law. The matters had previously been carefully prepared and we were most likely pretty much of a rubber stamp. Those members who, for political reasons, found the work uncomfortable probably solved this by not coming to the meetings.”

Eivor Halkjaer, who was Sida’s representative on the Committee in the early 1980s, goes even further: “The Committee was a precondition for implementing support to El Salvador; everybody was united around a common idea. Today, Sweden could not do something so controversial.”

Since 1964, Sweden had been granting humanitarian assis-

tance to refugees, national liberation movements and victims of apartheid in southern Africa.² There was no direct equivalent in Latin America. Swedish cooperation with this continent had to that date been limited.³ The turning point came when Swedish public opinion was awakened after the military coup in Chile in 1973. A budget item for humanitarian assistance to Latin America was then created. As humanitarian needs grew with increasing repression on the continent, so did the need to carefully analyse how assistance was distributed. This was to be the function of the newly created Committee for Humanitarian Assistance.⁴

Dominated by three organizations

One of the first applications came from the Swedish section of the Amnesty International Fund. The organization applied for Sida funding to continue support to Justicia y Paz, an organization that provided financial assistance to the families of poor farmers where one or both parents had been killed or disappeared. The relationship between the Amnesty Fund and Justicia y Paz had started back in 1977 and most likely constituted the first Swedish support to El Salvador. Financing continued for several years.

Increasing violence in Central America made support to this region the largest part of humanitarian assistance to Latin America. Funding was primarily distributed by three organizations: Diakonia, Church of Sweden Aid,⁵ and the Olof Palme International Center.⁶

In February 1980, Diakonia filed an application for USD 30 000 for support to a health clinic and a human rights committee in El Salvador. In December of the same year, the Olof Palme International Center applied for USD 470 000 aimed at assisting internally displaced persons.⁷ The Committee for Humanitarian Assistance approved the funding with the following justification: "Assistance to Salvadoran refugees and

2 The guidelines passed by the Swedish Parliament in 1969 depart from the criteria established by the UN in the Declaration on Decolonisation.

3 More long-term development cooperation was carried out with Cuba 1969–79 and had started with Chile in 1972.

4 The first guidelines for humanitarian assistance to Latin America were adopted in 1981. Among other things, they established: "The Swedish support should be directed to groups that to a greater degree than others are victims of repression. Priority should be given to activities based on initiatives from groups and organizations with the broadest possible popular support. Efforts that aim at mere survival should stand back for those that, besides contributing to physical survival, also directly or indirectly contribute to societal change in a democratic direction."

5 Also known by its Swedish name Lutherhjälpen.

6 The organization was named AIC until 1992. To facilitate reading, the name Olof Palme International Center will be used throughout the entire time period covered by the study.

7 Funding for humanitarian assistance implied full financing from Sida. Swedish NGOs have had differing abilities to contribute financially to their development work. While Church of Sweden Aid has put in several MUSD, Diakonia has not had many resources. As late as 1989, Diakonia only contributed three percent of the total, which was twice as much as the year before.

internally displaced persons appears to be perhaps the most urgent need in Latin America at this time.”

Eric Nilsson worked at Diakonia headquarters and remembers these first few years with certain awe: “We knew that the Committee had money. We had people in the right places so it was possible to take many initiatives. And Sida did not place conditions on the support.”

Role distribution among actors

There was a permanent discussion in the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance about how the roles of different Swedish and other actors should best be distributed. Since Sida lacked a presence in Central America, the agency had to rely on the competence of the Swedish NGOs. Over time, the Swedish embassies came to play a more active role in deciding on means and channels for funding, but this required experience.

In 1980, the Swedish Ambassador to Guatemala, Henrik Ramel, was asked to consider an application from Diakonia. The organization had asked for USD 235 000 for CEAH (the Ecumenical Assistance Committee) that was working with displaced persons. The Ambassador travelled to El Salvador and discussed the application directly with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defence. The Ambassador thus revealed not only the focus of Swedish support, but also details about the work of CEAH.

In a very indignant letter to the Ambassador, CEAH wrote: “We believe that your Government should study the situation in our country more closely before you take further actions that affect our suffering people. We demand that you take all necessary steps to secure the protection and integrity of all of us who work in CEAH.”

It was later found that several individuals at CEAH had been forced to leave the organization due to increased harassment from the Government.

El Salvador largest recipient

In the Government Budget for 1981/82, the Swedish Government wrote: “The victims of political repression in Latin America are in great need of support. In Central America, the situation in El Salvador is especially in focus.” El Salvador became the largest recipient of Swedish humanitarian assistance in Latin America. The fact that the funding was in great demand was proved when the almost MUS\$ 14 that had been budgeted for humanitarian assistance to Latin America in the fiscal year 1981/82, was already used up in the first six

SWEDISH HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE 1979–1992

MUSD

1979/80: 0.2	1986/87: 2.7
1980/81: 0.4	1987/88: 3.5
1981/82: 3.9	1988/89: 3.6
1982/83: 3.9	1989/90: 3.9
1983/84: 3.5	1990/91: 4.7
1984/85: 4.4	1991/92: 3.1
1985/86: 7.9	TOTAL: 45.7

In the period 1979–1992, it is estimated that Sweden channelled more than MUSD 45 in humanitarian assistance to El Salvador. The figure previously presented has been MUSD 34, but the examination carried out in this study shows that the total was larger. The numbers above do not include support channelled directly through international organizations such as the Lutheran World Federation. Nor do they include contributions that have been made by the Swedish organizations themselves. Consequently, the total amount would appear to be even larger than what has been possible to present here.

The figures presented in the table have been calculated using data that have been confirmed by a minimum of two sources in documentation accessible in the Sida archives.

months of the year. Of this amount, approximately one third went to El Salvador.⁸

During the first few years of the 1980s, few or no financial audits were carried out. On several occasions, the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance approved new funding without having received financial reporting regarding previous support. “I think we generally agreed that we were doing good things. We wanted to help, but we were forced to trust the organizations that received our money. It was difficult to check”, says Gabriella Lindholm, at the time an official at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Secretary in the Committee.

“It was a difficult balance, everything was politicised”, remembers Eric Nilsson at Diakonia. “Surely a part of the money went to the guerrillas, although we tried to avoid it. It was necessary to be well informed.”

Over the years, several irregularities were discovered. The Olof Palme International Center decided to end financing to CIAS (The Centre for Research and Social Action) after receiving incomplete financial reporting. Diakonia also had to confront several similar situations.

⁸ The figure is based on the amounts that NGOs applied for to the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance during the fiscal year 1981/82.



A woman searches for a photo of her disappeared husband in the archives of the CDHES. The organization was dependent on Swedish support for several years.

Photo: Ulf Anéer

Based on political analysis

The future orientation of the humanitarian assistance was discussed on many occasions in the Committee. In one of these discussions it was observed that Swedish support to Central America during 1980–83 had “undoubtedly” been larger than support from other countries.

It was also stated: “The last few years have been characterised by the lack of stable and reliable channels for humanitarian support in Central America on the one hand, and insufficient Swedish experience of working in this region on the other. As a result, the work has been of a markedly ad hoc nature, with an uneven flow of applications dropping in to cover often poorly assessed humanitarian needs.”

The discussions in the Committee were based on a political analysis of the cooperation. One example was the decision regarding an application from the Christian Social Democrats to support CDHES (The Salvadoran Commission for Human Rights). The commission was totally dependent on Swedish funding and had fallen into a deep internal crisis following the murder of the organization’s President, Marianela García in March 1983.

The Committee for Humanitarian Assistance suggested continued support to CDHES with the following argumentation: “Considering that Sweden has, up till now, assumed the main financial responsibility for the organization, other donors will most likely wait on the Swedish position before deciding whether or not to support CDHES. In these circumstances, the suspension of Swedish support could imply the end of the organization’s work. A decision in that direction cannot be considered consistent with the recently established practice for Swedish support to democratic forces in Central America.”

Eivor Halkjaer, who was responsible for the humanitarian assistance at Sida for several years, agrees that development cooperation with El Salvador was political: “Good development cooperation should be political. The humanitarian assistance was borderline admissible; it helped to expand the field of action. We were a player...”

Rubén Zamora, currently head of the Centro Democrático Unido and, during the armed conflict, leader of the Movimiento Popular Social Cristiano, one of the members of the FDR, sums up the humanitarian assistance in the following manner: “We shared values; the purpose was humanitarian and political. It was a time when certain ideals coincided with humanitarian needs in the country. We were all involved in this project.”

The humanitarian assistance was not only channelled through Swedish organizations: “In the work on the ground we met many people from Holland as well as Britain from, for example, Oxfam. We also had many dealings with the International Committee of the Red Cross”, says Gabriella Lindholm.

Firmer ground for cooperation

In the mid 1980s the Committee considered there to be good conditions for more long-term, programme-oriented cooperation. Several of the Salvadoran counterparts had been consolidated and were capable organizations.

Collaboration between Sida and Swedish NGOs had also taken on more stable forms. Diakonia, Swedish Church Aid and the Olof Palme International Center were applying an increasingly programme approach in their work, implying that a limited number of organizations received continued Swedish financing.

The Swedish Red Cross continued to channel substantial support through the International Committee of the Red Cross and, together with the other Nordic Red Cross organizations, financed a programme to strengthen the Salvadoran Red Cross.

“There was, however, no well-functioning coordination on the ground”, says Bo Nylund, active in several Swedish organizations, referring to the late 1980s. “Neither was there any collaboration with organizations from other countries. There just wasn’t enough energy.”

In tune with political changes in the world, the mandate of the Committee was increasingly under discussion. During the fiscal year 1991/92 only three items were submitted. In November 1992, the Director General of Sida and Chair of

the Committee, Carl Tham, declared that this way of working no longer made sense. With this, the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance was dissolved, the same year the Peace Accords were signed in El Salvador.

Support to those most affected – and politicised

Swedish humanitarian assistance was mainly channelled through the ecumenical coordination organization Diaconía El Salvador that organised refugee camps, resettlement projects and distributed emergency relief through its member organizations.⁹

In the first few years, Swedish funding through Church of Sweden Aid, the World Council of Churches and Diakonia Sweden, made up nearly half of Diaconía El Salvador's budget. Over time, the organization came to be the largest individual recipient of Swedish humanitarian assistance in Latin America.¹⁰

"There were never any conditions attached to Swedish assistance, contrary to other agencies that specified what they would support. This flexibility was very noteworthy with the Swedes", says Monsignor Ricardo Urioste, who at the time worked at the Archbishop's Social Affairs Secretariat of the Catholic Church. "Swedish support provided us with an extra lung; it helped us to breathe. We were relieved in that sense."

Diaconía El Salvador was managed by a board consisting of representatives from each of the member organizations. The member organizations turned to the board with financing

9 The support was initially channelled to ASESAL (The Salvadoran Ecumenical Association for Services and Humanitarian Assistance) that had its office in Mexico. Despite its name, the organization was run by political representatives of the FMLN, a fact that led to conflict with some of the Salvadoran churches and other organizations working with humanitarian assistance. These conflicts led to the closure of ASESAL in 1983 and opened the way for the forming of Diaconía El Salvador, an ecumenical coordination organization consisting of the Archbishop's Social Affairs Secretariat, the Baptist Church Emmanuel, the Lutheran Church, the farmers' cooperative organizations FUNPROCOOP and FEDECOOPADES, as well as the Episcopal Church.

10 Between 1981 and 1992, ASESAL and Diaconía El Salvador received approximately MUSD 18.5 in Swedish funding. Two other organizations also received considerable financing during the armed conflict: ARCECO, founded in 1982, was a programme within the Archbishop's Social Affairs Secretariat that came to be totally dependent on Swedish financing for several periods. ARCECO was a counterpart of Diakonia and Church of Sweden Aid. CIAS (The Centre for Research and Social Action) was founded in Mexico in 1980 in order to channel emergency relief to refugees, as well as civilian population in the conflict zones, militarily and economically controlled by the guerrilla. During the period 1981–86 CIAS received approximately MUSD 8 through the Swedish counterpart the Olof Palme International Center. Sweden financed approximately half of the organization's activities.

proposals for different projects. This coordination within the country made it easier for international donors to assign large amounts of support.

The member organizations carried out their activities independently, which was as much a strength as it was a weakness. On one hand, each organization could continue to develop its own work close to its own congregations or members, however on the other hand they could not take advantage of the added value of coordination.

Problems with financial reporting

The dependency on Swedish funding in the humanitarian field was a constant issue of discussion. In 1983, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs established that Sweden was, without comparison, the largest donor in this field in Central America. It was considered urgent that the Swedish Government exhort other governments and European development cooperation agencies to increase humanitarian support.

Another recurring item on the agenda was incomplete or poor financial reporting. In spite of these problems, it was considered important to continue the support. In order to decrease direct dependency on Sweden, international organizations such as the World Council of Churches were used to channel funding.

In 1984 the Ministry for Foreign Affairs wrote: "We are increasingly convinced that Diaconía El Salvador is, in the existing conflict situation, a unique coordination organization that should be stimulated, strengthened and continuously supported. Diaconía works with a general budget and Swedish funding can, for this reason, not be traced in detail. We believe this to be totally defensible."

In an evaluation from 1986, Sida analysed among other things, the effectiveness of the support.¹¹ The report found that although no quantitative goals existed, the people who had needed help had received it. However, there appeared to be little awareness regarding cost efficiency. The lack of coordination and the differing capacity levels among the member organizations contributed to resources not being used as efficiently as they should. The evaluation also underlined the risk of generating aid dependency, especially in the refugee camps.

Almost two decades later, there are still visible results of Swedish humanitarian support. One is the Network of Popular Educators that organised teachers who worked with

11 Eduards, K., Mossberg, S., Diaconía and ARCECO – an evaluation of humanitarian assistance in El Salvador, Sida, 1986 (in Swedish)

Swedish humanitarian assistance was mainly channelled through the ecumenical coordination organization Diaconía El Salvador. In the San Roque church in San Salvador, the Catholic Church ran a shelter for internally displaced persons. Photo: Ulf Anéer



displaced persons and refugees. This network was officially recognised by the Ministry of Education at the end of the 1990s. Another example is the Network of Volunteer Health Workers that continues to work in rural areas around the country.¹²

Strong pressure from outside

Diaconía El Salvador faced serious difficulties in 1986, when a former member of the Salvadoran Commission for Human Rights accused the organization in the media of being a “bank for the FMLN”. By then, Diaconía El Salvador was receiving support from some 40 European and North American organizations. Government-controlled newspapers directed harsh criticism at foreign donors.

Member organizations of Diaconía El Salvador carried out humanitarian activities through their congregations, Christian-based communities and farmers’ cooperatives. The beneficiaries were mainly poor rural families who had been displaced by the war and who were to be found in areas with strong sympathy for the guerrillas. For this reason, it was not always possible to draw a clear line between humanitarian assistance and indirect support to FMLN.

“We were not independent, but we had certain room for manoeuvre. The FMLN recognised the need for a humanitarian authority dedicated to working with the affected population”, says Dimas Vanegas, who represented the farmers’ cooperative organization FUNPROCOOP on the board of Diaconía El Salvador.

After the earthquake in 1986, Diaconia channelled emergency relief through Diaconia El Salvador and a new counter-

¹² Conclusion presented by the reference group, San Salvador, May 2004.

part, the Maquilishuat Foundation. This support was subject to rigorous financial control and Diakonia's own accountant travelled to El Salvador from Costa Rica to scrutinise the reporting.

Nevertheless, there was a tacit agreement that the checks could wait, says Ewa Widén at Diakonia: "Diaconía El Salvador's office was subject to several army searches and there were a number of reasons for not keeping precise book-keeping. The problem was not really lack of checks, but that the organizations did not have, for understandable reasons, sufficient book-keeping. When we later started to make demands it was clear that the organizations, in some cases, did not know how, they did not possess the necessary administrative capacity."

Internal contradictions

Diaconía El Salvador continued to grow, reaching its peak in 1989/90 with a budget of MUSD 24. By then, internal contradictions were becoming increasingly evident. "The discussions started during the refugee returns and from the need to have another view on development. Some maintained a charity approach, while others underlined the need to seek more long-term solutions for these people. The discussions were very tough", remembers Dimas Vanegas.

The work within Diaconía El Salvador had not been free of contradictions during the previous years. Political interests and pressure from the guerrillas had opened deep wounds. Despite these difficulties the member organizations had managed to agree on a common goal.

According to the Lutheran Bishop Medardo Gómez, Sweden contributed to the ecumenical work: "Sweden cultivated our unity. The people who were involved and the ecumenical delegations showed us the strength of working together. This was very important because it gave us an example to follow."

After the signing of the Peace Accords, the disintegration of Diaconía El Salvador became more and more obvious and the organization was formally dissolved in 1994. Diakonia and Church of Sweden Aid, which had supported Diaconía El Salvador for more than ten years, decided to continue supporting member organizations instead. Some went on to become counterparts of Diakonia, while others went to Church of Sweden Aid.

On the plane in a matter of hours...

The year was 1985 and the guerrilla commandant Nidia Díaz had been captured by an army patrol. The case received a lot of attention, in El Salvador as well as internationally. The guerrilla leader's family members were threatened and harassed; her mother and 4-year old son were forced to flee the country. They were just two of those who were granted asylum in Sweden.

The Swedish El Salvador political refugee programme started in 1984. On a visit to Sweden Anders Kompass, who had been recruited to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and worked at the Swedish Embassy in Mexico, met with Thord Palmlund, Director General of the Swedish Migration Board and also member of the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance. They discussed the conditions for a refugee programme.¹³

Sweden signed an agreement with the International Organization for Migration, (IOM).¹⁴ Through its office in San Salvador, the organization took care of plane tickets and other practical issues. Anders Kompass travelled from Mexico to conduct interviews with people in need of protection.

The interviews had been prepared by Oscar Melhado, who for many years was known only as "the lawyer". His task was to investigate the background of the individual cases. After the interviews, information was sent to the Swedish Migration Board for decision. Sometimes it was only a matter of hours before the people were on the plane, on their way to Sweden.

The lawyer Mats Baurmann, who a few years later became responsible for expert assessments at the Migration Board, still

¹³ According to some sources Sweden was the only developed country to receive political refugees from El Salvador. Others claim that Australia also received political refugees.

¹⁴ The organization was named IOM until 1989.

remembers the drama: “Many cases were urgent and had to be resolved in a great hurry. It was also special in the sense that the people were, in most cases, still in the country and therefore not formally refugees. Working with El Salvador was exciting; we felt that we were making a difference.”

The first Latin American refugees came to Sweden in 1973, from Chile. They were followed by people fleeing from the dictatorships in Argentina and Uruguay. Over the years a structure had been put in place and both selection and reception became routine. When the Swedish Government decided on the number of quota refugees,¹⁵ a certain share was often earmarked for Latin Americans, mostly Chileans. The Salvadoran group was small compared to others.¹⁶

“We knew very little about Central America and the programme for refugees from El Salvador constituted a rare exception. It was rather the result of individual involvement from a limited number of people”, says Ingvar Belkert, previously Head of Section for Latin America at the Swedish Migration Board.

Exchange of prisoners

In august 1984, Héctor Oqueli, spokesperson for the diplomatic commission of the FDR-FMLN, contacted the Swedish Embassy in Mexico. The issue was sensitive: Could Sweden receive four imprisoned guerrilla leaders? Negotiations had been held between the guerrillas and the army about exchanging army officers for wounded guerrillas who needed to be sent abroad for medical treatment and rehabilitation.

The Embassy contacted the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, explaining that they considered the prisoner exchange to be “extraordinarily important”. In addition to the purely humanitarian aspects, the initiative could constitute the beginning of a negotiation process between the Government and the guerrillas. The Embassy also underlined the political importance that this could have for peace efforts. Sweden accepted and welcomed the four guerrilla leaders and ten other wounded guerrilla soldiers as quota refugees.

15 Quota refugees are normally selected by the Swedish Migration Board in cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR. To be considered for the quota, a person has to be registered as a refugee. In exceptional cases, the refugee quota is used to extract people still in their countries of origin who are therefore not formally refugees. The Swedish refugee quota varied between 1 250–2 000 people per year, during the time period covered in this study.

16 In 1980–2002 a total of 1997 Salvadorans were granted asylum in Sweden on humanitarian grounds. Of these, 1 082 arrived during the 1980s. In 1990–92 a total of 821 residence permits were granted. Another 94 arrived 1993–2002. Most permits were granted in 1991, when a total of 400 Salvadorans came to Sweden on humanitarian grounds. Source: Statistics from the Swedish Board of Migration.

“The fact that Sweden received wounded guerrillas was very important to us. It was a political message, showing the world that the FMLN did not only have contacts with Cuba. Germany also took some people from the same group”, says Ana Guadalupe Martínez, who was member of the diplomatic commission of the FDR-FMLN.

In Sweden, however, few preparations had been made for this support. The refugees, all severely wounded, were sent to the refugee camp in Oxelösund, where they underwent the same medical examination as all new arrivals. They were then remitted to specialists. Four months later, nothing had happened; the Salvadorans were still waiting for treatment and the FDR-FMLN had, according to some information, started studying the possibility of sending them to another country where they would be properly looked after.

The case was embarrassing. In a telegram from the Swedish Embassy in Mexico to the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, the Ambassador wrote: “We were shocked to receive this news. If we are going to offer this kind of support, we should at least be able to administer it properly”.

Despite this incident, the reception of refugees was important to establish confidence in Sweden, as a country and as an international actor, says Anders Kompass. “We enhanced our credibility with the FMLN and among the popular organizations. We could later use this confidence to push for different initiatives.”¹⁷

17 Conclusion presented at the seminar on Swedish support to the peace process in El Salvador, Stockholm, November 2003.

OSCAR MELHADO – THE LAWYER:

A story for my grandchildren

The diplomatic corps had gathered on a hot June day in 1988. The Swedish Embassy in Guatemala had summoned them for an unusual ceremony: the awarding of the North Star Order, a Swedish mark of honour, on this occasion presented to a Salvadoran for his humanitarian efforts.

16 years later, wearing a tie with the Swedish symbol of three crowns, once a present from Lars Franklin, “the lawyer” Oscar Melhado tells his story in a calm voice and eyes damp with emotion:

“By chance, I was asked to defend a political prisoner. No lawyers would defend them for fear of their own lives. It was one of those decisions in life that one takes without really knowing why. I defended the girl and soon, my office was filled with people seeking help. I soon dedicated all my time to the defence of prisoners.”

Extend a hand

“One day Anders Kompass showed up in my office and asked why I was doing this. I told him that it was a matter of personal satisfaction; to be able to extend a hand to someone in need. Soon afterwards, Lars Franklin, who at that time worked at Diakonia, came by and offered support from his institution. They gave me USD 12–15 000 a year. Nobody ever

told me what to do; they wanted to help me in my work.”

“I managed to get thousands of people out of prison and we helped many go to Sweden as refugees. It wasn’t because I was a magician. I didn’t look for confrontation, but rather to make friends. I soon established that my professional knowledge as a lawyer was of little use during this time; if I had acted with a law book in my hand, I wouldn’t have managed to get anybody out, not one.”

Repaying favours

“There was a military court down at the National Palace. The soldiers there were especially hard-faced, fierce. It wasn’t easy to establish a relationship. One day I found one of the toughest ones crying. His father had been killed and he didn’t have enough money to transport the body and arrange a funeral. So, call it humanism or lawyer mentality, but I offered to help him using the undertakers that we had contracted to pick up the dead bodies that turned up along the streets.”

“From that day on they changed attitude towards me; everything became easier in my proceedings and in the court. And that’s how it worked. I had contacts in all areas and I helped people to solve problems. Like the time I arranged a water tanker for the Ministry of Migration who had been without water



***“The Swedes
who helped us
showed
a strong feeling
of humanism.”***

Oscar Melhado, lawyer, was awarded the North Star Order in gratitude for his humanitarian work during the armed conflict.

Photo: Anna Tibblin

for several days and they, in gratitude, processed several hundred applications for people waiting to leave the country. Many people owed me favours and in due time, they returned them.”

Feelings of gratitude

“Why am I still alive? In 1973, in my group at Alcoholics Anonymous there was a military officer who was attending the course at general staff headquarters. He asked me to teach him some law. Some other officers joined him and I gave them classes.”

“One of them was Roberto D’Abuissou, who was lieutenant at the time and other officers who later came to hold high positions. They felt gratitude towards me. They also knew that I wasn’t politically involved and maybe that’s what saved my life.”

“I went to Sweden in 1986 and was received by Pierre Schori, the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs. They had told me that he could only see me for 15 minutes. We spoke for almost two hours. He told me that my work was important for Swedish humanitarian assistance to El Salvador.”

Oscar Melhado tenderly fondles the ribbon carrying the medal: “When they presented me with the medal at the Swedish Embassy, I told them that my work had been duly rewarded by profound personal satisfaction. I am happy for what I have done; I feel that my life has not been in vain. The Swedes who helped us showed strong feelings of humanism.”

“It is something to tell my grandchildren.”

Political meetings

– in Ritva's kitchen

In Ritva Jacobsson's kitchen the soup pot was on the boil at least once a month. From the oven came the smell of newly baked bread. Meanwhile, members of the Central America Group arrived one after another at the house in the Stockholm suburb of Bromma.

This informal lobby group that had been formed in the early 1980s came to achieve a special position. Through the years, all Salvadoran opposition politicians, church leaders and guerrilla commanders of importance passed through Ritva's kitchen.

Ritva Jacobsson, Professor of Medieval Latin and a Catholic, had become interested in the situation in Central America through her work in Amnesty International. She met Bo Nylund, a prominent figure in the Swedish Central America lobby. For Bo Nylund, his interest had been aroused some years earlier. One of his students at the senior high school in Uppsala, one hour north of Stockholm, was Anders Kompass. After graduation in 1975, he was going to Latin America as an exchange student. He eventually wound up in a village in Guatemala and wrote to his teacher about his experiences.¹⁸

In 1981 Bo Nylund visited Nicaragua and met with refugees from El Salvador. During the years to come he went to Central America almost every year. Apart from being a board member of the Christian Social Democrats and of Örnjansgården Agni,¹⁹ he was also a member of the board of the Church of Sweden Mission, so he always had reasons to travel.

18 On his first visit to Latin America in 1976, Bo Nylund visited the village in Guatemala. After his return to Sweden, Örnjansgården Agni, an organization of which he was Deputy Chair, started to support health projects and other activities in the village.

19 Örnjansgården Agni was created in Germany in the 1920s as a student association. The founder was forced to flee Nazism and ended up in Sweden where the organization reappeared at the end of the Second World War and, later on, was converted into an organization for development cooperation.

Ecumenical delegations

The first in a long series of ecumenical delegation visits took place in 1983. The initiative came from Diakonia who considered links in Sweden to its work in Central America to be too weak.

Ritva Jacobsson participated in several of the delegation visits: "My role was to be a kind of Catholic hostage. As we know, it was about Catholic countries."

She, Bo Nylund and a few other people met in Uppsala after the visit in 1983: "It was a hot summer's day and we were sitting outdoors and drinking juice. We agreed that we had to do more for Central America. This is how the Central America Group was formed. After that we met regularly until well into the 1990s. We worked informally and had great confidence in each other."

From the start, one of the participants was the lawyer Christian Åhlund: "I was no important person in this context, but I learned a lot. The others wanted me to participate in the delegation visits because I had knowledge about human rights and how the legal system worked. In the Central America Group all of the most active members, except me, had a religious background."

Other frequent participants in the meetings of the Central America group were Karl-Axel Elmqvist and Bo Forsberg, both directors of Diakonia. The diplomats Anders Kompass, Lars Franklin and Michael Frühling participated now and then when they were in Sweden. The head of Sida's Department for Latin America, Eivor Halkjaer, came by on a few occasions, remembers one of the members. Sometimes journalists who were reporting from the region were also invited.

A semi-official position

"We exchanged information and discussed developments. All the leaders of the guerrillas and other important people from the region who came to Sweden visited us", remembers Bo Nylund. "We had a kind of semi-official position. When the Ministry for Foreign Affairs prepared a programme for visitors they normally included a dinner at Ritva's home."

Regarding media coverage the situation was completely different from today. Several of the members of the Central America Group confirm that there was a considerable demand for information.

"We wrote articles and held lectures in schools, libraries, churches... I don't know how many lectures about Central America I've held. I think this contributed to a public opinion that, in turn, put pressure on the Government. After each

ecumenical delegation visit we elaborated a report that was sent to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs”, says Ritva Jacobsson.

The members had access to the highest level of the Government. Sometimes they met with Pierre Schori. In early 1986 the Prime Minister, Olof Palme, and his wife participated in one of the meetings of the Central America Group. One month later Olof Palme fell victim to an assassin.

The members of the Central America Group fully agree that a significant common view existed between the members of the group and those who had an influence on Swedish politics on Central America. Where was the analysis formulated? “The Ministry for Foreign Affairs accepted our perception”, says Bo Nylund. “To a large extent, however, Diakonia generated the prerequisites for our knowledge through their work in the region. Sure, there were situations when we thought that Sweden did not do enough, but I don’t remember any concrete examples”, he continues.

Criticism of the armed struggle

In the 1980s solidarity groups in support of the FMLN were formed in different parts of Sweden. There was a clear difference between them and the Central America Group which was becoming more and more critical of the armed struggle. This criticism emerged gradually in the mid-1980s, not only within the Central America Group but also in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sida and Swedish NGOs.

The meetings of the Central America Group in Ritva’s kitchen stopped at some point in the mid-1990s. “I don’t think that the group has definitely come to an end. Our commitment continues, but in other forms. It is more difficult when the armed conflicts cease. In peace the lines are less clear”, says Ritva Jacobsson.

Christian Åhlund is currently Director of the International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC), which is a consortium of NGOs working to rebuild justice systems in countries affected by conflicts in all parts of the world: “I learned a lot from the work with Central America. A great deal of what I’m doing now is a natural extension of it.”

New communiqués were constantly produced...

Towards dinnertime, just as they had finished the latest translation, the fax machine in the office in the Stockholm suburb of Kärrtorp started beeping again. El Salvador was awake and new communiqués were under constant production. The FMLN representatives looked at each other with weary eyes and drew a deep and shared sigh; the struggle in exile was rarely glamorous.

The Swedish office, consisting of little more than a few desks and a fax, was also responsible for contacts with the other Nordic countries. Among their tasks was the dissemination of information to political parties and organizations, as well as handling contacts with the Government, authorities and the solidarity movement for El Salvador.

“We worked a lot in the Parliament, the interest was unlimited. There was broad political solidarity. When the Peace Accords were signed in Mexico, Sweden was represented by the Christian Democrat Minister Alf Svensson, which showed the breadth of the political support”, says Facundo Mauricio, who worked within the FMLN representation in Sweden for several years.

He had arrived in Sweden in 1985 after being imprisoned, tortured and subsequently released following international pressure. By way of the Red Cross and the church he received political asylum in Sweden. “Diplomats accompanied me to the airport and even onto the plane. UN staff was waiting in Miami to escort me, my wife and our child to Europe. And when we came to Sweden, all of the paperwork was ready”, Facundo Mauricio remembers today, almost 20 years later.

In Sweden, he continued to be politically active, mainly in support of the Salvadoran union movement – the same work that had caused his imprisonment in El Salvador. The aim was to mobilise political support by collecting signatures for appeals, winning support for different UN proposals and stimulating international pressure: “I had a lot of contact with the

trade union confederations in Sweden and Norway. I frequently visited the Norwegian Parliament and you could say that they were more precise in their views. They clearly supported the FMLN, while the Swedes played in different corners. The Swedes were more critical towards the FMLN.”

