ROLE OF NON-STATE ACTORS IN INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND ON HUMANITARIAN ISSUES IN CONFLICT AREAS

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Introduction

- **The subject is so wide I do not know where to begin. I am also not an expert on humanitarian issues in conflict areas. I would therefore like to confine myself to the role of non-state actor and just make some general remarks to stimulate discussion. By non-state actors I am generally referring to NGOs that act individually or in structured non-government or T2 processes, and empowered individuals who wield a strong and positive moral, intellectual or political influence (Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, Chandra Muzaffar; not Osama bin Laden, etc.).**

- **The proliferation of NGOs and their immense empowerment since the later part of the last century is widely acknowledged. NGOs at the local, national and international levels are now too mind-bogglingly numerous to be reliably census-ed (internationally operating NGOs 40,000; national: India alone 12 million). The Internet, global networking, rising civil society awareness and participation, and the availability of mainly foreign (Western) funding assistance has greatly empowered NGOs. Today there are NGOs in virtually every field and for every local, national and international cause mainly in non-authoritarian states.**

- **My focus is on NGOs in international security, both those operating largely on their own and those that have also formed coalitions with other NGOs in structured T2 processes in common cause. An example of the latter is my own Institute (ISIS) and the associations we have formed with similar institute in ASEAN as ASEAN-ISIS to complement the state association of ASEAN, with think-tanks in East Asia as Network of East Asian Think-tanks (NEAT) to complement and serve ASEAN Plus Three (APT), and in the Asia Pacific as CSCAP**

to complement the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). We also work in the specifically economic field, such as through PECC complementing APEC.

- **NGOs role in international security,** as we know, has been evolving and expanding. It takes various forms:
    - Relief and humanitarian assistance in conflict and natural disaster such as the ICRC.
    - Advocacy and policy input, such as human rights organisations and T2 organisations and processes that make security assessments, develop security concepts, suggest security initiatives, and themselves participate in confidence building, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution.
    - NGOs involved primarily in conflict management and resolution such as the HD Centre (Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue), and others involved in various aspects of peace building such as reconstruction.

Challenges

- <u>Funding</u>. Some NGOs, especially the more prominent ones operating at home or abroad, get substantial and adequate funding from private foundations, government bodies and philanthropies. They are strongly motivated, well-run, and staffed by many expert and experienced personnel. Funding the most NGOs however is inadequate and uncertain. They are constantly in search of funds and live literally from hand to mouth and initiative to initiative. Many of them are not as well organised and staffed with skilled people, but some are, and lack of regular and adequate funding often severely constrains their activities. They are found both in the developing and developed world. The reasons for their poor funding can be many, but the situation handicaps them. Where they have great potential, this is a loss for the peace community. Remedy: greater govt awareness and support for their role; better promotion and marketing

at home and abroad; and have better capacity and become more credible.

- **Expertise.**

- **Uneven development and empowerment.**

- **Driven by international agenda dominated by West and Western interests and values**, which in fact are sometimes very relevant and needed to address problems in the developing world and enhancing their progress. However, international NGO work driven by Western interests, values and world views sometimes do not jive with the more pressing and relevant needs of developing societies. E.g. emphasis on democracy and civil and political rights over stability, poverty eradication and good governance.