THE NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL
1946–2021

75 YEARS HELPING PEOPLE FORCED TO FLEE

NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL

75 YEARS
HELPING PEOPLE
FORCED TO FLEE

THE NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL
1946–2021

Chief Editor: Jan Egeland
Editorial Board: Richard Skretteberg, Eirik Christophersen, Patrik Ekløf, Benedicte Giæver, Kari Kvalberg, Ingebjørg Kårstad and Guri Romtveit
Editors/authors: Eirik Christophersen and Richard Skretteberg **Editorial Consultants:** Marianne Alfsen/Felix Media
Photo Editor: Ingebjørg Kårstad **Layout and design:** Anna Maria H. Pirolt **Translation:** John F. Smedstad Moore

ISBN: 978-82-7411-2612
nrc.no

FOREWORD

Our 75th anniversary gives reason for celebration, reflection and new initiatives. NRC's history illustrates how is a good thing to show solidarity with our fellow human beings who have been forced to flee their homes. Tens of millions of people have received assistance and protection since 1946. At the same time, we are reminded of all the places and periods where we fell short and were unable to help defenceless displaced people in war and times of crisis. Therefore, our 75th year as a humanitarian organisation also marks the start of our most ambitious strategy ever. We should, can and must assist, protect, listen to and promote the rights of many more of the world's refugees and displaced people than in previous decades because we have never before in our history seen so many people displaced by violence and disasters.

Norway was a poor country that had undergone five years of Nazi occupation when the foundation for our organisation was laid by the visionary initiators of "Europahjelpen" (Aid to Europe). The northern province of Finnmark had been burnt to the ground, and most Norwegians lived on ration cards after the long and difficult years of war. But our founders saw that the destitution, food shortages and homelessness were far worse in war-torn Central Europe, where World War Two had displaced millions of people. The fundraising campaigns became a national event that gradually developed into the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

We are proud of our origins and what our organisation has accomplished over the last three generations. A common thread runs through our 75-year-long history: our aid workers and our supporters have shown the ability and willingness to meet the biggest and worst humanitarian challenges, no matter where and when they arise. This willingness to act has gained us an international reputation and has meant that Norway and many other donor countries – as well as tens of thousands of individuals – have contributed to our massive global effort to assist those affected by war and disaster.

In our anniversary year, NRC has over 15,000 humanitarian aid workers working with and for over 10 million people in need. Our founders would nod appreciatively at the fact that our organisation has preserved their original idealism, at the same time as the quality of our work and our professionalism have become so much better.

The authors of this important book are two of our own experienced aid workers and refugee experts, Richard Skretteberg and Eirik Christophersen. We are grateful for their thorough analyses and well-written review of our organisation's 75 years in the service of humanity.

Harald Norvik
Chair of the Board

Jan Egeland
Secretary General

CONTENTS

◀ **REFUGEES:** A German family carrying everything they own through war-torn Berlin, 15 December 1945. Photo: dpa DANA/NTB

1946–1990: FROM A EUROPEAN TO A GLOBAL EFFORT FOR REFUGEES

HUNGER AND HARDSHIP IN EUROPE

After World War Two, large parts of Europe lay in ruins. Many countries experienced famine. A total of 21 million Europeans were homeless, and there were 15 million refugees.

The suffering and the large number of refugees in war-torn Europe were the reasons why Europahjelpen ("Aid to Europe"), the forerunner of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), came into being in the spring of 1946.

Even before the war, Norway had gained a good reputation for its work for displaced people. It began with Fridtjof Nansen, whom the League of Nations appointed as the first High Commissioner for Refugees in 1922. The League of Nations was the international association formed to contribute to peace and disarmament after World War One.

The same year, the League of Nations launched the so-called Nansen Passport, as an identification document for refugees. The passport was initially intended for Russian refugees, but was gradually expanded to other refugee groups, especially Armenians. The Nansen Passport was a sought-after document that gave refugees the opportunity to move across national borders. It also made it easier to find work or to be reunited with family.

Fridtjof Nansen's efforts for Russian and Armenian refugees in the interwar period gave many Norwegians the experience of having a special responsibility for providing humanitarian assistance to the world's refugees. He was undoubtedly also a great source of inspiration when Europahjelpen was formed.

After the end of World War Two, work began to prevent a war of such magnitude from ever happening again. The League of Nations had failed. Now, there was a strong desire to create a better organisation. The answer to that challenge was The United Nations (UN). The UN's birthday is considered to be 24 October 1945, the day that The Charter of the United Nations officially came into force. Although the UN's main purpose was to prevent new wars between states, the charter also laid the foundations for a broad effort to provide humanitarian aid and assistance to refugees.

THE NANSEN PASSPORT: The Nansen Passport was issued to help stateless refugees after World War One. It gave refugees the chance to move across national borders. A total of 450,000 passports were issued. This one belonged to Anatol Heintz (1898–1975), who fled from Russia to Norway as a young man. He eventually became a professor of palaeontology. Facsimile: The National Archives of Norway

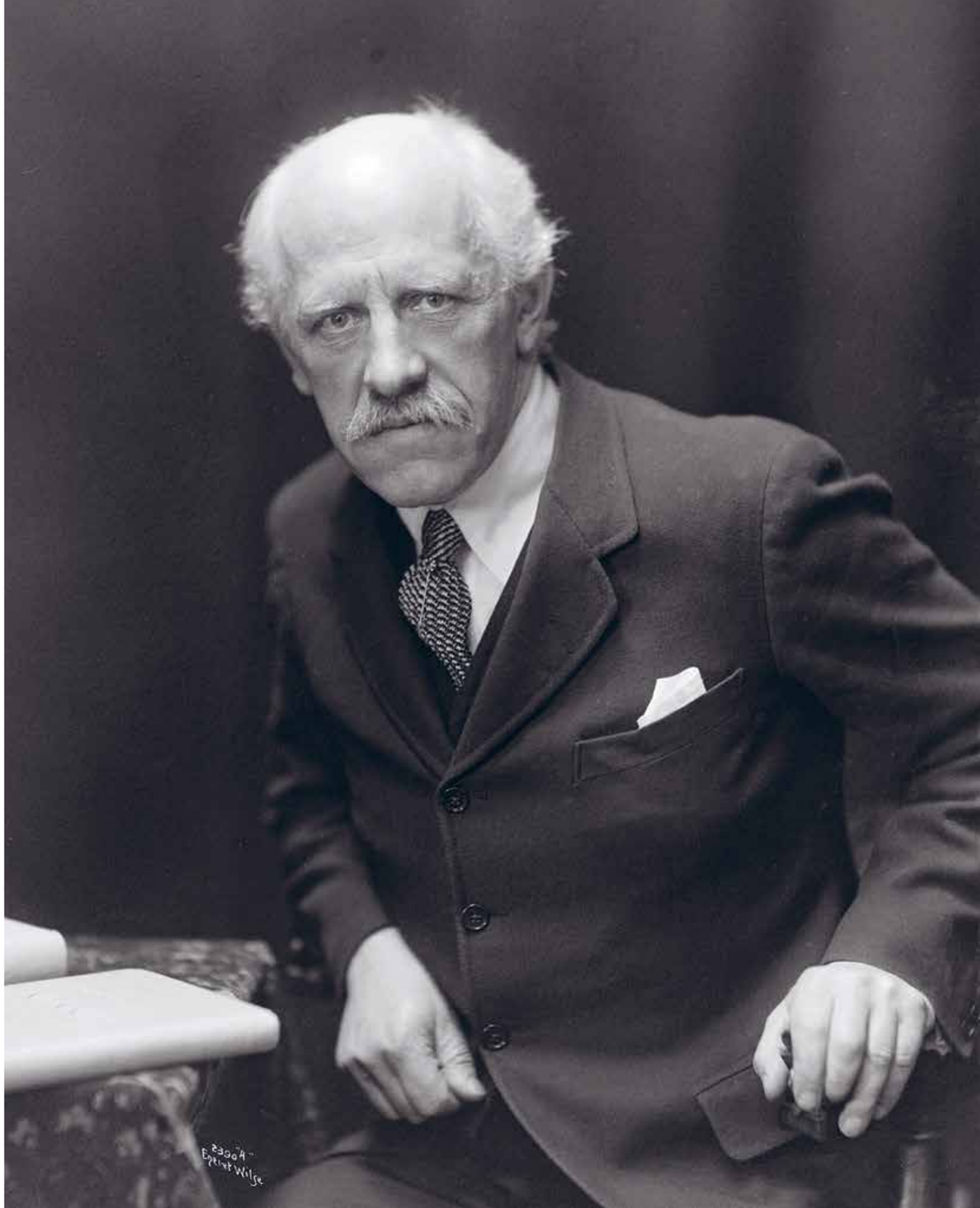
FROM CAMPAIGN TO ORGANISATION

Europahjelpen was initially a one-off fundraising campaign initiated by Norwegian People's Aid and the Norwegian Red Cross. It aimed to collect food under the slogan: "Help the starving in Europe". To start, Europahjelpen only collected food, not money. This was to avoid competition with the National Fund for Victims of War, which collected money for people in need in Norway.

A total of 600 local fundraising committees sent four million kilos of food to war-torn countries in Europe.

Europahjelpen grew in step with changing needs, and quickly went from a one-off campaign to becoming an umbrella organisation for a number of Norwegian voluntary organisations. The situation in Europe was still desperate and the need for aid enormous, so Europahjelpen lived on.

In the autumn of 1947, the founders, in consultation with the Norwegian



HERO AND HUMANIST: Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930) became world famous as a polar explorer. He was a professor and a naturalist, a diplomat and a political activist. In 1922, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his humanitarian and peace-building work. Photo: Anders Beer Wilse/ The National Library of Norway

Fredag morgen Aftenposten 24. mai

Europa sulter!

«Europahjelpens» mottagerinnsted i Oslo, ved den gamle brannstasjon. Matvarer til innsamlingen kan leveres her fra mandag.

Det er millioner av mennesker som sulter i Europa i dag. Det er vår plikt å gjøre hva vi kan for å redde disse menneskene fra sultedøden. Norges Røde Kors og Norsk Folkehjelp har derfor utvidet sin hjelpeaksjon til Østerrike til også å gjelde andre nødlidende land i Europa.

Det gjelder følgende land:

Østerrike, Tsjekkoslovakia, Frankrike, spanske emigranter i Frankrike, Nederland, Belgia, Polen, Ungarn, Hellas og Jugoslavia.

Det vil bli innsamlet matvarer fra private, firmaer og institusjoner, idet man regner med at det ligger store lager av matvarer rundt omkring i landet som ikke blir brukt. Vi har fått tillatelse til å samle inn følgende utenlandske matvarer:

Hestekjøtt eller leverpostei, kjøttpostei, tørrfisk eller sild i tomat, tørrede eller hermetiske grønnsaker, tørkeleverpostei, tran, fiskemel, knekkebrød og kjeks, tørrmelk, hvalkarbonade, corned beef og tørrkarnepølser.

Norges Røde Kors og Norsk Folkehjelp vil opprette innsamlingssentraler i alle norske byer, samt andre steder hvor en finner det hensiktsmessig. Hvert sted disse lokale innsamlingsstedene kommer i gang, vil dette bli kunngjort i den lokale presse. Nærmere innsamlingsinstruks og den lokale innsamlingssentrals adresse, vil også bli kunngjort på denne måte.

Transportsakyllene blir store, og en vil derfor oppfordre til det norske folk også å gi penger, slors eller lite som kan sendes til Postgiro-konto 66 «Europahjelpen».

Vi vil så vennlig vi kan oppfordre til det norske folks sans å gi slik bidrag, enten i form av matvarer eller penger til de stakkars sultne i Europa.

Oslo, den 20. mai 1946.

EUROPAHJELPEN

Norges Røde Kors
Arnold Bechtold (sign.)

Norsk Folkehjelp
Rolf Hofmo (sign.)

authorities, decided that Europahjelpen should organise a major fundraising campaign. In December of the same year, they formed a steering committee for Europahjelpen which – in addition to the Norwegian Red Cross and Norwegian People's Aid – consisted of representatives from a variety of organisations, including the Norwegian Women's Public Health Association, the Norwegian Housewives' Association, the Norwegian Press Association and the Ministry of Fisheries. The campaigns produced good results and the money went to families with many children, people with tuberculosis, the homeless and, later, also to refugees with disabilities.

While the acute relief phase in war-torn Europe gradually subsided in the early 1950s, the refugee problem persisted. In 1951, the UN General Assembly created the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which has since been the most central player in the international work for refugees.

The same year, the UN Refugee Convention was adopted to protect European refugees after World War Two. The convention secured people's right to seek asylum and enshrined the principle that no-one could be returned to a country where they risked persecution, torture or other inhumane treatment. The only condition was that they must have crossed an international border. In 1967, the UN member states adopted an additional protocol that extended the right to protection to refugees from all over the world, not just from Europe. At the same time, they removed the time limit set out in the original convention, which only applied to those who had fled events that occurred prior to 1951.

As early as the late 1940s, Europahjelpen became increasingly focused on providing aid to refugees – mostly outside Norway's borders, but also the reception and integration of refugees in Norway itself. The organisation had offices in both Hamburg and Vienna, and was involved in housing construction, health initiatives and schools, as well as cultural activities in refugee camps.

■□□ **EUROPAHJELPEN IN ACTION:** Norwegians' voluntary efforts for refugees and the destitute, especially in Germany and Austria, received international attention. Here, Europahjelpen distributes emergency supplies to people with tuberculosis in Vienna, Austria, around 1950. Photo: NRC

□■□ **GENEROSITY:** Europahjelpen collected food through appeals on the radio, commercials in cinemas and large adverts in the country's newspapers. Facsimile: Aftenposten, 24 May 1946

□□■ **CHILDREN HELPING CHILDREN:** Class 4C at Ullevål primary school packs toys they have collected for children affected by the war in Europe. The year is 1950, and the toys were to be distributed via Europahjelpen. Photo: NTB

HUNGARY, 1956: The first Hungarian refugees arrive at the border station in Buchs, Switzerland, 8 November 1956. Photo: Keystone/Photopress archive/Str/NTB

ISRAEL, 1948: A group of Palestinians flee a village in the Galilee district of Israel, five months after the new state was created. From 1948 to 1949, 750,000 Palestinians fled their homes, representing 75 per cent of the Arab population in Palestine. Photo: HO/Reuters/NTB

THE NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL IS BORN

While the Norwegian authorities were primarily concerned with the reception and control of foreign refugees in Norway, Europahjelpen (Aid to Europe) did not want to differentiate between refugees in Norway and those in other European countries, but wanted to address the refugee issue as a whole.

On 1 January 1953, the semi-governmental organisation called Det Norske Flyktningeråd, or the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), was established. It built on the existing umbrella organisation Europahjelpen, and had a board where six of the nine members came from voluntary organisations. The Ministry of Social Affairs appointed the three remaining board members. The composition of NRC provided a framework for how to envisage cooperation and responsibility-sharing, and provided important guidelines for post-war refugee policy.

NRC's task was twofold: to provide assistance to refugees around the world and help to refugees in Norway. The Ministry of Social Affairs financed the domestic work, while international aid was, in principle, to be financed through fundraising. This twofold task was far from unproblematic, and several conflicts in the following decades could be traced back to it.

The Norwegian authorities were not particularly engaged with international refugee work. In 1958, they expressed that they were "indifferent" to whether Norway should have a seat on UNHCR's Executive Committee. It is characteristic of the situation that, until the late 1960s, the Ministry of Social Affairs left it to NRC to organise the High Commissioner's visits to Norway.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, conflicts led to major refugee crises in several places in the world. The largest number fled in 1947, in connection with India's independence and the division of the country into the two states of India

and Pakistan.

In 1948–49, around 750,000 Palestinians fled when the state of Israel was established. The Korean War and France's colonial wars in Indochina also led to great suffering and large numbers of refugees. Nevertheless, the prevailing view was that the refugee problem was mainly related to the repercussions of World War Two, and that it would soon be overcome through joint efforts. Things didn't turn out that way.

The work to solve the refugee problems in Europe was approaching an end when the popular uprising in Hungary occurred in October 1956. In the months that followed, 200,000 Hungarians fled west and humanitarian aid organisations were put on high alert. More than 1,500 Hungarian refugees came to Norway in the winter of 1956–57. Support for the Hungarian refugees, both in Norway and abroad, was the most important focus for NRC in the late 1950s.

However, there was still a backlog of refugees in Europe, especially in Germany, Austria and Italy. UNHCR negotiated an agreement with Germany whereby they would pay compensation to refugees from Germany – something that was also practised in Norway.

Then, as now, there were intense discussions about how many, and not least, which refugees should be received in Norway. Government representatives emphasised society's need for refugees who were able to work or who could be rehabilitated to become contributing members of society, while the voluntary organisations were more concerned with the humanitarian aspect. They believed that those who needed help must receive help, regardless of whether they could make a living for themselves or not.

There was also disagreement about priorities. When the Ministry of Social Affairs wanted to use money from fundraising campaigns to help integrate refugees in Norway, the NGO representatives on the board of NRC protested. They believed such expenses were a state responsibility.

BEYOND EUROPE'S BORDERS

When the UN General Assembly declared 1959–60 as the International Year of the Refugee, the intention was to finally dismantle the European refugee camps. In Norway, NRC spearheaded a fundraiser under Fridtjof Nansen's slogan: "Compassion is *realpolitik*". The campaign was a great success and secured funding for NRC to continue its humanitarian aid work.

In 1961, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees stated that the time had come to lift our eyes to the rest of the world. NRC answered the call through fundraising campaigns and information about displacement issues. The same year, Norway celebrated Nansen's 100th birthday, which coincided with the awarding of the Nansen Refugee Award to King Olav, and NRC's 15th anniversary. On that occasion, NRC was promoted as a model for cooperation between the public sector and NGOs.

The woollen blanket fundraiser for Algerian refugees in 1962 was NRC's first involvement in refugee crises created by decolonisation and national liberation conflicts. The fundraising campaign produced 100,000 woollen blankets ahead of the winter in North Africa. About the same time, tens of thousands of refugees from Rwanda received aid from UNHCR and the Red Cross. NRC provided financial

> In Norway, NRC spearheaded a fundraiser under Fridtjof Nansen's slogan: "Compassion is *realpolitik*".

THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE REFUGEE, 1959/1960: The UN's first "international year" was dedicated to refugees. People all over the world raised money for the cause. In Norway, NRC's efforts included auctioning off cars. Here, the winner of the first car is about to be drawn in studio 23 at the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK). A police officer and a television presenter mix the pile of entries with shovels. Photo: NTB and NRC

JOINT CAMPAIGN FOR THE MIDDLE EAST: NRC sharply stepped up its activity in the Middle East following the Six-Day War in June 1967. It administered the work on the large Norwegian joint campaign for the Middle East the same year. Here, wool blankets are being collected for the refugees. Photo: NRC

TIBET, 1964: Tibetan refugees received a lot of attention in Norway. Here, the first group of a total of 40 Tibetan young people arrives in Norway. They were to receive an education in Gjøvik. Photo: Thorberg/NTB

ROYAL GIFTS: Crown Princess Sonja donated two gifts she had received from refugees during a trip to Malaysia for NRK's television fundraiser, 28 October 1979. Here, she is in the studio with presenter Lauritz Johnson. Photo: Bjørn Sigursøn/NTB

GAZA, 1965: Norwegian popstar Wenche Myhre was only 18 years old and already a superstar in Norway when she started a television fundraiser for a children's health clinic in Gaza. Here, she speaks at the opening of the fundraiser. Photo: NRK

> In April 1970, King Olav of Norway declared himself willing to be NRC's royal patron.

support for Norwegian mission projects in the area. In the years that followed, Africa came to make its mark on the refugee map, and NRC became involved in supporting refugees from Sudan, Angola and South Africa.

In the 1960s, NRC also became involved in the work for refugees in the Middle East, Tibetan refugees in India and Nepal, and Chinese refugees in Hong Kong and Macao.

However, at that time, NRC had only a small degree of responsibility for its own projects, and aid was mostly channelled through other organisations.

The UN played a crucial role in the decolonisation process, which accelerated in the 1950s and 1960s. In total, over 80 former colonies gained their independence, a process that affected over one billion people. In the Western world, a new generation began talking about international solidarity and responsibility for the "Third World".

But the UN still played a small role in resolving the issues associated with the large flows of refugees that arose in the wake of the conflicts in several developing countries. UNHCR had a very modest budget at the time and was primarily a lobbying organisation vis-à-vis the signatories of the Refugee Convention.

The situation of the Tibetan refugees received a great deal of attention in Norway. Tibetanerhjelpen ("Tibetan Aid"), led by Norwegian television host Lauritz Johnson, began a close working relationship with NRC. More than 40 Tibetan youths came to Norway and received an education in Gjøvik, becoming very popular with the Norwegian public. In Hong Kong and the small Portuguese colony of Macao, there were many refugees from China. NRC actively supported the prominent missionaries Annie Skau and Agnar Espegren in their work in these places.

The Palestinians already represented one of the world's largest refugee crises in the 1950s and 60s. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established in 1949, and by the mid-1960s, 900,000 Palestinian refugees were dependent on UNRWA's monthly meal rations.

The Middle East was also on NRC's agenda, and UNRWA's vocational school for Palestinian refugees in Gaza was significantly expanded with Norwegian funds in the early 1960s. When the young pop star Wenche Myhre started a fundraising campaign for a children's health clinic in Gaza in 1964, NRC allocated money to a similar paediatric clinic. The political conflict that led to the refugee crisis in the Middle East was sensitive, and humanitarian aid organisations had to exercise caution and diplomacy. NRC placed great emphasis on directing attention and assistance to both parties, and also provided funding for a school for Jewish immigrants in Natanya.

Following the Six Day War in 1967, Norwegian Church Aid, the Norwegian Red Cross, Save the Children and NRC joined forces on the "Joint Campaign for Middle East Refugees".

In April 1970, King Olav declared himself willing to be NRC's royal patron. Four years later, Crown Princess Sonja chaired the fundraising committee for "Refugee '74", the first TV fundraiser in Norway. The campaign brought in as much as NOK 22.5 million – a record sum in terms of private donations per inhabitant. In his 1974 New Year's speech, King Olav said:

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Norwegian Refugee Council's donors and all its helpers, including, to my delight, my daughter-in-law.

Crown Princess Sonja also sat on the committee for the fundraising campaign "Refugee '79".

MASS DISPLACEMENT AND AN IMMIGRATION BAN

Between 1960 and 1970, a total of 223 refugees came to Norway. Throughout the 1970s, immigration to Norway increased, and the number of refugees also began to rise. As a consequence, towards the end of the 1970s, NRC's foreign aid work was overshadowed by the great growth in its domestic workload.

The first large groups of "overseas" refugees who came to Norway in the early and mid-1970s were people fleeing Idi Amin's ethnic cleansing in Uganda and the dictatorships in Latin America, especially Chile. What was special about the Chilean refugees was that they were picked up directly from the country, with organised departure from the Norwegian embassy.

A few years later, large groups of Vietnamese boat people arrived. Of the 1,680 refugees who came to Norway in 1978–79, over 1,300 were from Vietnam.

Norway was not prepared for this increase in refugee numbers. As late as 1976, the Norwegian government's refugee quota was reserved for 50 disadvantaged European refugees. There was a clear mismatch between the number of refugees and the funds allocated. The state had fixed refugee quotas based on how many people were expected to arrive, and budgets were set accordingly. It became obvious that Norway's refugee policy needed updating.

While Norway had had free immigration, there was now a debate about limiting labour migration to Norway. The immigration ban, which was introduced in 1975, also had an impact on the reception of refugees. The ministries responsible wanted closer coordination between the refugee policy and the general immigration policy.

The period was marked by the Cold War, and in the Western world, refugee policy was in practice understood as asylum policy. The work was concentrated on helping refugees to find or receive asylum. The repatriation solution, i.e. that refugees could return home if conditions permitted, was hardly discussed.

The 1978 report on Norway's aid to refugees clearly stated that the political focus was to be on the immigration and asylum aspects of refugee work. In Norway, NRC was involved in the task of integrating refugees, and its activities abroad also aimed to support projects that made life easier for people in asylum.

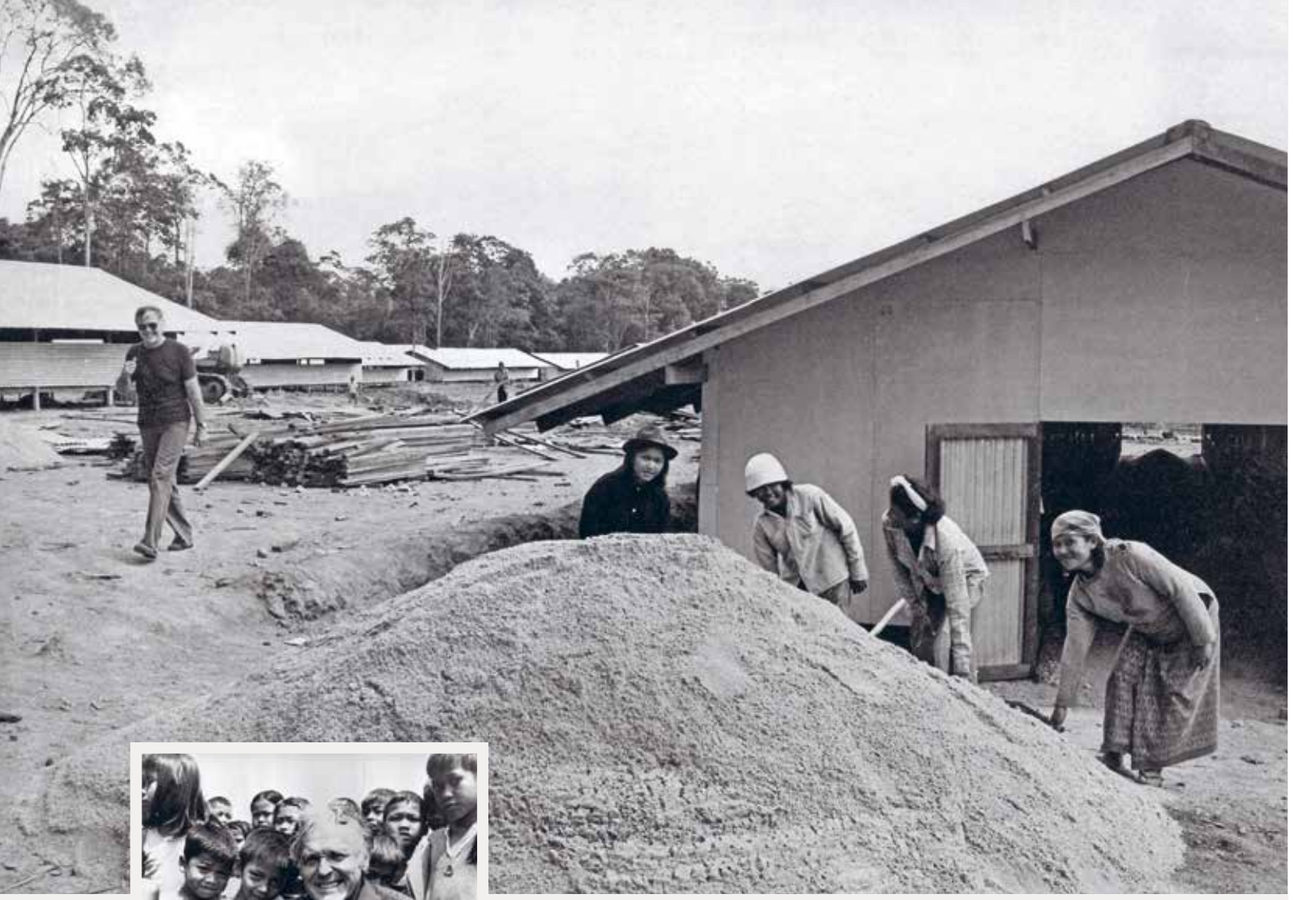
But the typical refugee of the 1980s, and even more so of the 1990s, was no longer an individual fleeing an authoritarian regime. The new situation was mass flight from war and violence. More and more people from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia applied for asylum in Norway. This development affected the entire international community and presented major challenges. NRC wanted to meet these challenges with aid from the Norwegian authorities and the Norwegian people by continuing its work for refugees, both at a practical level in the field and through active advocacy.

In the 1980s and 1990s, people's view of refugees in Norway began to shift. There was a great contrast between the small number of refugees who, a few decades earlier, had arrived in a very controlled way and gone straight into work, and those who were now arriving in far greater numbers on their own initiative, and were not permitted to find work. There was a growing suspicion

”
The typical refugee of the 1980s, and even more so of the 1990s, was no longer an individual fleeing an authoritarian regime.

BOAT REFUGEES, 1979: Vietnamese refugees are rescued in the South China Sea by the crew of the Norwegian cargo ship Lysekil in July 1979. Photo: Erik Berglund/ Aftenposten/NTB

VIETNAM, 1976: NRC Secretary General Wilhelm Bøe receives 18 Vietnamese refugees from two families on their arrival at Fornebu Airport, 16 September 1976. Photo: Oddvar Walle Jensen/NTB



FIRST NORWEGIAN IN HANOI

Tove Bjerkan was the first Norwegian to visit Hanoi after the American defeat in Vietnam in 1975. That same year, he was appointed to lead the work of NRC and Norwegian Church Aid from the main office in Bangkok.

There were large flows of refugees from neighbouring Laos and Cambodia in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Tove Bjerkan followed the entire Indochinese refugee drama closely, and his efforts made a big difference.

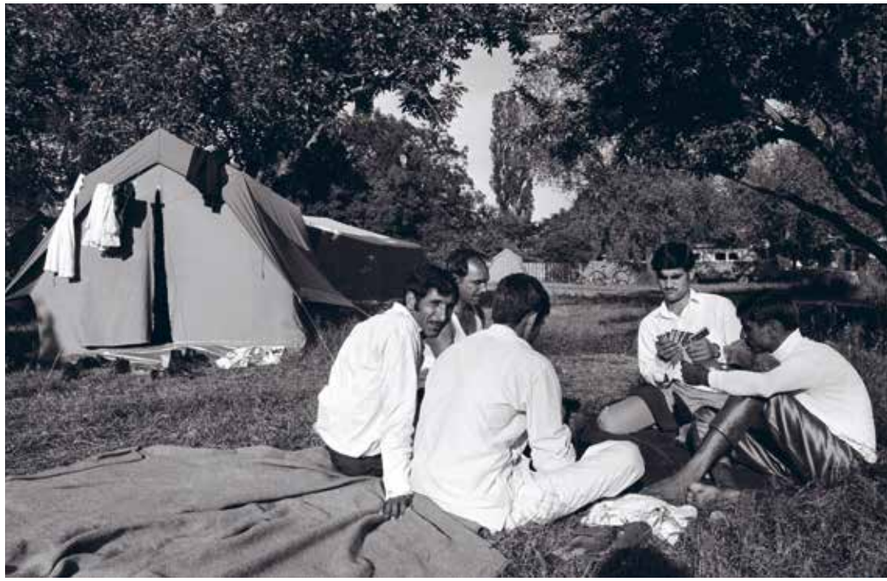
He was a driving force in helping thousands of Laotian refugees return home, and led vital humanitarian aid work for hundreds of thousands of Cambodian refugees on the border between Cambodia and Thailand. When NRC closed its office in Bangkok in 1989, Bjerkan continued to work for Cambodian refugees through the UN.

NEW REFUGEE CAMP: Tove Bjerkan inspects the construction of a refugee camp in Thailand on the border with Cambodia in the 1980s. Photo: NRC

A MONOLITH: Tove Bjerkan had great knowledge and an enormous network of contacts. Receiving a "briefing" from Bjerkan was sought after by both diplomats and journalists. Photo: Fredrik Schjander

THE COLD WAR: Until the mid-1970s, Norway received a number of refugees from Eastern Europe. In 1969, three young Poles jumped off the tourist ship "Batory" in Drøbak Sound and applied for asylum. In the photo, they are being interviewed by a journalist from NTB. Photo: NTB

LABOUR IMMIGRATION: Young Pakistani men with tourist visas are photographed at Ekeberg Campsite in Oslo in 1971. Four years later, Norway introduced an immigration ban. Photo: NTB



FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH NORWAY: Two refugees who have just arrived in the country receive advice from Tineke Stenstad, Director of NRC's social care department. The photo is from the early 1970s. Photo: NRC

of asylum seekers. Many Norwegians felt that asylum seekers were a burden on the welfare state and questioned whether they were "real" refugees.

INTERNAL STRIFE AND A NEW DIRECTION FOR NRC

The increase in the number of refugees to Norway made it clear that NRC's domestic department was not equipped to cope with the ever-increasing workload. At the same time, the authorities set a requirement for the professionalisation of integration work. All refugees who came to Norway were to be provided with education and housing, and it was the Ministry of Social Affairs' representatives in NRC – the domestic department – which was responsible for this. Pressure on this part of NRC increased.

This led to conflicts both within NRC, and with the Ministry of Social Affairs. In 1980, NRC's board asked the Ministry to create a separate, purely governmental body for reception and integration. The Ministry of Social Affairs took over responsibility for domestic work on 1 January 1981.

However, it still took a year and a half before the Norwegian Refugee Secretariat was established. During this time, the department that had been separated from NRC continued to use NRC's name. After the split, NRC set up an information department to inform people about its international work.

> On 1 July 1982, the work with refugees in Norway was officially separated from NRC's activities and taken over by the Norwegian Refugee Secretariat (later the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration).

On 1 July 1982, the work with refugees in Norway was officially separated from NRC's activities and taken over by the Norwegian Refugee Secretariat (later the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration). During this time, the department that had been separated from NRC continued to use NRC's name. After the split, NRC set up an information department to inform people about its international work.

On 1 July 1982, the work with refugees in Norway was officially separated from NRC's activities and taken over by the Norwegian Refugee Secretariat (later the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration). Under the Ministry of Social Affairs, this was a purely governmental body, with responsibility for receiving refugees and integrating them into Norwegian society.

NRC was left severely weakened. The organisation's new statutes stated, among other things, that "the Norwegian Refugee Council is an independent body, established by voluntary Norwegian aid organisations, whose task is to provide assistance to refugees outside Norway". The international work continued as before, primarily focusing on providing funding for projects run by other organisations.

However, NRC had gained a good reputation abroad. When UNHCR was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1981, High Commissioner Poul Hartling praised NRC's efforts on behalf of refugees worldwide.

The latter half of the 1970s had been strongly marked by developments in South-East Asia, and NRC made major contributions to humanitarian aid work in the region. From 1976 to 1986, around one million people fled from Vietnam alone. Of these, 680,000 were boat refugees. The Norwegian government promised to receive those who were picked up by Norwegian boats, which undoubtedly saved many lives. In addition, there were large numbers of refugees from Laos and Cambodia. NRC had primarily concentrated on providing humanitarian aid, but from 1981 onwards, long-term projects began to form an important part of its work.

In addition to project activities, information work became an important focus. The aim was to help generate a greater understanding among the Norwegian public of the situation facing refugees.

DRAMATIC REFUGEE NUMBERS AND NEW PROJECTS

At the beginning of the 1980s, there were around 10 million refugees worldwide, but that number rose to 17 million over the course of the decade. In addition, there was about the same number of internally displaced people – people forced to flee within their own homeland. Since they had not crossed an international border, these people were not legally considered to be refugees.

In Africa, the wars in the Horn of Africa, the civil war in Sudan and the conflicts in southern Africa contributed to a situation where a quarter of the world's refugees were located in nine countries on the African continent.

In South-East Asia, the situation was improving. Refugees continued to flow out of Vietnam throughout the 1980s, but their numbers were greatly reduced from 1989 onwards, when boat refugees no longer automatically received refugee status. The *Comprehensive Plan of Action (CMA)* was the first successful effort to end a refugee situation by using all three lasting solutions: repatriation, local integration and resettlement. Most of the latter took place in the United States, but some resettlement refugees also came to Norway.

In Latin America, the situation took a serious turn for the worse in the 1980s.

The civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala displaced more than one million people, mainly within the region.

But it was Afghanistan that attracted the most attention during those years. The 3.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan constituted the world's largest refugee population. A few million people had also fled to Iran and a large number were displaced within Afghanistan itself.