The collaboration with the trade union movement and other organizations was not primarily about money, but political activity. Political activities came, in fact, to characterise the FMLN’s work in Sweden. “We never had any problems with booking meetings at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, with political parties or authorities – we always felt welcome. The openness was probably due to the fact that we sought support for political proposals, not material or military ones. Of course the Swedes made demands, but that was something we could understand”, says Facundo Mauricio.

“I believe that Sweden played an important role in achieving the Peace Accords. The parties were very war weary, so the task was to steer the process in the right direction – and Sweden did that through the work in the UN, by opening new channels to talk about peace and so on. In this respect, I also believe that our work played a role in maintaining the interest of Swedish public opinion.”

Differing opinions

The Swedish solidarity movement in support of El Salvador was spread around the country and was as split in its opinions as it was in number of groups. Some only supported humanitarian efforts, while others actively supported the armed struggle.

Another group was the exiled Salvadorans and their organizations. Many took the name Association Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero (AMOAR). Among other activities, these groups organised cultural events, seminars and manifestations. They also collected funds. Each association was responsible for its own finances, which was a necessity in order to avoid disputes between the different political organizations on how to divide the money.

José Dario Sánchez, who for six years was President of the National Salvadoran Federation that united the AMOAR groups, remembers that the work changed over time: “We didn’t exactly have a strategy, but we agreed that we could not let the divisions in El Salvador affect how we worked in Sweden. We were in another country, in exile, and we needed to join forces. It wasn’t really that complicated, everybody understood – but naturally there were senseless and tiring discussions and people who just couldn’t accept cooperating across boundaries.”

Political disputes among the member organizations in the FMLN were, however, strongly reproduced in the solidarity committees and associations in Sweden. In 1983, a deep crisis within the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), one of the member parties of the FMLN, led to a split between solidarity groups in Sweden.

Over the years, these problems were more or less overcome. A more positive memory is the raising of funds that started in mid 1989 and was still going on in November, when the guerrilla offensive started in El Salvador: "In a few months we managed to collect USD 185 000. All 18 local groups were working together towards a common goal. Also Swedish organizations participated. And all of the money went to the same account."

A handful of these groups still continue to be active and several are running development projects in El Salvador with funding from Sida.²⁰

José Dario Sánchez is one person who continues to be active in the city of Eskilstuna. After the earthquakes in 2001, his organization collected funds and carried out information activities. They are currently planning to participate at the annual carnival in a neighbouring city, put up a stand and sell traditional Salvadoran *pupusas*. "Maybe it's the most successful thing we have done; last year we collected USD 2 000."

Political agenda

At the beginning of the 1980s there were approximately 40 solidarity committees working with Central America in Sweden. Many had been formed in the wake of the Nicaraguan revolution and had this country as their prime interest, while others were more oriented towards Guatemala and El Salvador.²¹

For several years, attempts were made to establish coordination between the different organizations. But both will and political views pulled in different directions. For this reason, the Campaign El Salvador Shall Triumph was founded in 1988 on the initiative of the FMLN.

"By then, however, the preconditions for a strong solidarity movement had already disappeared", explains Rolf Bergkvist, who was active in the solidarity committee in the town of Luleå and later, in the Campaign El Salvador Shall Triumph:

20 Between 1993–2001 approximately MUSD 1.1 was approved for 32 projects, implemented by 13 different organizations. The funding was channelled through the Swedish NGO Forum Syd.

21 The groups working with Nicaragua were members of the Swedish-Nicaraguan Friendship Society. The other committees were either members of the Coordination for the People of Central America (SAMCA) or worked with what then was named the Committee for Guatemala and El Salvador.

“When the Campaign was formed, interest in El Salvador had already started to diminish.”

Around 1990, when serious peace talks started, the Campaign organised seminars in Sweden to discuss peace in El Salvador. At this time, several full-page ads were published in Salvadoran newspapers where hundreds of Swedish trade unions demanded negotiations and peace for the Salvadoran people. This was one result of the Swedish campaign.

Control of the money

Before the so-called elections of the century in El Salvador in 1994, a delegation visit was organised to El Salvador. The participants were members of the Campaign and for most of them it was the first time they had set foot in the country. They participated as observers in the elections, ensuring that the procedure follow the rules.

“We had a couple of hundred members all over Sweden, but we never managed to have real strength in our work. This was in part due to the divisions within the FMLN. The competition wasn’t mainly political, but had to do with the desire to control the money that was collected”, says Jan Czajkowski, who for several years was President of the Campaign El Salvador Shall Triumph.

At the annual general meeting of 1995, the Board proposed that the organization be dissolved; it had fulfilled its function. A few weeks before the meeting, however, a group of Salvadorans had entered as new members. They voted against the closure and instead opted to start working with development projects in El Salvador. And so it came that a new group was left with the resources and the name of the organization.

Jan Czajkowski left the Campaign: “A lesson from all of this, seeing it in retrospect, is that a solidarity movement should keep its distance from political parties and organizations. Otherwise relationships aren’t healthy”, he says.

Larger and broader

7 May 1987 was supposed to be the day for national exams in mathematics in secondary schools all over Sweden. But the pupils had managed to convince the education authorities that there was something more important to do.

The exams were postponed and 250 000 pupils went out on the streets to collect funds for displaced persons and refugees in El Salvador. In one single day, they managed to collect MUSD 2. The annual campaign Operation Day’s Work organised by the pupils’ association has never succeeded, not before nor since, in collecting such a large amount. El Salvador broke the record.

Operation Day's Work handed the funds over to Church of Sweden Aid who channelled it on to Diaconía El Salvador. The result was 49 new or repaired schools around the country.

Why El Salvador? "We needed to find a country with political nerve that you could build a campaign around. At the same time it had to be a country where something could actually be done", says Ingrid Persson, who coordinated the campaign.

The preparations went on for six months with studies, dissemination of information materials and, in particular, with the training of campaign manager pupils in 600 schools. Everything was done on weekend courses. On Saturday evening it became customary to watch the US film "Salvador" that had just been released on video.

Ingrid Persson still feels that Operation Day's Work was perhaps the best thing she ever did in her professional career: "The pupils' organization was the only one that managed to explain to a large group what the conflict in El Salvador was about."

Between party brothers

Support to the politically like-minded has been a recurring theme in Swedish cooperation with El Salvador. These political ties were also a condition for the far-away country in Central America to appear on the Swedish agenda at all.

When the armed conflict began in El Salvador, Pierre Schori was International Secretary of the Swedish Social Democratic Party. The Social Democrats were active in the Socialist International, where the small Salvadoran socialist party MNR was also member. This party was, in turn, a member of the FDR, the political wing of the FMLN.

MNR was headed by Guillermo Ungo, whom Schori had met during his first trip to Latin America back in 1966. “El Salvador had a social democratic party that we could identify with”, Pierre Schori says.

Guillermo Ungo and his party brothers became frequent guests in Sweden. In early 1980, Ungo was guest of honour at a Swedish trade unions congress. Along on the trip was also Enrique Alvarez Cordoba, a businessman who had joined the opposition as he saw no other way to work against increasing repression.

“They made a strong impression and we discussed how important it was that they return to El Salvador to carry on with active opposition. Alvarez was murdered shortly afterwards and I remember how guilty we felt”, says Pierre Schori.

As well as international recognition, the MNR also received financial support from the Swedish social democrats. The party’s fund for international solidarity made several payments to their Salvadoran allies.

The Social Democratic Youth also had contact with the MNR youth movement. “They weren’t any great sums of money; it was more a question of showing the Salvadoran army that the opposition had friends in other parts of the

world. As a party we wanted to contribute to their political legitimacy”, says Monica Andersson, who worked for the youth federation and later became International Secretary in the parent party.

Towards the end of the 1980s, the Social Democratic Party broadened its contacts with El Salvador, mainly with smaller parties in the political centre. But it was difficult to establish a dialogue with the FMLN, she remembers. “Each faction had its own spokesperson, at the same time as they created parallel political structures. As a party we were prepared to support several initiatives in El Salvador, but their lack of coordination made it difficult, not to say uninteresting.”

Support to a broad opposition

Support to politically like-minded parties and organizations was a central component in Swedish cooperation with El Salvador.

- The social democrat Olof Palme International Center started its cooperation with CIAS in 1982. The Salvadoran organization had close ties to the FDR and Guillermo Ungo was President of the Board. For several years, Sweden was the main source of funding for the organization.
- The resettlement project in Tenancingo received support from Diakonia, Church of Sweden Mission and the Olof Palme International Center. The initiative was taken by the Director of Diakonia at the time, Karl Axel Elmqvist and the Secretary for Latin America at the Olof Palme International Center, Margareta Grape, both members of the Christian Social Democrats. The Tenancingo project was implemented through FUNDASAL, where several of the staff had previously been affiliated with CIAS.
- For several years, Diakonia supported the Maquilishuat Foundation, which was led by Héctor Silva, leader of the Social Christian Popular Movement (MPSC). The foundation also received support from the Christian Social Democrats for, among other things, training of political leaders.

In different memoranda, mainly originating from the second half of the 1980s, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs discussed the importance of the “third force” in El Salvador. This referred to the smaller political parties in the centre, between the FMLN on one side of the scale and ARENA and the Christian Democrats on the other, and the role that these parties could play in order to achieve peaceful solutions in the country.

The centre politician Rubén Zamora considers that the Swedes had obvious political interests: “They clearly wanted

to reorient the reference point of the Salvadorans; they wanted to broaden it. Sweden put much emphasis on social democracy and for that reason they also supported institutions close to the MNR. There was a political intention; they wanted to moderate the Salvadoran rebels.”

As far as the Swedish strategy to strengthen the smaller centre parties was concerned however, their attempts failed: “In this sense it has to be established that their partisan policy did not work. It was too limited to achieve results”, continues Rubén Zamora.²²

For the Swedish NGO Diakonia it was also a question of seeking new fields of action: “We sought cooperation with the Maquilishuat Foundation, hoping to broaden the political opposition as a strategy to promote the peace process”, says Diakonia’s Secretary for Latin America, Peter Ottosson.

The international arena

In the early 1980s, the Socialist International formed a working group to support different Latin American initiatives. It was chaired by Felipe González of Spain, Secretary was Pierre Schori. The working group took several initiatives for peace negotiations in El Salvador. As leader of the FDR, Guillermo Ungo served as a link between the Socialist International and the FMLN.

Guerrilla commandant Ana Guadalupe Martínez recalls: “The Socialist International was very important during the first few years. It was decisive that we received rapid access to the international arena; we could express our opinions to a broader audience and were given the chance to learn the diplomatic game”, she remembers.

Exchanges between parties

The Swedish Left Party did not have any developed relationship with the FMLN during the armed conflict, although there were more sporadic contacts, mainly with the Communist Party that formed part of the guerrilla front.

The Left Party’s youth federation had established contacts directly with the FMLN and for the organization’s congress in 1987, the members had collected USD 40 000. The money was presented to two young FMLN representatives to standing ovations from congress delegates.

Cooperation between the parent parties started after the Peace Accords. The Left Party has mainly supported the FMLN

²² Conclusion presented by the reference group, San Salvador, May 2004.

with training courses and other activities to strengthen party organization. A dozen mayors from FMLN-led municipalities have participated in an exchange with Swedish municipalities where the Left Party has strong support.²³

²³ The Swedish Left Party has financed its cooperation with the FMLN using so called mandate funds. Since 1995, political parties represented in parliament receive state funds for cooperation projects with political parties in other countries. In 2002, MUSD 3.8 was allocated and distributed according to the each party's representation in parliament. The Swedish Government justifies this funding by the desire to support the strengthening of political parties as this is considered a prerequisite for democracy.

The road to La Palma... and on

The road to La Palma was bordered with white flags. Many people had gathered and the call “We want peace now” was heard. In the crowd, members of the guerrilla forces and people from the capital who had only read about the guerrillas in the newspapers mingled.

It was 15 October 1984. Shortly before, the new Salvadoran President, José Napoleón Duarte, had declared that he was willing to meet the guerrillas in his native town, La Palma.

Among those who escorted politicians from the FDR and the leaders of the FMLN to the meeting were the Swedish Chargé d'affairs²⁴ Anders Kompass and the Swedish Ambassador to Mexico, Karl-Anders Wollter.

As early as in 1983, representatives of the FDR-FMLN and the Salvadoran Government's Peace Commission had met a few times in Colombia. These meetings had taken place within the framework of the Contadora Group.²⁵ They had, however, not produced any results.

Meanwhile, a group of US Democratic Party senators met confidentially with guerrillas and Salvadoran military representatives. The aim of these contacts was to create space for negotiations. “It might only be window dressing”, Héctor Oquelí, leader of the FDR, said in a meeting with the Swedish Ambassador, Karl-Anders Wollter. “At the same time it is positive that Duarte, in the eyes of the international opinion, has compromised himself to speak with the guerrillas.”

According to Oquelí, two factors had been decisive; the initiative of the US senators that had established direct contacts between the FDR-FMLN and the military officers, together with strong international pressure.

²⁴ Diplomat without the rank of Ambassador.

²⁵ The Contadora group consisted of Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela. In mid-1984 the presidents of these four countries had reached an agreement about a document recommending peaceful resolution of the Central American conflicts.

Many people had gathered for the first peace dialogue in La Palma and the call “We want peace now” was heard. In the crowd, members of the guerrilla forces and people from the capital who had only read about the guerrillas in the newspapers mingled. Photo: Ulf Anéer



Escort to the peace talks

From the FDR, Guillermo Ungo and Rubén Zamora were going to participate in the meeting. The leadership of the FDR was, however, worried about their security and requested help: Could the Swedes meet Ungo and escort him to La Palma?

The Swedish Ambassador asked for instructions from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm. The answer gave the green light, but Wollter and Kompass should consider their personal security and never act on their own “so that Sweden does not expose itself alone”. The meeting with Ungo, however, did not take place because a number of other ambassadors, both from Latin America and Europe, accompanied him.

The first peace dialogue in the church of La Palma ended with Archbishop Rivera y Damas emerging on the steps of the church and reading a communiqué. The parties had agreed to form a negotiation commission. They were to meet again in one month.

Before the new meeting, Sweden received a new request for diplomatic presence. Ambassador Wollter and a group of other ambassadors accompanied Rubén Zamora and Héctor Oquelí to the meeting in the town of Ayagualo. Anders Kompass and the International Committee of the Red Cross escorted one of the FMLN commandants, Facundo Guardado.

The talks in Ayagualo ended in deadlock. The FDR-FMLN presented a peace plan and took advantage of the opportunity to “make rhetorically skilful declarations to the thousands of people who were waiting outside the venue of the meeting, in the darkness behind the TV-cameras”. Later the same night the guerrilla’s peace plan was dismissed in harsh terms by Duarte.



The leaders of the FDR-FMLN had met with the new Salvadoran President, José Napoleón Duarte, in his native town La Palma. From left to right: Facundo Guardado, Guillermo Ungo, Ferman Cienfuegos, Rubén Zamora, Lucio Rivera and Nidia Díaz.

Photo: Ulf Anéer

Sweden's role

In early 1985 Karl-Anders Wollter and Anders Kompass summed up the situation in El Salvador in a memorandum to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. They considered it positive that both parties seemed to have come to the conclusion that neither of them could win the armed conflict and that a negotiated solution was necessary. However, several problems remained and very skilled mediators would be needed in order to solve them.

The memorandum ends with a summary of possible Swedish contributions. Primarily, the role as go-between and intermediary of non-official points of view was becoming more and more evident. Secondly, Sweden should, in different ways, try to contribute to the strengthening of President Duarte vis-à-vis the extreme right.²⁶

"I had started to get a picture of Duarte with more nuances. Therefore, we considered it important to increase contacts with him. It was, however, too late and at the same time, too early. Too late to stop the violence and too early to get real negotiations started", remembers Anders Kompass.

Abraham Rodríguez, one of the leaders of the Christian Democratic Party, participated in La Palma. Today he agrees with the Swedish analysis: "Duarte couldn't come to an agreement with the Front. That would have been to surrender the country to communism, as the Right said."

Five long years were to pass before serious negotiations were initiated. Swedish diplomatic activity continued throughout the

²⁶ Among other things they recommended the appointment of a Swedish Ambassador to El Salvador. Due to the political situation in the country Sweden had not had an Ambassador there since 1981. The recommendation was taken ad notam; in late 1986 Krister Göransson presented his accreditation to President Duarte.

entire period: messages were transmitted, parties were brought together and pressure was exerted. One example of the latter came after the FMLN's kidnapping of President Duarte's daughter in 1985. At the end of October that year, the FMLN Europe representative called the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Sweden, saying that Duarte's daughter would soon be released. The decision was "result of the opinion of the Swedish and other governments", the FMLN representative said.

Shortly afterwards she was released together with 24 mayors, loyal to the Government, who had also been kidnapped by the FMLN. In exchange, the Government released 21 political prisoners and 110 war wounded guerrilla members. In a newspaper advertisement President Duarte thanked the countries involved, among them the Prime Minister of Sweden, "Señor Oloff (sic) Palme".

On 24 October 1985, the Government released 21 political prisoners and 110 war wounded guerrilla members. In exchange the FMLN released the daughter of President Duarte and 24 mayors, loyal to the Government, who had also been kidnapped.

Photo: Ivan Montecinos/Pressens Bild



El Salvador is pictured as one of the dramatic arenas of the cold war. The reality described in the largest Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter (DN) was often divided into good and bad; on one side the people and the guerrillas and on the other, the death squads led by terrifying generals and corrupt politicians. The civil war is portrayed in bloody scenery, as is the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero and the North American nuns. Photos illustrate anguished mothers next to their dead or mutilated children.

El Salvador is described in terms of power conflicts; farmers against landowners, civilians against the army, Christian Democrats against the right wing junta and the FMLN against the rest. Words often repeated include bomb raid, bloodbath, decapitation, torture and death squad.

In the political arena, the conflict is converted into a "heated, urgent debate in the American congress" and DN describes how President Ronald Reagan evades American law in order to stop the guerrillas. He sends planes over Nicaragua to spy on the guerrillas and builds a military base in Honduras to train the Salvadoran army. The consequences are reported in numbers in DN's press items: increasing casualties in El Salvador and increased military spending for the us.

Growing criticism

The criticism against the Reagan regime grows. When the President warns in a television speech that "Central America will be invaded by communists if the us doesn't use its legal and moral right to stop it", DN chooses the heading: "Heavy Soviet reaction: Reagan is compared to Hitler". Political coverage is alternated with cover stories such as "DN in the war in El Salvador".

In feature stories, guerrillas are described as human, funny and smart. On one occasion they dress as army soldiers and fool the correspondent Bengt Albons at a roadblock. Lars Palmgren writes about exciting nightly marches to guerrilla headquarters, the hopefulness surrounding the peace project Tenancingo and how the guerrilla beauty queen Veronica "teaches the boys a lesson" in the macho camp.

When the Cold War is defused and Bush succeeds Reagan, reporting changes in character. A last reminder from the old days turns up when the guerrillas shoot down a North American helicopter. The event threatens to defrost the military funding to the government army that had been stopped when it became known that the army had been involved in the assassination of the Jesuit priests in 1989.

Changes to reporting

At the beginning of the 1990s, the peace process is formally underway. The good news receives massive coverage and in January and February 1992 long news articles and feature stories are published several days a week. The peace is described as "fragile and threatened" and is analysed from different perspectives.

After the initially positive tone the daily starts to report another kind of news again. DN correspondent Eva Thibaud quotes Rubén Zamora, who compares the country with "a patient that only took its medicine for five days despite the doctor's orders for 20 days." Soon, the "death squads reappear in El Salvador". Readers are informed that more people are killed in peacetime than during the war.

The last big media event, besides disaster reports from the earthquakes in 2001, was the coverage of the elections in 1994. As of 1995 the daily writes about El Salvador a couple of times a year, if that. The presidential elections in 1999 and the parliamentary elections in 2000 – each receive a small press item. Several of the larger articles report on increasing gang culture in San Salvador. DN publishes an extensive cover story on this topic in July 2000. A week later, the article is criticised by a reader for emphasising "sensational photos" instead of "providing background and proper analysis of the situation."

Tenancingo

– the example everyone was longing for

The peace talks had stranded. The end of the armed conflict was nowhere in sight. The situation for the people in El Salvador who had been displaced by the war was becoming increasingly unsustainable. And so Tenancingo was born, the project that nobody believed in – but that everybody longed for.

Tenancingo was a small town destroyed in a military attack in 1983. Approximately 12 000 people were forced to flee. Although it was situated in the middle of the conflict zone and both housing and other infrastructure had been demolished by the bombs, part of the population wanted to return home. They contacted Archbishop Rivera y Damas asking for help. The Archbishop turned to his church and to the Salvadoran Foundation for Development and Housing (FUNDASAL).

“There was much discussion on whether or not it was convenient to get involved in this project. In the national context there was talk of finding solutions for the displaced persons and this was a concrete project of return and reconstruction”, says Alfredo Stein, who was employed at FUNDASAL.

Several of those working at FUNDASAL had come from CIAS, an organization that, for several years, had received funding for its humanitarian efforts from the Olof Palme International Center. Confidence had already been built up.

“For this reason it is natural for us to want to help the Foundation’s efforts to reconstruct Tenancingo. We see this as a complement to the more disaster-oriented support that we are normally involved in”, wrote the Secretary for Latin America at the Olof Palme International Center, Margareta Grape in the application to the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance in November 1985.

The displaced persons would gradually return, the houses would be rebuilt, the infrastructure re-established. Income generating projects would reactivate the local economy and training of the population would permeate the entire venture.

One condition was that the army and guerrillas would respect Tenancingo as a demilitarised zone. This would require negotiations. And there were no guarantees.

"If this project succeeds, it will be the first and so far only example showing that it is possible to achieve concrete results by means of negotiation, at least at local level. Tenancingo is therefore an important pedagogic tool in the efforts that are being made to reinstate peace talks between the Government and the FMLN", the application continued.

The Committee for Humanitarian Assistance decided in December 1985 to support Tenancingo with MUS\$ 1. Half of the funds would be channelled through the Olof Palme International Center and the other half through Diakonia and the Church of Sweden Mission.

The Committee justified the support in the following manner: "The project includes important components, among others trying new forms of civilian rule and popular participation that could lead to concrete steps towards peace, demilitarisation and national reconstruction, as well as creating an alternative model for internally displaced persons that could serve as an example for future efforts."

A hope – and an example

In February 1987 Tenancingo celebrated its first anniversary. It was a solemn event with international guests including ambassadors and NGO representatives. Reconstruction was well underway and 300–400 people had returned. A school, day-care centre and the water supply was functioning and, despite several incidents with government and guerrilla troops, reconstruction continued.

In a report to the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Anders Kompass wrote: "For the nearly 500 000 Salvadorans who the war has driven from their homes and who now live in camps for displaced persons or in city slums, Tenancingo constitutes a hope; a hope of returning home. Several advances have been made. 150 families are living here on permanent basis, the municipal board is functioning and so is the school. But the situation will never be fully normal; the army forbids the opening of a pharmacy or henhouse fearing that these could provide the guerrillas with necessities. Despite all of the obstacles the Tenancingo project is what it promised; an amazing attempt in an impossible situation."

There were, however, several problems and the schedule was delayed. There were difficulties in the implementation of development projects; the people had not returned to the extent that had been planned for; the projects that were to

reactivate the local economy turned out to be too isolated from the national economy to be sustainable.

“The Tenancingo project responded more to the interests of international cooperation and politics, than to the needs of the population. In this sense it was a failure”, says politician Rubén Zamora when analysing the experience.

“Tenancingo generated so much enthusiasm that the donor community provided twice or three times as much funding as was needed according to our estimates. There was much discussion on what to do; there was always a risk of creating some sort of dream resettlement in the middle of a war zone. This wouldn’t have been sustainable either”, says FUNDASAL Director at the time, Manuel Sevilla.

In June 1987 FUNDASAL asked the Swedish donors for permission to redirect part of the Tenancingo budget to other development projects. In a letter the organization explained: “being realist, there will be a considerable surplus of approved funding”. A few months later FUNDASAL’s leadership was replaced and the Swedish organizations decided, for different reasons, to end their support to Tenancingo. This did not reduce the symbolic value of what had been accomplished.

Manuel Sevilla recognises the role played by Sweden: “The Swedes were not alone, but they were the closest. Sweden played an important role as an actor, mainly by not attaching conditions to their support. This flexibility resulted in success. This, together with the people involved, made a difference.”

TENANCINGO:

After the return

The four-wheel drive leaves a cloud of dust in its trail, covering the bushes alongside the dirt road. The four officials from FUNDASAL are eager to arrive; curious to know how they will find Tenancingo 18 years afterwards. Will the same people still be there?

“Tenancingo was the first resettlement. It helped to open possibilities for others to follow; the return showed that it was possible to overcome the obstacles. There hasn’t been proper recognition of this experience”, says the current FUNDASAL Director, Edin Martínez.

We pass women walking while balancing bundles on top of their heads, men with machetes, barefoot children and skinny dogs. Spray painted rocks, electric poles, walls and different colour party flags remind us of a hard-fought campaign for the upcoming elections. Finally, we arrive in Tenancingo, where only a few people are to be seen.

“One day the guerrillas came to the village. They were outside of our house. I was 18 and had a newborn baby, just a month old. I told my mother that we had to leave, the army is on its way and they will kill us all. So we fled to a neigh-

bour’s. Five minutes later a bomb fell”, Mrs Lourdes recalls. “This attack was the worst one, it was terrifying to go out on the streets, there were dead people all over.”

History of fear

The neighbour’s house that she had fled to is one of the few in this small town that remains as a bombsite. The ruins are testimony to this history of fear and pain. The memories are also painful for Mrs Maria: “I only had a chance to grab some corn and a few blankets. We didn’t come back until 1987. In June the year before, the resettlement had started. The

villagers were doing the reconstruction themselves.”

“My husband worked as a bricklayer and I helped him. The fear still hadn’t passed. It was worse when it got dark. After a while we got electricity. In

the beginning it was only on for three hours, but it helped us to shorten the nights.” In order to make a living, they received small-scale loans for agriculture. “The first year was difficult because we had to start from zero; the following year things were already a bit easier.”

Today Mrs Maria runs a small store. “There is no way to make a living here

***“It’s a terrible pity
that there are
no jobs and that
people are forced
to leave.”***



Tenancingo came to possess symbolic value during the war. The inhabitants decided to return and rebuild the town despite it being situated in the middle of a war zone.

Photo: David Isaksson/Global Reporting

now, there are no jobs. Many of the villagers have left, some for the US.” The officials from FUNDASAL ask Mrs Maria about people that they had known 18 years ago, when the Foundation was working here. She recalls the names and explains that many have died; some of them young. She thinks that the fear and worry shortened their lives.

Lovely and peaceful

Mrs Maria’s home lies on the road to the school. Climbing a small hill we meet children with happy faces: today school ended early because the teachers are having a meeting. When we arrive, only a few teachers and the headmistress Mrs Reyna are left. “I enjoyed being able to take care of these children. When I arrived, the school had recently been built; the old one had been left in ruins. Then I got married and stayed on. I’m happy here; it’s a lovely and peaceful

place. We have 418 children in this school.”

“It’s a terrible pity that there are no jobs and that people are forced to leave. Only a few of those that originally returned to Tenancingo are still living here. All of the things that we had when we worked with the Foundation have been lost, over time everything has deteriorated. Today there is no organization, no municipal board, not even cultural activities like we used to have”, says Mrs Reyna.

I walk through the classrooms, empty of children, searching for a memory without result. I was hoping to find a sign with the name “Operation Day’s Work”. The school in Tenancingo was built with funds from this campaign run by the pupils’ association in Sweden. “We have made several changes over the years, remodelled and built new classrooms. Maybe that’s why the sign isn’t here”, the headmistress suggests.

Heading towards peace

1986–1991

Central America

– a new scene of action

Sweden started a regional programme for development cooperation in Central America in 1986. Regional support was intended to promote joint efforts and exchange of ideas across borders, thus contributing to peace and development in the region.

“It was also a way to work in countries without having to sign bilateral agreements with their governments”, says Hans Magnusson, Counsellor at the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala.

In El Salvador it was primarily within the regional programme that Sweden supported efforts aimed at diminishing poverty. This was done through support to rural health services and water and sanitation programmes.

In 1986 Sida approved MUSD 1.4 for regional support. Three years later the financing had increased threefold and 15 different institutions formed part of the programme.²⁷

Several other countries had also started to develop regional programmes and the Nordic countries coordinated their contributions to a certain degree.

²⁷ Sida, Continued support to the regional programme in Central America, 1989 (in Swedish). The major projects concerned protection of the environment through the Centre of Tropical Agriculture for Research and Training (CATIE) and prevention of disasters through the Centre for Disaster Prevention in Central America (CEPRENAC). In the social area the largest project was aimed at promoting regional health through the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO). In 1988 support to the UNICEF programme for water and sanitation was initiated. The refugee issue was another priority. Support to the GIREFCA conference came from the regional programme. Within the area of democracy, human rights and gender issues, Sida supported the Inter-American Institute for Human Rights (IIDH). The programme also included training in public administration and business administration and contributions to economic recovery, including support to the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI).

Apparent disadvantages

In 1992 the regional programme had increased to more than MUSD 28.²⁸ By then, Sida considered that the time had come to focus efforts and decrease the number of projects. When regional cooperation was initiated there had been strong motives for this working method. The tense relations between the Central American countries and US attempts to politically and economically isolate Nicaragua had made Sweden prioritise joint efforts and regional contacts.²⁹

Now these conditions had changed. Still there were clear potential advantages, such as regional exchange of experience and more efficient project administration. There were, however, also apparent disadvantages for example the risk that partner organizations would become “channels for development cooperation” without a solid base of their own. The Swedish Government decided to concentrate its regional support to three areas: health, water and sanitation, and environment.

“Not everything included in the regional programme was successful”, says Göran Homqvist who worked at the Embassy in Guatemala during this period. “There were, for example, regional programmes for fighting malaria, measles etc. We had to close them. Instead we started to support the Pan-American Health Organization’s work to design local health systems.”

In El Salvador the objective was to develop a decentralised model for health services, Basic Systems for Integrated Health (SIBASI). In some municipalities support succeeded in achieving increased local responsibility for health care. Evaluations, however, showed that major shortcomings still existed regarding financial and administrative decentralisation as well as the degree of local commitment.³⁰

The Government was not sufficiently interested in devolution of responsibility and resources to the local level”, says Ellenor Ekman at Sida, who was responsible for the project. At the end of the year 2002, the Swedish support for health system reforms in El Salvador ended, after an investment of approximately MUSD 3 over four years.

28 Including cooperation with Costa Rica. In the same year, the budget item was renamed Development Cooperation with Central America.

29 Embassy of Guatemala, Annual Report 1993/94 regarding the budget items Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Assistance and Development Cooperation with Central America, 1994 (in Swedish)

30 Ayala-Öström, B., Belmar, R., Jertfelt-Gustafsson, T., Sida’s health reform support to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, 1999–2001, An evaluation – final report, SIFU, 2002; Frühling, P., et al, Informe de la Tercera Misión, Equipo externo de monitoreo y asesoría, Salud y Reforma en Centro América, ÅF-Swedish Management Group, 2002

Influence the authorities

Support to the UNICEF regional programme for water and sanitation was the second major contribution from Sweden with the aim of alleviating poverty. However, the programme did not live up to Sida's expectations: "Experience shows that real effects are achieved only when water, sanitation and health education are combined, for example regarding decreased infant mortality", says Jens Berggren, programme officer responsible for the support at Sida. "As some countries in the region have been successful in some aspects and have failed in others, experience should have been exchanged, but this has not happened."

Moreover, Sida had expected UNICEF to influence authorities in the countries concerned in order for them to take over responsibility for water and sanitation issues. "The programme has reached poor people and it has been cost efficient. The UNICEF staff is good at designing pipes and other technical aspects, but we wanted more than that."

The UNICEF programme has been evaluated on three occasions. The first study was carried out in 1991.³¹ At this time the programme included four countries, among them El Salvador. Since 1988 Sweden had assumed approximately half of the costs. The study recommended the support to be continued because the needs were great and the support reached those in the most vulnerable situations, primarily women and children.

Another evaluation was carried out in 1995.³² The programme had grown to include seven countries. There was also a special project for the former conflict areas in El Salvador. The evaluation team concluded that the programme had, to a great extent, succeeded in providing people with access to water and sanitation. The results were less impressive when it came to health education and institutional strengthening. As indicators and baselines were lacking it was not possible to evaluate impact.

When the next evaluation took place in 2002 it was still not possible to draw any firm conclusions about effects for the beneficiaries.³³ The evaluators could only report that in the majority of the communities visited, the inhabitants considered the effects to be positive.³⁴

31 Lewin, E. et al, Water and Sanitation in Central America, Sida 1991

32 Valdelin, J., et al, UNICEF's Programme for Water and Sanitation in Central America, Sida 1996

33 Öström, N., et al, UNICEF's Programme for Water and Sanitation in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras 1998-2001, Sida 2002

34 Through support to three Salvadoran provinces, 27 000 people had been provided with drinking water. This was half of the number stated in the objectives for the four years covered by the evaluation. Regarding the construction of latrines the target had been surpassed by ten per cent, 92 000 people had benefited from this support.

After 14 years of providing approximately MUS\$ 4 of financial support for the Salvadoran part of the programme, Swedish inputs were finalised at the end of 2002.

Sida can contribute to dialogue

In the early 2000s some institutions and programmes in El Salvador, or with links to the country, are still included in regional support. One of them is the Salvadoran Programme for Environmental Research (PRISMA)³⁵ that works with research and training on environment, natural resources and agricultural development.

“Sida can contribute to political dialogue”, says Herman Rosa, Director of PRISMA. “As an NGO we don’t always have access to politicians and authorities. Sida could help with the opening of doors. This was partly lacking before, Sida acted more like an NGO, supporting different projects but without seeing their influence possibilities.”

The Director of Diakonia, Bo Forsberg, agrees: “Sida can create meeting arenas and promote processes. In El Salvador more could have been done in this sense. However we, the NGOs, have a responsibility too. We tend to get absorbed in practical matters and don’t have time for meetings and dialogue.”

Torgny Svenungsson, programme officer for El Salvador at Sida, points out that there are also occasions when Sida has made efforts to create space for the NGOs in meetings and other important events. Still he agrees that in general Sida could be more effective in combining different parts of the support and utilising synergy possibilities. “Partly time is lacking, partly this is due to our organization. Probably it would have been easier if we had been regionally integrated and the Department for Latin America had, for example, included programme officers with knowledge about environmental issues. Instead the experts on environment are in another department. This means that it is more difficult to work in an integrated fashion.”

35 The research carried out by the Secretariat of the Latin American Faculty for Social Sciences (FLACSO) is supported, as well as the National Library in San Salvador. Moreover, new PAHO programmes regarding violence within the family and the promotion of youth sexual health receive Swedish support.

When the refugees gained a voice of their own

It was May 1989 and the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) was inaugurated. Everybody was there: Central American Governments, international donors and, after intense diplomatic activity, NGOs. The only ones missing were the refugees themselves.

Lars Franklin, who worked at the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala, had felt increasingly frustrated over the exclusion of the refugee organizations. He took the matter into his own hands and invited some Guatemalan refugees from Mexico.

During the conference opening ceremony he turned to the Government representatives and said: "There are some refugees standing out in the corridor, it would perhaps be convenient to let them in". Then he added: "When they had breakfast with our minister this morning, she found what they had to say very interesting."

The Swedish delegation was headed by the Minister for Development Cooperation Lena Hjelm Wallén, who was in full agreement with Lars Franklin's political move. It did the job. The refugees were allowed in all the way to the negotiating table. For the first time their voices were heard in discussions on how to alleviate the refugee situation in Central America.

Organization from below

The refugees' road to CIREFCA, to a conference that would give its name to an entire process had, however, not been an easy one. It had started several years earlier.

Since the beginning of the civil war, several humanitarian organizations had been working to improve the situation for the increasing number of internally displaced persons within Salvadoran territory – and for the refugees who had fled over the borders to neighbouring countries.

The largest counterpart for the Swedish NGOs was Diaconía El Salvador, the ecumenical coordination organization of

churches and farmers' cooperatives that distributed emergency relief to the civilian population affected by war and organised camps for displaced persons. The organization worked to improve living conditions, some people were integrated into existing farmers' cooperatives, others worked in income-generating projects or were given vocational training as a means of increasing their opportunities of reintegration into society.

The support also contained another component: to organise the displaced persons in the defence of their own rights. New organizations were formed that, over time, made increasing demands to return to the land they had been driven from. Similar work was being carried out in the refugee camps in Central American countries where Salvadorans had fled. Many of these efforts received support from Swedish NGOs.³⁶ The organization strategy gave results, even some unexpected ones.

The returns begin

In just one day, 4 000 people left the Mesa Grande refugee camp in Honduras and returned to El Salvador. It was in October 1987 and there were no guarantees for the future of the refugees. Two months earlier the Esquipulas II³⁷ agreement had been signed. In Paragraph 8 of the agreement, the Central American presidents established that their countries would work together to find a solution to the refugee problem.

The refugees who returned from Mesa Grande had seen their chance. Returning was a way to put pressure on the Salvadoran Government to fulfil its promises. Short-term humanitarian assistance was not the solution. Instead, conditions had to be created for their reintegration – and this was responsibility of the Government.

The refugee return of Mesa Grande had an important symbolic value. Others had previously returned to El Salvador, but on smaller scale. From this day on, refugee returns became an irreversible process.

The Government answered with a resettlement programme, where refugees were referred to areas well isolated from the conflict zones where they had their original homes. The Government strategy was to depoliticise the population, while the interest of the guerrillas was exactly the opposite; it needed to maintain civilian support in its areas of control. The Government's resettlement programme was strongly sponsored by the USA through its agency for development cooperation, USAID.

36 In addition to Church of Sweden Aid and Diakonia, several other Swedish NGOs such as the YMCA-YMCA of Sweden and the Swallows worked directly with Salvadoran refugees in Costa Rica and other countries in the region.

37 The Esquipulas Agreement consists of two accords; the first was signed in May 1986 while the second and most important one was signed in August 1987.

Upon returning to El Salvador, the refugees had to negotiate their terms under political and military pressure. This was no easy task.

Photo: Ulf Anéer



Strong international support

Upon returning, the refugees had to negotiate with different political and military interests. This was no easy thing to do. For this and other tasks the refugees received ample support from several Salvadoran NGOs that had been formed in order to capture international development cooperation for re-integration projects.

These organizations – FASTRAS, CORDES, ASDI, FUNSAL-PRODESE, REDES and others – received strong backing from the donor community and from UNHCR. The Swedish NGOs Diakonia, Church of Sweden Aid and the Church of Sweden Mission contributed considerable financing.

“Funding was in abundance, but there were differences between international counterparts. With the Swedes it was a relationship of accomplices; many were key political individuals with a big heart”, says the CORDES Director during these years, Oscar Pérez.

“It was noteworthy that Sweden acted with a political strategy. Swedish people were important, from embassies to NGOs, throughout the entire process of the refugee returns. They helped open doors for Salvadoran NGOs, gave them legitimacy and a voice of their own. The fact that Sweden supported civil society made other donors follow their example.”

One illustration of the closeness between the different Swedish actors during this time is that Diakonia’s open fund was used in several instances to finance efforts that neither Sida, the embassies nor UNHCR could fund.

A new perspective

After the signing of the Esquipulas Agreement, it had become increasingly clear to Sweden that cooperation with Central America could not continue as before; Esquipulas meant new demands.

“It was necessary to work with authorities and governments in a new way, at the same time as a dialogue had to be opened directly with the NGOs”, says Nils-Arne Kastberg, who moved from UNHCR to work with Sida’s recently initiated Regional Programme for Central America.

In 1988, Nils-Arne Kastberg travelled to Central America together with the Head of the Latin American Department at Sida at the time, Börje Ljunggren. One evening they had a caller, the UNHCR representative José Maria Mendiluce, who had stopped by at the Hotel Maya in Tegucigalpa. They had a drink together on the terrace.

José Maria Mendiluce told the two Swedes that UNHCR wanted to organise a conference for refugees in Central America. The aim was to create a platform in order to carry out the Esquipulas Agreement in practice. This, however, required resources. “How much do you need to guarantee the process?” asked Börje Ljunggren. “Half a million dollars”, was the answer. “You’ve got it”, said Börje Ljunggren and promised that the initiative would be supported by Sweden.

The Swedes, however, did have one condition: that the NGOs could participate in the conference. José Maria Mendiluce thought that it would be difficult to convince the Central American Governments to accept this – NGOs were in general regarded as troublemakers and often accused of collaborating with the guerrillas. He promised that he would do what he could.

Meanwhile, the Swedes initiated their own diplomatic offensive. They travelled around in the region, organising meetings and exerting pressure to increase participation. But it was not only governments and the UN that needed to be convinced; many NGOs did not want to participate.

The official at Diakonia Ewa Widén remembers a conversation she had with a couple of counterparts: “They were horrified by our position and asked how they would be able to maintain confidence from their grassroots if they sat down to speak with the Government. I answered them: How can you maintain their confidence if you don’t even try? We were asking something important and complicated; we wanted the refugees to negotiate with those who had forced them to flee.”



Part of the humanitarian assistance was used for vocational training of displaced persons, thereby increasing their financial opportunities of reintegration into society. Shoe-making was one skill taught at the San Roque Church in San Salvador.

Photo: Ulf Anéer

CIREFCA opens the way

In May 1989 the CIREFCA conference was held in Guatemala.³⁸ For the first time government representatives sat down at the negotiating table together with international donors and NGOs to discuss the refugee issue. Of the 64 organizations that had applied to participate, the governments had finally approved 62.

One of the main objectives of the conference was to guarantee financing so that the refugees could return to their countries of origin. CIREFCA received a total budget of MUS\$ 438.³⁹ Almost half (46 per cent) came from the European Union, closely followed by Italy with 26 per cent and Sweden with 14 per cent.

The conference adopted a plan of action for a three-year period, 1989–1992.⁴⁰ The plan established mechanisms for collaboration between the different actors through national follow-up committees.

In El Salvador, Consertación was created as a coordination organization for civil society organizations and was assigned the task of negotiating with different government entities and the UNDP on reintegration and reconstruction projects. Actors that had never spoken to each other now jointly decided on what should be done.

“Initially there were problems between the members of the coordination organization, but the Swedish Embassy pushed us to cooperate. The message was that we had to learn to work together if we were going to achieve anything with the Government and the UN. It was an important experience for us”, recalls FASTRAS’ ex-Director and member of Consertación, Andrés Gregory.

Swedish presence important

Within the framework of their regional development cooperation programme, Sida contributed considerable financing to the UNHCR budget and towards the end of the 1980s Swedish personnel were working in all the UNHCR offices in Central America. “The Swedish presence was important to organise the repatriations”, says Pia Stavás, who worked at the UNHCR office in El Salvador in the early 1990s.

“The fact that there were Swedes in different positions in the UN helped to strengthen the system. We provided sub-

38 The first attempt to convoke an international conference to discuss the future of Central American refugees was made by UNHCR and Mexico as early as 1986. It would, however, take until the signing of the Esquipulas Agreement before the political conditions were put into place.

39 Fahlén, M., Perez del Castillo, G., CIREFCA, An opportunity and challenge for inter-agency cooperation, UNDP/UNHCR, 1995

40 This was later prolonged by another two years, until May 1994, when the CIREFCA process was formally ended.

stantial funding, but we also promoted policy changes within the UN. The most important aspect was unity. We shared fundamental values and agreed on what had to be achieved. Swedes at different levels, we who were in the field as well as those in Sweden, trusted each other, making it possible to take rapid decisions. And with a lot of money it's also possible to influence events.”

Evaluations indicate success

An evaluation of the CIREFCA process, carried out by the UN in 1994, concludes:⁴¹

“Without doubt, CIREFCA created the conditions to increase active and visible participation of NGOs in the region. By means of collaboration and dialogue with their respective Governments, financing from the international community and solidarity from counterpart organizations in Europe and North America, the NGOs managed to strengthen their programmes, establish cooperation links between themselves, transcend the short-term view of their own work, consolidate their role as promoters of protection for the uprooted population, as well as identify and carry out sustainable solutions.”

In another study, from 1995, the CIREFCA process is described as a “success story”.⁴² The process is concluded to have been:

- A strategic initiative connected to a political process, where CIREFCA contributed concrete activities to regional peace initiatives.
- A platform for national dialogue between governments, NGOs and the refugees’ own representatives on issues directly related to the armed conflict.
- A new development approach where the refugee problem was put into a political and developmental context. CIREFCA showed that conflict management must include fighting poverty which, in turn, requires a state governed by law, respect for human rights and popular participation.
- A regional perspective, where both countries of asylum and countries of origin were included in the same planning process.

41 CIREFCA/AGNUR/PNUD, Evaluación de la puesta en práctica de las disposiciones del documento “Principios y criterios para la protección y asistencia a los refugiados, repatriados y desplazados Centroamericanos en América Latina”, 1994

42 Fahlén, M., Perez del Castillo, G., CIREFCA, An opportunity and challenge for inter-agency cooperation, UNDP/UNHCR, 1995

CIREFCA also constituted a framework for new collaboration between UNHCR and UNDP. As a concrete result, the two UN agencies joined forces in order to facilitate transition from emergency relief to development in Central America.

“CIREFCA didn’t function well, but without the mechanisms that were established for cooperation, the process would have been even more difficult. At least there was one person formally responsible at the UNDP. We could use this once the Peace Accords were signed”, says Pia Stavås.

CIREFCA created a platform for the role that the NGOs would come to play, and also speeded up the refugee returns. “In the case of El Salvador, CIREFCA was the result of an entire process where refugees themselves helped to move the conflict parties, as well as the UN, towards the negotiating table”, says the Counsellor at the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala Hans Magnusson, who also has a past at Diakonia.

SAN JOSÉ DE LAS FLORES:

The story of a small town

The town does honour to its name. Walls covered in flowering vines decorate the entrance.

In the square, the town hall in San José de Las Flores opens its doors to a well-filled ceremony.

We arrived at this small farming community in discrete search of reminders of Swedish support to El Salvador, but we are surprised to find that several people have gathered and are awaiting our arrival.

They are members of the municipal Government, the women's committee and the youth organization along with their neighbours. This well-organised community in the Province of Chalatenango wants to take this opportunity to express its "gratitude to the people of Sweden".

Thousands displaced

The story of San José de Las Flores is similar to that of many small towns in El Salvador. Everything changed in the 1980s when thousands of farming families who had started to organise fell victims to repression. Many were displaced in their own country; others sought refuge abroad.

Mr Lisandro begins to speak and others add their own parts to the story:

"We were 26 families who were taken

away by the 4th Infantry Brigade in 1986. We started to plead for our rights with the help of the Salvadoran Committee for Displaced Persons (CRIPDES). Several Swedes came, some were religious. We received international solidarity and assistance from many. A few months after being removed, we came back. The return was difficult, we came from San Salvador and many people, both Salvadoran and from other countries, accompanied us to guarantee that nothing would happen. Finally, we arrived at the abandoned town."

More families followed

"We were given some construction materials; we took over some of the abandoned houses and patched them up as best we could. We continued to organise, elected our local Government. The military activity made it difficult in the beginning. The war continued on the outskirts of town and we had to work in the fields. Some lost their lives."

More families followed after the first ones. Several came from the refugee camps in Honduras.

"After the Peace Accords another stage began. Some of the landowners told us that we had to leave the fields and the houses. A long and difficult negotiation process began, but this was eventually solved. Friendly institutions helped us to

buy the houses and land where the people worked. After that we started a process to gain recognition for our teachers and health workers who had worked throughout the war. Today, the majority have graduated and have jobs. Most of what we have is the result of solidarity.”

Difficult to explain

“It’s difficult to explain to the children how we lived and how hard we had to struggle to achieve what we have today. They haven’t felt the suffering and don’t value what we have in the same way. It’s another world nowadays; they are more interested in computers and games and dressing according to the latest fashion.”

***“Most of
what we have
is the result
of solidarity.”***

“Many from the town have left to live in the USA and it makes us sad to see our children grow up with the idea that when they are adults, they will also have to leave. The families are broken up.”

A group of young people have formed a music group in an attempt to keep the traditions alive and to recollect the historical memory of the community. They take farewell with some songs that reflect the stories of torment and struggle, but also of happiness and humour. The blue car

that came from Chalatenango with food supplies is one of the stars, accompanied by a tropical rhythm: “beep, beep, beep, goes the little blue car...”



In the 1980s, life in San José de Las Flores changed forever. Thousands of farming families were displaced; others sought refuge outside the country.

Photo: David Isaksson/Global Reporting

Within the framework of the United Nations

For many years, Sweden has been acting consistently to draw international attention to the situation in El Salvador, primarily within the framework of the UN.” This was stated by the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sten Andersson when he, in 1988, answered a question in parliament regarding death squads in El Salvador.⁴³

A recurring theme in Swedish action regarding the conflict in El Salvador was to draw attention to human rights violations in forums such as the Third Committee⁴⁴ and the Commission on Human Rights, both within the UN.

“The Swedish policy to promote human rights and the humanitarian assistance coincided”, says the former FMLN Commandant Nidia Díaz. “During the 1980s, Sweden acted consistently in support of resolutions on El Salvador in the UN. The difference between Sweden and other countries was a genuine interest and solidarity; Sweden was prepared to go a little further than the protocol required.”

In December 1980, the junta that had taken over Government in El Salvador one year previously shifted more and more towards the right, the guerrilla constellation FMLN had been formed and repression was steadily increasing. Sweden then voted for the first resolution in the UN which requested the Government of El Salvador to protect and maintain freedom and human rights. The resolution also demanded an end to weapons shipments and other military aid from all countries.

A few months later, Ola Ullsten, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Swedish centre-right Government, was to answer some questions in parliament about El Salvador. His speech was carefully edited because Sweden’s questioning of

⁴³ Answer to question from Bertil Måbrink (Left Party), 24 November 1988.

⁴⁴ The Third Committee is one of six committees of the General Assembly. It deals with violations of human rights. Resolutions adopted constitute a criticism that all countries wish to avoid. They also guide the actions of the UN system in order to put an end to abuses.

the US supply of arms to the junta in El Salvador had, in turn, received strong criticism from the US.

When the Swedish Ambassador in Washington, William Wachtmeister, saw the first draft he sent a telex to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in which he wrote: "We have to keep in mind that part of the irritation from the US is based on their wondering why we are taking such an interest in a small and distant country in their American backyard."

As a consequence, Wachtmeister thought that the speech in parliament should say something about the background of Swedish involvement. The answer took the form of a political declaration:

"The main themes of Swedish foreign policy are to work for national independence, peaceful solution to conflict and human rights. For a small, non-aligned country like Sweden it is of vital interest that respect for these principles is upheld. /.../ Our solidarity with suffering and oppressed people, wherever in the world they are, is not only an expression of natural human sensibility, it is also a way to defend principles that are of tremendous importance to our own security and independence."⁴⁵

Support to special rapporteur

In March 1981 the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva decided to send a special rapporteur to investigate the situation in El Salvador. Sweden voted in favour of this resolution.

The same year, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ola Ullsten, made a harsh declaration about El Salvador in the UN General Assembly. In his speech he pleaded for negotiations, a cease-fire and the forming of a coalition government. He ended by saying that the conflict was a battle between the oligarchy and the demands of the people for justice and "in this struggle the democracies of the world have to take a side".

The Salvadoran Government asked for a rejoinder and accused the Government of Sweden of ignorance and supporting guerrilla and terrorist movements as well as Marxism.

During the years that followed, in letters of thanks, the FDR-FMLN often expressed their gratitude for Swedish efforts in the UN: "We consider the role of the international community, and especially the one played by your Government, to be of vital importance", came in a letter from 1984, signed by Guillermo Ungo.

By the mid-1980s, Latin American countries, primarily Mexico and Venezuela, gradually took over the work of presenting resolutions on El Salvador in the Third Committee of

⁴⁵ Answer to interpellation from Eva Hjelmström (Left Party) and question from Bertil Zachrisson (Social Democratic Party), 13 February 1981.

the UN.⁴⁶ Consequently it became increasingly difficult for Sweden to influence their drafting. Moreover, Sweden felt that these resolutions became less powerful. "In spite of this, we should support the proposal", the Ministry for Foreign Affairs wrote to the Swedish Mission to the UN in New York in 1985. To do the opposite would be noted as a change of policy.

A resolution adopted in 1986 caused a furious protest from the Salvadoran Ministry for Foreign Affairs. When the new Swedish Ambassador, Krister Göransson, soon afterwards handed over his letter of accreditation, president Duarte also brought up the issue. He did not agree with the probable consequence of the resolution, that is, the extension of the mandate of the special rapporteur, José Antonio Pastor Ridruejo. According to Duarte it was "humiliating to be put to shame together with dictatorships like Chile and Paraguay".⁴⁷

International public opinion

In the coming years Sweden worked – successfully – for the special rapporteur to continue his mission. In a letter to the Swedish UN Ambassador in December 1987, the FDR-FMLN wrote that Swedish protests had been decisive as far as the General Assembly not cancelling the mandate was concerned.⁴⁸

"Swedish support was important. Sweden possessed a lot of knowledge and worked to promote human rights", says Abraham Rodríguez, one of the leaders of the Christian Democratic Party during this period. "Sweden contributed to the moulding of international public opinion in favour of an end to the war through negotiation."

While the drafting of the annual resolution on El Salvador was underway in the General Assembly in December 1989, Sweden initiated a meeting with other European countries. The aim was to establish a stronger resolution than those presented in the previous years. The issue was, however, delicate and several countries hesitated. Latin America was not prepared to allow the Europeans to influence negotiations.

However, the dramatic events unfolding in El Salvador – the FMLN offensive and the murders of the Jesuit priests – finally made several European countries decide to challenge the Latin Americans and submit their own proposal. As a result the Latin American countries accepted negotiations. The resolution that was later presented was approved by 96 votes in

46 This occurred not only as far as El Salvador was concerned. The Latin American countries tried to make all UN dealings with violations of human rights in the region an internal issue.

47 In his 1986 report, the special rapporteur dealt with political murders (the number had, however, decreased compared to the previous year), disappearances and the situation for political prisoners.

48 The mandates of the special rapporteurs are renewed every year. Normally the Commission on Human Rights takes the decision.

favour, one against (El Salvador) and 34 abstentions (the US among others).

This result can be considered a success, the Swedish Mission to the UN stated. Sweden had managed to influence the wording of the resolution in the right way and the Latin American monopoly on submitting proposals had been broken.

Soon, however, the UN was to assume a new role in El Salvador. With the negotiations and the Peace Accords, the controversies in the Third Committee and the Commission on Human Rights were gradually to come to an end.

Sweden

– a link to the USA

The FMLN considers Pierre Shori, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, as its official channel to the US administration. This was declared by the FMLN commandant Ana Guadalupe Martínez in a meeting with the Swedish Ambassador in Nicaragua in April 1989.

The USA and Sweden held contradictory opinions about the Salvadoran armed conflict. Still the USA was, without parallel, the most important external actor in the conflict and Swedish diplomats made great efforts to influence the US administration. In some cases they also acted as messengers between the USA and the guerrillas.

Ana Guadalupe Martínez and the FDR leader Héctor Quelí visited Sweden in 1981. The FDR-FMLN had recently been formed: “We met with Olof Palme and Pierre Schori and informed them about the situation”, says Ana Guadalupe Martínez. “Palme was early to perceive what was going on in El Salvador. There was a noteworthy coherence in the Swedish way of acting. Our relationship was open, close and always at the highest level.”

The conflicting USA and Swedish views had already become clear that year in spite of the fact that the Swedish Government was then a centre-right coalition. This shows that the Swedish position was not dependent on the Social Democratic Party, although it was the social democrats who maintained the personal relationships and the strongest commitment. During most of the conflict in El Salvador, the Social Democratic Party was in power.

Sweden criticised weapons shipments to the Salvadoran junta.⁴⁹ The Swedish Ambassador in Washington received a formal protest and the USA also sent a delegation to Europe –

49 The US weapons shipments to El Salvador were a frequent topic included in Swedish criticism of the USA. In meetings of solidarity groups and at other events it was often stated that the US provided the Salvadoran military with arms to a value of USD 1 a day.

to Sweden among other countries – in order to explain the US position.

At a press conference after the meeting with the delegation, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ola Ullsten, stated that the US should make more effort to establish a peaceful solution to the conflict. The following year a Swedish newspaper wrote that El Salvador had caused tensions between Sweden and the USA on a level not observed since the Vietnam War. In contrast to this, the Swedish position was well received by the Salvadoran opposition, which welcomed a counterweight to the USA.

Could Sweden really influence the US administration?

“I went regularly to Washington. Sweden had access to political leaders and could act as a go-between”, says Pierre Schori. “We had experience and saw what was happening – because we were there, on the ground in El Salvador.”

Staffan Wrigstad, who was Desk Officer for El Salvador at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in the early 1980s and Ambassador in Guatemala during the second half of the 1990s, also thinks that this might have been the case. “On several occasions, people in the US administration told me that Sweden was well informed about Central America. We were considered to be good discussion partners.”

Newspaper reveals contacts

In early 1989 Sweden was playing the role of the go-between. There were increasing indications that it was only a matter of time before negotiations between the Salvadoran Government and the guerrilla would start. One important reason for this was that George Bush had taken over as US President and brought with him a more pragmatic attitude than during the Reagan era.

Pierre Schori was the “channel” for presenting FMLN proposals and conditions to the US State Department as well as communicating reactions in the opposite direction. Among others, a proposal was relayed in which the FMLN offered to respect the results of the forthcoming elections if they were postponed for six months and some other demands were also met.

A Swedish newspaper, however, published an article about this initiative and the contacts between the FMLN and the USA. The article led to a visit from Ana Guadalupe Martínez to the Swedish Embassy in Nicaragua. She was worried about the leak and explained that some of the information published in the newspaper was incorrect. She also handed a letter to Pierre Schori with some explanations that she asked him to pass on to the Bush administration.

However, the guerrilla’s initiative did not produce any

immediate results. The elections in El Salvador took place as planned in March – and were boycotted by the FMLN. Alfredo Cristiani from the ARENA party was elected President.

A special relationship

“I had the impression that the relationship between us and the FMLN was rather unique”, says Charlotte Wrangberg who worked at the Swedish Embassy in Mexico 1989–91. “They always contacted us to provide information about new initiatives and to tell us about progress and setbacks in the negotiations.”

The largest scale guerrilla offensive during the conflict started in November 1989. At the same time, elections in Nicaragua were drawing closer.

Pierre Schori met with the US Assistant Secretary of State, Bernard Aronson, in Washington. Just as on other occasions when US and Swedish Government officials discussed El Salvador, Aronson initiated the exchange with the issue of Nicaraguan arms shipments to El Salvador. According to notes from the meeting, Schori answered by raising the topic of US weapons shipments to guerrillas in Angola. The conversation then moved on to less sensitive issues. Both underlined the importance of bringing the El Salvador parties back to the negotiating table.

Schori also highlighted the fact that the FMLN wanted to meet with Aronson. The US Under-Secretary of State did not rule out consultations with the FMLN in the future, but for the time being he was not prepared to meet them.

The Swedish Embassy in Mexico also tried to arrange a meeting between the US administration and the FMLN: “It was a Swedish initiative that originated with Pierre Schori. But nothing came of it because the US finally pulled out. The time was not ripe, they told us”, Charlotte Wrangberg remembers.

The leadership of the FMLN and Bernard Aronson were not to meet until the 1 January 1992, the day after the signing of the Act of New York.⁵⁰

50 Lindholm, M., *Fiender runt samma bord* (Enemies around the same table, in Swedish), 1997

“...audience at the highest level”

In early December 1989, the Swedish embassies in Guatemala and Nicaragua received a telegram with the designation “VERY URGENT” from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm.

The State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Pierre Schori, notified them that he was sending special envoys with “a very urgent message” to the Central American presidents. “You are hereby instructed so seek audience at the highest official level”, the ambassadors were told.

Swedish diplomatic efforts to contribute to peace negotiations between the Salvadoran Government and the FMLN culminated during the hectic days that followed. The aim was to establish a proposal regarding mediation in El Salvador by the United Nations among the Central American presidents before the opening of their meeting in Costa Rica on 10 December.

Less than a month earlier the FMLN had started its largest scale offensive to date. Fighting had reached the most prosperous parts of San Salvador, the Government had responded by bombing some of the poorest neighbourhoods in the city.

On November 16 the country had been shocked by yet another horrifying act of violence: six Jesuit priests at the Central American University, UCA, their housekeeper and her daughter had been assassinated by the army.

Three Swedish diplomats had come to San Salvador to assess the situation: Lars Franklin who was stationed at the Embassy in Guatemala, and Anders Kompass and Michael Frühling who both served at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm. The situation was serious, members of churches and NGO staff had been imprisoned or had gone into hiding, the leadership of the opposition alliance Convergencia Democrática (CD) had received death threats and had either fled the country or had gained the protection of foreign embassies.

“It felt like El Salvador was heading towards an even deeper crisis than the one it was already in”, remembers Anders Kompass.

On 1 December, Swedish diplomats met with one of the leaders of CD, Rubén Zamora. He spoke about the need for a new negotiation initiative in order to restrain violence. He presented a draft proposal that had been discussed, among others, with the Catholic Church and the FMLN. Apart from Sweden, Mexico and Venezuela had received copies of the draft. Its main point was that the UN Secretary General, Javier Pérez de Cuellar, should take on a more active role in the peace dialogue.

The question was: Who should launch the initiative? Correspondence between the Embassy and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs reveals that a number of possibilities were discussed. At this stage the three Swedish diplomats decided to contact Pierre Schori. Could Sweden try to persuade the Central American presidents to consider the proposal at their forthcoming meeting?

“We were sitting in the Hotel Camino Real waiting for the decision”, relates Anders Kompass. “We felt we had been called to a higher cause. Rubén Zamora had asked us to do this. We did not know if he would still be alive the next day.”