NRC's project activities had previously primarily focused on supporting the work of various operational organisations. But during the 1980s, NRC built up a project department and set up field offices in Thailand, Pakistan, Kenya and Costa Rica. Through the field offices, its focus turned in the direction of cooperation with local organisations. At the end of the decade, the organisation defined itself as a partially operational organisation.

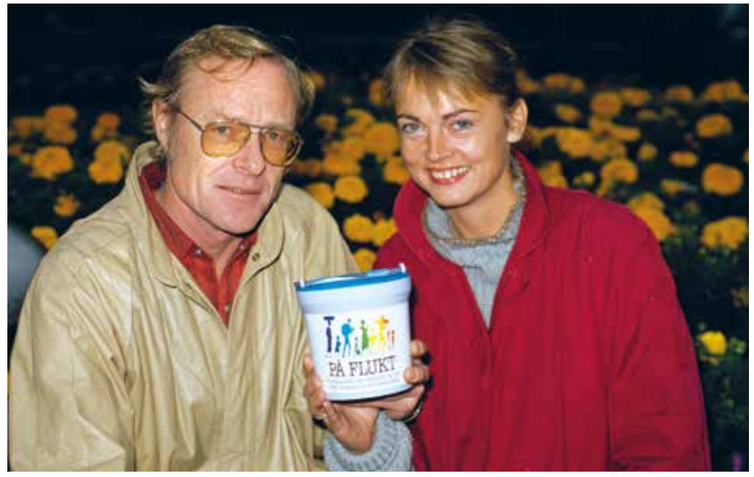
Acknowledging that several of the world's major refugee crises were long-lasting, NRC began to reconsider how to provide assistance. Humanitarian aid over a long period of time had a tendency to make the recipients passive. NRC therefore became involved in the task of finding solutions that, in the long run, could help refugees rely as little as possible on food aid.

This coincided with UNHCR developing into an humanitarian aid organisation in the 1980s, due to the growing gap between the number of refugees and its budget. The UNHCR succeeded to a lesser extent with lasting solutions.

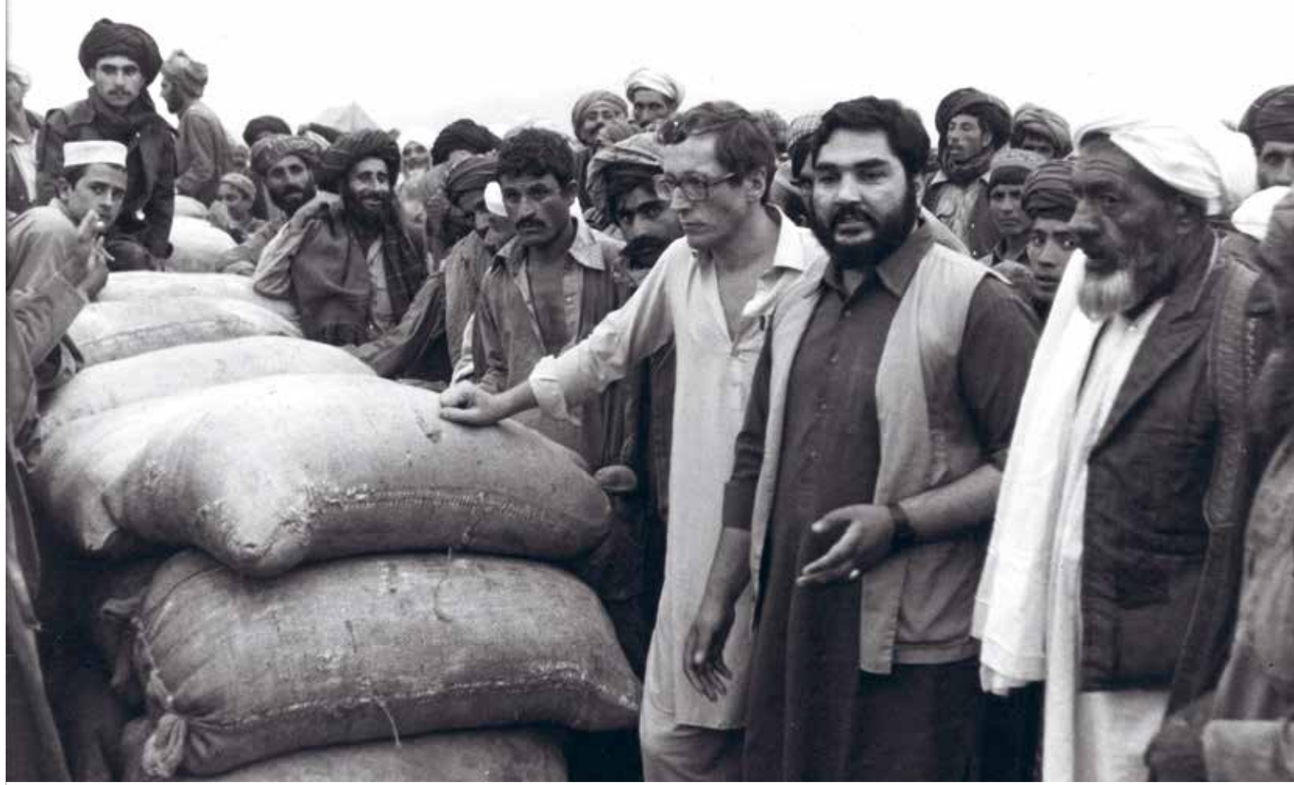
NRC was well placed to take on assignments and contribute to the protection of refugees. It was in the phase between humanitarian aid projects and long-lasting development projects that NRC would become involved. The overall goal was to come up with lasting solutions, where voluntary repatriation was the best option.

NRC placed special emphasis on establishing women's projects and educational opportunities for children. When NRC was again awarded the Norwegian national telethon, "TV-aksjonen", in 1988, it was an important vote of confidence. It brought in nearly NOK 100 million for the organisation's work. That money would prove to be very useful.

The Cold War was coming to an end, but the world's hopes for a new and more peaceful future would not last long. New conflicts were set to displace more people than ever before.



TV-AKSJONEN, 1988: Journalist Håkon Børde and actress Minken Fosheim were presenters for the Norwegian telethon on 15 October 1988, which raised money for NRC. Photo: Rolf Øhman/ Aftenposten



PAKISTAN, 1984: After going without food for five days, newly arrived refugees from Afghanistan receive bread flour in the transit camp Kacha Gari. Johan Sigmunn Hebnes, NRC's representative in Peshawar, is pictured here with representatives of the refugees, among others. Photo: Tore J. Brevik/NRC

CLEAN WATER: NRC's Johan Sigmunn Hebnes checks the water quality in a well that NRC had drilled for Afghan refugees in Pakistan in the mid-1980s. Photo: NRC

FISHMEAL SAVED LIVES: NRC's warehouse in Aranyaprathet, Thailand, in the 1980s. Fishmeal was an important source of protein and minerals for the Cambodian refugees. Photo: Tove Bjerkan/NRC

FLED FROM MASSACRE: Bosnian Muslims on their way to safety after fleeing Srebrenica, where around 8,000 boys and men were killed by Serb forces in 1995. Photo: Nick Sharp/ Reuters/NTB

THE 1990s: A NEW ERA FOR THE WORLD AND NRC

THE NEED FOR ASSISTANCE EXPLODES

At the end of the Cold War in the early the 1990s, a new political climate emerged. At the same time as there was a de-escalation of tensions and new democracies developed, a series of conflicts came to light, which had previously been overshadowed and restricted by the Cold War. Optimism was rapidly replaced with pessimism. The flow of refugees increased and refugee camps were re-established in Europe. The international community was not prepared for what lay ahead.

In the wake of the Gulf War in 1990 and the Balkan Wars, which started in 1991, the need for international aid and protection for displaced people exploded.

The international community – comprised of states, the UN and voluntary organisations – sought increased capacity, increased competence and new solutions. Against this backdrop, NRC embarked on a comprehensive reform process in order to be able to best contribute to solving these new challenges.

The five most important elements in this work were a stronger focus on lasting solutions, increased operational capacity, internal legal expertise related to refugees, alliance-building and a clearer role as an advocate for displaced people, both nationally and internationally.

NRC's ability and willingness to be on the ball throughout the 1990s would prove to be crucial for the organisation's growth and relevance. The first example of this came in 1991 when NRC signed an agreement with UNHCR to establish a standby roster that would be at the UN's disposal.

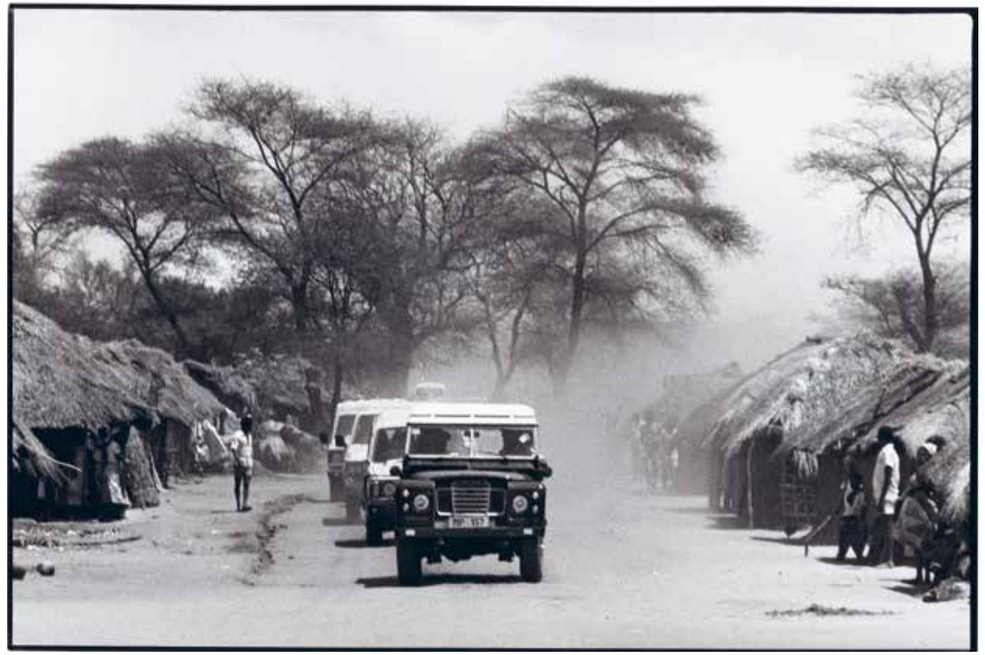
This global pool of experts contributed more than anything else to putting NRC on the map in the international humanitarian environment. NRC also became a major advocate for an ever-growing group of displaced people – internally displaced people.

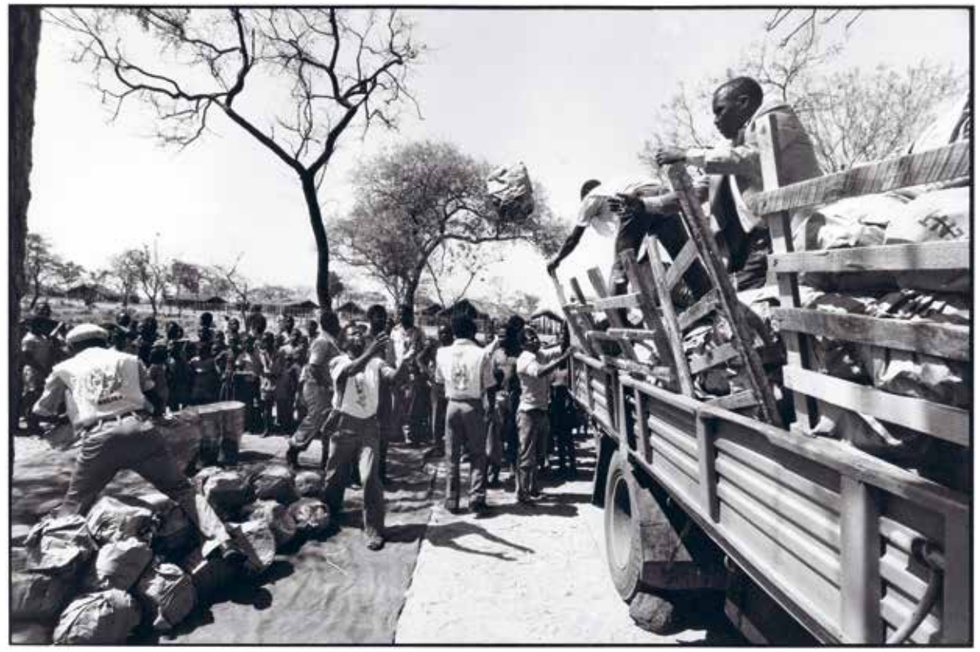
In the early 1990s, NRC began working closely with the UN to improve the protection of people forced to flee inside their own country. The expansion of programme activities would also give the organisation greater heft and influence. From having a large number of smaller projects spread across many areas, NRC began concentrating its project activities on four areas at the outset of the 1990s: Vietnam, Mozambique/Malawi, Latin America and Afghanistan. Now was the time to make a quantum leap.

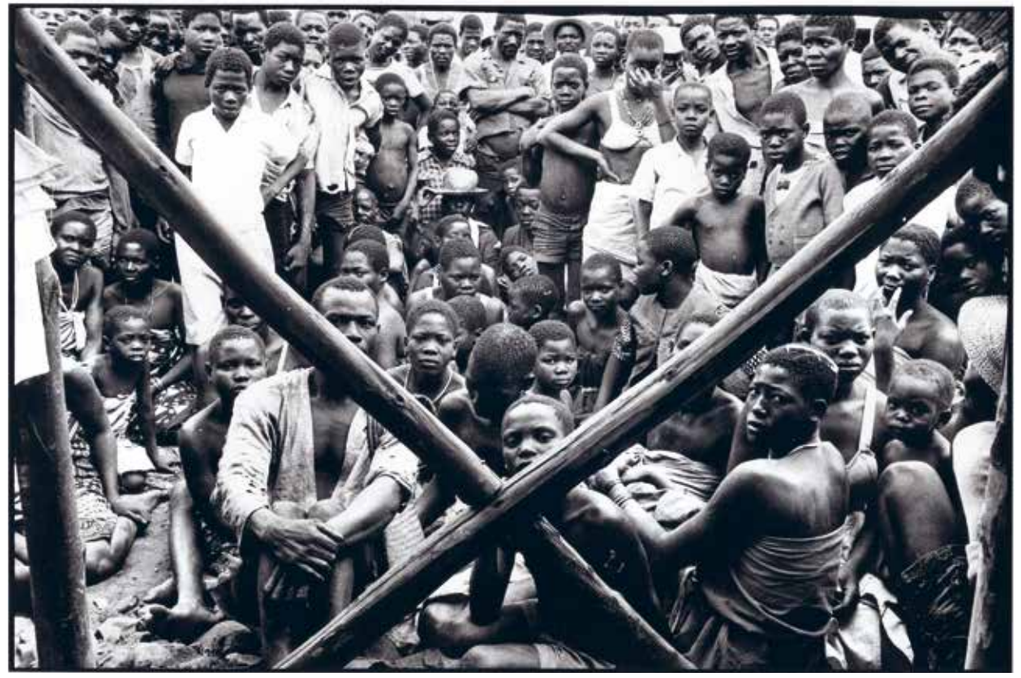
BURUNDI, 1988: The civil war in Burundi claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. Gudrun Engstrøm of NRC talks to Violetta who witnessed the killing of her entire family. Violetta herself was buried alive twice. Photo: Nils Inge Kruhaug/ NTB Pluss

DR CONGO, 1995: Rwandan refugees in a refugee camp in Goma, DR Congo. There is a great shortage of food and many refugees die of hunger and lack of clean drinking water. Solidified lava from volcanic eruptions prevents water drilling. Photo: Mikkel Østergaard/Samfoto/NTB

BURUNDI, 1996: The civil war in Burundi intensified in 1996 and led to massive numbers of displaced people, both within the country and over the border to neighbouring countries. Many fled by boat across Lake Tanganyika. NRC started work for internally displaced people in Burundi towards the end of the year. Photo: L. Taylor/UNHCR







MALAWI, 1988:
NRC provided assistance to Mozambican refugees in Malawi from the late 1980s, and assisted with their return to Mozambique following the 1992 peace agreement. Photo: Rune Eraker

THE STANDBY ROSTER – A BREAKTHROUGH IN COOPERATION WITH THE UN

During the 1990–91 Gulf War, the international community had difficulty dealing with the many Kurdish refugees seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) therefore asked NRC and the Norwegian authorities to assist with personnel who had experience from crises. UNHCR wanted to improve the humanitarian response, which had been far from satisfactory.

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it was willing to finance a global civilian provider of expertise. NRC was given the job of building up, administering and further developing this group. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) was also asked to contribute personnel to northern Iraq. They also established a standby roster, funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the time that followed, NRC and DRC developed a close collaboration in several areas. In 1991, NRC signed an agreement with UNHCR to establish a standby roster that would be at the UN's disposal. The time it would take to get personnel out into the field could thus be reduced to a minimum. With a faster response, more lives could be saved.

Through the standby roster, many Norwegians received training in crisis management and humanitarian work. It gave NRC access to humanitarian crises at an early stage and the organisation gained unique insight into how humanitarian operations worked, both the good and the bad. As NRC established new country offices, personnel from the standby roster acted as door openers to partners at all levels. They provided information about each country and its security situation, as well as practical support in the start-up phase.

NORSTAFF, as the original pool of experts was called, was established through a cooperation agreement between NRC and UNHCR.

The agreement was a formalisation of the ad hoc cooperation during the crisis in northern Iraq. The enormous suffering of the Kurdish civilian population had revealed major shortcomings in the ability of UN agencies to respond quickly and effectively to a major humanitarian crisis. The first people to be sent out were typically recruited through acquaintances and existing networks, including through the Norwegian Scout Association. The focus was on finding practitioners, and people who could work under basic and demanding conditions.

SPIN-OFFS AND ADDITIONAL COOPERATION AGREEMENTS

NORSTAFF quickly became part of the Norwegian Emergency Preparedness System for Humanitarian Crises (NOREPS), which consisted of Norwegian emergency aid services and response personnel. Throughout the 1990s, NRC entered into formal emergency preparedness agreements with an increasing number of UN organisations, such as UNHCR, UNICEF, OCHA, WFP, WHO, UNESCO and UNDP, in addition to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which was not part of the UN at that time.

In 1995, NRC took the initiative, via NORSTAFF, to develop comprehensive action packages, with personnel, goods and services within telecommunications, water and sanitation, education, health, transport and logistics as well as shelter. The packages were developed according to a modular principle so that they could be easily adapted to local conditions.

A package was designed to be implemented at 72 hours' notice, the same timescale that personnel could be deployed from NRC's standby roster. The task of developing these packages was distributed among four of the largest aid organisations in Norway. The packages were jointly owned, and could be used freely by the four organisations, regardless of who developed which package.

In 1995, with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NRC established an African provider of expertise (NORAFRIC), which in structure and function was an extension of NORSTAFF. This was a direct follow-up of the conclusions from the *Partnership in Action process* (PARinAC), which looked at the coordination of humanitarian aid and building capacity both nationally and in the places where operations were taking place. NRC had been an important driving force in this process, which was a series of conferences aimed at improving cooperation between UNHCR and the voluntary humanitarian organisations.

So far, humanitarian providers of expertise had largely consisted of personnel with a western background, but the creation of NORAFRIC was an attempt to change this. Initially, NORAFRIC consisted of 50 people from Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Uganda. NORAFRIC was the first in a number of regional providers of expertise established by NRC.

SENT TO RWANDA: Øyvind Olsen and Nils Olav Gjone were among the experts sent out by NORDEM to assist the war crimes tribunal in investigating the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. The photo is from Ntarama, where 5,000 people were killed in the spring of 1994. Photo: Richard Skretteberg/NRC

FIRST ASSIGNMENT: Kurdish refugees on the border between Iraq and Turkey in 1991. The new standby roster assisted and put NRC on the map in the international humanitarian environment. Photo: Knut Snare/Aftenposten/NTB

DIFFERENT TYPES OF EXPERTISE

Norway's role in democracy building, human rights work and tribunals following abuses during wars grew throughout the 1990s. In 1995, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took the initiative for an agreement between the Institute for Human Rights (later the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights) and NRC to strengthen the

Norwegian Resource Bank for Democracy and Human Rights (NORDEM). NRC was given administrative and operational responsibility, while the Institute for Human Rights was given responsibility for human rights expertise.

In 1995 alone, NORDEM personnel participated as election observers in Guatemala, Russia, South Africa, Tanzania and Haiti. The largest single operation was in the West Bank and Gaza, on the occasion of the forthcoming Palestinian elections. NORDEM was also involved in the war crimes tribunal for Rwanda.

On behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NRC was also given responsibility for recruiting and employing the civilian members of multinational teams of observers without a UN mandate. This was for areas where the Norwegian authorities had played an active role in peace processes and the UN was not wanted by the parties involved.

One example was when NRC sent civilian personnel to the *Temporary International Presence in Hebron* (TIPH) in 1994. TIPH was created on the Israeli-occupied West Bank to save the Oslo process, after the Palestinians threatened to withdraw following the Cave of the Patriarchs massacre. TIPH was given a mandate as an international observer. The first mission lasted only three months, in the summer of 1994, when the Israeli and Palestinian authorities could not agree on an extension of the mandate. The second mission lasted from 1996 until 2019.

Other examples immediately after the turn of the millennium included sending of personnel to the *Joint Monitoring Mission* (JMC) from 2002 to 2005, a peacekeeping operation in the Nubian Mountains of Sudan, and to the *Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission* (SLMM) from 2002 to 2008, an international team of observers who monitored the ceasefire agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tigers.

The total number of deployments per year – through NORSTAFF, NORDEM and teams of observers – remained stable between 260 and 290 from the end of the 1990s to 2004. However, the proportion of NORSTAFF deployments to the UN increased markedly, increasing from a third to a half of all deployments from 2004 to 2007. While election observers from NORDEM were often out on assignments for a couple of weeks, other missions could last up to a year.

In the 1990s, NRC's ability to build and operate global providers of expertise and quickly recruit the right personnel for international assignments made the organisation highly relevant to the UN, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other partners. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the most important partner in the development of NORSTAFF, and was involved in taking the initiative for several of the new providers of expertise and their strategic development.

But these providers had different purposes. NORSTAFF's most important function was to strengthen the UN's capacity in connection with humanitarian aid operations and to provide protection in crisis situations. This purpose was founded in NRC's mandate and in Norwegian foreign policy. When it came to TIPH, the deployment of the peacekeeping force in Sudan and the international observers in Sri Lanka, NRC was in practice a service-provider for missions where the purpose was linked to other Norwegian interests and foreign policy goals.

THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE: In the wake of the genocide, more than two million people fled Rwanda. The photo shows refugees on the border with DR Congo in 1995. NORSTAFF sent out a large number of experts who assisted various UN organisations in the relief work. Photo: Mikkel Østergaard/Samfoto/NTB

HEBRON, 1997: Two Norwegian observers with the *Temporary International Presence in Hebron* (TIPH) discuss with an Israeli soldier on his daily patrol rounds. The group was responsible for monitoring the agreement between the Israeli and Palestinian governments. The city on the occupied West Bank has several large, illegal Israeli settlements that continue to create tension and conflict. Photo: Rula Halawani/Reuters/NTB

PIONEER AND VETERAN: In 1991, Rolf Moi was one of the first to be sent out from the new pool of experts. He helped build irrigation systems to strengthen agriculture in Kurdish areas of Iraq. Here he is pictured on a later mission to Afghanistan in 1992.
Photo: Private

STANDING READY FOR 20 YEARS

Rolf Moi participated in NORSTAFF's first assignment to assist Kurds who were forced to flee from Iraq to Turkey and Iran in 1991.

"I had just returned to Jæren after several years as a missionary when I saw an advert in the Norwegian newspaper Aftenbladet," says Moi.

In the advert, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees called for people with foreign experience to take on a new assignment.

"I think it was my second day back at work, but I sent them all my papers. From there, things moved quickly. I was one of ten who were called in for an interview," he says.

In Kurdistan, Moi, an agronomist, was given responsibility for helping to secure the farming work. He slept and did admin work in one of Saddam Hussein's abandoned bunkers.

"The bunker was terribly cold in the winter. We kept a woodstove and two large generators going around the clock. Still, we wore our thermal clothes all day long. But that was nothing compared to what the Kurds were going through", says Moi.

"People lived in caves, in tents and in bombed-out buildings. The conditions were harsh. I will never forget how grateful the Kurds were for the help they received from us, regardless of the amount of aid we were able to provide."

Moi recalls that things moved very fast during this first assignment.

"I can't say that I remember any briefings, either before or after. But I went to Afghanistan not long afterwards, and then we had briefings in Oslo and Geneva before our departure. So there was a big improvement just between the first two assignments."

Later, Moi participated in a series of missions, including in Angola, Burundi and DR Congo. His toughest experience was in Rwanda, where he provided water to internally displaced people following the genocide and discovered that many of those he was there to assist were killed.

At the end of 2004, he went to Sri Lanka a few days after the tsunami had hit and helped NRC rebuild destroyed schools.

> The convoys were the very lifeline of international aid work in the Balkans.

THE CONVOYS IN BOSNIA

When war broke out in the Balkans in 1992, Europe was left with a refugee catastrophe on its own soil. The situation showed that not even Europe was safe from war and conflict. Television footage of the killing of civilians, inhumane detention camps, torture and large numbers of refugees made a big impression.

In Bosnia, hundreds of thousands of people were displaced. They lacked everything – food, medicine and shelter. Convoys to those in need ran through areas where the war raged. Norway, Denmark and the United Kingdom took on the responsibility of building up the dangerous but vital supply lines to the besieged areas. When the convoys began to roll in the autumn of 1992 under the leadership of NRC, they were invaluable to the hard-pressed civilian population.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs envisioned that one of the largest Norwegian humanitarian organisations would be responsible for the Norwegian contribution. But the need was urgent, and none of the organisations were able to commit themselves at short notice. Therefore, NRC was asked – and immediately said yes. However, the organisation did not have an office in the Balkans, and for the first few years the work was run out of Oslo. NRC worked closely with the Danish Refugee Council in the Balkans. The convoys in Bosnia became one of the best examples of fruitful Danish-Norwegian cooperation. The supply line also became an important line of contact into the war zones. Personnel, letters and messages could be transported in and out by the convoys. Few of those who participated had experience or education in this type of work, but they showed great loyalty and commitment.

The convoys were the lifeline of international aid work in the Balkans, according to former NorwegianForeign Minister and High Commissioner for Refugees Thorvald Stoltenberg. At its peak, 90 people and 60 vehicles were in action. In total, NRC recruited 200 people, both from Norway and from the local communities.

The convoys in the Balkans stood as an example of NRC's ability to adapt and to handle difficult and dangerous assignments in a professional manner. The aid work was also an example of the "Norwegian model", which emphasised close cooperation between the authorities and NGOs – a unique model in an international context.

FROM CONVOYS TO PROGRAMMES

The convoys in Bosnia were managed by the Oslo office until 1994. NRC then established offices in Croatia, and later in Bosnia and Serbia. Now, work began to repair and build new homes for those who had been internally displaced, as well as to secure water supplies and establish schools.

For much of the 1990s, NRC's programme activities in the former Yugoslavia accounted for more than half of its total activity.

The many internally displaced people, as well as those who had had their homes destroyed by acts of war in Bosnia, were in great need of help. In return for homeowners agreeing to house displaced people for a specified period, NRC

THE CONVOYS IN BOSNIA: In April 1996, the last lorries and drivers returned to Norway. Here, the drivers celebrate the conclusion of the operation on their return to Oslo. Photo: NRC

EUROPE ON THE REFUGEE MAP AGAIN: Lars Tangen, Director of Operations at NRC (right), together with two representatives from UNHCR, coordinates convoys with humanitarian aid supplies for refugees in the Tuzla and Zenica area, after the Serbs occupied the Bosnian city of Srebrenica in July 1995. Photo: Aleksander Nordahl/ NTB

REBUILDING IN KOSOVO: Logistics and transport coordinator Ole Saltvik from NRC stands beside Kosovo Albanian refugees who have returned home to a house in ruins. NRC followed up refugees who returned home and conveyed their experiences to others who were still in exile. Photo: Lise Åserud/ NTB

built an extra floor or extension onto existing houses. In this way, the organisation helped both those who had been forced to flee and the local population. Homeowners were selected in consultation with the local authorities.

The water supply was old and often damaged. NRC therefore chose to drill new wells locally. Here, too, the work was carried out in close collaboration with the local authorities, which proved to be an effective approach.

The massacres in Srebrenica and other areas in July 1995 took place towards the end of the war in Bosnia. Rumours were swirling in advance that something terrible was about to happen, but there was great uncertainty. The terrible abuses came as a shock, both those working in the area and to the outside world. The UN forces were paralysed.

The day before the massacres began, women and children fleeing over the frontlines signalled that something was brewing. NRC therefore decided to send all of its trucks fully loaded with humanitarian aid to central and northern areas of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The decision received immediate support from Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. NRC's decisive response gave local UNHCR offices the opportunity to meet the flow of people with far more resources than would otherwise have been possible.

Several of the convoys remained in the area for a lengthy period to give UNHCR increased capacity. The water supply was critical, and NRC's water drilling rig was therefore crucial in preventing a major disaster. The man who operated the rig worked three days straight – night and day – and managed to secure the water supply in record time.

Towards the end of the decade, the war in Kosovo led NRC to launch projects in Albania and Macedonia to assist Kosovo Albanian refugees. After the war ended, the organisation established a base in Kosovo to support with the reconstruction work.

THE CAUCASUS BECOMES AN IMPORTANT PROGRAMME AREA

In addition to the former Yugoslavia, activity also increased in the Caucasus. In 1995, NRC established a regional office covering Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, 15 independent states were formed. In the Caucasus, this led to a number of internal conflicts affecting all three countries in the region. Russia was involved in some of these conflicts. NRC opened an office in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1994. The main focus was the nearly 300,000 internally displaced people in the country. Most were living under very basic conditions in old hotels, sanatoriums and factory buildings, and had a particular need for food and services for their children. NRC's aim was to ensure that those who had been displaced could have as normal a daily life as possible.

As time went on, the focus shifted towards creating lasting solutions, especially through better and more permanent living conditions, and towards trying to integrate the displaced people into Georgian society. The challenge with this approach was that it could give the impression that the Georgian authorities accepted the loss of the territories in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The authorities did not want that. Tensions rose between Russia and Georgia, and war broke out again in the summer of 2008.

In Azerbaijan, the armed conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave had already begun in 1988. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a full-scale war broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The enclave was located inside Azerbaijan, but consisted mainly of ethnic Armenians. When Armenian separatists took control of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent areas, it displaced the Azerbaijani part of the population. This led to retaliatory actions where the Armenian population in the rest of Azerbaijan were forced to flee to Armenia.

Russia negotiated a fragile ceasefire in 1994, but there have been repeated clashes in recent years. In 2020, full war broke out again, and Azerbaijan regained parts of the area it had lost 30 years earlier.

In the first years of the conflict, NRC's work in Armenia and Azerbaijan was led from its office in Georgia, but it later established offices in both countries.

NEW PROGRAMME COUNTRIES IN A DECADE OF CIVIL WARS

The conclusion of a peace agreement in 1992 enabled Mozambican refugees to return home, and NRC gradually phased out its activities for refugees from Mozambique in Malawi. NRC provided assistance during the return process and continued working in Mozambique until 1996.

The civil war in Guatemala lasted from 1960 to 1996, when a peace agreement was signed. NRC assisted with the return and reintegration of refugees who had resided in neighbouring Mexico until 1998.

In Vietnam, NRC supported with the repatriation of Vietnamese people who

AZERBAIJAN, 1994: Merethe Kvernrød from NRC is surrounded by a group of frustrated displaced people in Imishli. They feel forgotten by the world community after fleeing Nagorno-Karabakh due to the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Photo: Rune Eraker

AZERBAIJAN, 1994: Internally displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh have sought refuge in Imishli, Azerbaijan. From a distance, they can look over to the area they fled from, which is now controlled by Armenia. Photo: Rune Eraker

GEORGIA, 1997: Internally displaced people receive towels and other hygiene items from NRC. Photo: Gia Chkhartishvili/NRC

were living in camps in nearby countries and who had not been granted asylum status. NRC had ensured in advance that the situation for the returnees was not dangerous. This is an example of how the end of the Cold War changed refugee policy.

In 1993, NRC withdrew from Vietnam, as there was no longer a need for its expertise in refugee issues. Norwegian Church Aid took over responsibility for the continuation of NRC's projects. For years, NRC and Norwegian Church Aid had been cooperating on emergency aid and long-term assistance in Afghanistan and for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. In 1996, Norwegian Church Aid took over sole responsibility for this work.

In the mid-1990s, Africa was still the major displacement continent, with over 20 million refugees and internally displaced people. After phasing out its work in Mozambique, NRC was able to step up activities in Angola, where it had established a presence in 1995.

As the conflicts in El Salvador and Guatemala gradually came to an end, the armed conflict in Colombia escalated. As early as 1991, NRC was providing support for various projects in the country, and eventually for Colombian refugees in neighbouring countries, through the consortium *Project Counselling Service* (PCS).

An entirely new area for NRC was West Africa, where horrific civil wars raged during the 1990s. The organisation established a presence in both Sierra Leone and Liberia in 1999.

Common to several of the new programme countries was the high number of internally displaced people. The various UN organisations with which NRC worked closely, often had limited mandates or chose for other reasons to distinguish between internally displaced people and refugees. NRC did not make the same distinction, as long as the need for help and protection was the same. On the contrary, NRC nearly always included internally displaced people as a target group – sometimes even as a dominant target group, such as in Colombia.

GUATEMALA, 1996: Two children born in exile in Mexico are in their home country for the first time. The photo is from their new home in Petén, Guatemala in 1996. NRC phased out its work in the country in 1998, after more than four decades of civil war. Photo: UNHCR

AFGHANISTAN: The civil war in Afghanistan led to great suffering, and several hundred thousand people were forced to flee in the early 1990s. This boy lost his leg when he stepped on a mine in the capital Kabul. Children were particularly vulnerable to mines. Photo: Aleksander Nordahl/NTB

A FOCUS ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

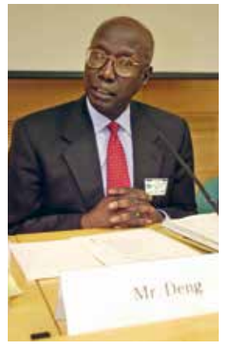
In the early 1990s, more and more people were forced to flee due to internal conflicts, civil wars and human rights violations. Many did not cross any international borders, but remained displaced in their home countries. They were not covered by the Refugee Convention and thus were not entitled to international protection.

The United Nations established the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in 1991, and both within the UN and among international humanitarian organisations, there was agreement that new measures were needed to provide assistance and protection. Common to all internally displaced people was that their country's authorities could not or would not provide the protection that all states are obliged to provide to their own citizens. In many cases, people were displaced precisely by their own authorities – as in Rwanda, Sudan, Sri Lanka and the Balkans.

The situation for internally displaced people was often as difficult as for refugees, and in many places, women and children comprised the majority of those who had been displaced. It soon became clear that the international community and humanitarian organisations had few tools at their disposal to meet these challenges. They could not intervene in what the affected states defined as internal affairs, despite the fact that all people, including internally displaced people, are protected by humanitarian law. In many of the conflict areas, national authorities were concerned with asserting their own sovereignty and armed groups did not want to let international actors into areas under their control. The humanitarian aid apparatus was dependent on finding practical solutions in every situation, and the result was often a minimum of protection and assistance.

NRC quickly became aware that there were major shortcomings in international protection, and realised it needed to develop its own instruments to help protect internally displaced people. It was not appropriate or desirable to reopen negotiations on the Refugee Convention. NRC therefore began a long-term collaboration with the diplomat Francis M. Deng from South Sudan, who in 1992 was appointed by the UN Secretary-General as the first special representative for internally displaced people. His mandate was to draw up guidelines for legal standards for the protection and assistance of internally displaced people.