Meetings with presidents

Pierre Schori called and gave the green light. This led to intensive activity at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Urgent instructions were sent to the ambassadors. When Lars Franklin arrived back in Guatemala, however, President Vinicio Cerezo had already left for the meeting. Instead, Lars Franklin remembered some years later, he had to relay the message to the Guatemalan Minister for Foreign Affairs.⁵¹

In contrast to this scenario, Michael Frühling managed to meet with the Nicaraguan President, Daniel Ortega, on the night before the meeting. Frühling conveyed the message that Sweden would like to see the presidents make a joint request to the UN Secretary General to study the possibilities of mediation in the Salvadoran conflict. According to a telex to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm, Ortega reacted positively and promised to take the idea with him to Costa Rica.

The same telex reveals that Anders Kompass, who had been sent to Costa Rica to talk with president Oscar Arias, had also been successful. While he was there, however,

51 På väg mot fred ...med svensk assistans (On the way to peace ...with Swedish support, in Swedish), Nyheter från Latinamerika, 1992/1

Bernard Aronson, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, had called. According to *Kompass*, interest from the US was limited: "Arias connected the telephone's loud-speaker so that I could hear. The most important thing is that you condemn the FMLN and Ortega, Aronson shouted from the telephone. The murder of the Jesuits, I wrote on a paper for Arias. That was the guerrilla, Aronson answered. A big lie, I wrote."

No isolated initiative

The Swedish initiative to promote negotiations was not isolated from other diplomatic efforts.

"There is no relevant government or organization that has not taken initiatives on, or been involved in, discussions about mediation in the Salvadoran conflict", the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala had stated a few weeks previously. In this frenetic diplomatic activity the UN, the Organisation of the American States (OAS), the Catholic Church, Venezuela and some of the Central American neighbouring countries, among others, were involved.

In 1989, the FMLN had presented several peace initiatives and had, for the first time, talked about a cease-fire. The newly elected president, Alfredo Cristiani, had taken this into consideration and a dialogue had been initiated, with meetings in Mexico as well as in Costa Rica.

In early November the FMLN broke off the dialogue in protest against a bomb attack on the confederation of trade unions FENASTRAS, which claimed ten lives. A few days later FMLN initiated an offensive and everything that had been achieved in terms of reaching a peaceful solution to the conflict seemed at risk.

Meetings and dinners succeeded each other; the Swedish Ambassador in Cuba reported that his French colleague had had to interrupt a dinner because Fidel Castro wanted to discuss a peace initiative with him. Pierre Schori had a meeting with Bernard Aronson. The Swedish Ambassador in Nicaragua talked with Oscar Arias.

Explorations on how to bring about a more active role for the UN were also underway in different places. The Ambassador in Nicaragua met Salvador Samayoa and Ana Guadalupe Martínez from FMLN in Managua. They had just come back from a meeting in Montreal with Álvaro de Soto at which de Soto had inquired about FMLN's opinion on mediation through the Secretary General. The FMLN representatives explained that their attitude was positive.

A few days before the Central American presidents' meeting, the UN Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar also sent a letter to Oscar Arias in which he explained that he was at their disposal if the presidents agreed that they wished to request such assistance.

"It is difficult to assess the importance of the Swedish initiative, but it probably helped to focus interest on the role of the UN", says Michael Frühling. "It was the right thing to do and the Government of Sweden had a good reputation. We also had the confidence of the FMLN."

Now, 15 years later, the Costa Rican ex-President Oscar Arias states that he does not have sufficient knowledge about the Swedish efforts to be able to give a more specific opinion about their importance and possible results in relationship to the peace process in El Salvador.

"But I want to take the opportunity to say that I, together with 35 million Central Americans, am deeply grateful for the support of the Government and the people of Sweden for the peaceful solution of our regional conflicts."

The UN brings a new dynamic

The Central American presidents' meeting, which took place 10–12 December 1989, was tempestuous. In addition to El Salvador, there were other controversial issues on the agenda, primarily regarding Nicaragua. However, the final declaration from the meeting contained the longed-for request for the UN Secretary General to become involved in attempts to re-establish peace talks: "The five presidents decided to request, in the most respectful way, that the Secretary General of the United Nations, using all possible personal efforts, take necessary action in order to reinstate the dialogue between the Government of El Salvador and the FMLN, thereby contributing to its successful development."⁵²

Anders Kompass believes it to have been decisive that the UN took on the role as mediator: "This brought a dynamic to the negotiations that had not been there before."

"After the FMLN offensive and the murder of the Jesuit priests the right moment had come, it was time to involve the UN", Rubén Zamora agrees. "The previous negotiation initiatives had sought to keep the dialogue within the country, with mediation from the church. But now we wanted to involve the UN."

52 Declaration of San Isidro de Coronado, 12 December 1989

Rubén Zamora has no clear memory of the message to the Central American presidents.⁵³ “It sounds familiar ... The Europeans played an important role in order to provide space for the UN, also in relationship to the US.”

“It was typical of the Swedes that they were careful not to take on a leading role for themselves. They advocated and worked hard to create consensus”, he continues. “Sweden supported the countries in the region that wanted to obtain a political solution.”

Discrete Swedish support behind the scenes would also prove to be useful during the coming negotiation process.

53 A report from the Swedish Embassy in Nicaragua shows that the request to the Secretary General was “formulated in a different way from the Swedish initiative”. However, it has not been possible to establish the exact wording of the initiative, as the message to the Central American presidents has not been found in the archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Secret meeting paves the way for agreement

I came back from Geneva on Tuesday night and after a quick visit to the office on Wednesday I flew back here for the new round of consultations between the Government and FMLN, which start today.” These were the words of UN mediator Álvaro de Soto in a letter to the Swedish State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Pierre Schori, in July 1990.

The letter continued with hearty thanks for the generosity of the Swedish Government in providing quick and flexible support for the meeting on human rights that had just taken place in Geneva. The conference was a great success; the ideas that came up were now to be used in the peace talks, de Soto indicated.

Serious negotiations between the Salvadoran Government and the FMLN had finally started.

In December 1989, the Central American presidents had agreed to ask the UN Secretary General to become involved in the efforts to reinstitute the dialogue. Now immediate action is needed to strongly emphasise that a new, independent international authority has entered the scene, stated an internal memorandum from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Sweden needs to consider its opportunities of assisting the UN if so required.

The Swedish Mission to the United Nations met with a representative of the UN. Among other things, the UN wanted to discuss the possibilities of establishing a friends’ group of countries in order to support the Secretary General in the mediation task. Sweden could form part of such a group, but there was a risk that President Cristiani would “fall back on the negative view of Duarte regarding Swedish collaboration”.⁵⁴

However, the opening of the negotiations dragged on. In a

⁵⁴ A few years earlier, when Swedish participation in an international observers’ group for Central America had been considered, the then President of El Salvador, Duarte, objected.

new report, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs stated that the Salvadoran military were blocking Cristiani's willingness to talk with the FMLN. Because of this situation, the President needed support from the USA, but Washington did not seem to be prepared to put real pressure on the military forces they had supported for so long. Strong pressure was, however, coming from the US Congress, especially after the assassination of the Jesuit priests.

Senator meets with the FMLN

The US democrat senator Christopher Dodd decided to take action. In January 1990 he visited Guatemala and met with Ana Guadalupe Martínez and another representative of the guerrillas.

The meeting, which took place at the airport, consisted of an exchange of ideas. As the FMLN representatives were worried about their security, Lars Franklin from the Swedish Embassy met them on their arrival in the country. He also invited the visitors for lunch at his home after the meeting. Simultaneously the Swedish Embassy received telephone threats.

A few days later the Salvadoran opposition politician Héctor Oquelí, who was on a short visit to Guatemala, was kidnapped and murdered. Lars Franklin had to go to the airport again, this time to meet the Oquelí family. After these events the Swedish diplomat's situation was considered too unsafe and he had to leave the country.

In New York the UN got back to Sweden with good news. A framework for the negotiations would soon be in place. The mediator, Álvaro de Soto, was considering asking Sweden to form part of the group of friends. However, this did not happen: "I do not have a good answer as to why. We were assigned a more independent role", the diplomat Michael Frühling says. "The fact that Sweden did not have an embassy in El Salvador was possibly one reason."⁵⁵

Different opinions

Salvador Samayoa formed part of the diplomatic and political mission of the FDR-FMLN and was a frequent guest in Sweden during the 1980s. According to him the guerrillas wanted Sweden to be a member of the group of friends. A book which Samayoa wrote in 2002, "El Salvador: La Reforma Pactada", only mentions Swedish support once in its description of the negotiation phase; in relation to the meeting on human rights in Geneva. However, he does not exclude the

⁵⁵ The friends' group consisted of Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela and Spain.

possibility that Sweden also contributed in other forms: “During the negotiations, Álvaro de Soto was the one who managed contacts with different actors, took measures and had knowledge about all the support.”

Samayoa also speaks with appreciation of the Swedish support during the phase that preceded the negotiations: “Sweden was one of the countries that acted fastest, with least bureaucracy – and with political capacity.”

Oscar Santamaría was a member of the Salvadoran Government 1989–94, among other functions he served as Minister for Foreign Affairs. He is less positive towards Sweden. During the armed conflict Sweden sympathised with the guerrillas, he believes.

During the negotiations the Salvadoran Government mainly related to the UN, the countries in the group of friends and the US. “It is possible that also Sweden joined them. That was, however, not perceptible to us.”

Meeting in Geneva decisive

In early April 1990 the parties involved in the conflict met and agreed to initiate formal peace talks and in May negotiations started. On 16 July, the secret brainstorming meeting took place in Geneva. The aim was to collect ideas and proposals regarding one of the stumbling blocks to the negotiations: human rights and how they were to be supervised. Sweden financed the meeting and contributed to the practical arrangements.

“A surprising unanimity regarding how possible UN supervision could be designed was developed among the participants”, Michael Frühling, one of the Swedes who attended, wrote afterwards.

Only ten days later, after negotiations in Costa Rica, the Salvadoran Government and the FMLN signed the first of three accords. The parties agreed to the establishment of a UN mission in El Salvador to verify compliance with provisions mandating respect for human rights.⁵⁶

In a new letter to Pierre Schori, Álvaro de Soto wrote that the agreement would not have been possible without the meeting in Geneva. “Now we need to start thinking about the operational aspects of this huge supervision operation”, the UN mediator continued. A new, confidential meeting must be arranged, this time in New York. Finally he solicited Swedish support for this conference as well. Yet another meeting took

⁵⁶ The mission was later named ONUSAL (the United Nations Observer Mission to El Salvador).

place in Geneva in November, this time with the aim of collecting ideas on reforms of the judicial system in El Salvador.

In April 1991 the parties signed a new agreement in Mexico in which they agreed to create a truth commission in order to investigate the serious violations of human rights during the civil war.

The agreement also included the establishment of a new electoral tribunal with provision for broad political party representation. Furthermore, the accord contained important reforms of the armed forces and the founding of a new civilian police force, changes within the judicial system and the establishment of a new ombuds institution for human rights.

Preparations for peace

Several new rounds of negotiations took place in Venezuela and Mexico, without result. Meanwhile, fighting was still ongoing in El Salvador.

Preparations for peace were, however, advancing. The new UN mission, ONUSAL, was installed. A group of five experts from the UN, among them one Swede, travelled to El Salvador in order to outline the structure of the new police force. Sweden financed the mission. In San Salvador the trial started against the nine members of the army who were accused of the murders of the six Jesuit priests the year before. Swedish diplomats participated as observers during the trial.

“It was not until the second half of 1991 that the parties entirely focussed on events at the negotiation table”, Anders Kompass says. “By then, both realised that a lot had been achieved. The negotiations became the important thing.”

During the negotiation phase Sweden, together with other countries, contributed to a fund that covered the costs of hotel and living expenses for the FMLN team.⁵⁷

This is in line with the impression of Sweden that one of the members of the Government’s negotiation team, general Mauricio Vargas, has: “Sweden supported the guerrillas. Above all politically, but also financially... including during the conflict. At least that is what people said...” He does not remember that Sweden played any role in the negotiations.

In September, the UN Secretary General invited the parties to a new round of negotiations. The result was the third agreement in which the Salvadoran Government and the guerrillas, among other issues, agreed on a programme for land transfer.

On New Year’s Eve, 31 December 1991 – the very same

⁵⁷ In June 1991, Sida approved USD 50 000 in support to the FMLN to cover costs connected to the negotiations. The money was channelled through Church of Sweden Aid.



The Peace Accords were signed in January 1992 in Mexico City. A handshake between the Salvadoran President and the FMLN guerrilla leaders confirm the end of the armed conflict.

Photo: AFP/Pressens Bild

day the mandate for the UN Secretary General, Javier Pérez de Cuellar, ran out – the Salvadoran Government and the FMLN signed the Act of New York. It established that the parties had agreed to end the armed conflict.

A few days later Sweden received an official invitation to participate in the ceremony in Mexico where the peace agreements would be signed. The Minister for Development Cooperation, Alf Svensson, headed the Swedish delegation and said, in a press communiqué:

“We are delighted to see that these eleven years of war, that have cost more than 75 000 lives, have finally come to an end. Now an important peace process begins and for Sweden it is a great honour to participate in this historic moment when we hope that the foundation of a lasting peace in the whole region will be consolidated.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Ministry for Foreign Affairs: Statement by the Minister for Development Cooperation, Alf Svensson, 9 January 1992.

INVISIBLE WOMEN

Swedish cooperation with El Salvador has been characterised by a number of committed individuals with great power of initiative, of whom the most visible have been men. Where are the women? And what happened to the gender perspective?

Many women in leading positions played important roles in Swedish support to the peace process in El Salvador. Eivor Halkjaer was responsible for humanitarian assistance to Latin America at Sida for a long period and was then Head of Sida's Department for Latin America.

Gabriella Lindholm worked with Central America in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and then went on to become their Head of Section for America. Margareta Grape was responsible for cooperation with El Salvador at the Olof Palme International Center and was also a leading member of the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance. This to name just a few of the women who held important positions in relationship to Swedish support to El Salvador.

In spite of this, a collective image exists of a group of men who initiated and carried out the Swedish support. Why? Could it be a reflection of how things were seen from the Salvadoran side, for example within the strongly hierarchical military and church structures? Does it say more about the Swedes than about historical facts?

Another possible explanation could be that several of the men – Anders Kompass, Lars Franklin, Michael Frühling and Pierre Schori – made international careers, which possibly contributed to their greater visibility. In this context, it is interesting to note that the women had great influence regarding the distribution of funds.

Support without gender perspective

The support to the peace process also lacked a clear gender perspective. Although donors did not speak about gender as such, equity issues were on the agenda in the 1980s. During the civil war, humanitarian assistance was directed at the civilian population, primarily women. It was, however, common for the support not to take the situation of women and children into consideration. For example, UNHCR noted great deficiencies when it started to make gender analyses.

The lack of gender perspective continued after the signing of the Peace Accords. An evaluation from 1995 of 16 projects that had received Sweden support states: "None of the evaluated projects have incorporated the gender issue in a systematic way". With two exceptions the theme did not appear in the basic project documents beyond the possible mentioning of women as part of the beneficiary group.

Awareness increases

However, awareness regarding gender issues seems to have increased during the second half of the 1990s. In a report to Sida on the support to the fund for war wounded and disabled it is, for example, pointed out that the project document does not say anything about the distribution between women and men among the beneficiaries nor does it consider their different needs for rehabilitation. Because of this, Sida decided to raise the issue with UNDP.

In the decision regarding continued support to civil society participation in the electoral process through Consorcio, Sida notes that gender aspects were not included in the first phase of the project. Church of Sweden Aid that channelled the Swedish support has called attention to this issue and requested that consideration is taken to the opportunities for women to take part in politics.

Sida also commissioned a review of the gender perspective applied at their important, new partner FUSAI.

This text is partially based on the opening speech by Eva Werner Dahlin and the following discussion in the seminar about the Swedish support to the peace process in El Salvador held in connection with this study on 24 November 2003.

Implementation of the Accords 1992–1994

Support is needed now, the sooner the better!

The celebrations were over. The time had come to begin implementation of the agreements the parties had signed in Chapultepec Castle in Mexico on 16 January 1992. However, no arrangements had been made. “There was no money, nobody had prepared the situation. Without quick and flexible funds from Sweden and the other Nordic countries it would have been impossible to cope with the first few months after the peace agreements.”

This is explained by Anders Kompass who arrived in San Salvador a few weeks after the signing of the Peace Accords. His task was to coordinate the UNDP’s work with the peace process. Salvador Samayoa from the FMLN agrees: “In early February, one of the first governments to come to our help was the Swedish one. Sweden made it possible for us to carry out the agreements.”

The most urgent issue was the demobilisation of the FMLN. The Peace Accords stipulated that the approximately 8 000 members of the guerrilla forces should concentrate into 15 areas in different parts of the country. Gradually they were then to hand in their arms and integrate into society. However the agreements were vague regarding how to put this into practice. Consequently, the observers’ mission, ONUSAL, UNDP and organizations such as PAHO, UNESCO and Caritas coordinated their work to solve practical matters so that the former guerrilla members would have roofs over their heads, food and water.

“Support is needed now, the sooner the better! A Swedish contribution of about MUSD 1 would be very valuable”, the diplomat Michael Frühling wrote from the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala.

Sida answered, granting MUSD 1.6 for food and other necessities for the disarmament camps. This amount constituted half of the initial support to demobilisation. Also, Sweden contributed a little more than USD 500 000 for medical support and dental treatment for the former guerrilla members.

The Ad Hoc Commission and the Truth Commission

A few months later Sweden granted USD 53 000 to the work of the Ad Hoc Commission.⁵⁹ The Commission's task was to investigate the human rights record of the officer corps of the Salvadoran Armed Forces. Norway and Denmark contributed equal amounts. In actual fact, the Scandinavian countries financed the entire work of the Commission.

The President of the Commission was the highly respected Christian Democratic politician Abraham Rodríguez: "I did not want to take on this assignment. I only did it in order to render my duty to my country. We could not, however, accept funding from the Salvadoran Government. I discussed the subject with the head of ONUSAL. He agreed, but due to the bureaucracy of the UN we did not receive any funds. Then I spoke with the Swedish Ambassador in Guatemala. He promised to promote the issue with the Nordic countries. We did not need much money, we received no salaries so it was only to cover the expenses."

In May the Secretary General of the UN requested support for the Truth Commission. This Commission was going to investigate acts of political violence during the civil war. Sweden contributed USD 345 000. This amount constituted a little more than ten percent of the Commission's budget.

As early as in 1991, Sida had granted a two-year support package of USD 150 000 to the Human Rights Institute of the Central American University (IDHUCA). This support made it possible for IDHUCA to assist the Truth Commission and to create a documentation centre regarding violations of human rights.⁶⁰

Coherent approach

Discussions concerning possible Swedish support during this period show a high degree of coherence. When Michael Frühling, in July of 1992, presented a preliminary proposal for forthcoming Swedish support he highlighted three areas: demobilisation, democracy and social and economic rehabilitation. In the longer term he wanted to include support to the new civilian police and the Ombuds Office for Human Rights, the preparations for the elections and land transfer.

These were the same areas that Lars Franklin in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had prioritised in an internal report six months earlier, only a few days after the signing of

THE PEACE ACCORDS

- Mandate for the UN to verify that the agreements were followed and to mobilise and coordinate international development cooperation to assist in their implementation.
- Demobilisation of FMLN and its transformation into a political party.
- Decrease and restructuring of national defence forces. Purges through the investigations of an Ad Hoc Commission.
- 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.
- Creation of a Truth Commission to investigate political violence during the armed conflict.
- 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, among other things, transfer of land.

⁵⁹ According to the Sida database only USD 30 000 were paid out.

⁶⁰ Other research institutes that received Swedish funding during this period were FLACSO, that received USD 345 000 for 1992–94 and the Institute for Environmental Research PREIS (later renamed PRISMA) that received about USD 130 000 in 1991–92.

the Peace Accords. “There were no contradictions”, says Torgny Svenungsson, who was in charge of El Salvador at Sida. “Many things were obvious, like support to demobilisation and the new police force. And our assessments were facilitated because, with Anders Kompass in the UNDP, we had somebody who we trusted in a central position.”

The report including the final proposals from Michael Frühling was presented in January 1993. The only differences, in relationship to the initial proposal, was an increase in support to the election process and that Swedish financial resources were considered too limited for an involvement in the land transfer issue. Demobilisation, democracy and social and economic rehabilitation are crucial issues in order to promote development that benefits the majority of the population in El Salvador, Michael Frühling wrote. Moreover, other donors’ support for these areas has not been sufficient, neither are they considered as top priorities by the Salvadoran Government.

At this time, a decision had been taken to support agricultural training for the demobilised guerrilla soldiers. Sweden had also decided to initiate support to UNHCR’s work to provide new identity documents for people who had lost theirs during the war. The Swedish Government had allocated an annual amount of approximately MUSD 8 for three years to the so-called basic programme for El Salvador.

Mirna Liévano de Márques, who was Minister of Planning in the Cristiani Government, appreciated the Swedish support: “The contributions from Sweden to the implementation of the Peace Accords were important. The support from the USA, for example, was much larger but they had supported the Government during the entire conflict and, because of this, their support did not have the same symbolic value.”

Delays activate contacts

In mid-1992 it was clear that there were going to be delays in the implementation of the Peace Accords. This led to intense diplomatic activity. The FMLN contacted the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm and expressed its dissatisfaction with the fact that the old police forces had not yet been dissolved, the transfer of land to ex-members of the guerrilla had not taken place and promises regarding scholarships and pensions had not been fulfilled.

At the Swedish Embassy in Washington the USA complained, both about the “foot dragging” from the Salvadoran Government and the risk that the FMLN was not going to start handing over its arms on 1 May, as had been agreed. This led the Ministry for Foreign Affairs to send instructions to the

Embassy in Guatemala to urge the FMLN to be pragmatic. But the answer was negative. The only negotiation card the FMLN had to play was the disarmament and the former guerrillas were not going to lose that in any way at all.

Sweden also maintained intensive contacts with the ONUSAL. "The Ambassador in Guatemala often came to see me in order to find out how the process was advancing", says the then head of the ONUSAL, Augusto Ramírez Ocampo. "A great advantage with Sweden, as well as with the other Nordic countries, is that they do not have any political or hegemonic self-interest, hardly even business interests."

On the initiative of officials

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Margaretha af Ugglas, issued a statement in support of the Truth Commission when it began its work in 1992.⁶¹

For the centre-right Government, that had assumed power in Sweden a short time previously, El Salvador was a new issue: "We officials were very enthusiastic. We wrote statements, sent instructions to the Embassies, etc. I don't remember a single occasion when we were not able to do what we wanted. But everything was on our initiative. The political profile was not high", says Charlotte Wrangberg.

In El Salvador the delays continued. Repeatedly, crises were solved by substituting new timetables for existing ones.

The moment came when the Ad Hoc Commission was going to hand over its report to the UN. Although the report and its recommendations were not going to be made public it was expected to arouse great interest. It was known that the report named a large number of high-level military officers and that it would recommend that they be dismissed or removed from active duty.

Because the Commission had been financed by the Scandinavian countries, the Ministries for Foreign Affairs, on a Swedish initiative, issued a statement in which they manifested their support for the Ad Hoc Commission. The Swedish Embassy in Guatemala also met with Abraham Rodríguez and asked if he, or the other members of the Commission, needed protection. Threats against them could not be ruled out. Rodríguez, however, said no: "I said that I didn't want to leave the country. I had not done anything wrong."

Instead Rodríguez travelled to New York – to present the report to the UN. On the days before the presentation he was subjected to strong pressure. Among others the US Assistant Secretary of State, Bernhard Aronson, came to visit him at his

61 Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Margaretha af Ugglas supports the peace process in El Salvador, 10 July 1992

Colonel Christer Robson was one of the Swedes who participated as observers in the ONUSAL. Here he is discussing with the FMLN leader "Paco" in La Reina. Photo: Ulf Anéer



hotel. Aronson requested that an exception should be made for the Salvadoran Minister of Defence, René Emilio Ponce, who was the first name on the list of the Ad Hoc Commission.

Rodríguez refused: "We wanted to make an exemplary cleansing. That wouldn't be the case if the main person responsible was excluded."

However, the Commission had touched on the most delicate issue of the peace process and its recommendations were going to lead to a severe crisis for the Peace Accords.

“...it is very likely
that the peace process
is lost”

Without the purge of the Armed Forces, democratisation of the country would not have been possible.” The President of the Ad Hoc Commission, Abraham Rodríguez, points this out a little more than ten years after the event.

The most severe crisis for the Peace Accords came towards the end of October 1992. In a sensationally harsh speech President Cristiani rejected a proposal from the UN Secretary General regarding a new timetable for its implementation.

“The peace process has arrived at its most difficult moment”, Michael Frühling at the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala wrote. His assessment was that if key issues of the Peace Accords, for example the implementation of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Commission, were to be softened up or set aside “it is very likely that the peace process is lost”.

“It is no coincidence that the situation becomes critical now”, his report continued. “The deadline for the purge of the officer corps is approaching. The process is in a transition period between civilian and military criteria and the question is which of them will gain the upper hand within the state.” Sweden and other countries took a number of diplomatic actions and strong pressure was exerted on the Salvadoran Government. After an urgent trip to El Salvador by the former mediator Álvaro de Soto the crisis was, however, averted. Reluctantly the Government accepted the timetable that had already been approved by the FMLN.

Contributions to police academy

In accordance with the new timetable the armed conflict formally ended on 15 December 1992. This was celebrated with an official ceremony in San Salvador.

Simultaneously, Sida was preparing new projects: MUS\$ 1.8 for equipment to the new police college, the National Academy of Public Security, and another USD 570 000 for

54 per cent of the electorate took part in the first round of the elections in 1994.

Photo: David Isaksson/Global Reporting



three Swedish police instructors who were going to serve at the Academy.⁶² At Sida there was some anxiety about the constant delays in the peace process. These delays meant that the funds earmarked by the Government could not be spent. From time to time the Embassy in Guatemala sent reassuring information that new projects were on their way. In order not to lose the leverage based on being a rather generous donor, decisions should be put off for a while longer.

Sometimes the tone was more frustrated, for example when the Embassy advocated ear-marking funding for a limited part of a UNDP project – in spite of the fact that this was against usual routines: “This is about the UN which has to make efforts every day in order for the letter and the spirit of the Peace Accords not to get lost.”

On the same occasion the Embassy assured that, while having a certain understanding for “all the good and interesting arguments” from the Ministry of Finance that payments had to be made within the same fiscal year as allocation. Still, it hoped that it would be possible to release the money although the Salvadoran reality “is moving a bit slower than we had expected or been promised”.⁶³

In the first months of 1993, tensions in El Salvador were again increasing. The Truth Commission handed over its report, but the governing party responded by immediately adopting an amnesty law protecting all those who, according to the Commission’s report, had committed abuses. In a letter to his Swedish colleague, the Salvadoran Minister for Foreign

⁶² Information from the Sida database, December 2003

⁶³ However, in 1993 Sida approved USD 700 000 for housing for demobilised guerrilla and army soldiers. The support was channelled through the UNDP. Earlier, MUSD 1.3 aimed at housing for returning refugees had been approved. This support was channelled through Diakonia and the Salvadoran organization FUSAI (previously named ASAI).



"ARENA has defeated communism", the newly elected President, Armando Calderón Sol from the ARENA party, declared in 1994.

Photo: David Isaksson/Global Reporting

Affairs explained that the amnesty law was necessary for the country to put civil war and confrontation behind it and move forward. The Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs answered that, if supported by the people, the law could contribute to reconciliation. "It would, however, be alarming if the new law becomes an obstacle to the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth Commission", she continued.

Anxiety about political violence

During the second half of 1993, preparations for the first elections after the signing of the Peace Accords began. Simultaneously political violence, primarily against members of the FMLN, increased. Sweden expressed its "particular anxiety" about this to the Salvadoran Government.

Early the following year the so-called Joint Group for the Investigation of Illegal Armed Groups with Political Motivation was established. The task of the Joint Group was to investigate the new wave of politically motivated murders and other crimes. Sweden contributed approximately USD 310 000 to their efforts.

Through the UNDP, Sweden also initiated support to the new Ombuds Office for Human Rights, one of the institutions founded as a result of the Peace Accords. The Ombuds Office's activities were initiated in 1992 and, apart from financing from the state, it was supported by the European Union, Spain and others. Still, a number of problems with its activities remained. The Swedish support was aimed at capacity building of staff responsible for investigations and collection of information, strengthening of the Ombuds Office's powers to deal with abuses against personal freedom and security and the establishment of a computerised database for the handling of cases.

However, capacity-building efforts were partially lost when

the Ombuds Office was hit by a severe crisis and some of the qualified staff left at the end of the 1990s. The construction of the database also ran into a number of problems. Still, the Swedish support is considered to have been important: "There is no doubt that Sweden was one of the countries that exercised most influence when it comes to strengthening of institutions related to human rights, like the Ombuds Office and the police. Some projects failed but on the whole the support was important", says Juan Faroppa who worked at the ONUSAL's office for human rights and was a member of the Joint Group.

The former Human Rights Ombud, Victoria de Avilés, remembers another aspect: "When we started to investigate how other public institutions were behaving they felt accused and our situation became difficult. There were even threats against me. Then the Swedish Ambassador took an interest in my personal security. The Swedes behaved that way, always acted with solidarity. The support was also quick and non-bureaucratic. Other countries discussed for long periods, but then nothing came out of it."

Before she took over responsibility for the whole Ombuds Office, Victoria de Avilés was Deputy Ombud with special responsibility for children's rights: "The issues relating to children had been invisible during the war. Because of this it was important to highlight them. I had an excellent relationship with the civil society, among others with Save the Children Sweden. This was also important because the myth that civil society organizations could not work with the state was proved wrong."

Observers for the "elections of the century"

Before the elections, the Swedish Government gave Sida the task of recruiting Swedish observers to be put at the UN's disposal. A large number of donors supported the preparations for the elections in different ways. Sweden contributed MUSD 1.8 through the UNDP to the strengthening of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal. Still, it had not been possible to solve some of the problems in relation to the elections, the Embassy in Guatemala said: "It is worth noting that all independent experts, including the ONUSAL, are of the opinion that the problems could have been solved if the will had been there from the authorities responsible and the traditional parties." Among the problems mentioned in the report from the Embassy was that about 300 000 voters were not going to be able to cast their votes because they had not received electoral cards.

On 20 March 1994 the so-called "election of the century"

took place in El Salvador. Considering the intensive preparations and the fact that the entire political spectrum was represented for the first time, the turnout was a disappointment, especially to the international donors. Only 54 per cent of the electorate took part in the first round. It was assumed that the complicated registration process was one reason for this.⁶⁴

As none of the candidates received more than 50 per cent of the votes a second round took place at the end of April. When the votes had been counted it was clear that the peaceful and democratic elections had not led to a change of power: Armando Calderón Sol from the ARENA party won with 68 per cent of the votes, the candidate from the left, Rubén Zamora, received 31.7 per cent.

“ARENA has defeated communism”, the newly elected President declared, according to a report from the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala.

⁶⁴ UNDP, Final Report Project ELS/93/LO4, Support for the Electoral Process, 1994

NGOs seek a new role

After the Peace Accords, conditions changed for the Swedish NGOs. It was a new era and new tasks were to be undertaken, often with new counterparts. At the same time, Sida became an actor in its own right, with interests that did not always coincide with the NGO agenda.

The Peace Accords were signed at a time when Save the Children Sweden was redefining its activities in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁶⁵ From previously financing social projects, the organization changed focus to political advocacy.