On the initiative of NRC, among others, painstaking work began to survey the number of internally displaced people worldwide in the 1990s. Producing realistic and credible statistics presented major methodological challenges, partly because the international community lacked access in many places.



INTERNALLY DISPLACED: In 1992, Francis M. Deng was appointed the UN's first Special Representative for Internally Displaced Persons. Here, he participates in the launch of humanitarian aid appeals for Sudan and Afghanistan in Oslo in 2000. Photo: Erlend Aas/ NTB

A UNIQUE KNOWLEDGE BASE ABOUT INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

Shortly after Francis M. Deng was appointed UN Special Representative for Internally Displaced Persons in 1992, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) was established to coordinate work between the UN and international humanitarian organisations. The IASC gradually took the initiative to provide access to more and better information about internally displaced people.

Since NRC had started a collaboration with Francis M. Deng early on and taken on the role as an advocate for internally displaced people, its office in Geneva was asked to contribute. The enquiry sparked positive interest at NRC's head office in Oslo. When the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also promised support, NRC's board gave the go-ahead for the project, which was later dubbed the *Global IDP Project.*

To ensure it had the relevant expertise, NRC sought cooperation with the *Refugee Studies Centre* (RSC) at the University of Oxford. They had relevant methodological knowledge and experience with data collection. NRC established a full-time position, and two people were hired part-time to start the work. The aim was to gather reliable information and publish a yearbook on internal displacement caused by conflict. NRC collaborated with the RSC on the launch of the periodical *Forced Migration Review*, and contributed a number of articles in the years that followed.

NRC's office in Geneva was responsible for administration, donor contact and cooperation with the UN – especially with IASC, OCHA and with Francis M. Deng.

In 1998, NRC's *Global IDP Project* published the book *Internally Displaced People – A Global Survey.* The original plan was for this to be an annual publication, but it was quickly decided to replace the yearbook with an online database. Newly hired staff took up where the yearbook left off. The content and working methods were not changed, and the academic approach of Oxford was retained. The *Global IDP Database* was launched in December 1999.

An electronic database provided the opportunity to share knowledge without going via the cumbersome route of printing and physically distributing books and journals, and made it possible to continuously update information. In retrospect, it may seem that the transition to a database was obvious, but at the time, it was seen as a brave and radical decision.

The work with the content of the database became significantly more extensive and resource-intensive than anyone had anticipated at the outset. Information was rarely readily available and sensitive issues emerged. It was important not to make mistakes. By constantly seeking out new sources and carefully verifying and cross-checking information, the *Global IDP Project* was able to collect reliable data. Only very rarely did they have to settle for just one source. On the other hand, sometimes the flood of information became very large and thus labour-intensive. Much had to be reviewed before it was possible to distinguish what was essential and relevant.

COLOMBIA, 1997: The Pavarando camp for internally displaced people houses 3,800 people who have fled the civil war in the country. In the 1990s, NRC took on an increasingly strong role as an advocate for internally displaced people. Photo: Jon Spaull/ UNHCR

INCREASED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND A STRONGER ADVOCATE

In the 1990s, NRC gradually expanded its cooperation with international organisations outside the UN system. In addition, NRC's own member organisations and other Scandinavian aid organisations were important partners. In the 1990s, NRC worked closely with the *Danish Refugee Council* (DRC) and the *International Council of Voluntary Agencies* (ICVA), the world's largest association of national and international voluntary humanitarian organisations.

ICVA was NRC's most important platform for promoting its goals on the international stage. In 1992, NRC's Secretary General Trygve Nordby was elected to head up ICVA's humanitarian work. Two years later, NRC was elected to ICVA's executive committee, while Nordby was elected President of the entire association.

NRC was also, as previously mentioned, an important driving force in the so-called *Partnership in Action* process (PARinAc).

The organisation's long-term cooperation with the UN was further strengthened, and one of NRC's most important contributions was to make the UN more operational through its standby roster. In a refugee crisis, time is a crucial factor and personnel are the most important single resource. In addition, NRC developed into an important lobbying organisation for UNHCR.

The fact that NRC took such a clear role as an advocate at an early stage gave it a profile that differed from other humanitarian organisations – especially in Norway, but also internationally. It was a brave strategic choice, both because it was controversial at times and because it was resource-intensive to develop a policy on important humanitarian issues.

In its role as advocate for displaced people, NRC took a big step forward from the one-dimensional charity role. This applied both in the programme countries where NRC stood out more and more as a clear and principled actor as the 1990s progressed, and also in the Norwegian debate.

The greatest attention internationally probably derived from NRC's role as an advocate for internally displaced people. The issue of internally displaced people was one of the biggest humanitarian and political challenges facing the international community in the 1990s. The number of internally displaced people was nearly double the number of refugees.

There was no international convention that protected internally displaced people in the same way that the 1951 UN Refugee Convention protected refugees. Consequently, internally displaced people were in a far weaker position than the world's refugees, both in terms of protection and humanitarian aid. In conflict areas, it is true that internally displaced people were protected by international humanitarian law and human rights, but in practice, this was far from sufficient.

Through its office in Geneva, NRC took on a clear role as an advocate for internally displaced people. The fact that millions of people in some of the world's worst conflict areas lacked physical and legal protection generated engagement and drive. This work quickly gave NRC a unique position, both in the UN system and vis-à-vis other international NGOs. It also made NRC a more interesting partner for donors, such as Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, because, in addition to conducting humanitarian aid work on the ground, it could contribute with in-depth analyses and reporting.

NEED FOR NEW STRATEGIES AND EXPERTISE

A conflict that constantly challenged NRC as a "semi-governmental body", was the tension between humanitarian and political visions. When the organisation ran a major fundraising campaign in support of Tibetans in 1971, for example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs chose to keep a very low profile – out of consideration for Norway's relations with China. Another hot topic was the assistance to the Palestinian refugees, where there was a great deal of agreement on the operational work, but where some member organisations almost vetoed NRC being an advocate for the same group.

The dramatic international refugee situation and the debates on asylum and and refugee policy throughout the 1990s helped to put refugee issues higher on the political agenda, both in Norway and internationally. At the same time, resources allocated to international refugee work were very limited. In 1990, UNHCR performed the feat of providing assistance and protection to twice as many refugees as in 1980, with no increase in funding. The time was right to develop new strategies for refugee work, and NRC's work as an advocate for refugee rights became an important focus area. This was often closely linked to NRC's operational work, but the quality also depended on having professional expertise at the head office. The ambition to play a larger and more important role in providing protection to displaced people led NRC to start building its own legal expertise within the organisation. In addition, NRC also included legal aid components in its operational work to a greater extent.

This expertise was an important reason why NRC gradually gained a central role internationally, and was increasingly drawn into dialogues with UNHCR.

It was also on the basis of its own legal competence in refugee issues that NRC, through its office in Geneva, initiated and later developed what was to become the world's leading centre of expertise for knowledge about internally displaced people: the *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre* (IDMC).

NEW DEVELOPMENTS HIGHLIGHT NRC'S RELEVANCE

With its increased operational activities, its standby roster, its clearer role as an advocate and its specialist expertise on internally displaced people, NRC experienced significant growth. It began to receive at least as much, and often more, attention and grants than the large organisations that made up its members.

In Norway, the Red Cross, Norwegian Church Aid, Norwegian People's Aid and Save the Children were defined as the "big four" humanitarian organisations. With NRC's growth, the former four-leaf clover became "the big five". Internally in NRC's board, there was increasing friction – both regarding the operational work abroad and the increasingly significant role that NRC was taking as an advocate, both nationally and internationally.

With a clearer identity as an independent, operational organisation with strong international expertise in refugee law and refugee policy, NRC's status as an umbrella organisation became increasingly difficult.

"With a clearer identity as an independent, operational organisation with strong international expertise in refugee law and refugee policy, NRC's status as an umbrella organisation became increasingly difficult.

The 16 member organisations constituted NRC's highest body, the Supervisory Board. The Supervisory Board also had three observers from Norway's central government: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Local Government and Labour, and the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration. The heavy state presence in itself led to a further legitimisation of NRC's role, which weighed heavily on some of the member organisations – both because it put NRC in a privileged position, but also because some had principled objections to the intermingling with the government. For the government observers, on the other hand, it was not always easy to stand behind NRC's clearer role as an advocate.

Increasingly, situations arose where the largest member organisations in particular felt that they were being held "hostage" by NRC's operational field work. To some extent, member organisations also felt they were "hostage" to the refugee policy positions that NRC argued for in the Norwegian public debate. This applied to a greater extent to the smaller organisations that themselves had a narrower mandate.

NRC's structure began to be an obstacle to its operational work and hampered further development. The status as an umbrella organisation provided little or no added value – either for the refugees, the members or NRC.

An example can be taken from the aid work in the former Yugoslavia. NRC's projects and its collaboration with UNHCR and other UN organisations on the use of personnel from NRC's standby roster, meant that NRC was, by far, the Norwegian organisation that conducted the most extensive international refugee work.

NRC shifted its professional focus from assistance to emergency aid interventions in acute refugee situations, using instruments ranging from individual legal advice to the administration of refugee camps and major logistics tasks. Virtually none of these projects was done in collaboration with the Norwegian member organisations. Where NRC worked with the national or local Red Cross or Red Crescent, Care or Caritas and others, it happened directly and not through their Norwegian sister organisations.

Another element that came into play was issues related to funding. Since the establishment of Europahjelpen (Aid to Europe) in 1946, NRC had received most of its financial resources from large fundraising campaigns. Eventually, the organisation also received government funding for both domestic and foreign work. The telethons (TV-aksjonen) also contributed significant capital.

NRC never received financial support from its members. In addition, the members did not contribute to financing NRC's activities beyond a small, symbolic, annual membership fee. The major source of funding eventually became project funding from the Norwegian government. Increasingly, funding also came from other countries' governments and from assignments as an operational partner for various UN organisations.

NRC MEMBER ORGANISATIONS IN 1996:

- Amnesty International – Norwegian branch
- CARE Norway
- Caritas Norway
- Delta Internasjonalt KFUK-KFUM (YWCA-YMCA)
- Jewish Community of Oslo
- National Association for Public Health
- Norwegian Church Aid
- Norwegian Mission Council
- Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS)
- Norwegian People's Aid
- Norwegian Red Cross
- ORT Norway
- Norwegian Students and Academics International Assistance Fund (SAIH)
- Save the Children
- UNICEF
- United Nations Association of Norway

FROM MEMBERSHIP ORGANISATION TO FOUNDATION

NRC had grown from being a limited fundraising campaign in 1946 to becoming an important organisation and actor in Norwegian and the international community's work with refugees.

But at the organisational level, the challenges had been many, and NRC's history had been marked by a tug of war between different interests and forces. Nevertheless, NRC had shown a great ability to change in step with developments, both in Norway and the wider world.

Towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, NRC started a review of its organisation; in particular, its project activities and relationship with its member organisations. The result was a reorganisation, the first phase of which ended with the appointment of a new Secretary General, Trygve G. Nordby. In connection with NRC's 50th anniversary in 1996, the organisation issued the publication *På flukt* (Displaced). In the leading article, Nordby wrote:

The charity mindset is no longer enough. There is a need for increased professionalism to ensure quality and accountability. At the same time, there is a desire to safeguard the resources that lie in volunteering and the solidarity and commitment of individuals.

To achieve its ambitions, NRC needed greater freedom of action. On the organisational level, the answer was to transition from being a membership organisation to becoming a foundation. This happened in March 1997, less than a year after NRC's 50th anniversary.

The final decision of the Supervisory Board meeting on 13 March 1997 reads as follows:

The Norwegian Refugee Council has transitioned from being a membership organisation to a foundation by dissolving the Norwegian Refugee Council as a membership organisation and creating the Norwegian Refugee Council Foundation. The organisation is considered dissolved and the foundation founded on 13 March 1997.

All of the organisation's activities, rights and obligations in their entirety are assumed by the Norwegian Refugee Council Foundation.

The Norwegian Refugee Council Foundation is established with foundation capital of NOK 1,000,000. The amount is transferred from the Norwegian Refugee Council to the Norwegian Refugee Council Foundation.

Thus, NRC as a membership organisation was history, and all its rights and obligations were transferred to the new foundation.

According to an article in the Norwegian newspaper Klassekampen on 25 January 1997, the Secretary General of Norwegian Church Aid warned against *"severing ties with popular organisations and becoming a commercial actor rather than a critical voice in the refugee debate. Instead of strengthening the member organisations and their international networks with its expertise, the Norwegian Refugee Council will be a small and specialised operator for the UN and thus the government systems."*

In addition to Norwegian Church Aid, it was the Red Cross that most clearly indicated its opposition to the change. Until then, the Red Cross had been the dominant organisation in Norway when it came to international aid work. Both organisations argued that NGOs must have legitimacy, and both were concerned about NRC's lack of popular support.

Popular movements must either be rooted in a defined membership or a broad financial donor base, which indicates support for the cause. NRC had neither. The fact that several of its member organisations had popular support gave, at best, NRC a very indirect form of the same thing. The challenge for the member organisations that were concerned about NRC's lack of popular legitimacy was that they did not want an independent NRC that competed for popular support, members and money.

The new NRC foundation was based on the objects clause of the former membership organisation. It had been updated as recently as 1993 – in other words, after NRC had taken a more proactive role in its work with internally displaced people and in its advocacy work. However, the new objects clause contained important additions. It explicitly mentioned both "emergency response work" and "humanitarian aid". In addition, it contained a new sentence that clearly signalled NRC's ambitions to position itself internationally:

We will seek to achieve this i.a. through collaboration and coordination with other humanitarian organisations, Norwegian and other countries' authorities, UN organisations, private enterprise and peacekeeping institutions.

Section 3, on "Financing", was expanded to include far more sources than the original "collected funds and donations". Now, it included: "paid assignments" and "income from our own work". Here, too, a new sentence was introduced that ensured future freedom of action: "This work may be conducted by the Founda-

tion or by companies we own".

As history has shown, this was the right direction to take. NRC could not have played the role it did in the years that followed, both nationally and internationally, without the freedom of action created by the change from being governed by member organisations to becoming an independent foundation.

It is interesting to compare NRC with the *Danish Refugee Council* (DRC). The organisations worked closely together during the humanitarian crisis in northern Iraq and the convoy operation in Bosnia. But for DRC, it did not lead to any major expansion. Like NRC, the organisation was an umbrella for other humanitarian organisations. It could not establish field offices and projects without permission from its member organisations. In 1995, NRC was unable to establish a presence in the Horn of Africa since this was defined as Norwegian People's Aid and Norwegian Church Aid's area. When NRC became a foundation, it was liberating for the organisation. Not to mention, emergency assistance and lengthy decision-making processes do not belong together.

MORE AND MORE INTERNAL CONFLICTS: Optimism at the beginning of the 1990s was quickly replaced by civil wars and large flows of refugees. More people than ever needed assistance. This photo is from Rwanda in 1994. Photo: Karsten Thielker/AP/NTB

BACK IN THE DEBATE ON NORWEGIAN REFUGEE POLICY

"As a result, starting in the early 1990s, NRC became far more involved in operational work in refugees' home countries, both to prevent displacement happening and to contribute to repatriation.

The first post-war refugees came to Norway in a very controlled way and went straight into work, while the asylum seekers in the 1980s came on their own initiative and were not permitted to take work. In the 1950s, selection commissions from Norway travelled to the refugee camps in Europe and selected those who could quickly become productive members of society. A few years later, this was changed, and Norway also began to accept refugees with illnesses or disabilities, whom other countries had refused to accept.

After the Norwegian Parliament decided to stop labour immigration in 1975, the distinction between legal categories for immigrants became more important than before. Political asylum, also called refugee status, was one of the most important grounds for residence in Norway that the authorities still recognised. An application for political asylum could also be granted in part through what was called a "residence permit on humanitarian grounds" or for "refugee-like" reasons. This coincided with changes in UNHCR's statutes.

Ever since the painful division in 1982, when the work with refugees in Norway was separated from NRC's activities and taken over by its Secretariat, NRC had deliberately declined to comment on the Norwegian debate about refugee policy. This would soon change.

NRC also took part in the international debate on how to best meet the ever-increasing challenges associated with displacement and involuntary migration, both inside and outside national borders. Compared with the previous exile-oriented work, NRC's strategies for humanitarian aid work became more nuanced. NRC placed greater emphasis on finding lasting solutions – such as repatriation, integration in exile or relocation to other countries. As a result, starting in the early 1990s, NRC became far more involved in operational work in refugees' home countries, both to prevent displacement and to contribute to repatriation.

To achieve the overall goals of protection with an emphasis on lasting solutions, it was important to see all refugee policy instruments, both nationally and internationally, in context. The end of the Cold War opened up the possibility of incorporating the fundamental links between aid and human rights in refugee work. NRC thus defined its task far more broadly than before, and began to relate more actively to political realities and political authorities.

A COMPREHENSIVE REFUGEE POLICY

Trygve Nordby took over as Secretary General of NRC in 1990, and in August of the same year, he launched the concept of "a comprehensive refugee policy" in a column in the Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet. The ideas were elaborated upon in several reports, lectures and articles in the years that followed, but most important was the close dialogue with the Norwegian authorities.

Nordby spoke in favour of seeing the work for refugees in Norway and abroad more in context. In a time of great need and few resources, one had to ensure that those with the greatest need were prioritised, and that resources were used efficiently, so that as many people as possible could receive assistance. He illustrated the skewed use of resources by saying that Norway's annual expenditure on the reception and integration of a small number of refugees in Norway was almost as high as UNHCR's overall budget for aid to refugees worldwide.

An important element of a comprehensive refugee policy was that aid to refugees had to provide lasting solutions. Nordby highlighted repatriation as the best solution for most refugees. It would also make it possible to assist more refugees in a more effective way. NRC elaborated on its position in a report entitled "Repatriation: the best solution". The second-best solution was reintegration into the country to which the people had fled. In cases where that was not possible either, resettlement in a third country was a last resort.

The focus on repatriation was not new to NRC, which had distinguished itself internationally with, among other things, the NARV repatriation project for Vietnamese refugees. The goal was to bring a few thousand unaccompanied child refugees home to their families in Vietnam from camps in South-East Asia. While repatriation had long been the main rule for refugees who had been living in poor neighbouring countries, it was both new and controversial to apply this principle to refugees who had come to Norway and other western countries.

At the beginning of the 1990s, voices critical of immigration began to make their presence felt in Norway. In the established political parties, a number of people criticised what they described as a naive immigration and integration policy. Rune Gerhardsen received the most attention when, as the new leader of Oslo City Council in 1991, he published the book *Snillisme på norsk* (Norwegian *Nice-ism*), where he claimed that the Norwegian welfare state made too few demands on those who received benefits and services – including immigrants.

In this political climate, it was noted that NRC was arguing that Norway should prioritise spending money on aid to refugees in the areas where they lived, and that protection in Norway should in principle be of a temporary nature. Trygve Nordby repeatedly emphasised that it was not a question of either/or, and that it was crucial for Norway to take its international responsibility by also accepting resettlement refugees and individual asylum seekers. But it was difficult to bring out the nuances in a message that at first glance resembled what the leading immigration critic Carl I. Hagen was championing at the time.

Nordby was confronted with this in an interview with NTB in connection with NRC's 50th anniversary in 1996:

NRC is not entirely uncontroversial. Nordby and his staff receive criticism because they believe forced deportation of refugees may be necessary in some cases.

"NRC does not see the individuals. It is a mouthpiece for the authorities," claimed some critical voices. But Nordby took the criticism in his stride.


En helhetlig flyktningpolitikk

Facsimile: Dagbladet
27 August 1990

> An important element of a comprehensive refugee policy was that aid to refugees had to provide lasting solutions. Nordby highlighted repatriation as the best solution for most refugees.

> "We believe it is the right policy to focus on providing help in local areas rather than bringing refugees to expensive Norway. We just have to live with the fact that some people take it as support for their anti-immigrant views."

"Our task is to see the big picture. Our goal is to provide protection to as many people as possible who need it. This requires a needs assessment. We believe it is the right policy to focus on providing help in local areas rather than bringing refugees to expensive Norway. We just have to live with the fact that some people take it as support for their anti-immigrant views."

A central part of the idea behind the comprehensive refugee policy was to improve the coordination of Norwegian assistance for refugees. The responsibility was shared between the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Local Government and Labour and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the latter was the little brother in the cooperation, in terms of both resources and power.

NRC argued that the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had to be strengthened and given the main responsibility for coordinating efforts. The organisation worked closely with the Ministry to set up a committee to prepare a report to the Norwegian Parliament on a comprehensive Norwegian refugee policy, to be coordinated and led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, this met with opposition in the other two ministries, and in the end it was the Ministry of Local Government and Labour that was given the task of leading the work.

NRC lost the battle over who should lead the work on a new refugee policy. However, the committee that was eventually established was given a similar mandate as NRC had argued for a year earlier – and the same members, including NRC itself. In 1992, the committee presented "Comprehensive refugee policy: a report from the working group". It discussed matters of principle related to internally displaced people, temporary protection, preventive measures, lasting solutions, international cooperation, coordination and the role of NGOs.

When Parliamentary Report no. 17 (1994–95) was presented, NRC endorsed its main principles, including the controversial temporary protection scheme, but emphasised that this had to be used flexibly. NRC also emphasised that the refugee quota had to be targeted more consistently at those with a real need for protection. At the same time, Norway sought to strengthen its efforts to develop a framework for Europe, including clear guidelines for responsibility-sharing.

TEMPORARY PROTECTION IN PRACTICE

When the war in the former Yugoslavia broke out, and a large number of Bosnian refugees sought asylum in Norway, the Norwegian Parliament made a change in the law that made it possible to provide temporary protection on a collective basis in a mass refugee situation – without processing asylum applications individually. The first Bosnian refugees to arrive received only a six-month temporary residence permit. In 1993, this was extended to 12 months.

The expectation that it would be safe to return to Bosnia-Herzegovina after a short period, however, quickly proved to be unrealistic. While there had been agreement across party lines that it made sense to introduce temporary protection in a mass refugee situation, there was great disagreement about how long the refugees had to stay in Norway before they were granted permanent residence.

In connection with the report to Parliament on a comprehensive refugee policy, the authorities decided that temporary collective protection could be provi-

REPATRIATION, 1996: Local Government Minister Gunnar Berge wanted to see for himself if it was defensible to send refugees home to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. Here, he is in conversation with the repatriated refugee Sedad Badzak, who had previously lived in Lunner Municipality in Norway. Photo: Jon Hauge/ Aftenposten/NTB

NORWAY, 1996: Bosnian refugees at Fornebu Airport before leaving Norway for their hometowns Kljuc and Sanski Most. Photo: Lise Åserud/NTB

ded for three years, with the possibility of a one-year extension. If it was still not safe to return after four years, permanent residence would be granted.

An important reason why NRC was a supporter of temporary collective protection, was that it made it possible to provide protection to war refugees who were not being individually persecuted, and therefore did not have the same rights as refugees as defined in the Refugee Convention. Often, temporary residence on humanitarian grounds had been the only option for residence in Norway. NRC emphasised that it was important that those who received temporary residence were actually repatriated for the scheme to work over time, and therefore supported the decision of three years plus one year.

NRC and the Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers (NOAS) had both been on the committee for a comprehensive refugee policy and stood together on many key questions, including the demand that the Kosovo Albanian refugees who arrived Norway in the early 1990s had to be given temporary protection and not repatriated as conditions stood at that time. However, when it came to the question of how long refugees should be required to live in uncertainty as to whether they would be granted permanent residence, the organisations parted ways. NOAS believed that the refugees should be granted permanent residence after two years. In addition, they were opposed to the possibility of forced repatriation. Trygve Nordby disagreed with this:

"If we remove the requirement for repatriation, we close the door for those who may need protection next time. Some will have clear security reasons for staying in Norway. But there should be very compelling reasons if pure social considerations are to be considered sufficient for Bosnian refugees to be permitted to stay," stated Trygve Nordby to Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten, on New Year's Eve 1995.

Following the Dayton Accords in 1995, which marked the end of the war in Bosnia, the Labour government hoped that a large proportion of refugees would be able to return home the following year. NRC was among those who thought that this was premature, and that there must be a more thorough survey of the conditions to which each individual refugee would return before repatriation was justifiable.

In the autumn of 1996, Thorbjørn Jagland took over as Prime Minister of Norway and made major changes in the government. Anne Holt took over as Minister of Justice from Grete Faremo, who became Minister of Petroleum and Energy. Early on, Anne Holt held a less strict line on refugee and asylum issues than her predecessor. After only a few months as Minister, she announced that the Bosnian refugees would be granted permanent residence in Norway.

The decision was positively received by most organisations in Norway, but NRC was concerned it could make it difficult to receive refugees on the basis of temporary collective protection in future, and that supporters of a strict refugee policy would now have a new argument. In response, Aftenposten editorialised:

NRC sees ghosts in broad daylight when it expresses fear that the Government's decision gives supporters of a strict refugee policy a new argument.

Collective protection was again used when Norway received Kosovo Albanians during the war in Kosovo in 1998. This time, too, NRC was in favour of temporary protection, while NOAS believed that the refugees should be granted ordinary residence on an individual basis. Unlike the Bosnian refugees, the Kosovo Albanian refugees were able to return home in a relatively short time, and only a few were granted permanent residence.

To date, this is the last time Norway has used temporary collective protection in a mass refugee situation. Not even NRC advocated for this scheme to be used when Norway received a large number of Syrian refugees in 2015.

> An important reason why NRC was a supporter of temporary collective protection, was that it made it possible to provide protection to war refugees who were not being individually persecuted, and therefore did not have the same rights as refugees as defined in the Refugee Convention.

INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING ON RETURN AND REPATRIATION

NRC warned the authorities that emphasising integration in Norway could make it more difficult to motivate people to return to their home country. It offered to assist with information and counselling on return and repatriation. In 1995, the Directorate of Immigration asked NRC to establish a return project, which was named *Information and Counselling on Return and Repatriation* (INCOR).

The principle of temporary protection was established precisely with a situation such as the mass displacement in the Balkans in mind. The protection was supposed to cease when the situation in the refugees' home countries allowed it. However, the peace was fragile and uncertain, and demands for repatriation could prove to violate the principle that no-one should be sent back to countries where there is a risk of persecution – so-called "non-refoulement".

At the same time, repatriation should be the aim and should be emphasised from the time the refugees arrived in Norway. The authorities also established a financial support scheme for those who returned home, to help them re-establish themselves in their home country.

INCOR aimed to assist refugees make independent, informed choices about returning, ensuring that those who did return home were prepared for what they would encounter. This was to be done through thorough information and counselling work, both for individual refugees and for larger refugee groups.

INCOR's work was based on the experiences NRC had gained in Vietnam, where aid organisations had used various methods to inform refugees and give them a realistic idea of the situation in their hometown in Vietnam. Through films, photo albums and interviews, parents at home were also informed about how their children actually experienced living in the camps.

Following up the returnees after repatriation, and passing on their experiences to those who were still in exile, had a very good effect both in South-East Asia and for Bosnian refugees in Norway. INCOR placed great emphasis on visiting the places the refugees came from in Bosnia, and obtaining information from local authorities, international and private actors, neighbours and not least, people who had returned home previously. Through the collaboration with the newspaper *Bosanska Posta*, the project quickly became known – and well received – among the refugees themselves.

However, many of those who worked with refugees in municipalities around Norway were sceptical, fearing that the refugees would feel unwelcome if they started talking about returning home. The focus on repatriation and the refugees' homeland nevertheless contributed to expanding the perspective of refugee workers and improving integration work in Norwegian municipalities. After the government decided that the Bosnians should be granted permanent residence, INCOR directed its work towards refugees who were considering returning home voluntarily. For the Kosovo Albanians, the situation was different, since they were required to return.

The Bosnian refugees in Norway were concerned about the rights they had to their homes back in Bosnia. The situation related to property rights was very complicated, something already experienced by NRC and other organisations that worked with renovating and reconstructing homes. When an international property claims commission for Bosnia was eventually established, NRC was invited to help register property claims among Bosnian refugees in Norway.

> INCOR aimed to assist refugees make independent, informed choices about returning, as well as help ensure that those who did return home were prepared for what they would encounter.

RETURN TO KOSOVO, 1999: Kosovo Albanian refugees who have been in Norway return home. Here, Muharrem Osmani, 75, meets his great-granddaughter Arijetta, 5. He had no idea that his family was back in Kosovo. Photo: Heiko Junge/NTB

The project was strengthened by the inclusion of several Bosnian lawyers. The experience and knowledge gained were also shared with the *Civil Rights Project* (CRP), NRC's programme for free legal aid in the former Yugoslavia. Information and counselling from INCOR and legal aid from CRP became the basis for *Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance* (ICLA), which is now one of NRC's core operational activities worldwide.

An important aspect of the INCOR project was to build up experience-based knowledge about voluntary repatriation, and to pass this on to national and municipal actors in Norway as well as internationally, through lectures and reports. From 2000, the INCOR project was expanded to include all refugees in Norway. But in the years that followed, fewer and fewer refugees chose to return.

A TIME OF CHANGE

When Secretary General Trygve Nordby stepped down in 1997, he left behind an organisation that had grown significantly within a few years, and which stood on its own two feet as an independent foundation. However, the growth had presented financial challenges, especially because the administration grant that the organisation received was not sufficient to finance a head office that had more than doubled its number of employees in the space of a few years.

There was great anticipation regarding who would take over the helm after Trygve Nordby. It came as a great surprise to both the staff and the humanitarian sector that former Minister of Justice Grete Faremo emerged as a hot candidate. She had recently been forced to step down due to the revelation that left-wing politician Berge Furre had been under surveillance while serving on a commission to investigate allegations of illegal surveillance of Norwegian citizens (the Lund Commission). Faremo had made a name for herself as a strict Minister of Justice on refugee issues, and the media therefore showed great interest when she was linked with NRC. Faremo confirmed that she had been offered the position, while the Chair of NRC's Board Kjell Holler stated that Faremo was one of several candidates under consideration.

Andreas Wiese, a columnist in the Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet, summed up the discussion as follows:

If someone last autumn had suggested that in half a year Anne Holt would be the Norwegian Minister of Justice and that Grete Faremo would be Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, they would probably have got good odds on that bet. But this is what could happen, now that NRC is generously considering offering the dismissed Faremo asylum from politics. They probably know a good lawyer when they see one. And the transition does not have to be so great either: NRC prefers to deal with refugees outside our borders. Just like Minister of Justice Faremo did.

However, it was Ola Metliaas who was eventually appointed as the new Secretary General. Metliaas came from the position of Director of Ullevål University Hospital, where he had had the demanding job of implementing major financial cuts. It would turn out that he would face the same challenges in NRC.

SIERRA LEONE, 1999:
The brutality of the war is clearly visible in the capital Freetown. At its peak, close to half of the country's population fled their homes due to the civil war, which lasted from 1991 to 2002. Photo: Clive Shirley/UNHCR

UN GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

A breakthrough in the advocacy work for internally displaced people came in 1998 when Francis M. Deng presented guidelines for internal displacement to the UN – *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.* His goal was for the international community to put internally displaced people on the agenda.

The UN guidelines set out the most important rights of internally displaced people, and the duties of authorities and armed groups in all phases of displacement. The guidelines define internally displaced people as people or groups who have been forced to flee *"to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border."*

The guidelines are not legally binding, but they reiterate and set out human rights and humanitarian laws that are relevant to internally displaced people, and that are individually binding in themselves. They also provide guidance on humanitarian aid to internally displaced people and solutions to displacement through return, local integration, or settlement elsewhere in the country.

In 2000, 25 million people were estimated to be internally displaced, while the number of refugees was 14 million. Despite this, there was no single UN organisation responsible for this group, in the way that UNHCR was responsible for refugees. The issue of internally displaced people was put on the agenda by political heavyweights when the then United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Richard Holbrooke, raised it in the Security Council in 2000. He called for a clear allocation of responsibilities within the UN, preferably with UNHCR. Discussions continued and internally displaced people were defined as *"persons of concern"* by UNHCR even though they were not covered by the provisions of the Refugee Convention.

TELETHON, 1998: Norwegian prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik – with a large cheque in an envelope – is welcomed to national broadcaster NRK's studio by Secretary General Ola H. Metliaas of NRC. Photo: Terje Bendiksby/NTB Pluss

TV-AKSJONEN: "DISPLACED IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY"

In the same year that the UN adopted its guidelines for internally displaced people, NRC's commitment to the same group was rewarded when it was awarded the Norwegian national telethon TV-aksjonen, on the theme of "Displaced in their own country".

For an organisation with great ambitions to provide help to an increasing number of displaced people, this was very welcome. The focus of the campaign was to raise funds for internally displaced people in the former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, Colombia and the countries of Central Africa. This was an important recognition of NRC's pioneering work in the field and as an advocate for this group.

The fundraiser helped to raise awareness of the great need for help for an often neglected group of displaced people. NRC was also pleased that no less than NOK 119 million was collected for the cause, even though the amount did not reach the record NOK 177 million raised for the Norwegian Cancer Society the year before. For the first time, the internet was used as an important information channel in connection with the national telethon.

The good results from the telethon enabled the organisation to continue to increase aid to displaced people. However, the conditions for how the raised funds were to be used did not allow NRC to cover the large deficit that had built up for the operation of the head office in Oslo.

For several years, the administration funding from project grants had been too low to cover the real administration costs, which had caused the organisation's equity to drop to a nearly critical level.

> This was an important recognition of NRC's pioneering work in the field and as an advocate.

No stone was left unturned in the effort to cut costs, while also trying to shield NRC's core activities as much as possible. Among other things, a decision was made to close down NRC's library, which had offered free services to students and researchers. Nevertheless, it seemed inevitable that there would be a downsizing of the organisation.

Just a few short months after Metliaas had taken over the reins, dissatisfaction arose among staff in relation to his leadership style, and several people in the management team resigned. It developed into the equivalent of washing one's dirty linen in public, whereby Metliaas, through interviews in various newspapers, criticised the staff who had resigned, followed by harsh accusations from those who had resigned in protest.

The public quarrel subsided while the organisation came together to implement the national telethon in 1998, but tensions continued to brew internally. In connection with the downsizing, the discord returned to the surface with full force. A lack of confidence developed among a majority of the staff, and Metliaas chose to resign from his position.

WOULD NRC SURVIVE?