The time was right to make demands based on rights approach. “The first few years we worked to get the Salvadoran Government to assume its responsibility, but it was difficult to achieve concrete results in the form of new legislation or government funding. On the other hand, I’m convinced that our work helped to change attitudes; today there is more awareness about the rights of girls and boys”, says previous programme officer at Save the Children Sweden, Annika Andersson.

One of the projects supported by Save the Children Sweden after the signing of the Peace Accords dealt with the mental health of former child soldiers. Assessments of this project point out that it, besides benefiting the children and their families, also served to reach other former combatants with information regarding the peace agreement. This, in turn, helped to stimulate processes of empowerment and participation. Other projects supported at this time included the training of police officers on children’s rights and a campaign demanding Christmas benefits for working children.

Together with counterparts, Save the Children Sweden achieved visible and concrete results from its work during the 1990s. Among others, two alternative reports have been pre-

⁶⁵ The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the UN in 1989 and ratified by El Salvador in 1990.

sented to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.⁶⁶ The organization also initiated and carried out a regional campaign against corporal punishment and abuse of children that went on for several years. An evaluation of this campaign concludes that corporal punishment and other abuse of children have become less socially acceptable and are, to a greater extent, considered to be a social problem.⁶⁷

Rapid changes after the Accords

The Peace Accords also caused Diakonia to redefine its work. During the armed conflict, the organization had mainly supported religious organizations and others that primarily worked to strengthen the situation of displaced persons and refugees.

The Swedish NGO had not worked with explicit or detailed strategies; instead its activities were primarily based on confidence and the objectives defined by counterparts, remembers Göran Paulsson who was a programme officer at Diakonia in the early 1990s: “The changes came fast after the Peace Accords. Some of the old counterparts could not live up to the new demands. Meanwhile, new organizations appeared, without political ballast. Also we wanted to do new things.”

In 1992, Diakonia was told about the municipality of Nejapa, where joint activities were underway between municipal authorities, NGOs and the inhabitants. Diakonia decided to support these efforts through FUSAI,⁶⁸ an organization that the Swedish NGO had learned to know during the repatriation process a few years earlier.

Diakonia invited its counterparts for a discussion: What role were they to play in this new process? They agreed that the peace process presented new, complex challenges regarding popular participation and that it was at local municipal level that concrete results could be achieved. Consequently, Diakonia decided to concentrate on cooperation with counterparts that worked with development of local democracy.

“After that we jointly and meticulously analysed all of the counterparts according to the new criteria we had decided upon. It became evident that some of them would not fit into this new scheme. It was a painful process, but it was straightforward and open. As straightforward as it could be considering that we were the ones who had the money”, says Ewa Widén, regional representative of Diakonia after the signing of the Peace Accords.

⁶⁶ A body that monitors governments' implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

⁶⁷ Carlsson, J., Tibblin, A., External Evaluation of the Campaign against Corporal Punishment and Abuse of Girls and Boys in Central America and Mexico, 1996–2000, Save the Children Sweden, 2002

⁶⁸ The Salvadoran Foundation for Integrated Assistance, an NGO that initially implemented UNHCR's programme in El Salvador. The organization was named ASAI until 1995.

Confusion during transition

The Director of FUNDAMUNI, Guillermo Galván, remembers the situation after the signing of the Peace Accords when his organization had recently been created. They were working with the establishment of local public administrations in 44 municipalities which had lacked government authority presence during the war. The work consisted of finding means of cooperation between the central government, local authorities and the inhabitants' own organizations.

"Initially we were contacted by Church of Sweden Aid saying that they wanted to support us. Shortly afterwards, we were approached by both Diakonia and Sida. I never knew what actually happened, if they cut a deal between themselves, but in the end, Diakonia came back to us, offering to be our Swedish counterpart. It was strange; the Swedes didn't appear to have any clear criteria on what they wanted to support."

Both Diakonia and Church of Sweden Aid wanted to establish a counterpart relationship with FUNDAMUNI. Sida decided the outcome by approving financing for Diakonia, arguing that this organization had a more extensive presence in the country and was more specialised in local democracy.

The Director of Diakonia, Bo Forsberg, confirms that ambiguities existed but also explains that this is quite common in transition phases; from war to peace and from dictatorship to democracy: "Both us and Sida were searching for the right road to take. My memory is that when Sida started to work openly in El Salvador, they initially wanted to take charge of practically everything. This caused some irritation, but after a while, we found our respective roles".

"However, a gap was created between us on one side and Sida and the Embassy on the other", he continues. "I believe

Since 1993 the Swedish ngo Education for Development (UBV) has sent volunteers to El Salvador. In the photo, volunteer Johan Schmidt is carrying out an interview at the Rosales Hospital in San Salvador.

Photo: Magnus Rosshagen



that there was a need for more opportunities for joint analysis, for example seminars and other arenas for discussion, with participation from Sweden and El Salvador, both governments and NGOs.”

Role division among the Swedes

In 1996 Diakonia financed an evaluation of its own organization, carried out by their counterparts.⁶⁹ Among other things, the evaluation emphasised what it found to be an unclear relationship between Diakonia and Sida. The report concludes: “Considering the degree of interrelationship and Diakonia’s financial dependency, confusion sometimes exists, among counterparts as well as within Sida and Diakonia, about who takes the initiative in decisions on what to support. This confusion may result in duplication of effort and a questioning of Diakonia’s autonomy in its choice of counterparts and initiatives to support.”⁷⁰

The fact that it was not always evident who made the decisions and why is illustrated in many anecdotes. Göran Paulsson, who worked at Diakonia’s regional office, remembers when an official from the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala showed up in his garden with a project proposal in his hand saying, “You have to support this”.

It would, however, be wrong to call this interference, says Göran Paulsson: “There was great concordance on what should be done; it was based on confidence and the fact that we knew each other well.”

An example of less clear distribution of roles is the support to Consorcio, a grouping of five NGOs working to promote electoral reform and civil participation in the electoral process. Initially, Consorcio applied for financing directly from Sida which, in turn, asked Church of Sweden Aid to channel support through the Lutheran World Federation office in San Salvador. Church of Sweden Aid accepted, but the extended chain of agencies involved led to lack of monitoring and disbursement delays.

69 Torres, T., Lorena Argueta, Z., Castellanos de Ponciano, E., Evaluación externa de Diakonia sueca, 1996

70 Another conclusion was that the decision-making structure of Diakonia discriminated against Salvadoran staff: “Internal communication and decision making have not been open to the local staff. Salaries also differ between Swedes and Salvadorans. Furthermore the systematisation of information in Spanish is considered weak”.

Low electoral participation

A few years later, despite not having any knowledge concerning the impact of the support, several large donors, among them Sida, were prepared to continue financing Consorcio.⁷¹ In the decision from 1999 on support to the second phase of the project, Sida states that the objectives were to increase civil participation and voter registration by organising local civic forums and committees. Sida argued that Sweden should increase support to civil society in this area as the Salvadoran authorities had not carried out agreed electoral reforms.

In a report from 2000, Sida states that participation in the parliamentary and municipal elections in March the same year was only 38 per cent. The same report states that Consorcio reached a maximum level of activity, covering 45 municipalities.⁷² Nothing is said on the possible impact that this work had on electoral participation.

This topic is, however, analysed in a monitoring report by the Norwegian Institute for Human Rights at the University in Oslo who were contracted by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) to carry out the study. The report concludes that low electoral participation could be interpreted as a result of the inefficiency of Consorcio activities and that it will most probably be necessary to seek other working methods. The low participation could, nonetheless, also be interpreted as due to the existence of other factors that had more influence on the population's willingness to vote.

The report continues, stating that the methods for self-evaluation applied by Consorcio were insufficient as they did not attempt to systematically estimate the impact of activities. The Norwegian Institute for Human Rights considered the civic forums and committees to be a very innovative approach, but also pointed out a number of problems, recommending rigorous follow up on behalf of the donor community. It is also recommended that Consorcio increase its opportunities of working with advocacy by forming long-term alliances with key actors in the electoral field.⁷³

In 2002, Consorcio's work at municipal level was converted into a platform for reconstruction efforts after the earthquakes the year before. Sida granted new support, this time without Church of Sweden Aid and the Lutheran World Federation as intermediaries.⁷⁴

71 ITAD LTD & The Overseas Development Institute, *The Evaluability of Democracy and Human Rights Projects*, 2000

72 Sida, *Report El Salvador, January–June 2000*

73 Ekert, S. et al, *Review of the project "Citizen 2000" of the Consorcio de ONG de educación cívica de El Salvador*, 1999

74 Sida, *Reports El Salvador, July 2001–March 2002 and April–September 2002*

Coordination after disasters

One example of strategic distribution of roles between Sida, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Swedish NGOs is the political coordination organization created after Hurricane Mitch in 1998. In summary, the organization aimed at working in different arenas to advocate the implementation of the commitments that had been made in "The Stockholm Declaration".⁷⁵

While Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs took an active role in bilateral and international arenas, Swedish and other international NGOs worked in parallel forums, where they, together with their counterparts, exerted pressure on the Central American Governments to fulfil their promises.

Similar initiatives were taken after the earthquakes in 2001, when Diakonia financed coordination between Salvadoran organizations in order to increase their capacity to influence the reconstruction process. This led to the participation of several NGOs and civil society representatives in the Consultative Group⁷⁶ in Madrid in 2001. At this meeting, the international donor community and the Salvadoran Government discussed financing for the reconstruction after the earthquakes.

Results and new methods

During the armed conflict the Swedish NGOs had demanded financial reporting from their counterparts, but the most important aspect had been to deliver humanitarian assistance to the population in need. After the signing of the Peace Accords, Sida placed new conditions on agency financing – both regarding routines and content. Sida wanted to see clearer results.

The new requirements were, in part, the result of a generalised trend of professionalisation of Swedish development cooperation at the time and in part due to the fact that Sida considered some of the routines tolerated during the armed conflict to be no longer acceptable.

Save the Children Sweden introduced stricter checks on their counterparts. With this aim, the organization trained a number of external auditors in how NGOs worked so that they would be able to make correct and efficient audits. This training was repeated for several years.

When Sida asked that the NGO applications for 1996 be

⁷⁵ The Stockholm Declaration makes a number of demands which would lead to the decrease of social and environmental vulnerability in Central America. The Declaration was adopted by the Central American presidents and the international donor community at a meeting with the Consultative Group for Central America in Stockholm in May 1999.

⁷⁶ Meetings where the donor community convene with government representatives, under the auspices of the World Bank or the Inter American Development Bank, to discuss the economic situation of a country and its need for development cooperation and loans.

submitted according to the Logical Framework Approach, this proved to be a great challenge for Diakonia and its counterparts. Nobody had previously worked with this planning method and Sida did not provide any instructions.

Diakonia has continued to work with the method, attempting to develop indicators in order to measure results. Most counterparts believe this work to be important, but several of them consider the attempts to be rather fumbling and moreover it makes their applications extremely time consuming. Diakonia staff in El Salvador state that their work has become increasingly technical as a result of Sida's demands.

Needed more knowledge

The Olof Palme International Center had not been active in El Salvador since support was ended to CIAS⁷⁷ and Tenancingo during the armed conflict.

Latin America Secretary Birgitta Strömblad recalls that during the first few months after the signing of the Peace Accords, the organization was presented with a great number of project proposals from El Salvador. Many were submitted by what appeared to be an unceasing flow of delegations visiting Sweden.

“Almost all of them had the same basic idea; they planned to work with local democracy and popular education in rural communities... It was difficult to know which ones had solidity.”

Meanwhile, interest had awakened among the Center's member organizations,⁷⁸ especially trade unions and local branches of the Workers Educational Association where former Salvadoran refugees had become organised. “We needed more knowledge and at the same time we wanted to present our organization”, says Birgitta Strömblad.

The Olof Palme International Center opted to carry out a study trip to El Salvador in November 1994. A seminar was organised in San Salvador in which all the Salvadoran organizations who had been in contact with the Center were invited to participate.

The outcome was a number of development projects run by local branches of the member organizations and different Salvadoran NGOs. The spectrum was broad; from building houses in Chalatenango Province to union training in the capital. Some of the projects are still going on, others have ended.

Birgitta Strömblad believes that important lessons can be

77 The Centre for Research and Social Action, a Salvadoran NGO that received Swedish funding 1981–86.

78 The Olof Palme International Center is a development organization with close Social Democratic Party ties. It serves as an umbrella for 29 member organizations, among others the Workers Educational Association and trade unions.

learned from the cooperation with El Salvador: “After the Peace Accords, hundreds of new organizations appeared. Many were created as an indirect condition of international donors for their cooperation. We made demands that they had to be member-based, eventually leading to them all becoming members of each other. We contributed to an unhealthy environment in the organizations. The lesson is that we need to be more careful and not make demands that force the creation of organizations that lack true support.”

Local democracy – an accepted concept

Diakonia's focus on local democracy was evaluated in 1999. Among other things, the study underlines that “it is quite remarkable to see how local and municipal democracy has emerged as a generally accepted and inevitable fact in such a short a time after the signing of the peace agreements in El Salvador. Today, even conservative and heavily bureaucratic state institutions have made participatory planning a requirement. /.../ In this sense, we are witnessing nothing less than a historic process. The Diakonia program, through its partner organizations, has been a part of it, or actually among the pioneers of it.”⁷⁹

The evaluation also concludes, however, that it is not possible to judge efficiency in relationship to costs: “The bottom-line question of cost-effectiveness is how much democracy the approximately MUSD 3 invested in El Salvador over these two years has produced.”⁸⁰ The report also states that it was not possible to attribute results specifically to Diakonia's support, apart from the strengthening of the counterpart organizations involved.

The strengthening of the counterparts, however, turned out to be highly relevant. After the earthquakes in 2001, Diakonia could quickly channel USD 870 000 in emergency relief through these counterparts; they were already in place and had well-established structures.

According to an evaluation from 2003,⁸¹ the counterparts had learned the importance of rapid assistance in order to avoid political polarisation between organizations and authorities as these parties normally compete for international development cooperation funding. For this reason, the assistance

79 Bye, V. et al, Diakonia Program for Democracy and Human Rights, the El Salvador Case, Sida Evaluation 99/16

80 Ibid

81 Tibblin, A., Bartholdson, Ö., Gunnarsson, A. et al, Professional Activists or Active Professionals? An Evaluation of Diakonia's Development Cooperation in Latin America 1999–2001, Sida Evaluation 03/07

was directed to municipal authorities as well as to organizations, with the double objective of distributing help and strengthening local capacity. This was a direct result of previous work with local democracy.

In 2001 Swedish NGOs received approximately MUSD 2 in Sida financing for El Salvador.⁸² Of this total Diakonia received approximately half, USD 970 000⁸³ followed by the Swedish Cooperative Centre with USD 290 000.

82 The amounts do not include the emergency humanitarian assistance allocated after the earthquakes the same year.

83 Of this sum, Diakonia contributed approximately USD 60 000 in proper funds.

SWEDISH ORGANIZATIONS IN EL SALVADOR

- During the war, the Swedish branch of **YWCA-YMCA** gave support to Salvadoran refugees. After the Peace Accords, the organization has been working directly with its Salvadoran affiliated organization, supporting, for example, leadership training.
- The development cooperation organization of the Catholic Church, **Caritas**, supported several projects in El Salvador during the 1990s.
- **The Swedish Cooperative Centre (scc)** has worked in El Salvador since 1988 and has since then supported cooperative movements. In recent years, support has been concentrated on ecological farming, housing and cooperatives' marketing policies.
- **The Olof Palme International Center** has worked in El Salvador on different occasions. During the 1980s support was directed to humanitarian needs; in the 1990s development projects in cooperation with member organizations and Salvadoran NGOs have been supported.
- The volunteer organization **Education for Development (uev)** opened an office in El Salvador in 1993 and has since then placed some 20 volunteers in Salvadoran organizations, mostly for a period of two years.
- Since 1979 the **Swedish Red Cross** has supported work in Central America through the International Committee of the Red Cross. During the armed conflict, the organization contributed approximately USD 1.7 a year to El Salvador.
- **Diakonia** started working with El Salvador in 1980. The regional office moved from Costa Rica to San Salvador in 1993.
- **The Swallows** have supported minor projects in El Salvador since the early 1980s.
- **The Swedish Organization for Individual Relief** has, since 1993, cooperated with Nuevo Amanecer, an association that assists poor families with facilities such as day care centres, health projects and education.
- **Church of Sweden Aid** was, together with Diakonia, the largest Swedish donor during the civil war. After the Peace Accords most support has been channelled through the Lutheran World Federation to religious and non-religious counterparts.
- **Save the Children Sweden** started working in El Salvador in 1983 with funding of its own and administrating support from their office in Mexico. In 1993, the office moved to San Salvador. This office was closed in 2003, while a smaller one was established in Costa Rica.
- **The Church of Sweden Mission** has had presence in El Salvador through several missionaries who have worked with the Lutheran Church and with the Central American University, UCA. The organization has also supported projects, among them Tenancingo.
- **Örjansgården Agni** financed the activities of FESPAD in 1988–98. After that, the organization became a counterpart of Sida.
- **The Baptist Youth of Sweden** have sent several volunteers to work in their sister church in El Salvador. The organization has also collected project funds.

Economy and peace – parallel surgery

El Salvador is like a patient lying on the operating table with the left and the right sides of his body separated by a curtain and unrelated surgery being performed on each side.

In this way the ex-mediator Álvaro de Soto described the lack of coordination between the peace process on one hand and economic policy on the other in early 1994.⁸⁴

In the years to come Sweden, as well as the UNDP, put a great deal of effort into attempting to create a common view for the implementation of the Peace Accords and the relevant economic policy.

In November 1993, six months before Álvaro de Soto published his drastic metaphor on the situation in El Salvador, the Resident Representative of the UNDP in the country, Anders Kompass, was devising plans for how to achieve better coordination between the UN system and the international financial institutions.

In a letter to Lars Franklin at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs he wrote that he hoped to put together a group of economists who could produce a serious and constructive study to be used in discussions with a small group of actors within development cooperation. He hoped that he could count on Swedish, and Nordic, assistance in these plans.

Lars Franklin reacted positively and wrote a memorandum in which he proposed a Swedish – or Nordic – project with the aim of developing a common view for the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the UNDP regarding peace processes and democratisation. El Salvador was to be the country of reference in this work.

According to Lars Franklin structural adjustment loans from the multilateral institutions to El Salvador had limited

⁸⁴ De Soto, A., del Castillo G., *Obstacles to Peacebuilding*, Foreign Policy, 1994, in Boyce, J. K. et al

connection to the peace process.⁸⁵ In the Consultative Group's meetings, the Nordic countries had proposed that the World Bank and the IDB take more notice of the peace process.

The banks do not listen

"The banks say that they listen to these arguments, but this is not noticeable in the loan agreements. The dialogue between the UNDP, the World Bank and the IDB is not particularly well developed. The way the structural adjustment programmes are carried out brings a risk of making resource mobilisation through the UNDP and the NGOs meaningless. At the same time the chances of a successful and socially acceptable economic adjustment are diminished."

Lars Franklin elaborated a project that was to start with an analysis of the situation. Then, a proposal for better coordination among donors concerning countries in transition from war to peace would be developed and presented, for example in the Consultative Group.

Accordingly, Sida decided to commission a study on the implementation of the Peace Accords and the economic policy in El Salvador. The consultant Alexander Segovia was hired. He elaborated the study "The implementation of the Peace Accords and economic reforms in El Salvador".

The study indicated a conflict between the accomplishment of the peace process and the stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes, carried out under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The Salvadoran Government had solved the conflict prioritising the economic reforms or, in other words, the peace process had been subordinated to the lack of economic resources. Segovia also pointed out that the Government as well as the IMF had made it clear that increased costs due to the Peace Accords had to be financed by resources coming from development cooperation.

No discussion

The Bretton Woods institutions had made no efforts to discuss the consequences of the economic policy for the Peace Accords. On the other hand, Segovia pointed out, neither had the UN thought about discussing the economic effects of peace with the international financial institutions.

Some of the lessons learned from the study:

⁸⁵ Economic reforms in accordance with the usual concept of the stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes of the IMF and the World Bank were initiated in El Salvador in 1989. The first stand-by agreement with the IMF was signed in 1990 and a second one in 1992. A World Bank structural adjustment programme was initiated in 1991 and another one in 1993.

- Improved coordination between the Government, the UN bodies and the IMF, The World Bank and the IDB is necessary.
- The conditional lending of the multilateral institutions has to include the fulfilment of the Peace Accords and their economic consequences, for example, the founding of democratic institutions, which imply expenses for the state.
- The Government has to be encouraged to mobilise internal economic resources for the fulfilment of the Peace Accords and democratisation. In El Salvador, the contrary has occurred as the IMF, the World Bank and the IDB have regarded the Peace Accords as subordinated to an austere economic policy.

The study was sent to the Ministries for Foreign Affairs in Norway, Denmark and Finland. In a letter to the multilateral institutions, the then Head of the Department for Latin America at Sida, Elisabeth Lewin, initiated a discussion about the conclusions. Especially, she indicated that the Salvadoran Government should contribute more internal resources to the peace process through increasing the extremely low tax level in the country.⁸⁶ The international financial institutions should encourage this.

Elisabeth Lewin wanted to know whether the IMF, the World Bank and the IDB were interested in raising the issues mentioned at a coming meeting with the Consultative Group. However, she received no answer to this question.

In their comments the IMF and the World Bank agreed with the need for better coordination between different actors. Regarding the other issues, they did not concur with the conclusions of the study. The peace process had not been subordinated to economic policy. The taxes had been raised and further increases were planned. The World Bank also rejected the criticism of separating political and economic issues, saying that its mandate did not allow an involvement in political matters.

Sweden's voice not loud enough

"I don't know if we achieved anything. I can't remember the study leaving any traces behind", says Torgny Svenungsson, at the time responsible for El Salvador at Sida. "Our voice was not loud enough and we did not have any tools for a dialogue with the multilateral institutions."

Insufficient coordination between the Swedish actors might

⁸⁶ The tax ratio in El Salvador in 1993 was only 9.4 per cent of GDP, a low level even compared to other Latin American countries.

have contributed to the lack of results. Torgny Svenungsson does not remember either contacts or coordination with the Ministry for Finance or the Central Bank, which were responsible for the positions of the Nordic and Baltic members of the boards of directors of the IMF and the World Bank.⁸⁷

“I do not think we reasoned that way back then. Today it is completely different. We visit the Nordic-Baltic office in Washington more frequently and, contrary to before, we have direct contacts with our board members”, he adds.

Elisabeth Lewin, now Head of the Multilateral Unit at Sida, thinks that it would have been possible to gain more today: “The multilateral financial institutions would have assisted in putting pressure on the Salvadoran Government. The World Bank has changed for the better, before it only spoke about economic growth, it is not like that now.”

Less than a year after the Segovia study was finished, the UNDP in El Salvador issued a more comprehensive study dealing with the same theme.⁸⁸

“I tried to raise the issues with the Government but was given the cold shoulder. The IMF and the World Bank had the same attitude. So I thought that we should at least document the issue”, says Anders Kompass.

A dialogue between the deaf

The study was carried out by a group of international economists under the leadership of James K. Boyce. It raised a number of issues in relationship to the peace process and the economy.

The consolidation of peace requires an economic policy that leads to a more equal distribution of resources and strengthens democratic institutions. For this to be achieved donors and lending agencies need not only to condition their support to the accomplishment of the demands of the structural adjustment programme. They also have to impose conditions regarding the fulfilment of the Peace Accords, for example concerning tax increases, is the main conclusion of the study.

“It was a dialogue between the deaf”, says the Director of the research institute PRISMA, Herman Rosa, who participated in the study. “The Word Bank did not listen and the Salvadoran Government only wanted to continue with the economic policy it had already initiated. There was no real

87 The Nordic countries and the three Baltic States share an executive director on the board of the IMF and another one on the World Bank board.

88 Boyce, J. K. et al, *Adjustment Towards Peace: Economic Policy and Post-war Reconstruction in El Salvador*, 1995

support even within the UNDP, the management feared controversy.”

“Within the opposition there was not sufficient maturity to take on the issue”, adds Rafael Góchez, who worked at the UNDP when the study was published.

“Maybe it would have been easier to promote a debate today”, continues Herman Rosa. “Now it is easy to show that some of the aspects of the economic policy have failed, for example regarding the agricultural sector.”

Support for a limited period

We are going to plan support for a limited period of time only, with the aim of facilitating the transition from war to lasting peace in El Salvador. The Swedish Embassy in Guatemala wrote this to Sida in Stockholm in August 1994. Sida had started to prepare a strategy for further support to El Salvador. The time had come to sum up the experiences gained so far and lay the foundations for the future.

A discussion took place as to the level of ambitions. Should the strategy only deal with the implementation of the Peace Accords or were there reasons to treat El Salvador like any other programme country?⁸⁹ When the Ministry for Foreign Affairs decided that the Swedish support should concentrate on the peace and democratisation process, however, plans for more long-term cooperation were cancelled.

“Sweden was more distinct than other countries in its emphasis on supporting the implementation of the Peace Accords and not contributing to traditional projects”, says Edgar Varela, programme officer at UNDP during the period in question.

Sida commissioned some studies on the support and the situation in El Salvador. One of them has the title “Evaluation of Swedish support to the peace process and democratisation in El Salvador”. This study, which was carried out by Gabriel Siri and Jenny Malmquist, is a review of 16 of 22 projects, supported by Sweden during the first three year period after the signing of the Peace Accords.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Swedish development cooperation with programme countries is broader and more long-term than with other recipient countries.

⁹⁰ The Swedish contribution to one of the projects, the Ombuds Office for Human Rights, had not yet been paid out when the study was carried out. Consequently, the project is not mentioned here.

Support with political strategy

Siri and Malmquist state that Swedish support to the FMLN demobilisation camps and capacity building in agriculture for demobilised guerrillas and military personnel had fulfilled its objectives.

Regarding housing for ex-soldiers from the guerrillas as well as the army, delays were considerable. This was mainly to do with the fact that land transfer to ex-combatants was lagging behind schedule. Also, the former guerrilla members took more interest in the housing issue than the ex-soldiers. This was a factor that should have been considered by the project.⁹¹

The construction of houses for returning refugees also progressed more slowly than planned during 1993 due to the fact that the refugees did not receive any land. The delays were, however, compensated for during the following year.

“One characteristic of Swedish support was that it had a political strategy. It targeted areas with the highest potential impact. One example is the support to the National Civil Police. Through its permanent presence Sweden provided legitimacy and security in relationship to US cooperation. The fact that the UNDP, which was responsible for implementation, was directed by Anders Kompass was important”, considers the political leader Rubén Zamora.

Sweden had supported three commissions that were all mandated to investigate violent episodes in the country: the Ad Hoc Commission, the Truth Commission and the Joint Group for the Investigation of Illegal Armed Groups with Political Motivation.

The report from the Ad Hoc Commission was not made public due to its sensitive nature. After prolonged delays the Salvadoran Government was forced to comply with the Commission's recommendations and all the army officials who were accused of having committed human rights violations were dismissed or removed from active duty in other ways.

The Truth Commission investigated abuses by both sides during the civil war. The implementation of the report's recommendations was obstructed to a large extent by the amnesty granted to the individuals identified as being responsible shortly after its publication. Siri and Malmquist, however, state: “The mere fact that the names of those found guilty were published in a document with international support represented a serious moral sanction and had a healthy effect on the peace process of the country”.

SWEDISH COOPERATION WITH EL SALVADOR 1992–2001

MUSD

1992:	4.0
1993:	6.9
1994:	5.3
1995:	4.5
1996:	7.3
1997:	4.8
1998:	5.1
1999:	7.1
2000:	7.8
2001:	8.3
TOTAL:	61.1

The figures have been calculated in accordance with instructions from the OECD, Development Assistance Committee (DAC). They include support through NGOs and multi-lateral cooperation in cases where the support is explicitly earmarked for the country concerned.

Source: Sida Sweden 2001, Statistical yearbook.

⁹¹ The differences seem to be due to socio-economic factors and the level of organization, the evaluators assume. The demobilised army soldiers were more urban and less inclined to integrate themselves in the rural areas with their rather spartan conditions.

The Truth Commission was presided over by the Colombian ex-president Belisario Betancur. As one of the instigators of the Contadora Group, he had a long term relationship with Sweden: "The attitude of Sweden was always very constructive, it was like Swedish participants brought fresh air, their contributions were always positive, looking for ways to cooperate and solve problems. They neither caused conflicts, nor raised obstacles."

The Joint Group was established as a consequence of increased preoccupation from the UN with escalating political violence in El Salvador in 1993. Siri and Malmquist mention some positive initiatives as a result of the recommendations of the Joint Group. In the long term, however, they did not result in any conclusive advancement in the fight against political and organised crime.

"During the implementation of the Peace Accords, Sweden formed part of a key group of donors that financed the work of the UN and increased its room for manoeuvre. In this, our support made a difference", says Göran Holmqvist, who was in charge of cooperation at the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala during this period.

Good, in comparison with Bosnia

Through the UNHCR, Sweden supported the issuing of identity documents for individuals who, due to the war, had lost theirs. One effect of the project was that local registers were re-established; another that more than one million people received identity documents. This, in turn, was a prerequisite for them to vote. The support fulfilled its objectives, according to Siri and Malmquist, however "a definite advancement requires far-reaching reforms, costly programmes and, above all, the political will to implement them."

The Swedish contribution to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal consisted mainly of technical and institutional support. This contributed to the acceptable implementation of the elections in March 1994, but "regarding lasting electoral reforms, few steps forward were taken".

Support to the National Academy of Public Security and to equipment for police officers also achieved their objectives in the short run: 5 800 new police officers were trained during the first two years of the academy, three Swedish instructors contributed to their education and 2 000 new police officers were provided with uniforms and other equipment.

On the whole, Göran Holmqvist thinks that the effects of the peace process and the support to it were positive: "In an early phase there were reasons to doubt whether, for example, the deployment of a new police force would be possible to

accomplish at all. However, a new political map was drawn in El Salvador. That was not so bad, not compared to Bosnia at least...”

The Siri and Malmquist study also includes support to the Institute for Human Rights at the Central American University (IDHUCA) and the Secretariat of the Latin American Faculty for Social Sciences (FLACSO). The support to both institutions is considered important.

The support to PRISMA and its magazine *Tendencias* is estimated to have contributed to the establishment of PRISMA as an important institution for the study of the environmental situation and essential development themes. The evaluation praises the quality of *Tendencias* but notes that only 2 500 copies are published. The unit cost is, therefore, very high.⁹²

In general, Siri and Malmquist consider the Swedish support to be relevant. Most of the projects accomplished their objectives rather well, at least in the short term. The objectives of the support to FLACSO, PRISMA and *Tendencias* are, however, too vague for goal fulfilment to be assessed.

The evaluation concludes that the most important gap in relationship to objectives for Swedish development cooperation was that the gender perspective was not integrated into any of the projects in any systematic manner.

Donor coordination is needed

Siri and Malmquist call attention to the insufficient political will on the part of the Salvadoran Government: “The delays in the implementation of the Peace Accords as well as the lack of a clear direction regarding the development process of the country generate negative implications for the effectiveness of development projects aimed at institutional development.” They continue: “Better coordination among external donors would be the most effective instrument in order to obtain such a commitment. The UNDP offers incipient and praise-worthy scope for such efforts...”