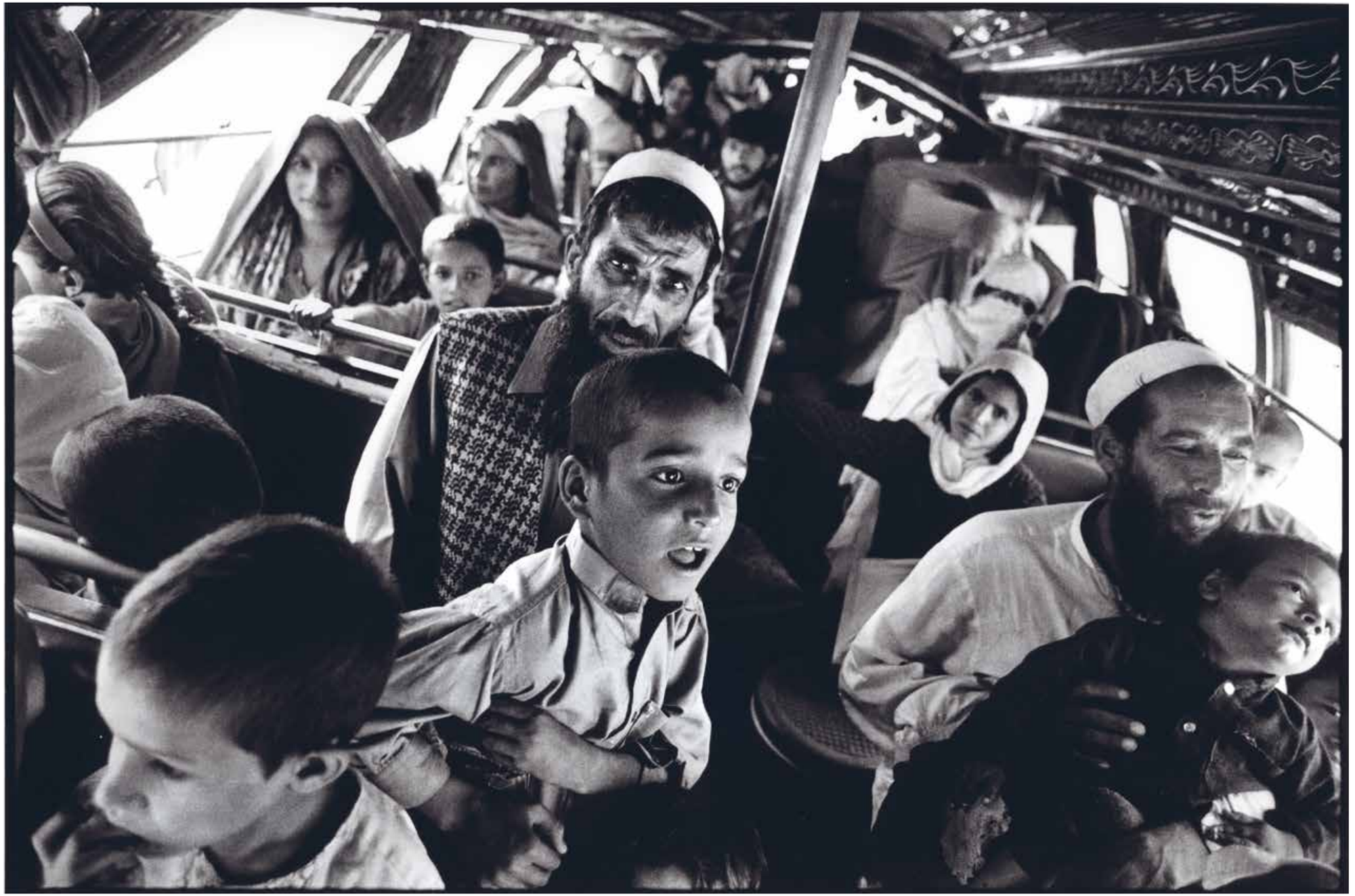
In the spring of 1999, many questions were asked as to whether NRC was viable. At the same time as the conflict between the Secretary General and the employees was playing out in full public view, the Secretary General of Norwegian People's Aid, Halle Jørn Hansen, proclaimed in the media that he believed NRC should be dissolved because he thought Norwegian humanitarian organisations should have their origins in a popular movement and not be organised as an independent foundation.

The day after Hansen's statement, it became known that the Office of the Auditor General of Norway planned to investigate how the organisation had been operating in the slot machine market, which had shortly before led to the resignation of NRC's marketing manager.

NRC fought to get its finances in order. At its lowest point, NRC had distributable equity of only NOK 6 million. With an annual turnover of NOK 300 million, continued operations would be in real danger if the organisation could not implement drastic measures. A downsizing was inevitable, and the negotiations, in which the two unions in NRC were involved, ended with eight of the 59 employees at the head office being made redundant.

Tom Emil Asp had been hired as an external organisational consultant to provide advice to the organisation through a demanding restructuring process. When Metliaas resigned in June 1999, Asp was appointed Acting Secretary General for the rest of the year, until a permanent Secretary General was in place.

"As an organisational consultant, I am used to giving good advice that others must put into practice. This is the first time I have to deliver on the recommendations I have given. It will be a new experience," said Asp when he moved into the Secretary General's office.



FORCED REPATRIATION: A nine-year-old Afghan boy sees his home country for the first time on the bus ride from Peshawar in Pakistan to Kabul. Countless Afghan refugees in Pakistan were forcibly repatriated in the period following ***Operation Enduring Freedom*** in 2001. Many ended up being internally displaced. Photo: Rune Eraker

THE 2000s: AN EXPERT ORGANISATION EMERGES

A NEW MILLENNIUM BEGINS: GETTING THINGS IN ORDER

Steinar Sørlie took over as Secretary General of NRC on the first working day of the new millennium. He assumed responsibility for an organisation that had gone through a turbulent time, with major staff reductions at the head office.

An important priority was to create order and instil confidence among the employees, and a number of psychosocial measures were implemented in collaboration with occupational health services. The Secretary General chose to hold frequent all-staff meetings for the first time.

It was also necessary to take action to strengthen NRC's financial situation. One money-saving measure was to terminate the lease for one floor at the head office at Grensen 17 in Oslo. Furthermore, the organisation prioritised professionalising the application process and starting work on approaching new sources of funding. In addition to institutional donors, NRC began reaching out to the business community for the first time, and in 2000, the organisation entered into a partnership agreement with Norwegian energy company Statoil.

NRC had previously invested in slot machines as an important future source of income, but unforeseen problems and legal disputes led to the income from those machines in the 1990s not living up to expectations. In 2000 and 2001, revenues from slot machines increased significantly, and NRC's lottery activities also generated important income. However, the experiment with bottle recycling and refund donation scheme ended in 2001, due to low interest from the grocery chains.

By the end of 2001, the organisation's equity had grown to an acceptable NOK 36 million, compared with NOK 7 million two years earlier.

As part of the work to cut costs, it was long uncertain whether NRC's office in Geneva could be maintained. Steinar Sørlie, however, insisted that it was crucial to maintain operations in Geneva, both to further develop cooperation with the international humanitarian sector and to maintain NRC's strong position as the leading organisation on internally displaced people.

OPERATING REFUGEE CAMPS: In the mid-2000s, camp management became one of NRC's core activities. In DR Congo, NRC operated, among others, the Mugunga 1 camp outside Goma in North Kivu. In just a short period in the autumn of 2008, a quarter of a million people were forced to flee in this area and NRC scaled up its relief work. Photo: Truls Brekke/NRC

STRATEGY PROCESS AND A REVISED POLICY PAPER

The new management team, which was established in early 2000, started a strategy process to clarify NRC's role and mandate as a professional displacement organisation. There was agreement that it was necessary to strengthen the organisation's profile. This would prove to be an important and decisive choice.

The end of the 1990s was marked by increased competition for funding between the various humanitarian organisations. The fact that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the most important donor for all the major Norwegian humanitarian aid organisations probably also intensified the competition.

In addition, NRC had been marked by unrest and changes in leadership, at the same time as the organisation was constantly hiring new staff. Many had backgrounds from other voluntary organisations that did not have a special focus on refugees. The projects that NRC established in the field were often a cross between the various needs the organisation believed were present, what the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prioritised or was willing to finance, and the expertise of NRC's own employees.

The result was a diverse range of projects, which showed that NRC had spread itself too thinly and too expensively in too many fields, making it impossible for the organisation to develop core competence in the selected areas. Many employees had high levels of expertise, but this tended to be person-based and not well enough integrated into the organisation. It became important to institutionalise expertise so as to be able to extract synergies.

The strategy process was broad and involved all employees. Among other things, drafts of the new strategy were regularly sent for consultation across the organisation, and strategy seminars were held both at the head office in Oslo and in the larger regional offices – such as in Nairobi, Baku and Belgrade.

Central to the work on the Policy Paper was the process of developing a vision for NRC. The organisation's employees were to embrace four basic values: dedicated, inclusive, innovative and accountable. The vision "We will make the difference" was in line with the proactive attitude that once again characterised the organisation.

The result was a Policy Paper that sharpened NRC's mandate by clarifying that the protection of the rights of refugees and internally displaced people was the basis for the organisation's activities.

Three main pillars in NRC's activities were formalised: advocacy work, programme activities, and the standby roster – NRC's pool of experts. They all aimed to strengthen the international protection of displaced people.

> Concentrating programme activities on defined core areas quickly contributed to increased professionalisation and to giving the organisation a clearer profile.

Advocacy work would take place in countries where NRC had its own programmes, in international forums or vis-à-vis the Norwegian authorities.

Programme activities included NRC's direct efforts for refugees and internally displaced people in various countries and regions, either alone, on behalf of the UN and other agencies, or in collaboration with permanent or context-specific partners. In order to be able to work systematically with competence development and transfer of experience, and thus strengthen the quality of its work in the field, NRC chose to concentrate its programme activities on four core areas:

- distribution of food and other emergency assistance
- shelter – also containing an element of camp management, which became a separate core activity shortly afterwards
- education in crisis situations – primary school education for children and young people

The pool of experts and its work to strengthen cooperation between NRC and the UN was emphasised in the new Policy Paper.

At the same time, each individual envoy represented a unique opportunity for NRC to obtain direct information from the field about refugee-related conflicts and the UN's effectiveness in areas where the organisation itself was not present. The envoys also played a role as "door openers" for NRC when it was necessary to cooperate with UN organisations on project implementation.

In the period before the Policy Paper was adopted, the most heated discussions revolved around the number and types of activities that were to be reduced. Many believed that the needs of the refugees had to be the decisive factor, whether the need was medical care, social measures or food. Others believed that food distribution could be left to pure relief organisations. However, the importance of gaining access to refugees as early as possible in a crisis situation – to be able to carry out advocacy work, for example – trumped the scepticism.

Concentrating the programme activities on defined core areas quickly helped to improve professionalisation and give NRC a clearer profile. It also led to the development of an advisory department at the head office, with specialists in various disciplines. They were given responsibility for evaluating and documenting field experiences, developing handbooks and contributing to staff training.

SIERRA LEONE:
AN INNOVATIVE SIGN OF THINGS TO COME

In Sierra Leone, the civil war was marked by extreme brutality. Prisoners had their arms and legs cut off, and mutilation was part of the war strategy. There was also extensive recruitment of child soldiers and villages were burnt to the ground.

Two million people were displaced. With an increased UN presence in West Africa, Norwegian personnel from NRC's standby roster were deployed across the entire region, and in 1999, NRC established a country office in the capital Freetown. NRC's work in Sierra Leone quickly developed into the organisation's largest country operation.

The aid work consisted primarily of building and operating refugee camps, repatriation and return programmes, and extensive support for the victims of mutilation. In collaboration with UNICEF, NRC was the first to negotiate with the armed group *Revolutionary United Front* (RUF) to establish return programmes for refugees. The work with those who had had their limbs amputated was innovative and gained international attention.

When US President Bill Clinton paid a state visit to Norway in 2003, he and Prime Minister Bondevik decided to mark the visit by each donating USD 1 million to assist the maimed survivors of war in Sierra Leone. After the visit, NRC was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and asked whether the organisation could take responsibility for managing the Norwegian contribution. Among other things, this was the start of a large housing project for internally displaced people.

The experiences from the demanding work in the refugee camps of Sierra Leone led to NRC preparing a toolbox for the operation of camps – the so-called *Camp Management Toolkit*. Over time, this became a source of useful recommendations for the humanitarian sector, in terms of both protection and practical solutions for camp management. It was also an indication of a realisation that NRC would soon address. It was better to be good at some things than to try to cover everything.

SIERRA LEONE, 2000: Drugged child soldiers were behind grotesque abuses against the civilian population during the civil war in the 1990s. Thousands of people had their arms and legs amputated with machetes. This photo was named Photo of the Year in Norway in 2000. Photo: Harald Henden/VG

NRC GETS INVOLVED IN NEW AND INNOVATIVE PROJECTS

NRC did not limit itself to copying traditional humanitarian activities, but was innovative and developed its own, new types of programmes. The organisation made a name for itself as an innovator in three fields in particular: education, information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA), and camp management.

NRC did not limit itself to copying traditional humanitarian activities, but was innovative and developed its own, new types of programmes.

EDUCATION IN CRISES

Many believed that education was long-term development aid. However, NRC had skilled staff in the field, who managed to convince the organisation that attending school is an important form of protection for children in conflict areas. In addition, acute conflicts often proved to be long-lasting. With "lasting solutions" as a perspective, education was eventually chosen as a core activity.

NRC had begun to develop an educational programme for children affected by war as early as 1995, when the organisation was awarded money from *Olympic Aid*, after Norwegian speedskater Johan Olav Koss donated his prize money from the Winter Olympics in Lillehammer. This made it possible to test a new education concept in Angola.

NRC took as its starting point teaching materials developed by UNESCO, which was also an important partner. The material was translated into Portuguese and further developed. Later it was also translated into French and used in several French-speaking countries in Africa, to provide education to refugees and internally displaced people who had missed out on all or part of their schooling due to war and conflict.

In addition to introducing the basic subjects of writing, reading and arithmetic, NRC also emphasised local culture and history, as well as song and dance. In addition, two areas stood out as particularly important for a population affected by war, conflict and the abuse of children and women. One was human rights, and the other was the fight against HIV and AIDS.

It became clear early on that there was a shortage of trained teachers in many of the countries affected by war and conflict. Therefore, it was crucial to offer courses to potential teachers.

INFORMATION, COUNSELLING AND LEGAL ASSISTANCE (ICLA)

A legal aid programme for refugees was something completely new. NRC had developed experience with information related to repatriation and return through the project *Information and Counselling on Return and Repatriation* (INCOR), and in the former Yugoslavia, legal advice had crystallised as an important need that no-one else was covering. UNHCR, which had tried to set up information programmes itself on several occasions, was enthusiastic about the concept.

Experience from the Balkans showed that many refugees and internally displaced people lacked identity documents, which made it difficult to access important services. From the very beginning, this was therefore an important focus area for NRC.

Another area that stood out early on was land and property rights. Many people discovered that others had taken over their property when they tried to return home, and needed help to document that they were the rightful owners. It was not uncommon for the "occupiers" themselves to have been displaced from their own property elsewhere, and it was necessary to work on many issues in parallel.

SCHOOL MEALS: NRC serves school meals to schoolchildren in northern Uganda. For many children, this was the only proper meal they received every day. The school meal programme also helped parents send their children to school instead of them working at home. Photo: Roald Høvring/NRC

In 2003, NRC introduced comprehensive ethical guidelines – a *Code of Conduct* – which all employees were required to sign and commit to comply with.

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

In 2002, it became known that employees of several humanitarian organisations in Sierra Leone had used their position to engage in sexual relations with people they were there to assist. It highlighted the need for stricter guidelines for how humanitarian aid workers should behave.

These camps were not run by NRC, but the organisation had activities in the area where the abuses took place. Together with various UN bodies, NRC sat down to look at how systems could be improved to prevent future abuses.

In 2003, NRC introduced comprehensive ethical guidelines – a *Code of Conduct* – which all employees were required to sign and commit to comply with. The guidelines were noticed in the humanitarian sector and were used as inspiration for other organisations when they adopted similar guidelines in the years that followed.

CAMP MANAGEMENT TOOLKIT

A refugee camp is a society in miniature, and a clarification of roles between the authorities, the voluntary organisations and the refugees themselves was absolutely essential. NRC led and coordinated this work, and worked in parallel with the start-up of camps in Liberia at the request of the UN. In addition to clarifying roles, NRC emphasised the need for the refugees' voices to be heard. For security reasons, the UN imposed a total ban on weapons in the camps. This also applied to local police and the military. If anyone wanted to enter the camps, it had to be cleared with camp management in advance.

The work culminated in a handbook – the *"Camp Management Toolkit"* – which set out clear standards for camp management. It was eventually used as a guide not only for NRC, but also for the humanitarian sector as a whole.

AWARD: NRC's Eldrid Kvamen Midttun received the Voices of Courage Award from actress Liv Ullmann in 2001 for her work with displaced children. The prize is awarded by the *Women's Refugee Commission* which Ullmann helped start. Photo: NRC

EDUCATION FOR DISPLACED CHILDREN

Eldrid Kvamen Midttun played a key role in NRC's decision to specialise in providing education to children in crisis situations. She was hired as a school consultant in 1987, with responsibility for communicating information about displaced people to Norwegian schools. Through her work, she became aware of the large, unmet need for schooling among children affected by war, conflict and displacement, and she convinced the leadership of the organisation to start working with this issue. The funding from Olympic Aid in 1994 made it possible to start the first education projects for displaced children.

There had previously been little understanding that education was also important as humanitarian aid. In 1998, NRC therefore launched "Education – the fourth component of humanitarian aid", in addition to food, shelter and health, and received financial support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to develop educational programmes specifically designed for children who were out of school due to war and displacement.

It soon became clear that the school systems in many of NRC's programme countries were weak. They had often been destroyed by conflict and lacked the resources to provide a good education. Many teachers had little or no training, and sometimes the parents with the best educational background had to step in. Therefore, NRC began to arrange teacher training, in advance of the school year wherever possible. NRC emphasised a child-friendly approach, and corporal punishment, which was common in many places, was discarded.

During the *World Education Forum* in Dakar in 2000, Peter Buckland from UNICEF, Christopher Talbot from UNHCR and Eldrid Kvamen Midttun from NRC launched the *Resolution on Education in Emergencies*. The resolution was adopted and led to the creation of the *Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies* (INEE) the same year. Midttun herself sat on the board of INEE from 2000 to 2009, and was Chair from 2002 to 2003.

When INEE marked its 20th anniversary in 2020, the network had 130 partner organisations and 17,000 individual members in 190 countries.

CRITERIA FOR STARTING UP AND WINDING DOWN

NRC's revised Policy Paper also addressed criteria for starting up and winding down programme activities. The most important criteria in connection with start-up were that the refugees or internally displaced people had an unmet need for international protection and presence, and that NRC had real access and could implement an effective programme activity.

Ensuring the security of aid workers was also crucial, and there had to be a genuine need for the type of assistance that NRC could offer. In practice, this would mean one or more of NRC's core activities. The programme activities should also contribute to lasting solutions and not just alleviate immediate distress. The bottom line was always that there should be enough financial and human resources, both in the field and at the head office.

Winding down a programme would take place if there was no longer a need for protection or the type of assistance that NRC could offer, or if these needs were met by other actors. The same applied if the aid work could not be carried out safely or if the security situation did not allow NRC to have a presence in the area. If the situation was deadlocked and NRC's activities did not contribute to a significant change, the organisation should also withdraw. Financial support from donors was obviously absolutely necessary, and NRC would of course have to wind down its activities if it failed to obtain the necessary financial, human or other necessary resources to continue its work. These criteria for starting up and winding down still apply to a large extent today.