“Did we lose opportunities through keeping our distance from the Government?” Torgny Svenungsson, former programme officer for El Salvador at Sida, asks himself. “Could we have exercised more influence if we had initiated, at least some minor bilateral projects? We had no platform for a dialogue with the Salvadoran Government. This issue was, however, not discussed then.”

Göran Holmqvist assumes that the reasons for this were political as well as administrative. Another important issue of the same nature was that development cooperation with El

⁹² The support to *Tendencias* was finalised a few years later and the publication was closed.

Salvador was managed from Guatemala: "I was in favour of opening an office in El Salvador. Presence is important. We would have been more involved in everything that happened if we had been there. Things, however, remained the same and I am sure we lost out on it."

As part of preparations for the elaboration of the country strategy, Sida commissioned three more studies on the situation in El Salvador.⁹³ With them as a background, a proposal was formulated for a strategy that was to be valid until the end of 1997. From then until the year 2000, grant-based cooperation would be phased out.

The proposal did not suggest any drastic changes in relation to ongoing Swedish support. The three forms of support were to continue: peace and democratisation, regional programmes and support through NGOs. "The role of the civil society was an important political issue for us. NGOs were to be given acknowledgement and status and we wanted to create space for a dialogue between them and the Government", says Torgny Svenungsson.

Criticism from NGOs

"With the aim of limiting the administrative burden on the development cooperation authorities", support to the peace process was mainly going to be channelled through the UNDP and other UN bodies and through NGOs, the strategy reads.⁹⁴ Consequently, the role of the UN system, and especially the one of the UNDP as coordinator, was going to be promoted. The Swedish NGOs in place in El Salvador⁹⁵ discussed the proposal and sent a number of comments to Sida.

They wondered how the UNDP could still be seen as the main channel for support, in spite of doubts regarding the UNDP's ability to change focus from administration of projects to a clearer political role in coordinating cooperation and in dealing with the Government? The NGOs also criticised the lack of concrete action plans regarding support to democracy and human rights: "It is not only a question of money but also of strengthening the role of certain institutions in society. If this is not done, support for democracy risks becoming wasted money allocated to institutions that are favoured by the donors but have no support within the country."

93 El desarrollo socio-economico reciente y el avance de los Acuerdos de Paz, by Carlos Vilas and Björn Feuer, *Análisis del Proceso de Democratización, los Derechos Humanos y el Sistema Judicial en El Salvador*, by Gino Costa and others and *The Implementation of the Peace Accords and the Economic Reforms in El Salvador* by Alexander Segovia

94 Sida, *Propuesta al gobierno de Suecia sobre lineamientos para la cooperación sueca en El Salvador durante el periodo 1 julio 1995-31 diciembre 1997*, p 17, 1995

95 Diakonia, YWCA-YMCA, Save the Children Sweden, SBUF and UBV.

Sida shared the views of the NGOs about the deficiencies of the UNDP, the answer said. The aim of cooperation was, however, actually to provide the UNDP with a stronger position and facilitate coordination. In March 1995 the proposal was sent to the Swedish Government for approval.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Sida, Propuesta al gobierno de Suecia sobre lineamientos para la cooperación sueca en El Salvador durante el período 1 julio 1995–31 diciembre 1997, 1995

THE OMBUDS OFFICE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS:

Fighting for a place in society

“...to end the armed conflict by political means as speedily as possible, promote the democratisation of the country, guarantee unrestricted respect for human rights and reunify Salvadoran society.”

So begin the Peace Accords that were signed on 16 January 1992 which put an end to the war in El Salvador. To guarantee compliance, the Ombuds Office for the Defence of Human Rights was created.

Upon entering this institution in San Salvador, we recall the formal words of the agreement.

What is the situation like today, 12 years afterwards?

The offices are impersonal; bare walls and neon lights convey a feeling of chilliness. There is considerable movement. Many people, most of them young, enter and leave continuously carrying different case files.

Heavy security

We are surprised to see the heavy security measures that still have to be taken to protect the staff from the many threats they receive.

The door is opened with a press of a button from a desk. Deputy Ombud for the Defence of Human Rights, David Morales, listens to our question with a

smile: “Many things have happened during these 12 years”, he says before continuing to speak of the complications surrounding an institution whose functioning depends on major transformations in society.

Ambitious mandate

Apart from depending on political fluctuations and having a limited budget, the institution was also founded with an overly ambitious mandate.

It began functioning without previously analysing reality, and without a defined operating strategy. These shortcomings were compensated for by a strong will to investigate everything and comment on all cases, creating expectations from the population and an avalanche of cases impossible to investigate.

“We drowned. It was impossible to even open a file on each individual case”, says David Morales.

“A vote of confidence”

Towards the end of 1994, UNDP started a project to professionalise the work carried out by the Ombuds Office, including training of staff. Sweden supported the creation of a database. The latter, however, collapsed during the earthquakes of 2001 and was never brought online again.

David Morales continues:



The Ombuds Office for the Defence of Human Rights was one of the institutions created through the Peace Accords. The institution began work in 1992.

Photo: Agneta Gunnarsson

“The second Swedish project was presented in a visionary manner. It was also a vote of confidence for the institution to receive direct financing.”

The objective of the project was to take a more strategic approach to the causes that generate violations of human rights. Clear objectives were defined along with strategies to focus on more preventive measures, thus breaking with the simple task of processing cases.

Defamation campaigns

“We have also passed through many difficulties and lived through severe crises. Defamation campaigns were launched,

threats, budget cuts. The Government has marginalised the Ombuds Office;

still there is lack of understanding for our role. This entails a risk for the institution.”

Regarding the future, David Morales expresses anxiety as the office is saturated with work.

“We have achieved a good foundation to stand on; several institutional changes are well underway. Development coop-

eration plays a key role, not just as financier but also as political support to help us overcome difficult situations. In this sense, Sweden has been of special importance.”

“The Government has marginalised the Ombuds Office; still there is a lack of understanding for our role.”

The withdrawal begins 1995–2001

The relationship with UNDP – on the decline

All the time we hoped that the situation would improve. The decline was not so evident...”

Pia Stavås was programme officer for El Salvador at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 1995–96. She was also one of those who, at close hand, experienced the period when the UNDP’s role as coordinator of the peace process weakened and the Swedish relationship with the UNDP office in El Salvador deteriorated.

Around mid-1995 the UNDP in El Salvador received a new Resident Representative, Joana Merlin-Scholtes. She had extensive experience from countries where the UNDP mainly cooperated with the governments regarding non-controversial projects. Her predecessor was promoted to the UNDP head office in New York. “The new leadership was not used to the delicate political role the UNDP had played in El Salvador”, says Staffan Smedby who, at the time, was working at the UNDP. “Until then, the office had kept a high profile, acting as the guarantor for the Peace Accords. The UNDP had also welcomed all parties into the work, including the NGOs. Some people thought that this had been at the expense of administrative routines and that one aim of the new leadership was to strengthen the administration. Another objective might have been to improve their relationship with the Salvadoran Government”, he says.

Edgar Varela, who was programme officer at the UNDP, does not agree: “Anders Kompass had strategic thinking. That was the important thing, he didn’t want to merely administer. It would have made a great difference if he had been able to stay for another three years.”

Göran Holmqvist was responsible for development cooperation at the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala: “We were taken by surprise when we saw how much depended on individuals.

It wasn't only Anders Kompass but also a whole group of people who left with him."

Others had, however, understood the importance of key individuals. Shortly before the change in leadership at the UNDP in El Salvador, Sweden acted in favour of Lars Franklin to be appointed Resident Representative of the UNDP in Guatemala. "This issue is about promoting the peace process", Pierre Schori indicated in an in-house message.

Correspondence between the parties involved show that in mid-1995 relations with the UNDP were poor due to the lack of an answer regarding the post in Guatemala. From the Swedish side, the risk of all their joint activities with the UNDP in Central America being jeopardized was mentioned. The crisis was, however, solved and Lars Franklin assumed the post as Resident Representative of the UNDP in Guatemala.

New support to the judicial system

In early 1995 the UNDP had presented some new projects to the donors:

These projects fitted into the Swedish strategy well, stated the Embassy in Guatemala. As they were urgent and the sums of money involved not too high, Sweden could consider financing them on its own, if other donors were not interested. During 1995 and early 1996 Sida consequently took decisions about the new Swedish contributions.

The legal sector, which was considered politicised, corrupt and inefficient, received support of USD 745 000. Thanks to the Peace Accords the Salvadoran Parliament had elected a new Supreme Court and a new National Judicial Council.⁹⁷ The project was to begin with a study of the legal sector, but this was met with resistance from the start, according to information the Embassy in Guatemala sent to Sida: "It is probably not desirable to have a study that shows how bad the situation is and this position would probably be backed by the major donor who has supported the institution for eight years, having reason to feel certain a co-responsibility".

The "major donor" was the USA.

Edgar Varela was responsible for the project supported by Sweden at the UNDP: "The crisis within the UNDP and the Government's lack of will to improve the judicial system caused problems for the project. Initially it was planned to end in two years but that was too short-term, instead it continued until 1999."

⁹⁷ Sweden contributed to the training of prosecutors on investigation methods and human rights. Another part of the project dealt with information and other means of improving knowledge about a new penal law and human rights among members of parliament. The third part of the Swedish support was used to, jointly with the National Judicial Council, prepare a strategy regarding training of jurists and elaborating methods for evaluating the performance of judges.

In his opinion Sweden had neither sufficient knowledge about the complex judicial sector nor sufficient interest: “Sweden relied too much on the UNDP and did not understand that they themselves needed competent staff in order to follow up. Despite all the problems, however, the project had some positive effects; as a result of the study that was made it was, for example, decided to initiate new training for judges. Recently, Sweden has decided to take up support for it again.”

Sweden also decided to support the new pension fund for people wounded or disabled during the armed conflict. Also here, the Embassy in Guatemala suspected that problems would arise. The project document said nothing about contributions from the Government.⁹⁸

Proposal for follow-up groups

With the aim of enhancing the UNDP’s leverage vis-à-vis the Salvadoran Government and increasing control, Sweden proposed that follow-up and consultation groups be created for all major projects. The UNDP, the Salvadoran authorities responsible and the donors would form part of the groups. The proposal was well received in a meeting with other donors but was never fully realised.

“Regarding support to the police there was a coordination of donors”, Göran Holmqvist remembers. “It did not work very well but was better than nothing. I remember that there were conflicts between us and one of the biggest donors, Spain, who mistrusted our emphasis on human rights.”

Amerigo Incalcaterra, who was a legal advisor at ONUSAL, was satisfied with the Swedish commitment: “Spain tried to monopolise support to the new police force with staff from its Guardia Civil that was a military force, in other words the completely opposite of what we wanted to achieve in El Salvador with the founding of the civilian police. We tried to find other models and were happy with the Swedish one. The Swedish support tried to incorporate a civilian and democratic way of thinking into the police force. That was not easy, however.”

According to Edgar Varela, the UNDP – as well as the support from the Nordic countries to UN bodies – were not always well received by the Government of El Salvador. The UNDP as well as the Nordic countries were considered too left wing. However, Norma de Dowe, Head of the Secretariat for National Reconstruction, praises cooperation with Anders Kompass and the professionalism of the UNDP. “However, the

⁹⁸ The facts confirmed the fears. The UNDP later had to repay almost USD 290 000 as Sida considered that the project did not live up to expectations.

Swedes were sometimes partial. They saw the Right as the bad guys. I don't remember anything special about Sweden's support, apart from the fact that the Swedes were badly informed about the situation here."

In April 1995 ONUSAL's mandate ended. However, the UN considered that there was a need for a smaller mission that would continue to verify the fulfilment of the Peace Accords. Consequently, the establishment of a post-ONUSAL mission named MINUSAL was discussed. The Swedish Embassy in Guatemala proposed that the Scandinavian countries pay the costs that were not covered by the ordinary UN budget. The Norwegians and the Danish agreed and together with Sweden, they received special thanks from the UN. At the end of the year MINUSAL was extended for another six months. Sweden contributed to this prolongation as well.

Five steps backwards

Chilly relations with the UNDP persisted. By mid-1997 Sweden decided not to enter into any new agreements until changes had taken place. Their dissatisfaction was not new, but earlier Sweden had, by and large, agreed with the aims and strategies of UNDP, considering that they needed to be strengthened. "Now UNDP took five steps backwards. We tried to make them return to the previous agenda, but the Peace Accords as a national point of reference faded more and more", remembers Tina Lundh, who worked at the Embassy in Guatemala.

"In the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, we were hoping that Anders Kompass in New York would be able to solve the problems. Moreover, as the Government had signed the Peace Accords we were convinced that it was going to fulfil them. That was our Swedish, maybe a little naive, perception of agreements", says Pia Stavås.

The lesson learned is that people are important, she thinks: "The system is vulnerable, great damage was done when Anders Kompass disappeared from the UNDP office in El Salvador. The right individual is not the only thing that is needed. However, if the right people are not in place nothing is achieved, regardless of the rest."

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION TO EL SALVADOR 1992–2001	
MUSD, gross amount	
USA	1 724
Japan	464
Germany	261
European Union	228
Holland	74
Sweden	61
Canada	41
Italy	34
Norway	26
Denmark	19
Source: OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), 2004	

In need of a success story

Ambassadors from the European Union member countries in El Salvador had made an official call on President Armando Calderón Sol to share their views on the delays in the peace process. The criticism from the EU had, however, been softened by the Spanish Ambassador who did the talking and only an oral statement was made.

Why? Staffan Wrigstad the Swedish Ambassador, who participated in his first joint EU official call, wanted to know. And should not a written statement have been presented in order to leave some trace behind? The answer came from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm: “Our impression is that Spain has shown some sensitiveness to the UN Secretariat’s need for a good example of functioning UN presence. Thus, the statement we had agreed on in Brussels seems to have been softened in Madrid.”

In 1995 Sweden had become member of the EU. This meant partially new routines in the work with El Salvador, joint official calls, project proposals that needed to be commented on and increased demands for coordination. “I was never enthusiastic about the EU development cooperation”, Staffan Wrigstad says. “We who were working on the ground didn’t participate in the process. Instead project proposals arrived from Brussels and we were supposed to comment on them in just one day.”

No coordinating unit

The delays in the peace process continued. During their official call, the EU Ambassadors had raised issues regarding electoral reform, police training and reforms within the legal sector.

“Donor coordination didn’t function well”, Staffan Wrigstad remembers. “While Anders Kompass was there the UNDP took on the role as coordinator. No other authority could assume it.”

In New York the MINUSAL was on the agenda once again. The Salvadoran Government considered that the time had come for the UN observers to withdraw. Sweden did not agree and on the eve of a Nordic meeting with the UN, the Swedish Mission to the UN was instructed to relay the view that the peace process in El Salvador could not be considered finalised. Therefore, if El Salvador was going to continue being a “success story” the mission should continue.

In another meeting on the issue, the UN Deputy Secretary General, Marrack Goulding, stated that the Scandinavian countries had raised an important issue of principal: How could the UN keep up their long term commitment when the member states became impatient and wanted to avoid further costs? Goulding also admitted that it had been a mistake not to involve the UNDP in the work of the ONUSAL and MINUSAL missions.

“Tensions existed between ONUSAL and the UNDP”, confirms the diplomat Michael Frühling. “The lesson learned was implemented in Guatemala where MINUGUA and the UNDP were brought together in a joint unit. On a trip to New York Lars⁹⁹ and I designed the model for how it was going to work.”

Pia Stavås, who was responsible for El Salvador at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, mentions another problem: “ONUSAL had no development approach. They implemented and then withdrew – without leaving any structures behind. In the future, when similar mandates are decided by the UN, Sweden should advocate for institutional development, not merely supervision.”¹⁰⁰

In 1996 the peace agreements in Guatemala were signed. The UN was allocated new agreements to verify – and many donors moved their attention as well as their money from El Salvador to its neighbouring country.

Mini solution before the elections

The year was 1997. In El Salvador, local and parliamentary elections were approaching. Electoral reforms became more and more urgent. After the elections in 1994, when the problems in the electoral system had become evident, the two presidential candidates who had received most votes had agreed to carry out reforms before next elections. A proposal had been presented, but the ARENA party stopped its approval in Parliament. Time was running out for the most important reforms.¹⁰¹ It was, however, still possible to “clean up” the elec-

99 Lars Franklin, Resident Representative of the UNDP in Guatemala 1995–2001

100 This lesson was also taken advantage of in Guatemala. Institutional strengthening formed part of the MINUGUA's work from the outset.

101 Establish a new register with one single identity document that could also be used for voting, introduce proportional municipal elections in order for the opposition to become represented in municipal decision-making bodies, and introduce the right to vote in the individual's area of residence instead of in his or her birth-place.

toral register where many people did not appear, others were registered twice while the dead had not always been taken off the lists.

During a new official call by the EU, the issue of electoral reform was again raised. The Salvadoran Minister for Foreign Affairs explained that the Government lacked resources to do anything about the electoral register. Italy, who was the spokesman for the EU, then generously offered support from the EU – and the Minister for Foreign Affairs requested MUS\$ 6. In the prevailing situation, this mini solution would be a step in the right direction, considered the Swedish ambassador, Staffan Wrigstad, who once more thought that the EU had been too soft.

In a statement a few days before the elections in March 1997 the EU hoped for “a spirit of mutual respect” and reminded of its support to the electoral reforms. The elections were a success for the left. FMLN increased its number of seats in Parliament and won a majority in more municipalities than before, including in the capital.

Final support to the police training

Sida approved another USD 500 000 to cover the costs of the three Swedish instructors who had served at the National Academy of Public Security since 1994. Between 1994 and 1998 the police college had trained no less than 15 000 police officers, but still there was a need to enhance the quality of the training. Also, conflicts existed between the Academy and the leadership of the new police force. In 1998, which was the final year of Swedish support, the Swedish police officers were supposed to train local instructors and to present a study on how to improve work at the Academy.

Lars Carlsson was one of the Swedish police officers: “Our mission was not very well thought through and interest from Sida not always great”, he states. “During the fourth year we were supposed to train other instructors, but that was not possible; we were needed in the classrooms. On our own initiative we carried out the study that ended in a number of proposals on how to improve training at the Academy. I doubt that Sida ever considered them.”

“The new police force is a great step forward for El Salvador, but problems with corruption, violence and so on, are not solved through replacing the old police with a new one. It’s the same country and the same people”, he says.

Hugo Barrera, who was Minister for Public Security 1994–99, considers the Swedish support, together with assistance from other countries, to have been vital. “Problems still exist in relationship to the police, but they would most likely



The National Civilian Police was founded by the Peace Accords. It replaced the previous police forces, controlled by military powers.

Photo: Magnus Rosshagen

have been worse without the advice we got. The support from Sweden and other countries made our road shorter.”

Possibilities exhausted

Other projects supported by Sweden had run into worse problems: “The support to the judicial system got stuck. Meetings were cancelled, no reports were produced, nothing was done”, says Tina Lundh, who worked at the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala. “The fund for war wounded and disabled was another problem”, she continues. “The assistance was intended to finance a register, but the disabled people didn’t receive any money. The UNDP should have pressured for changes – but they didn’t. At the end we broke off the support and got part of the money back.”

At this time the UN office for verification of the Peace Accords had been replaced by a small unit, connected to the UNDP but reporting to the UN Secretariat. After the elections in 1997, Álvaro de Soto invited donors to the UN voluntary fund for El Salvador, among them Sweden, to a meeting. He had received a good impression during his last visit to the country and proposed a reduction of the unit. Six months later a new proposal for a reduction was presented. This time the argument was that the presence of the UN could not contribute to the solution of remaining problems.

In June 1998 the UN again informed the countries concerned that there were parts of the Peace Accords that were not fulfilled. Primarily the problems dealt with the land transfer programme, registration of the properties of returning refugees and the fund for war wounded and disabled. The Salvadoran Government was, however, less and less interested in taking advice from the UN. For this reason, the verification unit was closed down. Any chances of achieving full comp-

liance of the Peace Accords through UN verification were no more.

In October Hurricane Mitch hit Central America. Honduras and Nicaragua became the top priority of the donors in the region – and El Salvador was gradually left more and more on the margins.

Housing – and saving the Ombuds Office

In January 2001 two devastating earthquakes hit El Salvador. More than 1 100 people died and houses and infrastructure worth millions were destroyed.¹⁰² Sida allocated MUSD 9 as extraordinary support. In addition to pure disaster relief, the money was also to be used to create a new fund for the construction of houses.¹⁰³

Already before these events Swedish development cooperation had started to head off in a new direction. The era of the Peace Accords was coming to an end, for Sweden too.

“Swedish support is not as political as it used to be. It has become more traditional, but positive aspects that have always been characteristic for Sweden are still maintained, for example support to NGOs and the long-term perspective”, says political leader Rubén Zamora.

Sweden had become more and more isolated. The UNDP – despite the new Resident Representative, Bruno Moro, with whom Sweden had fruitful cooperation – had never been able to re-establish the agreements from Chapultepec as guidelines for its efforts. Several other donors had left El Salvador or cut down their support.

Sweden also started to give in: “I doubt that it would have been possible to do more”, says Staffan Wrigstad, the former Ambassador in Guatemala. “In spite of everything we kept the peace process on the agenda for longer than the Salvadoran Government wanted to. With this we contributed to the accomplishment of some things that would otherwise not have been done.”

Was there anything that could have been done differently? “We could have used the respect with which we were met,

¹⁰² Material losses were estimated at USD 1.6, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC).

¹⁰³ The fund was never realised. To reach people with low incomes the credit fund needed to be combined with state subsidies. The Government, however, decided to abolish the subsidies and instead use the resources for the construction of temporary houses and restoration of infrastructure, leaving the financing of permanent houses to the international community.

both from the Government and the opposition, and been even clearer. Although the Government considered us to be a bit of a nuisance they also saw us as friends. Contrary to many other donors, we were not trying to promote self-interest. With this in consideration, it might have been possible to achieve a little more.” The lack of time was, however, a limitation. Events in Guatemala needed considerable attention and El Salvador was a constant bad conscience for the Ambassador: “We were not there. Every time I went to El Salvador I had to update myself. Maybe we should have had an office in El Salvador. Then we would have had more control.”

“The important lesson learned is that it takes time to be stay informed, analyse existing possibilities and take part in ongoing processes”, says Staffan Wrigstad.

Others who have in-depth knowledge of Swedish support to El Salvador agree: the methodology, the use of all existing possibilities – diplomacy, development cooperation, etc. – and strategic thinking were the important features of support.

FUSAI becomes the largest partner

Housing was no new issue for Swedish development cooperation in El Salvador. During the armed conflict, part of the humanitarian assistance had been directed towards the construction of housing. In 1993 financing had been given to housing for demobilised soldiers from both sides. Apart from the regional support to health services and water and sanitation, it was primarily through housing projects that the part of the Swedish strategy for El Salvador that dealt with poverty alleviation was realised.

“The Embassy in Guatemala was not one of those where development cooperation issues were integrated. Consequently, there was no great interest. This is one of the reasons why Sweden did not put that much emphasis on the socio economic agenda”, considers Hans Magnusson, Counsellor at the Embassy.

At the millennium, the number of housing projects as well as the sums involved increased steeply. This partly originated, like so many times before in the 20-year history of Swedish support to El Salvador, from the Swedish NGO Diakonia. For most of the 1990s, FUSAI had been one of Diakonia's partners: “We wanted to complement the work of Diakonia with local democracy”, says Tina Lundh who worked at the Embassy in Guatemala. “Regarding FUSAI we both agreed they had grown out of Diakonia and Sida should take over.”

FUSAI quickly became Sida's largest partner. In 1999 the organization was granted five-year support of totally MUSD 4.8, intended for a fund for the construction of houses for families

with low incomes. After the earthquakes in 2001 work was directed towards the worst affected areas. FUSAI also received MUS\$ 2.4 for disaster relief, reconstruction, promotion of local democracy and preventive measures.

The Director of FUSAI, Luis Castillo, considers that Swedish development cooperation has always aimed at strengthening institutions and that this has distinguished it from other donors. The partnership with Sida, however, means a more narrow focus on projects: "Bilateral donors are oriented towards results and are not so preoccupied with social processes. We have tried to discuss these aspects, but the people at Sida don't understand organizations. The idea of development is not to put together projects but to create capacity."

He also regrets that it has not been possible to combine the Sida support for housing with Diakonia's work with local democracy. "We have proposed that Diakonia could work with local democracy in the areas where we support the construction of houses, but this has not been met with any interest."

The support to the Foundation for Studies of the Application of the Law (FESPAD) that had been a counterpart of Örijansgården Agni for more than 10 years passed to Sida.

AREAS OF COOPERATION THROUGH SIDA 1992–2001

- **Housing** (houses for families with low incomes, local development, disaster relief and reconstruction): approximately MUS\$ 6
- **Demobilisation** (support for food and necessities, housing, medical examinations, agricultural training): around MUS\$ 5
- **Water and sanitation** (UNICEF): MUS\$ 4
- **The new civilian police** and the National Academy of Public Security (equipment, books, instructors, etc.): MUS\$ 3
- **Decentralisation of health services** (PAHO): MUS\$ 3
- **The electoral process** (strengthening of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, identity documents, electoral observers): approximately MUS\$ 2.8
- **The Ombuds Office for Human Rights**: MUS\$ 1.2
- **The legal system**: MUS\$ 0.7

This list shows the principal areas of the Swedish support channelled through Sida and different UN bodies. It does not include cooperation through Swedish NGOs. The figures, as well as the order in which they are presented, should only be seen as approximate indications.

It is important to note that it has been possible to establish neither the exact sums nor the precise relationships between the areas. The main reason is that several of the projects could be included in more than one category. The support to housing for demobilised soldiers or their families is, for example, included in the area Demobilisation but could also belong to the category Housing. Another reason is that the considerable fluctuations in the USD exchange rate during the 1990s have sometimes distorted the figures.

FESPAD primarily works with the promotion of the rule of law. The Director, Maria Silvia Guillén, praises Sida's commitment and interest. She speaks about Sida in the same way as many other organizations describe their partnership with Swedish NGOs. "Sida gives us political accompaniment, an open, close support. We feel that they care about our organization."

The advantages and disadvantages of direct support from Sida to civil society organizations instead of support through partnerships with Swedish NGOs have not been discussed much within Sida. Torgny Svenungsson at Sida thinks that that the issue should have been more carefully analysed. "In these cases I see primarily two reasons. First, the organizations had reached a high level of capacity regarding advocacy and other relationships with Government so that they wanted to receive support from another state actor, as this would increase their leverage. Secondly, we had run into problems in our relationship with the Salvadoran Government and therefore wanted to work at local level. With this we entered the field of the NGOs."

Sweden furthermore initiated support to investigative journalism and moulding of public opinion through TV debates and the other specialised programmes on Canal 12, one of the most influential stations on Salvadoran television. Publication of the UNDP Human Development Report on El Salvador was also supported.

Efforts to remove the Ombud

In 1998 Sida decided to support the Ombuds Office for Human Rights with USD 315 000. The support was aimed at the development of preventive methods to work with the police and the prisons – two institutions often reported for abuses. This was the first time Swedish financing was directly allocated to the Ombuds Office. Sida had not been happy with the UNDP project proposal and therefore employed the consultant Eduardo Piroto to develop a new proposal. Later on he was hired to work with the project.

Shortly afterwards, however, problems appeared. The Human Rights Ombud, Vitoria de Avilés, gave in her notice and a long conflict about her successor began. For several months the Ombuds Office's work was brought to a standstill due to the lack of a Director. Sweden acted together with the UNDP and a group of like-minded countries including Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, the USA and Canada. In a letter to the Salvadoran President and the President of the Parliament the group expressed its anxiety that one of the institutions that had been created by the Peace Accords was threatened with paralysis.

Sweden also tried to promote the issue within the European Union. However, while the EU was still hesitating Eduardo Antonio Peñate Polanco was appointed new Ombud for Human Rights. Under his leadership the institution was affected by a severe crisis with dismissals of staff, lack of efficiency, corruption and nepotism. Most countries cancelled their support to the Ombuds Office during this period, but Swedish development cooperation was maintained. Simultaneously, efforts were made to remove Peñate Polanco.

Active in the fight

The Swedish partner organizations FESPAD and IDHUCA were among the most active participants in this fight. Apart from contributing to the debate in the media they met with, and tried to influence, a special investigation commission of the Parliament. They also proposed a new mechanism for the election of the Director in which civil society and the Central American University would participate and select candidates. Sweden also took part:

“On one occasion a delegation from Parliament together with a large group of journalists came to Guatemala to hear our opinion on the situation. I gave my version and that contributed to his fall”, says Staffan Wrigstad.

Eduardo Piroto goes one step further: “Thanks to the diplomatic efforts of Sweden, total disaster was avoided and the Ombuds Office was saved.”

Peñate Polanco was forced to step down and in 2001 the new Director, Beatrice Alamanni de Carrillo, was appointed. Thanks to her, confidence in the institution has started to be re-established, an evaluation which Sida instigated shortly afterwards, says.¹⁰⁴

“Due to the crisis at the Ombuds Office and also because of an increasingly negative attitude from the police, the project did not yield the expected results”, says David Morales, who is Deputy Director. “Still it had several positive effects; now we are changing the work, from the handling of individual cases to strategic planning and preventive work. This is a result of the Swedish support.”

104 Blomquist, L., Bartolomei, M. L., Uggla, E., Evaluation of Swedish Support to the Ombudsman Institutions in Latin America, 2002

In January and February 2001, two devastating earthquakes affected El Salvador. More than 1 100 people died and houses and infrastructure worth millions were destroyed.

Photo: Luis Romero/Pressens Bild



Few evaluations

Despite the continuity of Swedish support to the peace process in El Salvador and the limited number of institutions and projects that were supported for relatively long periods, few evaluations have been carried out.

Sida's in-house working documents show that an evaluation of the support to the National Academy of Public Security was planned during 1999, but never realised. Instead a study which was published in 2000 on the evaluability of democracy and human rights projects contains some examples from El Salvador and, among other things, gives a general idea of the support to the police academy.¹⁰⁵ The study highlights lack of coordination between the donors. One important lesson learned is that a general development plan including all sub-projects should be elaborated before this type of support starts.

The study also deals with support to the judicial sector. Among other things it was aimed at improving investigations of organised and political crime. The analysis of the problem in the project documents was insufficient and the objectives unrealistic – these are some of the conclusions of the study.

Regarding the fund for war wounded and disabled both the UNDP and Sida are criticised for the project's emphasis on institutional development. The improved capacity of the fund's staff did not mean that the target group received any money, the study points out. For this to have been successful, joint activities with, and commitment from, other authorities and institutions would have been necessary.

¹⁰⁵ IFAD LTD in association with the Overseas Development Institute, *The Evaluability of Democracy and Human Rights Projects*, 2000

Time for withdrawal

In the regional strategy for Central America which was valid from 1997, Sida had established that support to El Salvador should end in the year 2000.¹⁰⁶ The issue was raised when a new strategy was under development: "Everybody had forgotten the decision to phase out cooperation with El Salvador, but my opinion was that we couldn't work everywhere. The peace process was a special historical context. Its time had now passed. In order to do more we would have needed another platform", says Göran Holmqvist, Head of Sida's Department for Latin America. "The poverty criterion was also important. In the long run it is not possible for us to work in a middle income country", he adds.

In Sida there were, however, diverging opinions on this. One of the objections was that confidence towards Sweden in other countries where armed conflicts are ongoing, for example Colombia, could diminish if it became known that development cooperation was not long term. Considering the inequality between rich and poor in El Salvador there were also objections to the poverty criterion. Still the decision was taken that grant-based cooperation would end in the year 2005 and instead new kinds of cooperation would be introduced, primarily in the form of technical assistance financed through contracts (KTS).¹⁰⁷

"It is positive that we got a transition period", says Joakim Olsson, programme officer for El Salvador at the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala.

Salvadoran as well as Swedish NGOs regret not having been consulted before the decision was taken. "We all feel that the departure is premature, that work is only half finished."¹⁰⁸

A certain anxiety about the consequences also exists. Regardless of whether the organizations have received funding directly from Sida or through partnership with NGOs the decision implies less money.

Alberto Morales in the Salvadoran Ministry for Foreign Affairs is, however, enthusiastic about the new orientation: "Before the Swedes kept their distance from us. Now they have understood that the country has changed and they have approached Government. Some time ago they organised a workshop about the elaboration of projects concerning state institutions."¹⁰⁹ This resulted in five project applications.

¹⁰⁶ Sida, Regional strategy for Central America, 1996

¹⁰⁷ Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Regional Strategy, Central America and the Caribbean, 2001–2005

¹⁰⁸ Conclusion presented by the reference group, San Salvador, 11 February 2004

¹⁰⁹ The workshop that was held in 2002 introduced the KTS method, based on joint financing and cooperation with Swedish institutions. Among the institutions that have afterwards presented project proposals is the Ombuds Office for Human Rights.

New themes and “old” issues

The relationship between El Salvador and Sweden was extended with new components. When the Swedish Ambassador in Guatemala met with the Salvadoran Minister for Foreign Relations they discussed possibilities of promoting foreign investments in El Salvador. A Government delegation from El Salvador visited Sweden and explained that they were not primarily interested in development cooperation but partnership on more equal terms. El Salvador also opened an Embassy in Stockholm.

The “old” and well-known issues were, however, still there. In a report about the situation regarding human rights in El Salvador from October 2001 the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala described a number of problems remaining: the legal sector was still corrupt and lacked independence, the police were often accused of committing abuse, the Ombuds Office for Human Rights enjoyed low levels of confidence among the population and the electoral reforms had still not been carried out. Approximately half of the population was poor – and of them it was estimated that 26 per cent lived in extreme poverty. The tax ratio was still very low.¹¹⁰

“The transition to democracy is not consolidated”, says the former Director of the Ombuds Office for Human Rights, Victoria de Avilés, now a judge in the Supreme Court. “I’m not a pessimist, but there are advances and set-backs. Therefore, cooperation should continue to assist key institutions.”

David Escobar Galindo, well-known independent intellectual who participated in the peace negotiations on the Government side agrees: “The Swedes should not leave! We are still building normality in El Salvador. It’s difficult. And the construction of normality is the phase in which support is most needed.”

110 Eleven per cent of GDP, according to the report from the Embassy to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

HOUSING:

A step towards a better future

The straight dirt road turns down into a valley. Then it climbs again and the Guazapa volcano appears behind the hills. The road is lined with rows of small, identical houses, made of cement blocks. From an open door, salsa music is heard.

Manuel Navarro is sitting in front of one of the houses, watching the children playing with some pieces of wood. “More or less we’re fine here”, he says and shows us around in the only room in the house, the patio on the back where the banana trees have already reached several meters’ height and the latrine at the far end of the plot of land. Manuel, his wife and the three children have lived in the house of 25 square metres on the outskirts of Guazapa town for two years.

The house was built with support from FUSAI an NGO that, in turn, received the funds from Sida. The Swedish contribution was part of the extraordinary assistance granted to El Salvador after the earthquakes in 2001. Manuel Navarro and his family used to live on a steep slope, in a shed made out of scrap wood and with a tin roof. The earthquakes did not directly affect the

family, but as their home was situated in a risk zone, they were invited to participate in the housing project.

Mutual help

The FUSAI projects mean that the beneficiaries themselves assist in the construction of the houses in accordance with the “mutual support” method. The people are organised into working groups and equipped with tools and construction materials. They also receive technical assistance from trained staff. Manuel Navarro is a bricklayer so the work was no problem. He is also satisfied with the good atmosphere in the neighbourhood: “We are all friends here.”

The families can borrow money for the houses, the land and infrastructure from a credit fund that FUSAI has started with support from Sweden. In order for costs to be feasible for people with low incomes, however, subsidies from the state are necessary to complement

the loans. FUSAI had been promised subsidies for this project but has received no money so far. This means that the organization itself has had to cover a larger part of the costs.

Manuel Navarro pays USD 27 a month.

“The site is beautiful so despite everything we are doing quite well.”



FUSAI works with housing. At the end of the 1990s it became Sida's major counterpart.

Photo: David Isaksson/Global Reporting

"It's expensive, but you have to make an effort. The site is beautiful so despite everything we are doing quite well", he says.

Another of the FUSAI projects is situated on a slope outside Apopa, a municipality that belongs to the metropolitan area of San Salvador. Here, most of the 100 houses are joined in long rows. Like in Guazapa, FUSAI has cooperated with the UNICEF water and sanitation programme, also supported by Sweden. UNICEF has drilled for water and built latrines. Although the work was finished more than a year ago no pump has yet been installed.

"We have to buy drinking water from a tanker that comes every day", says Maria Cruz.

No answer from the municipality

She lives in the lowest part of the ravine where there is also a well where the inhabitants can fetch water for washing and cleaning. "We have asked the municipality why there are no pumps, but we

haven't received any answer. They say that the water is contaminated", says Maria Cruz and the neighbouring women who have quickly gathered concur.

The engineer from FUSAI does not agree, however. The water was supposed to come from a depth of 40 meters and should be drinkable. He promises to investigate the issue.

The women start to discuss other problems that have not yet been solved: the bus stops far away and the school is too small to receive all the new children. "Several inhabitants have also been victims of crime, but since we got electricity it has been quiet", says Maria Cruz and points to the street lamps.

The monthly cost for the loan, which is to be repaid in ten years, is lower than her family paid for the apartment they rented earlier. In this sense, and in spite of all problems, Fe y Esperanza (Belief and Hope), which is the name of the area, lives up to expectations of a better future.

Analysis of Swedish-Salvadoran cooperation

Strategies, effectiveness and counterparts

The objective of this chapter is to make a general and interpretative analysis of the role of Swedish cooperation with El Salvador during the period 1979–2001. The topics covered include the strategies applied during the period of cooperation, its effectiveness and relationships between Swedish and Salvadoran counterparts.

The issues dealt with relate to the questions posed in the terms of reference for this study. The analysis is based on the description presented in the previous chapter. This documentation is, in turn, based on an analysis of archive material, interviews and discussions with the reference group in El Salvador as well as contributions and comments collected at a seminar of Swedish actors.

The analysis covers financial cooperation, diplomacy, humanitarian support, the relationship between political parties and Swedish asylum policy. It includes support carried out by the Swedish Government and that initiated by NGOs, political parties, churches and solidarity groups.

Swedish cooperation strategies

Traditionally, the main emphasis of Swedish foreign policy has been to work for national independence, peaceful resolution of conflicts and respect for human rights. These values have not been politically controversial; they constitute the very foundation of Swedish society as a result of its own development as a small and non-aligned country.

Swedish strategies for cooperation with El Salvador were a natural extension of these principles, during the armed conflict as well as in peacetime.

During the war there were no explicit Swedish strategies for its support. There were, however, clear general outlines, based on the principles mentioned above, that remained in place during the entire period.

A few years after the Peace Accords, explicit strategies for government cooperation were formulated. These also reflected, to a large extent, the basic Swedish principles of foreign policy.

During the war

– common vision and interdependence

Support to El Salvador was initiated in the early 1980s, in an international context characterised by a high level of political polarisation, especially between the USA and its allied countries and the so called socialist bloc, under the leadership of the Soviet Union. In the presence of this dispute between political and military powers, the Swedish position was one of neutrality and non-alignment.

The Swedish national scene and the international context of the epoch allowed Swedish cooperation with El Salvador to gain a prominent role in efforts to find a political and negotiated solution to the Salvadoran civil war, in international actions to enhance respect for human rights and in humanitarian assistance for the people affected.

The changes of government in Sweden during the period analysed did not influence Swedish policy in any way worth mentioning.¹¹¹ The way in which cooperation was executed was, however, not uniform and illustrated differences in the different periods during and after the armed conflict.

While the armed conflict was still ongoing, Swedish cooperation with El Salvador enjoyed great political support in Swedish society. This permitted decision-makers a lot of room for manoeuvre and provided them with the capacity to act swiftly. There was a common vision accepted by officials of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida, members of the Swedish NGOs, churches and, to some extent, solidarity groups. This common view showed as much coherence and national support as if it had been government policy.

One expression of this political coherence that, in addition to the conflict in El Salvador, also existed in relationship to repression in other Latin American countries and South Africa was the form and function of the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance. The major part of humanitarian assistance to El Salvador was channelled through this Committee. According to information gathered for this study, the Committee, with its broad political participation in decision-making, was a prerequisite for the implementation of this support to El Salvador.

At operational level it is worth noting that although the relationship between different actors was based on a common view, it was also characterized by mutual dependence; the NGOs depended on the funds from the Swedish Government; Sida depended on the NGOs to maintain a Swedish presence in El Salvador; and the diplomats, who had limited funds of their own, depended on the financial resources of Sida as well as on the activities of the NGOs as tools for broadening their political field of action.

Close relationship – and diverging opinions

The common Swedish view was also held by large parts of the solidarity movement. The Central America Group developed a close relationship with decision-makers in Sweden as well as with Salvadoran opposition leaders and other major figures. Members of the group contributed their experience, among other things from their ecumenical delegation visits, to the formulation of Swedish policy. Members' knowledge constituted an important source of information for churches and other groups in Sweden.

111 Sweden had centre-right coalition governments 1976–82 and 1991–94. During the remaining period the Social Democratic party governed.

The majority of the Salvadorans who arrived in Sweden as refugees during the conflict years were politically organised and many of them continued to work in solidarity groups and committees for exiled Salvadoran people. The majority of these groups and committees were, however, divided into different political factions and had problems working together for long periods during the war. The campaigns and activities carried out were often aimed at raising support for the FMLN.

Within the solidarity movement divergent opinions concerning crucial themes existed, above all regarding the armed struggle and the justification for it. The groups that supported the armed struggle were outside the broad common view in Sweden in this regard, but formed part of it in other areas, for example in relationship to human rights violations carried out by the Salvadoran Government.

From the early 1980s FMLN maintained an office in Sweden. Representatives interviewed for this study point out that Swedish decision-makers were interested in dialogue and that relationships were good, despite different views on certain issues.

Flexible and rapid decisions – a result of close contacts

During the conflict, officials within development cooperation, the diplomatic arena and NGO staff could make decisions on political support or channelling of financial resources, with relative flexibility and rapidity. Normally, general outlines and important decisions were established in Sweden. In the political and diplomatic fields the main centre for formulation of strategic directions and decision-making was the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which maintained direct and permanent contacts with the Swedish embassies in Central America. The Ministry's communications with Prime Minister Olof Palme were also frequent during his period of government, 1982–86.

In the field of humanitarian assistance, despite the Ministry for Foreign Affairs being present and playing an important role, the main decisions were taken by Sida which in turn delegated most of the formulation of general outlines to the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance.

Regarding the Swedish reception of political refugees from El Salvador, which was initiated in 1984, formal decisions were taken by the Swedish Migration Board, normally in accordance with information received from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

More detailed outlines and operational decisions were, however, normally taken by Swedish entities or individuals in the region, primarily at the Swedish Embassies in Mexico and

Guatemala and in the regional office of Diakonia in Costa Rica. These maintained close and fluent communications with Stockholm and enjoyed broad support and, with this, extensive space for action.

This situation was reinforced by the fact that several key individuals in Swedish diplomatic positions originated from the NGO sphere, possessed good knowledge of the region and were committed which contributed, in turn, to a closeness to the socio economic and political reality of El Salvador. This permitted Swedish cooperation to rely on greater access to Salvadoran political and social actors, operate in larger arenas and gain important credibility, with the FMLN and among popular organizations as well as concerns other countries, the UN system and also, the USA.

Several of the Swedish officials showed personal commitment above and beyond the call of duty. Their ideals and stated position in favour of those affected by violence, in some cases with religious motivation, permitted a political affinity with Salvadoran counterparts and undoubtedly facilitated relationships. It is also worth mentioning that several officials, from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs as well as Sida and the Swedish NGOs, continued to work with El Salvador for many years; a fact that, without any doubt whatsoever, contributed to coherence.

Management of conflicts – but without strategies

Swedish cooperation with El Salvador was not based on an explicit conflict management perspective as neither Sida nor the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had yet integrated this analytical tool in their work in the 1980s. In spite of the lack of theoretical framework, however, the strategies that were promoted in the case of El Salvador, for example widening of the circle of actors and external participation in the form of mediation from the UN, have later become generalised methods of conflict management.

Measures to promote dialogue, endorse security for the parties, and support structural stability, for example through the promotion of human rights and democracy, were all part of Swedish support to El Salvador. These forms of support are the major categories in Sida's current work on conflict management.¹¹²

112 Sida and conflict management, www.sida.se, 2004

Peace comes

– roles are changed

After the signing of the Peace Accords, Sida initiated support to the peace process. The first explicit strategy for cooperation with El Salvador indicates three areas of action:

- integration of ex-combatants into civilian life;
- democratisation and human rights; and
- poverty alleviation.

This strategy was to be valid from July 1995 until the end of 1997. From then until the year 2000, grant-based cooperation was to be phased out.

The following strategic document, a regional strategy for Central America and the Caribbean 1997–2001, highlights the same areas. It also notes that weak national ownership has caused deviations and delays in the implementation of the Peace Accords. If this situation is not changed, Sweden will try to “find ways to increase national responsibility, including through support to civil society”. Finally, it is underlined that grant-based cooperation will end with this time period. Nothing is, however, said about how the withdrawal will be carried out.

In the current regional strategy for Central America and the Caribbean 2001–2005 it is stated that the Peace Accords have ceased to be a platform for combating structural obstacles to development. Swedish support will be withdrawn during the period. Simultaneously, technical assistance financed by contract will be introduced.

The different Swedish actors maintained strategic political coherence after the signing of the Peace Accords; they shared the objectives of the agreements. Although many joint reference points still existed, the common view once experienced by Sida and the Swedish NGOs was, however, fading. Sida became an actor in its own right and primarily channelled its interests through UNDP concentrating, in its role of official Swedish development cooperation agency, on the implementation of the Peace Accords.

The NGOs had channelled the major part of the humanitarian assistance during the armed conflict, but now they were also assuming new roles. The Swedish organizations initially continued supporting their old counterparts, but simultaneously they were gradually passing on to work with new themes and new partners. Sida’s humanitarian funds had been transformed into financing for the promotion of democracy and human rights.

The different realities resulted in increased distance between official cooperation and Swedish NGOs. The Swedish

actors were absorbed by all of the new issues that originated from peace and the distribution of roles between Sida and the NGOs was initially somewhat unclear. Seemingly, there was not enough room for reflection in a more strategic manner on complementary efforts.

Even though some coordinating meetings were organised between Sida and the Swedish NGOs in Central America, the so-called Antigua rounds, people interviewed for this study are of the opinion that time and space for more continuous discussion and common analyses was lacking.

During the war Sida had shown a certain tolerance regarding reports and audits from the NGOs, partly due to security reasons and partly because of the existence of a global objective that was primarily political: to obtain a negotiated solution to the conflict. When the armed conflict ended this gradually changed. In peace, Sida increased demands for reporting and measurable results from the activities of the NGOs. These new demands were not only applied in El Salvador but formed part of a general tendency within Swedish development cooperation as a means of professionalisation.

The NGOs were also interested in improved reporting, audits and methods for measuring results and had actually already initiated such efforts before 1992. Still, they felt certain lack of conformity in the demands that Sida was presenting, for example in relationship to performance management accounting, and considered that official development cooperation was not making the same demands on its own work.

Devoted to the Peace Accords – and more and more isolated

Several of the people interviewed in this study consider that Sweden was probably the donor country that remained most consistently devoted to the Peace Accords as a platform for its support. By doing this, Sweden most likely contributed to keeping the peace process on the agenda for a longer period than otherwise would have been the case.

From 1996 onwards however, Swedish development cooperation, besides lacking a trustworthy intermediary in UNDP, found itself to be increasingly isolated in the work that related to the Peace Accords; the cooperation was losing its main point of reference. For the Government and other actors in Salvadoran society, the agreements had already been fulfilled.

In response to this situation, Sida increased cooperation through civil society. One example is support to local development and housing through the Salvadoran NGO FUSAI. Another example is the support to the five NGOs in Consorcio to promote participation in elections and electoral reform. In the lat-

ter case, Sida explicitly indicated that the support was an attempt to use an alternative form to achieve results, as the Salvadoran Government had not realised promised electoral reforms. However, it seems that no analysis was made regarding the real possibilities for the NGOs to bring about – or try to bring about – changes that not even the entire donor community had been able to persuade the government to implement.

At the end of the 1990s, cooperation spent less time on strategic thinking, was less oriented towards obtaining political reforms and more focused on the implementation of projects and programmes. In this context, official grant-based Swedish cooperation with El Salvador reaffirmed, in practice, its withdrawal.

Cooperation channelled through NGOs and technical cooperation would remain. However, no analysis was made of the impact of this withdrawal on institutions and processes that had been supported by Sweden. Salvadoran counterparts and other actors are of the opinion that the grant-based cooperation should continue, taking into consideration the fact that the peace process still cannot be considered to be consolidated. Several partners have also formulated criticism towards Swedish cooperation for not having canvassed Salvadoran opinions before the final decision was taken.

In this final stage, the retreat not only seems to depend on the loss of the main objective of the support – the fulfilment of the Peace Accords and the consolidation of the institutions created by them – but also on the loss of the strategic and shared view that characterised and inspired Swedish cooperation during the conflict epoch.

The effectiveness of Swedish cooperation

In this section a general reflection is made on the effectiveness of Swedish support to El Salvador. The study has analysed the accomplishment of implicit and explicit objectives. It has, however, not been part of the mission's task to assess the cost efficiency of the different forms of support.

Political objectives

– in humanitarian assistance too

The main line of action in Swedish foreign policy was, as previously mentioned, to work for national independence, peaceful solutions to conflicts and protection of human rights. Within the framework of this general outline there were a number of objectives for Sweden's political and diplomatic efforts in El Salvador during the armed conflict. These objectives were not explicit and were thus not to be found in writing in any strategy document. Still, they were clearly identifiable and maintained over a long period of time.

These implicit objectives consisted primarily of drawing international attention to human rights violations in El Salvador within the framework of the UN, opening space for negotiations in the international arena, in the Central American region and within the FDR-FMLN and acting as counterweight to US policy towards El Salvador.

Another objective, related to the global aim of achieving a peaceful solution to armed conflict, was to work for increased room for manoeuvre for the smaller political parties in the centre. At the end of the 1980s a new objective appeared: to promote the preconditions for the UN to play a leading role in the peace negotiations.

Guidelines for humanitarian assistance to Latin America, adopted in 1981, state: "Efforts that aim at mere survival should be secondary to those that, in addition to contributing to physical survival, also directly or indirectly contribute to societal change in a democratic direction."

This wording shows that humanitarian assistance also had political objectives. The most characteristic feature of overall Swedish support during the 1980s was precisely this; that political and diplomatic work on the one hand and humanitarian assistance, the programme to receive refugees in Sweden and other kinds of support on the other, were coordinated and subordinated to their common political objectives. This was the foundation of the joint common view: development cooperation and politics should walk hand in hand, mutually strengthening each other.

One of the political objectives of humanitarian assistance was to increase Sweden's knowledge about the situation in the country and also to establish confidence among popular organizations. These political and diplomatic efforts contributed simultaneously to investing the humanitarian organizations – both Swedish and Salvadoran – with legitimacy and resources. The main objective of the programme to receive refugees was to save lives, but it was also intended to contribute to the enhancement of Sweden's influence and credibility as a discussion partner in the conflict.

The overall political objective was also visible within support to the development of the community of Tenancingo. Negotiations and reconciliation efforts vis-à-vis the Government, the army and the guerrillas concerning Tenancingo were, to a large extent, regarded as a contribution to the search for a negotiated way out of the conflict.

The existence of a shared view and strategy facilitated the coordination of policies and other actions. Another important precondition was that key individuals within the support to El Salvador who had started by working with humanitarian assistance were later to be recruited by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Consequently, relationships between individuals were also facilitated because many of them already knew each other. Without doubt, the shared view and strategy made Swedish support more effective.

It is, however, more difficult to establish the importance of interdependence. Mutual dependence is not necessarily a precondition for coordination of efforts, but undoubtedly this coordination is facilitated if the different actors involved have full confidence in each other.

Presence and knowledge – important for legitimacy

Sweden played an important role in the struggle to unite the parties and to maintain the international scene active and alert in the promotion of respect for human rights. Worth mentioning are the actions of Sweden in the General Assembly of the

UN and the meetings of the Commission for Human Rights in Geneva.

Reports from the Swedish Mission to the UN and other documentation reveal that Sweden's positions were sometimes decisive, for example in order for the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on human rights in El Salvador to be extended and for annual UN resolutions on El Salvador to be made more powerful. By acting in the UN and directing criticism against US arms shipments to El Salvador, Sweden contributed to placing El Salvador on the international agenda during the first few years of the conflict.

Permanent and committed efforts, first-hand knowledge about the situation and notable interest were factors that explained Swedish leverage in relationship to the Salvadoran conflict and Sweden's capacity to convince other governments and international institutions. Another contributing factor was that Sweden did not have political or economic self-interest in El Salvador or in the region.

Political support to Contadora and Esquipulas was also important, according to information from individuals with knowledge about these processes.

Sweden acted consistently to try to influence the USA, identifying and using existing arenas. This might have had some effect on US politics, but concrete indications of this are difficult to find. Other factors, both internal and external, were more important.

The active presence of Sweden, both nationally and internationally, provided important political and diplomatic legitimacy, also as concerns the FDR-FMLN. The Swedish interventions contributed to strengthening those in favour of negotiations within the guerrillas, among other things through discussions with Guillermo Ungo from the MNR.

Contrary to this, Sweden did not succeed in widening the space for "the third force", in other words the smaller political parties in the centre. Swedish support was too limited and the Salvadoran society too polarized to accept increased influence from these parties.

It should be emphasised that one element of great importance was that Sweden had the financial resources to provide flexible, rapid support in situations that were considered politically opportune. The Diakonia open fund was used on several occasions to support work within the diplomatic field which, for different reasons, could not be financed directly through Sida or the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The granting of financial support consolidated the credibility of Sweden as an actor; it showed that Sweden did something more than talk.

Creating consensus

– without taking the lead

The issue of giving the UN a more active role as mediator in the conflict in El Salvador was promoted by several actors, not only by Sweden. A number of different initiatives were taken, from Sweden and other countries as well as from the UN itself. Together with these other actors Sweden contributed to the initiating of the negotiations and their slow path to peace.

The fact that Sweden was one of the countries considered by the UN for the “group of friends” countries to support the UN Secretary General in the mediation mission which was part of the process that led to the Peace Accords is one indication of its effectiveness in the field of politics and diplomacy.

In general terms it can be concluded that the majority of the outlined objectives were achieved, both in the political and diplomatic fields and within humanitarian assistance.

However, it is difficult to establish a causal relationship between Swedish efforts and the results that were achieved. This is in part due to the deliberate Swedish policy “not to expose itself on its own”, exercise pressure to create consensus without taking on a leading role, and in part it is due to the great number of actors and external events that influenced the results.

One of the main limitations of Swedish cooperation was that it rested heavily on a number of key individuals. This constituted a risk as the support was, to a great extent, dependent on the creativity and opinion of these people.

Another limitation was the flexibility – within the framework of a general outline – in the execution of political and diplomatic support, which does not allow more detailed analyses and documentation on the way it was carried out. This makes it difficult to study the support’s main successes and weaknesses in more detail.

In relation to the difficult balance between clear objectives and flexibility, a study on Swedish support to conflict management highlights the importance of combining flexibility at operational level with clear and explicit directives at strategic level in order to be able to evaluate whether objectives have been achieved and claim responsibility for the results.¹¹³

113 Sida, Sida Evaluations Newsletter, No 2, 2001

Confidence, flexibility – and high risks

Operational decisions within the humanitarian assistance were based on confidence and, consequently, supervision and control were sometimes less rigid. A stricter control process would, in many cases, have been difficult to apply in practice, mainly for security reasons.

This could be questioned concerning financial efficiency in the sense that it was not possible to establish whether the approved funds had been used in an adequate and efficient manner, whether or not they contributed to creating dependency, or even if they had been used for their stated aims, etc.

Moreover, this behaviour, despite its enormous advantages regarding speed and flexibility, exposed activities to high risks. In the Salvadoran case, although no conclusive data exists, it would appear that the Swedish funds were, on the whole, used properly and well distributed by the Salvadoran counterparts. Problems did exist, however. The Olof Palme International Center interrupted support to one counterpart as funds were used for objectives other than those agreed upon and reporting was insufficient. Later on, Diakonia also discovered irregularities within at least one of its counterparts.

The humanitarian assistance, received and channelled by NGOs – primarily the Salvadoran ecumenical coordination organization Diaconía, was primarily destined to cover the needs of the civilian population most affected by the war. The majority of this population lived in conflict zones under guerrilla control, many of the distribution channels used were therefore subordinated to FMLN's organisational structure.

In spite of these inconveniences it is difficult to see alternative possibilities for the channelling of the significant amounts required for humanitarian assistance. Moreover, it should be considered that the Salvadoran organization Diaconía, consisting of various churches, cooperative organizations and the Archbishop's Social Affairs Secretariat, gave the greatest possible legitimacy in the polarized – and politicised – atmosphere existing in El Salvador in the 1980s.

In the study on Sida's support to conflict management mentioned above, the importance of strengthening the institutional capacity and financial sustainability of local organizations is highlighted, also in conflict situations.¹¹⁴ This type of support did exist in El Salvador. Within the framework of the support to Diaconía El Salvador, efforts were made to strengthen the churches and organizations that formed part of the coordination organization. It is thus possible to state that

¹¹⁴ Sida, Sida Evaluations Newsletter, No 2, 2001

the outlines of the cooperation did include institutional strengthening. Despite the fact that some reports and evaluations mention some advances in this field, however, there are no real possibilities for analysis of the progress made, due to lack of indicators and systematisation of experiences.

Certainly, the protection of the civilian population affected by the conflict and the strengthening of these organizations' financial and administrative capacity was, to a large extent, related to enhancing their capacity for advocacy. The support received by the refugees also contributed to the success of the refugee returns before and during the CIREFCA process.

In addition, the Swedish policy of receiving refugees achieved, as far as can be estimated, its established objectives. Around 2 000 individuals, many of them under death threat as well as family members, were given asylum in Sweden. This, and not least the reception of a certain number of war wounded guerrilla members, also contributed to the consolidation of Sweden as an actor in search of a peaceful solution to the Salvadoran conflict.

During the negotiations

– strengthen the UN

Through consistent support to UNHCR and other UN agencies in relation to the CIREFCA process, Sweden contributed to establishing a platform for the role that the UN would later come to assume. Also, the strategy of placing Swedish officials in different UN offices in Central America contributed by influencing the organization as well as strengthening it.

During the negotiations, the main Swedish line of action was to strengthen the UN in different ways and to support the UN mediator in order for him to be able to carry out his mission.

The best documented episode in Swedish support during this period is the organising and financing of the conference on human rights in Geneva that led to the first peace agreement; the agreement on human rights, signed in Costa Rica in 1991. On other occasions, however, Sweden also contributed funds, practical support and proposals. The letters of thanks from the mediator Álvaro de Soto to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs are evidence that these efforts had certain importance.

In different ways, Sweden acted to open up dialogue spaces for the FMLN, for example through its attempts to organise a meeting between the guerrillas and the US Assistant Secretary of State. Sweden also promoted the negotiation process taking initiatives as far as the FMLN were concerned as well as Central American Governments and the USA.

These efforts and the rapid and discrete support to the meeting in Geneva, undoubtedly contributed to the fact that

the Peace Accords, after one year and six months of negotiations, could be signed. Sweden was, however, once again one actor among many others and it is not possible to quantify the importance of its support.

In peace time

– focus on the Accords

After the signing of the Peace Accords, political measures and other actions from official Swedish development cooperation concentrated mainly on the fulfilment of the Accords. As early as a few days after their signing, three priority areas were identified: demobilisation, support to the strengthening of democracy and social and economic rehabilitation. Regarding demobilization, Sweden acted speedily in order for the agreement to be implemented in line with its timetable. This support was decisive, according to information gathered for this study.

Sweden, together with Norway and Denmark, financed the work of the Ad Hoc Commission. The work of the commission was absolutely vital and its contributions gradually led to the recommended purge within the army. One part of the Peace Accords that all parties consider fulfilled is the one that refers to the absence of political influence in the new role of the military.

Sweden also contributed to the Truth Commission. Its effects were not as evident, but the very fact that abuses committed during the war were documented was an important step towards establishing the truth.

Sida provided support for several of the institutions created or reformed through the Peace Accords, such as the Ombuds Office for Human Rights, the National Civilian Police, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and the National Judicial Council.

It is worth noting that after the signing of the agreements, interventions from Swedish cooperation in the area of social and economic rehabilitation of people affected by the conflict were very limited. This is in line with the historical behaviour of Swedish cooperation with El Salvador; to focus more on political and humanitarian issues than on the topic of socio-economic development.

Within the framework of the regional support, however, a few large projects that directly aimed at development for vulnerable groups were carried out. During the final years of the 1990s there were also some direct inputs from official Swedish development cooperation in the field of development. These were partially developed within the framework of disaster relief, as in the case of Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and the earthquakes of 2001.

One explicit objective of Swedish support was to strengthen the coordination of cooperation between the UN and bilateral donors, as well as between UN agencies and multilateral financial institutions.

Due to the important role of the UN, through ONUSAL as guarantor and verifying unit of the Peace Accords and the UNDP regarding development and consolidation of them, political measures and development cooperation from Sweden were channelled through and tightly connected to these agencies. The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs considered the strengthening of the role of the UNDP in the implementation of the peace process an important objective. Meanwhile, in the first Sida strategy for cooperation with El Salvador the channelling of support through the UNDP is only referred to as a means of limiting Sida's administrative burden. Officials at Sida state that this does not reflect conflicting views. The different way of formulating the motive is, however, an example of the more operational approach Sida applied, as the agency responsible for the implementation of cooperation.

Results and positive examples

– but in the short term

During the first period after the signing of the Peace Accords cooperation objectives were fulfilled to a great extent: in spite of delays demobilisation was completed, as were the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Commission. The importance of the latter for the future democratic development of El Salvador is undisputed. An evaluation published in 1995 also indicates other positive examples.¹¹⁵ If the evaluation had been carried out a few years later, the assessments would probably have been more critical in some cases. One reason for this is that some of the examples studied were never actually realised in practice.

With reference to support to institutions, results vary. In some cases short-term objectives for projects were met but long-term objectives, regarding strengthening and consolidation of institutions have yet to be accomplished. In some cases Swedish support has been rather short term and Sweden is criticised for having thought, for example, that it would be possible to achieve changes within the legal sector through a two-year project. Support has been more long term in other cases, for example regarding the Swedish instructors who worked at the National Academy for Public Security. The follow-up from Sida was at least in some respects, insufficient.

¹¹⁵ Siri, G., and Malmquist, Evaluación del apoyo de Suecia al proceso de paz y democratización en El Salvador, 1995

Sweden played a more active role in support to the Ombuds Office for Human Rights. Financial support was granted on various occasions and towards the end of the 1990s Sida decided to channel support directly to the institution. Sweden also promoted efforts to find a solution when the Ombuds Office suffered a deep crisis. Although few of the objectives of this directly supported project seem to have been achieved, the institution still has the will to fulfil them and continues to work in this direction.

Attempts to coordinate – without concrete results

Individuals with knowledge about the work of UNDP in the mid-1990s consider that Sweden relied on this organization too much and should have had staff of its own to evaluate proposals and follow up on projects. One interesting question is whether the effects of Swedish contributions would have been more sustainable if Sida had been able to work as actively as it did concerning the Ombuds Office for Human Rights.

Swedish efforts to strengthen UNDP's role as coordinator of the implementation of the Peace Accords were frustrated when a new Resident Representative took office. She did not want – or was not able – to assume the political role the UNDP had carried until then. With this, the possibilities for coordination of cooperation were partly lost. Coordination had been a natural role for UNDP and no other agency could fill it. The coordination and follow-up groups that Sweden proposed were initiated in a few cases but never became institutionalised.

Efforts to achieve better coordination between the Peace Accords and the economic policy that Sweden, as well as the UNDP, supported failed, as did coordination around the issue. International financial institutions and the Salvadoran Government did not show any interest and neither UNDP nor Sweden had sufficient leverage to place the issue on the agenda. From the Swedish side, it is possible that the lack of internal coordination between, on the one hand the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida, and on the other the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank, which are responsible for Swedish positions on the board of the IMF and the World Bank, contributed to the lack of results.

The Peace Accords initiated a process of adaptation for Swedish NGOs as well. From concrete tasks as administrators of humanitarian assistance during the conflict they had to develop new roles. For Save the Children Sweden, their unquestionable platform was the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and activities relating to advocacy and moulding of

public opinion in relationship to it. Diakonia supported refugee returns, preparations for ex-guerrillas and civilians to be able to present applications to the new police college and the organization of war disabled people. Diakonia was, however, starting to reorient its work towards the theme of local democracy, supporting organizations that promote dialogue and understanding between different political parties and training of mayors, among other things.

Undoubtedly, the activities of the NGOs, above all at local level and with advocacy on specific issues such as children's rights, were important. Their effects are, however, difficult to quantify. The work of Diakonia has been evaluated several times over the last few years. In these evaluations, the lack of indicators for measuring effectiveness has been noted. Other NGOs also lack general instruments to assess the effectiveness of their activities.

Alternatives discussed

– and not discussed

In 1994, while preparations for the elaboration of a Swedish strategy for cooperation with El Salvador were going on, a discussion took place, at both Sida and in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, as to the level of ambitions. It was decided that Swedish support should concentrate its efforts strictly on the fulfilment of the Peace Accords and not take on a broader agenda. The Swedish Government approved the strategy in 1995, which established a three-year time frame for the cooperation programme.

Official Swedish development cooperation has been administered and monitored from the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala and, in some cases, from Sida headquarters in Stockholm. In several interviews, the possible limitation of not having a direct presence in El Salvador has been indicated. This option was rejected for administrative reasons, among others the high cost involved. Considering the fact that Sweden had invested large amounts of resources, financial as well as personnel, and had maintained a high political profile in relationship to the conflict in El Salvador, the failure to invest in a more direct presence after having achieved the objective of peace shows certain lack of persistence on behalf of Sida. Moreover, it could be interpreted as a lack of political vision. Diakonia as well as Save the Children Sweden moved their regional offices to El Salvador after the Peace Accords.

According to interviews, experiences from El Salvador caused Sida to open an office in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Sida had learned that it was necessary to main-

tain a presence in the country in order to coordinate and implement effective cooperation.

Another choice made within Swedish cooperation was that it never entered into a direct bilateral relationship with the Government of El Salvador – parallel to channelling support through UNDP. After the signing of the Peace Accords, the establishment of a platform for dialogue with the Salvadoran Government was never discussed. This theme has appeared in the last few years and was mentioned by several of the interviewees in this study. Sufficient information is not available to analyse the advantages and disadvantages that the establishment of such a relationship would have implied. However, it can be pointed out that it would have been useful if the choice had been the result of a conscious decision.

The platform disappears – the common view fades

As the peace process became consolidated, Swedish development cooperation seemed to gradually lose the common, strategic view that had characterized it during the conflict years. Sweden attempted to maintain the demands of the Peace Accords on the agenda, but they increasingly lost their importance as a platform for cooperation.

Considering the fact that institutions created or reformed by the Peace Accords had still to be consolidated, both institutionally and to gain acknowledgement from the population, it is logical to ask why Sida did not continue to seek forms to support them. The most important explanation is, of course, the lack of will on the part of the Salvadoran Government to carry out the reforms that were established in the Accords. Another reason has to do with the fact that many other donors had reduced or reoriented their cooperation. It is, however, also possible that the lack of follow up and evaluations regarding Swedish support to the peace process contributed to the fact that Sida did not see any further chances of supporting the reforms.

Instead, Sida broadened its support to include, for example, housing for low-income households and other projects. Sida sought to strengthen civil society's capacity to advocate and mobilise public opinion on themes that had previously motivated support to government institutions; electoral reform, decentralization and the judicial system, for example.

After Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and the earthquakes in 2001, disaster relief became a new area of activity in which civil society played an important role. In this work the Swedish NGOs, Sida and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs developed joint strategic efforts, with similarities to the com-

mon view that characterised their cooperation during the armed conflict.

As by this time, the end of cooperation with El Salvador was drawing closer, it was not considered necessary to develop explicit strategic directions. The result was, in part, dispersed support with weak follow-up and without a coherent framework. There were different opinions among different officials and between departments within Sida regarding the direction of some projects.

There seem to be several reasons for these changes. Firstly, Swedish cooperation was losing the coherent political framework that it enjoyed during the war epoch and the first few years after the conflict. This had started to change shortly after the Peace Accords. Government cooperation worked at national level, mainly through UNDP, while the NGOs were oriented towards the local level and other specific themes. At the end of the 1990s, many contact points still existed between government cooperation and Swedish NGOs as well as between Sida and Salvadoran NGOs, although not all shared the same analysis and, consequently, did not have the same agenda.

Two other explanations are worth mentioning. Primarily, the reduction and frequent rotation of staff in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida in Stockholm and new, dramatic events in the region, mainly the peace agreements in Guatemala and Hurricane Mitch, that demanded time and resources. Secondly, Sweden's entry into the European Union and the implications that this brought about regarding new priorities and working methods.

The planned end of cooperation showed that different opinions existed, both between Sida and the NGOs and within Sida. Their Salvadoran counterparts considered that they at least should have been given an opportunity to state their opinion, before the final decision was taken.

Swedish cooperation and its counterparts

One important aspect to examine in order to assess the behaviour of Swedish cooperation with El Salvador is its relationship with Salvadoran counterparts. It is of interest to know if they were harmonious and respectful, if there was dialogue, how the needs of the counterparts were decided upon and who took the decisions.

This part of the analysis also tries to give some answers concerning the relationship between Swedish cooperation and the UN agencies, above all UNDP. Finally the role of Swedish public opinion is examined.

Bad times – good relations

During the intensive period of the war, in the middle of conflictive dynamics and lack of confidence, relationships between Sweden and its Salvadoran counterparts were fruitful and harmonious, based on respect and mutual confidence. This type of relationship existed within the sphere of political and diplomatic interventions and as regards human rights as well as in humanitarian assistance.

During the conflict, these features characterised the dialogue between Swedish cooperation and its counterparts. For example, the framework for political and diplomatic cooperation was, to a great extent, defined by the Salvadoran opposition, above all the social democratic MNR. The party shared the vision and strategy of Swedish foreign policy and cooperation and, as the main experts on Salvadoran reality, they defined the framework of cooperation.

Swedish cooperation maintained a permanent and direct dialogue with its Salvadoran political counterparts, above all regarding issues related to the search for a negotiated political solution to the conflict and respect for human rights. These, in turn, intended to broaden political room for manoeuvre, try-

ing to moderate hard line positions within the guerrillas. The frank and frequent exchanges, based on confidence between discussion partners who shared the same strategic vision and on the knowledge of the counterparts, was also present in the field of humanitarian assistance.

This kind of relationship, resting on counterparts, helped Swedish cooperation to become more informed, trustworthy and flexible, more in line with the needs and closer to the reality of El Salvador and the region, and consequently more effective. The respectful relationship between allies won the confidence of the counterparts and permitted Swedish cooperation to develop a broad capacity on the international scene and with other donors. In fact, it converted Sweden into a positive reference point for other actors.

In good times

– distance and demands

In the post-war period dialogue with counterparts began to be modified and relationships from the previous epoch were weakened. During the years immediately after the signing of the Peace Accords the dialogue was still political and focused on the fulfilment of the Accords. There were, however, new actors: UNDP, the other bilateral donors and – although Sweden did not establish a direct relationship with it – the Salvadoran Government. Relationships with these and the coordination of interests that were in part contradictory took time and resources and probably meant that less room was left for dialogue with Sweden's traditional counterparts.

A large part of Swedish cooperation with El Salvador consisted of different kinds of support to the institutions that were created or reformed as result of the Peace Accords, for example the National Civilian Police, the Ombuds Office for Human rights, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and the legal sector. Support to these institutions faced many difficulties and unforeseen complications, which put great pressure on Sweden's limited personnel resources for the administration of cooperation with El Salvador.

The fact that Sida started to develop its own operational strategies meant that Sweden had an agenda of its own instead of – except for a few general outlines – relying on the judgements and priorities of its partners. As Sida's interest became focused on the implementation of the Peace Accords, Swedish NGOs were trying to find new roles; partly because El Salvador in peacetime required new inputs, partly because working methods had changed. Indisputably, the feelings of solidarity and closeness from the conflict years were transformed into requests for strategic planning, periodic reports

and audits. Some of the old counterparts could not meet these demands, despite support to institutional strengthening from Swedish organizations. In their place, new partners appeared.

Sida changed, from being an ally of the Swedish and Salvadoran NGOs to becoming a superior instance for control. Demands for applications for the Swedish NGOs to be elaborated in accordance with the logical framework approach and with performance management results meant a great deal of extra work for counterparts.

This image is, however, not uniform or exclusive. Simultaneously, Sida continued to be an important discussion partners for the NGOs. Sida also worked to strengthen the participation of civil society in different contexts, for example in the work with the Stockholm Declaration after Hurricane Mitch and at the Consultative Group meeting in Madrid after the earthquakes.

The United Nations

– main ally of Sweden

One of the basic strategies of Swedish foreign policy is to support the UN system, politically and financially, as a forum for the solution of global problems. Within the framework of the regional programme for Central America, initiated by Sida in 1986, Sweden had supported the regional programmes of UNICEF and PAHO. The CIREFCA process, which started in 1989, instigated important support to UNHCR. These contributions, in connection with a conscious policy to place Swedish officials in different UN agencies in the region, meant that Sweden had gathered experience and knowledge about the UN in Central America.

This, together with the important role the UN had played in the Salvadoran peace negotiations, made it a natural choice for Sweden to channel the support to the implementation of the Peace Accords through the UN, mainly UNDP who had been assigned the role as coordinator of cooperation. This choice became even more evident as Anders Kompass who had played a central role in Swedish support to El Salvador started to work at UNDP, first as an advisor and then as Resident Representative. In addition to this, Swedish contacts with the Government of El Salvador had been limited. Yet another element that spoke in favour of UNDP was the shortage of personnel within Sida and, therefore, the desire to avoid direct and more demanding involvement in El Salvador.

The result was that Sweden, during the first few years after the signing of the Peace Accords, channelled approximately 80 per cent of its support through UNDP and other UN agencies. In mid-1995, however, a new Resident Representative was

appointed to UNDP in El Salvador, a person with a more traditional way of working, and the agency consequently relinquished its role as guarantor for the peace process. Swedish efforts to avoid this change failed and in 1997 Sweden decided not to sign any new project agreements with UNDP.

This brought consequences for Sida's opportunities to contribute to the implementation of the Peace Accords, both due to the lack of new projects to support and weakened coordination between the donors, which meant reduced opportunities to put pressure on the Salvadoran Government.

Sweden had staked everything on one single card, UNDP, and was now left with reduced space for action. If alternative strategies had simultaneously been tried, for example direct cooperation with the Salvadoran Government, it is possible that Sweden would have had a platform for dialogue and major possibilities to influence the Government.

The role of Swedish public opinion

Swedish support to El Salvador grew within the framework of the symbiosis that was to become characteristic for the whole decade of the 1980s: the work of Diakonia and other Swedish NGOs and the decisive commitment of politicians. The principal role among the politicians, especially during the early years of the 1980s, was played by Pierre Schori, who was then International Secretary of the Social Democratic Party and active in the Socialist International. However, no major political differences existed in Sweden regarding El Salvador.

The solidarity movement for El Salvador developed in the shadow of the movement for Nicaragua and was also too affected by the conflicts between different factions of the FMLN to be able to attract larger groups. In spite of never becoming a large-scale movement, however, the different groups managed to carry out a considerable amount of activities that contributed to maintaining El Salvador on the Swedish agenda.

Through a large number of ecumenical delegation visits, the Central America Group contributed to providing other groups in Sweden with information about El Salvador. The campaign El Salvador Shall Triumph circulated information and implemented activities in support of the FMLN. Groups of Salvadoran refugees living in Sweden and other solidarity groups organised cultural events and collected funds, in this way contributing to spreading knowledge, especially at local level. The most important public opinion campaign regarding El Salvador during the whole decade of the 1980s was the Operation Day's Work, organised by the Swedish school pupils' association, which took place in 1987.

An analysis of articles published in the Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter reveals that the conflict in El Salvador received a great deal of attention during the entire decade of the 1980s. Assassinations, massacres and other abuses were at times front-page news. US policy towards El Salvador was also subject to news coverage.

The image Dagens Nyheter gave of the conflict coincided with the general perception of the influential Swedish actors, in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs as well as the NGOs. It was, however, not the media that generated the Swedish commitment to El Salvador. Nor did the limited interest in the media for the less spectacular themes relating to the implementation of the Peace Accords influence Swedish cooperation after 1992.

Lessons learned

Lessons learned

1. A SMALL COUNTRY LIKE SWEDEN CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF IMPORTANT RESULTS.

Prerequisites include the existence of political will, a common view and knowledge to analyse the options offered by the international context.

2. IT IS IMPORTANT TO SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE.

To achieve credibility and positive results, coherent action is necessary. It is important that all sectors and actors involved act according to a common view. This is true both for sectors and actors with presence in the relevant country – diplomats, cooperation officials, private sector representatives, NGO staff, etc. – and for actors in other fields of action and on other levels of decision making, such as within the World Bank, the IMF, the European Union, as well as authorities and institutions such as the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, development cooperation agencies and NGOs.

3. A STRATEGIC VISION IS ESSENTIAL.

Strategic thinking is of fundamental relevance to the achievement of sustainable results. In order to develop strategic thinking, practical opportunities to monitor and analyse developments and participate in ongoing processes should exist. It is essential to be able to count on accurate knowledge, as well as an ample network of contacts in all fields.

4. STRATEGIC THINKING REQUIRES TIME, DIALOGUE AND COORDINATION AMONG ACTORS INVOLVED.

Conditions for this must exist, or be created, at operative level as well as within the decision making process. The establishment of these institutional prerequisites is, to a great degree, the responsibility of the institutional leader-

ship and should not be reduced to a question of how programme officials individually decide to use their working time.

5. PEOPLE ARE IMPORTANT.

Apart from institutional conditions, effective cooperation depends on individuals with interest, knowledge and personal commitment in order to take advantage of opportunities presented along the way. Without competent and devoted people, prepared to go the extra mile, grand results are seldom achieved. People with different backgrounds and experience contribute distinct perspectives, thereby enriching joint efforts.

6. POLITICAL SUPPORT IS FUNDAMENTAL FOR FLEXIBILITY.

In order to be able to act with flexibility and take risks, it is indispensable to have political support at the highest decision making level. The Swedish diplomats who worked in El Salvador in the 1980s enjoyed broad support, enabling flexibility and permitting them to stretch limits, thereby undoubtedly contributing to success. Humanitarian assistance situated on the outer limits of international law also requires broad political support. This was achieved in the 1980s through the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance.

7. LONG-TERM COMMITMENT GIVES RESULTS.

The persistent promotion of human rights was a main theme of Swedish action throughout the armed conflict in El Salvador. This strategy was especially concrete in the work within the UN, through the political refugee programme and also in support to the meeting on human rights in Geneva that subsequently led to the first peace accord. The confidence and credibility that Sweden had gained was not the result of isolated efforts, but rather of the long-term investment of having accompanied the Salvadoran process for almost ten years. In contrast, several projects Sweden supported with the aim of fulfilling the Peace Accords had surprisingly short implementation phases and, consequently, left few traces behind.

8. SPEED AND FLEXIBILITY CAN BE DECISIVE FACTORS.

A situation of conflict or civil war has its own logic. Rules and other demands are more elastic, the situation leaves room for more swift action. It is, however, also possible to be creative and flexible in times of peace and within the framework of more traditional development cooperation.

This requires institutional space and promotion of individual initiatives. The possibility of acting when necessary, with the speed that was needed, enabled Sweden to make important contributions after the signing of the Peace Accords – the demobilisation of the FMLN and the Ad Hoc Commission are examples of this. However, in order to assess if objectives have been reached, operational flexibility needs to be combined with long-term strategies including explicit objectives – which can then be modified if circumstances change.

9. A RELATIONSHIP OF INTER-DEPENDENCY FACILITATES COORDINATION.

Inter-dependency is not necessarily a prerequisite for coordination of efforts and close cooperation, but it undoubtedly helps if the actors involved are dependent on each other. Mechanisms that contribute to mutual dependency could be useful and help to avoid institutional jealousy.

10. BROAD PARTICIPATION BRINGS RESULTS.

Swedish diplomatic action and development cooperation are traditionally oriented towards coordination and the participation of all the actors involved, including civil society. This fits well into a conflict management perspective. Swedish political and diplomatic action in El Salvador was based on a strategy of constantly seeking ways to broaden and strengthen the circle of actors in order to create new meeting spaces on different levels and under distinct circumstances. One example was the participation of civil society in the CIREFCA conference and the following process, and another the support to the small and more moderate political parties within the FDR.

11. ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES SHOULD BE ANALYSED.

Sweden decided to channel its contributions to the peace process through the UNDP. There were several valid reasons to choose this means, but the lack of parallel strategies came to have negative consequences when the UNDP no longer lived up to expectations. Opportunities to initiate parallel and direct cooperation with the Salvadoran Government should have been analysed from a strategic point of view. In the same manner, a strategic analysis should have been made concerning the possible advantages of establishing a permanent presence in El Salvador.

12. PARTNERSHIP REQUIRES DIALOGUE.

The existence of relevant reasons for phasing out grant-based cooperation with El Salvador does not reduce the contradiction regarding how this decision was implemented. Sida initiated development cooperation with El Salvador with the explicit objective of supporting the fulfilment of the Peace Accords. When Sweden decides to phase out the support, this is done without previous consultation with individuals and organizations who have maintained extensive relationships with Swedish cooperation and consider that the peace process and democracy still remain to be consolidated. In order to avoid that formal strategies established by donors are regarded as their agenda only, it is also vital that they become topics for discussion and consultation with counterparts and other relevant actors in the country in question.

13. STUDIES AND EVALUATIONS BROADEN THE BASIS FOR DECISION-MAKING.

The aim of Swedish cooperation was the Chapultepec agenda and the situation regarding democracy and human rights. Consequently, this objective should have been the point of departure in the analysis of the reasons for concluding support. Most likely, it would have been easier to make such an analysis if more studies and evaluations had been carried out on Swedish support to the peace process.

14. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT CAN BE KEY IN PROCESSES OF DRASTIC CHANGE.

Institutional support is vital to strengthen counterpart organizations, also during situations of conflict or change. It should be pointed out that institutional support entails not only demands concerning administrative and financial management, but should also include components such as democracy, transparency, gender, etc. Even in a conflict situation, a culture of transparency should be generated, taking into consideration the special circumstances so as not to jeopardize the security of counterparts or beneficiaries. A culture of transparency will not be achieved by merely demanding audits, but will require permanent dialogue and institutional strengthening.

15. DOCUMENTATION FACILITATES LEARNING.

In order to learn and continue to build on acquired experience, documentation of processes that are of interest to Swedish cooperation should be considered. The activities of diplomats and other Swedish actors were carried out

with prudence and modesty. It was low profile work, discrete and hardly discernable diplomacy. This study has managed to document some of these activities, but in many cases experiences are not documented in detail due to lack of systematisation.

16. LESSONS FROM THE TRANSITION SHOULD BE COLLECTED.

The transition from war to peace turned out to be a difficult process for Salvadoran civil society. Nor were the Swedish organizations prepared to confront the new problems that emerged. In order to obtain more knowledge and be better prepared for similar situations, it could be of interest for Sida as well as for the Swedish NGOs, to study in more detail and systematise the experiences that have been acquired in El Salvador and other countries that have undergone processes of transition, from war to peace, or from dictatorship to democracy, to learn more on the implications for civil society.

Annexes

People interviewed

Alemán, Rafael, Director of the FMLN Political Institute, formerly refugee in Sweden (6 February 2004)

Andersson, Annika, Programme Officer at Diakonia, formerly Programme Officer at Save the Children Sweden (5 February 2004)

Andersson, Hans, former volunteer for Education for Development (UBV), later Member of Parliament for the Swedish Left Party (15 January 2004)

Andersson, Monica, former International Secretary of the Swedish Social Democratic Party (16 January 2004)

Arce, Rodrigo, ex President of the campaign El Salvador Shall Triumph (4 December 2003)

Attve, Doris, Programme Officer at the Sida Department for Humanitarian Assistance (22 January 2004)

de Avilés, Victoria, Magistrate in the Supreme Court, Director of Ombuds Office for Children's Rights 1992–95, Director of Ombuds Office for the Defence of Human Rights 1995–98 (10 February 2004)

Barrera, Hugo, Minister of Public Security 1994–1999 El Salvador, Vice President of ARENA (18 May 2004)

Baurmann, Mats, Legal Adviser at the Swedish Migration Board (21 January 2004)

Belkert, Ingvar, former Head of the Latin America Section at the Swedish Migration Board (18 February 2004)

Bendz, Eva, former missionary in El Salvador for the Church of Sweden Mission (13 January 2004)

Berggren, Jens, Programme Officer at Sida (26 January 2004)

Bergkvist, Rolf, activist in the solidarity movement for El Salvador (19 January 2004)

Betancur, Belisario, former President of Colombia, initiator and participant in the Contadora Group (28 January 2004)

Brundin, Tomas, former Programme Officer at Diakonia and Latin America Secretary at Church of Sweden Aid (26 January 2004)

Carlsson, Josephine, former Latin America Secretary at Church of Sweden Aid (21 January 2004)

Carlsson, Lars, Police officer in ONUSAL 1992–93, National Police Academy, 1994–98 (26 January 2004)

Castillo, Luis, Director of FUSAI (6 February 2004)

Castro, Miguel Tomás, The Baptist Church Emanuel (10 February 2004)

Cederberg, Ingemar, formerly at the UNHCR in Honduras, Swedish Board of Migration and the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala (26 January 2004)

Córdova, Ricardo, Director of FUNDAUNGO (6 February 2004)

Czajkowski, Jan, ex President of the campaign El Salvador Shall Triumph (14 January 2004)

Díaz, Francisco, head of electoral campaign, CDU, ex Director of FESPAD (9 February 2004)

Díaz, Nidia, Member of the Central American Parliament, former FMLN commander (5 February 2004)

de Dowe, Norma, the National Reconstruction Secretariat between 1989–1996 (19 May 2004)

Escobar Galindo, David, member of the Government peace negotiation delegation, President of the José Matías Delgado University (19 May 2004)

Ekman, Ellenor, Programme Officer at Sida (18 December 2003)

Enríquez, Alberto, Programme Officer at FUNDE (2 February 2004)

Faroppa, Juan, member of ONUSAL and the Joint Group for the Investigation of Illegal Armed Groups with Political Motivation (23 December 2003)

Forsberg, Bo, Director of Diakonia (30 March 2004)

Franklin, Kerstin, former Programme Officer at Diakonia in Costa Rica and Guatemala (28 January 2004)

Frühling, Michael, Counsellor at the Swedish Embassy in Guatemala 1990–1995, Head of the Latin America Section at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1987–1990 (27 January 2004)

Fröberg, Per, Programme Officer at Sida (22 January 2004)

Galván, Guillermo, Director of FUNDAMUNDI (6 February 2004)

García, Pedro, Programme Officer at Diakonia (9 February 2004)

Gauding, Anna-Karin, Programme Officer at Diakonia 1980–1983 (25 November 2003)

Góchez, Rafael, Consultant and Programme Officer at UNDP 1994–2002 (10 February 2004)

Gómez, Medardo, Bishop within the Lutheran Church (5 February 2004)

Grape, Margareta, Head of Cooperation at the Church of Sweden, formerly at the Olof Palme International Center 1978–1992 (27 November 2003)

Gregory, Andrés, Consultant and former Director of FASTRAS (9 February 2004)

Guillén, María Silvia, Director of FESPAD (3 February 2004)

Gärtner, Maria, Programme Officer for Latin America at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (22 December 2003)

Halkjaer, Eivor, Director of the Latin America Department at Sida 1989–1994 and 1997–2000, Ambassador in Nicaragua 1995–1996 (28 January 2004)

Hasbun, Franzi, Journalist, Channel 12 (5 February 2004)

Holmqvist, Göran, Swedish Embassy in Guatemala 1993–1996, since 2000 Director of the Latin America Department at Sida (14 January 2004)

Incalcaterra, Amerigo, Legal Advisor to ONUSAL (27 January 2004)

Jacobsson, Ritva, Central America Group (22 December 2003)

Kastberg, Nils-Arne, former Programme Officer at Sida with responsibility for the Regional Programme for Central America (22 January 2004)

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Martínez, Ana Guadalupe, ex FMLN commander (4 February 2004)

Mauricio, Facundo, ex member of the FMLN representation in Sweden (9 January 2004)

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Morales, David, Assistant Ombuds Officer for the Protection of Human Rights (3 February 2004)

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Ottosson, Peter, Latin America Secretary at Diakonia (28 January 2004)

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Persson, Ingrid, Head of the campaign Operation Day's Work of the Swedish Pupils' Association (27 January 2004)

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Poggio, Carolina, Programme Officer at Diakonia (9 February 2004)

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Ramos, René, Programme Officer at Oxfam America, formerly consultant for Diakonia (9 February 2004)

Rodríguez, Abraham, leader of the Christian Democrat Party (PDC), President of the Ad Hoc Commission (2 February 2004)

Rodríguez, Marcos, Programme Officer at FUNDE (4 February 2004)

Rosa, Herman, Director of PRISMA (9 February 2004)

Rosander, Gunnel, former Central America Coordinator for The Swallows (7 January 2004)

Samayoa, Salvador, representative in the FMLN negotiation commission, currently President of the National Council for Public Security (3 February 2004)

Sánchez, José Darío, President of the National Salvadoran Federation in Sweden (12 January 2004)

Santamaría, Oscar, various minister posts in El Salvador 1989–1994 (18 May 2004)

Schori, Pierre, International Secretary in the Social Democratic Party –82, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 1982–1991, Minister of Development Cooperation and Migration 1994–1999 (28 January 2004)

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Silent understanding behind humanitarian assistance

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Abbreviations

AMOAR	Association Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero / Asociación Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero
ARENA	Nationalist Republican Alliance of El Salvador / Alianza Republicana Nacionalista de El Salvador
ASESAH	The Salvadoran Ecumenical Association for Services and Humanitarian Assistance / Asociación Salvadoreña Ecuménica de Servicios y Ayuda Humanitaria
CATIE	Centre of Tropical Agriculture for Research and Training / Centro de Agricultura Tropical para la Investigación y Capacitación
CDHES	The Salvadoran Commission for Human Rights / Comisión para los Derechos Humanos de El Salvador
CEAH	The Ecumenical Assistance Committee / Comité Ecuménico de Ayuda
CEPREDENAC	Centre for Disaster Prevention in Central America / Centro para Medidas de Prevención de Catástrofes en Centroamérica
CIAS	The Centre for Research and Social Action / Centro de Investigación y Acción Social
CIREFCA	International Conference on Central American Refugees / Conferencia Internacional sobre Refugiados Centroamericanos
CRIPDES	Salvadoran Committee for Displaced Persons/ Comité por los Desplazados de El Salvador
FDR	The Revolutionary Democratic Front / Frente Democrático Revolucionario
FESPAD	Foundation for Studies of the Application of the Law / La Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho
FLACSO	Secretariat of the Latin American Faculty for Social Sciences / Secretaría de la Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales
FMLN	The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front / Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional

FPL	Popular Liberation Forces / Fuerzas para la Liberación Nacional
FUNDASAL	Salvadoran Foundation for Development and Housing / Fundación Salvadoreña de Desarrollo y Vivienda
FUNPROCOOP	The Foundation for Promotion of Cooperatives / La Fundación Promotora de Cooperativas
FUSAI	Salvadoran Foundation for Integrated Assistance / Fundación Salvadoreña de Apoyo Integral
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IDHUCA	Department of Human Rights at the Central American University / Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas
IIDH	Inter-American Institute for Human Rights / Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MINUSAL	United Nations Mission to El Salvador / Misión de Naciones Unidas en El Salvador
MNR	National Revolutionary Movement / Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario
NGO	Non governmental organization
ONUSAL	United Nations Observer Mission to El Salvador / Observadores de Naciones Unidas en El Salvador
PAHO	Pan-American Health Organization
PRISMA	Salvadoran Programme for Environmental Research / Programa Salvadoreño de Investigación sobre Desarrollo y Medio Ambiente
SAMCA	Coordination for the People of Central America / Samordningen för Centralamerikas folk
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund



The study "An extraordinary relationship – Swedish cooperation with El Salvador 1979–2001" is published in English and in Spanish.

A summary of the study in English, Spanish and Swedish can be found on Sida's website: www.sida.se, under publications.

More information, including the Terms of Reference for the study, reports from a seminar with the reference group in El Salvador and a seminar with actors in Sweden, can be obtained from Sida's Department for Latin America or through the consultant Context: info@context.nu

"The Swedish support provided us with an extra lung; it helped us to breathe", says Monsignor Ricardo Urioste in El Salvador.

Humanitarian assistance during the armed conflict in the 1980s, in part channelled through the Catholic Church, was one expression of Swedish support to the country.

The Swedish non governmental organizations who started working in El Salvador at an early stage and the newly awakened interest of the Socialist International paved the way for political and diplomatic support. After 1992, development cooperation began to support the implementation of the Peace Accords.

The study documents more than 20 years of Swedish support to the different phases of the peace and democratisation process in El Salvador. It tells the story of an extraordinary relationship that has resulted in knowledge, contacts and ties of friendship on both sides of the Atlantic. An independent analysis of support is presented as well as a number of lessons learned along the way.

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