It is interesting to note that the Policy Paper also emphasises a regional approach to programme activities, stressing that NRC should focus on "forgotten" conflicts, in terms of both advocacy work and practical assistance. Knowledge and willingness to develop are emphasised in several places. Among other things, the Policy Paper states:

The Norwegian Refugee Council is an experience-based competence organisation. This places great demands on the link between developing knowledge in the field and at the head office, on systems for obtaining and institutionalising experiences and "lessons learned", and on training and the continuing development of staff both abroad and at home.

DRAMA ON A NORWEGIAN SHIP

When the Norwegian ship "Tampa" took on board 438 boat refugees in distress at sea at the request of the Australian maritime rescue authorities on the night of 27 August 2001, Captain Arne Rinnan had no idea of the political drama that would ensue.

Most of the refugees came from Afghanistan, but there were also people from Sri Lanka and Pakistan on board. The rescue operation lasted for several hours. The crew of the Tampa lifted pregnant, infirm, unconscious and frightened refugees onto the deck. The Australian government refused to accept the refugees, while Norway stood firm and denied any responsibility.

As the political quarrel continued, the situation quickly deteriorated for the refugees. NRC came to the fore and commented on the case in all the national newspapers, as well as on radio and TV. It strongly criticised Australia's denial of the refugees' right to seek asylum, and cited one of the most central principles of international law: that no-one should be sent back to a country where they risk persecution. NRC stressed that these principles applied not only to Australia as a coastal nation, but also to Norway as the ship's flag state, and advocated a division of responsibilities, after Australia had first processed individual asylum applications.

Captain Arne Rinnan guided the ship towards Christmas Island, but the Australian authorities refused to allow anyone to go ashore. Meanwhile, the boat refugees had begun a hunger strike and the health of several was rapidly deteriorating. Rinnan refused to accept orders from Australian soldiers, who boarded the ship to force it back into international waters. The world followed the crisis intently for eight days, from when the refugees were picked up until they were transferred to an Australian naval vessel.

The refugees eventually had to accept that the Australian transport ship "Manoora" would transport them to Papua New Guinea. They were then flown to New Zealand, which said it was willing to receive 150 of them. The Pacific island of Nauru received the rest, with financial support from Australia.

Captain Rinnan was interviewed by TV stations from around the world. In an interview with NRK, ten years after the incident, he said:

"We just did what we had to do. It was the right thing to do then, and I would do it again."

In April 2002, Captain Rinnan, the crew of the Tampa and the shipping company Wilh. Wilhelmsen were honoured with the Nansen Refugee Award, which is awarded by UNHCR.

But things did not go well for all the boat refugees. Some succumbed to the temptation to accept a cash payment from the Australian Government to return to Afghanistan. The *Edmund Rice Centre* in Sydney later tried to track down many of those who had returned home. They found that 22 of the people who returned from Nauru, including four children, had been killed in Afghanistan.

"We just did what we had to do. It was the right thing to do then, and I would do it again."

REUNITED AFTER NINE MONTHS: The captain of the Tampa, Arne Rinnan, meets Rajab Ali and Tahere again, who were rescued by the Tampa crew in August 2001. They proudly show off their six-month-old baby. Photo: Ross Land/AP Photo/Fotopress/NTB

GREAT MEDIA ATTENTION: Here, players from the *Freetown Vikings* practise at the Tanum transit reception centre after applying for asylum in Norway. Photo: Jon Petter Evensen/Aftenposten/NTB

FREETOWN VIKINGS

In 2000, NRC enabled the football team *Freetown Vikings* from Sierra Leone to participate in the world's largest football tournament, the Norway Cup for children in Oslo. Neither NRC nor the Norway Cup were prepared for the challenges involved.

Svein Arne Laukli worked for NRC in Sierra Leone, where he spent much of his free time coaching the boys' team *Freetown Vikings*. Sierra Leone had been through a brutal civil war and there was still fighting in parts of the country. Many of the boys had lost their parents.

The team received a lot of attention in the Norwegian media, and Norway's Sierra Leonean community and others enthusiastically followed its impressive performances. After the referee was chased off the pitch by angry fans who felt that the *Freetown Vikings* had been the victims of unfair decisions, there were police guards present at the matches.

Before the team came to Norway, Laukli had received assurances from all the players that they would return to Sierra Leone with him when the tournament was over. Laukli began to worry that some of them had other plans, but the players assured him they had no plans to stay in the country.

On the morning of 5 August, the squad leader discovered that 20 players and the coach had disappeared. The next day, 12 of the players reported to the police in Stavanger, Trondheim and Strömstad and applied for political asylum.

NRC's Secretary General became personally involved and tried to persuade the players to return home. He also stated in interviews that he did not think they would have grounds for asylum, since none of them were being personally persecuted.

This was met with criticism from several quarters. Employees in the Directorate of Immigration anonymously told the newspaper Dagbladet that the players were being tricked into returning by NRC, despite there being a strong likelihood that they would be granted asylum. NOAS was also critical of how NRC handled the situation. It turned out that everyone who eventually applied for asylum was granted it.

However, some of the players were persuaded to return home, and when the plane left, two days after the team's disappearance, six players and one coach were on board.

The players continued to receive attention in the Norwegian media after the tournament, and Dagbladet sent a journalist to Sierra Leone to interview those who had chosen to return home. They said they were met with criticism and negativity from family and friends because they had not taken the chance to stay in Norway. But the coach also revealed that he was criticised by families who were disappointed about the players who did not return home.

Several of the boys who were granted asylum went on to play for professional Norwegian teams, including Viking, Bryne, Moss and Sogndal.

AT LEAST 50 PER CENT INTERNATIONAL DONORS

When Raymond Johansen took over as the new Secretary General of NRC on 1 September 2002, he emphasised that his first major task was to implement the previously agreed strategies and the Policy Paper. As a former plumber, he insisted that strategies should be "installed" instead of the more academic "implemented".

NRC was not only to follow the need and contribute wherever possible, but also be a unique and professional organisation. In the forward to the 2002 annual report, Johansen wrote: "The Norwegian Refugee Council's strategic work has resulted in a stronger focus: we know who we are and where we are going."

Establishing core activities in the programme work was quickly followed by another goal: to increase the proportion of international institutional donors. While nearly 90 per cent of project funds came from the Norwegian authorities in the 1990s, the goal now was that a maximum of 50 per cent of funding should come from Norwegian sources. However, this should not come at the expense of the contributions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and NORAD. NRC should rather actively and purposefully seek closer cooperation with the EU, the UN, Swedish Sida and other international institutional donors.

> NRC's strategic work has resulted in a stronger focus: we know who we are and where we are going.

There were three main reasons for this:

1. To limit political and economic dependence on one country or one donor.
2. To give NRC access to a larger donor base and thus greater growth.
3. To increase the organisation's influence as an advocate through a broader collaboration with institutional donors.

This decision quickly began to yield results. The donor base, the budget and NRC's influence grew. Once again, NRC developed in a way that strongly distinguished it from other Norwegian humanitarian organisations.

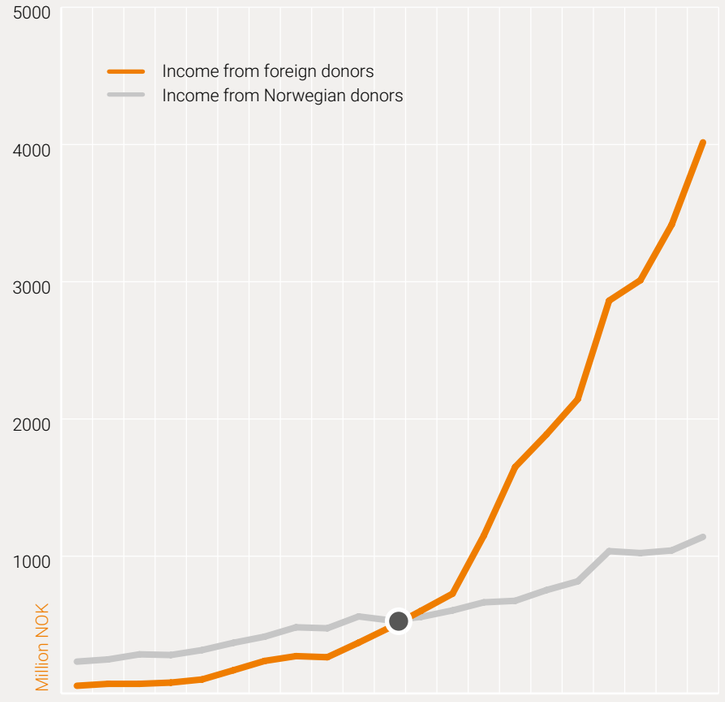
As early as 2001, NRC's board decided to strengthen relations with the EU's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), and in the years that followed, the organisation received ever increasing budget funding from the EU. More than anything else, this contributed to professionalising NRC's project management. The EU required completely different documentation on how funds were used and what results the organisation was trying to achieve.

As an important contribution to this work with the EU, NRC established an office in Brussels in 2005. The following year, NRC Europe was formally established as a Belgian organisation. Through the Brussels office, NRC gained more direct access to the EU's humanitarian departments. The organisation was better equipped to conduct internal controls and to develop reporting and anti-corruption systems.

All this contributed to NRC being able to expand its donor base further. Another added benefit of the expanded donor collaboration was a professionalisation of the support systems at the head office, such as the establishment of a separate section which, among other things, was to coordinate the work with applications, reports and guidelines for collaboration with institutional donors.

NORWEGIAN AND FOREIGN INSTITUTIONAL DONORS: 2000–2020

In 2002, NRC set a goal that at least 50 per cent of its income should come from non-Norwegian donors. In the years that followed, the work began to bear fruit, but it was not until 2010 that funding from donors such as the EU and Sida really took off.



The measures taken around the year 2000, including downsizing and sub-letting a floor at the head office, helped NRC balance its finances. Slot machines, a travel lottery and a small but loyal group of regular donors made important contributions to NRC's day-to-day operations. Nevertheless, it was obvious that the funds from the telethon in 1998 had been crucial in enabling the organisation to grow and provide assistance to more and more displaced people.

In principle, the donations from the telethon were to be used within five years, but the Norwegian Fundraising Association gave permission to extend the period by three years. Nevertheless, it was important to obtain income from sources other than institutional donors before the telethon funds ran out – and it was getting urgent.

Alternative income was crucial in order to be able to start up projects in cases of urgent need, before it was clear whether institutional donors would provide funding. It also enabled NRC to provide assistance in areas that donors did not want to support for various reasons. In addition, the administration grant that Norwegian organisations received was not large enough to cover the real costs. The paradox was thus that the better NRC got at obtaining funding from institutional donors, the most strained its finances would become, because its unrestricted income did not grow in step with its project funding.

COLLABORATION WITH BUSINESS

While collaboration between humanitarian organisations and the business community had long been the norm in the United States, it was uncommon in Norway before the turn of the millennium. Several large Norwegian companies, especially those with international operations, had begun to consider it important to demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility. A number of other Norwegian humanitarian organisations had come further than NRC, and had already signed the first partnership agreements.

Steinar Sørlie believed NRC was well placed to make similar agreements. Despite scepticism in parts of the organisation about collaborating with commercial actors, he convinced the board to hire a director of corporate relations.

When NRC was looking for a new Chair in 2000, after Siri Bjerke resigned upon becoming state secretary, Gerard Heiberg was elected – partly due to his long business career. The hope was that he would help open doors through his large network of contacts. Heiberg also took on a special responsibility to support the organisation in this process.

NRC succeeded relatively quickly in entering into a partnership agreement with Statoil, which supported the organisation with NOK 1 million annually in the years that followed. However, it proved more difficult than expected to form partnerships with other commercial actors.

In 2002, Raymond Johansen, who had by that time taken over from Sørlie as Secretary General, recommended shutting down the corporate relations department. The majority of the board supported this proposal, but both employee representatives on the board voted against it, and demanded that it be entered into the minutes that they considered the decision as a solution to a staff conflict and that the requirements for further efforts had not been thoroughly assessed.

One short year later, the organisation started slowly reaching out to the business community again. Eventually, it became a key focus area once more. However, it would be more than a decade before commercial partnerships provided significant income to the organisation.

While collaboration with the business community was given less priority for a period, the focus on acquiring partners among Norwegian membership organisations increased. This was considered important, not least because NRC, unlike several other Norwegian humanitarian organisations, did not have local associations in Norway.

In 2004, NRC initiated a collaboration with the Norwegian Scout Association (NSF). In the years that followed, NSF arranged a scout fundraiser every spring, which raised money for NRC's projects. Scouts visited NRC in Uganda, and the organisation was present at the scouts' National Jamboree in 2005, where it arranged a two-day role-playing activity in which the scouts gained insight into the challenges refugees can face.

Another important partner was the Norwegian Humanist Association, which also carried out fundraising campaigns among its members.

Plan International established a Norwegian branch in the mid-1990s. They had a professional fundraising apparatus and spent significant resources on marketing, which had not previously been seen to a great extent in Norway. Several other organisations followed suit and recruited a large number of regular donors. Compared with these organisations, NRC was a small player with about 1,000 regular donors.

SCOUTS IN UGANDA: The Norwegian Scout Association (NSF) visited NRC's projects in Uganda in 2005. NRC was also invited to the scouts' National Jamboree the same year. This is a facsimile from the magazine Speideren, extra edition in connection with the scout fundraiser and the National Jamboree in 2005. Cover photo: Gøril Trondsen Booth

AFGHANISTAN, 2010: A car from NRC on its way to Samangan province, which had been hit by an earthquake. NRC built houses for families who were left homeless after the quake. Photo: Christian Jepsen/NRC

NRC did not have the resources to prioritise large marketing budgets and instead hoped that increased visibility in traditional media would contribute to attracting more financial supporters. Despite the organisation's success in increasing its media coverage, surveys showed that only five per cent of the Norwegian population mentioned NRC when asked to name humanitarian organisations.

A CHANGE OF NAME

An important reason for the low level of familiarity with and knowledge about the organisation was considered to be that the Norwegian name, *Flyktningrådet*, ("The Refugee Council") could suggest that NRC was a public body. Many people also associated NRC with providing assistance to refugees in Norway. This was understandable, since the organisation had played this role when it was a semi-governmental body.

In 2004, the board decided that it was appropriate to change the Norwegian name of the organisation. The English name remained unchanged. *Norwegian Refugee Council*, was well established and did not involve the same challenges as the Norwegian version.

The organisation engaged a professional agency in the naming process and

also invited employees to make suggestions. After a long and thorough process, Secretary General Raymond Johansen presented two alternatives to the board. His preferred alternative was *"Refugo"*. It was a contrived name, but with associations to the English words *"refugee"* and *"refuge"*. The second alternative was "Shelter", which was one of NRC's core activities.

Both proposals received a mixed reception from the board, although it was not completely dismissive of *"Refugo"*. The board encouraged the administration to make thorough assessments before a final decision was made. The proposed name was tested on focus groups, which showed that few associated it with a humanitarian organisation. The board therefore decided to revisit the issue.

Early in the process, several employees had suggested "Flyktninghjelpen", which can be literally translated as "Refugee Aid". It was a natural alternative, not least because the Danish sister organisation was called the *"Danish Refugee Council"* in English and*"Dansk Flyktningehjælp"* in Danish. Svein Mollekleiv, Secretary General of the Norwegian Red Cross, had already proposed *"Flyktninghjelpen"* when NRC became a foundation in 1996 – to separate the new independent organisation from the previous umbrella organisation. At that time, his suggestion fell on deaf ears.

The external agency did not consider "Flyktninghjelpen" as a real alternative in the first round. After the board's feedback, however, the Secretary General and the administration found that simplicity was perhaps the best option, and that "Flyktninghjelpen" was the clearest description of what the organisation was actually doing. The board agreed, and a long and detailed process eventually came to a simple solution. From 1 February 2005, NRC officially changed its Norwegian name to "Flyktninghjelpen".

However, the expectation that the name change would lead to the Norwegian people gaining a clear understanding of the organisation's activities turned out to be too optimistic. The challenges of making it clear that NRC was not a state puppet and that it did not work with refugees in Norway continued.

A STRONGER VOICE

Through the development of a "comprehensive refugee policy" and the establishment of the Geneva Office in the 1990s, NRC took a clear stand in its advocacy work early on. This gave the organisation a profile that differed from other humanitarian organisations – also internationally.

Taking a more active role as an advocate for displaced people in the many countries where NRC operated made the organisation a clearer and more principled actor. In September 2004, NRC published a special booklet: *Colombia – the conflict that the world doesn't want to see*. The booklet describes a humanitarian situation and conflict that was little known in Norway. It was very well received and was in demand by the humanitarian community in both Norway and Colombia.

For NRC, independence was absolutely crucial in exercising the role of advocate. NRC was to stand alongside refugees and let their voices be heard, without taking sides with political or military actors. NRC's active advocacy work in Norway, in its programme countries and in international forums distinguished the organisation from the Red Cross, but also from Norwegian People's Aid at the other end of the scale, which had taken a clear political side in the Sudan conflict.

FLYKTNINGERÅDET

REFUGO
NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

FLYKTNINGHJELPEN
NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

NRC
NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL

CHANGING LOGOS:
Until 1993, NRC used the same logo symbol as UNHCR. A new logo was then designed to create a more distinct identity. When Petter Nome became Director of Communications at NRC in 2003, he oversaw a change of colour from burgundy to orange. In connection with the Norwegian name change in 2005, a draft logo was drawn up for the first choice name, "REFUGO". When the organisation instead opted for "Flyktninghjelpen", the orange logo was retained with the original symbol of people fleeing. In 2008, it was decided that the symbol in the original logo should be removed and replaced with "NRC".

"PÅ FLUKT" (DISPLACED) THEMATIC BOOKLET:
NRC was early to point out that humanitarian crises that were little heard of were not "forgotten" but rather "neglected". The booklets on Colombia, Western Sahara and Bhutan between 2005 and 2008 helped to increase the focus on neglected humanitarian crises, and the annual list of neglected crises that the organisation publishes today has its roots in those booklets. Photo: NRC

> For NRC, independence was absolutely crucial in exercising the role of advocate.

However, NRC also wanted to conduct public information campaigns and advocacy work on the situation for refugees and internally displaced people around the world. The "Global Displacement Overview" (*Flyktningregnskapet*) was launched as a publication for the first time in 2004. It was an up-to-date reference work on the world refugee situation, and NRC's editorial staff collaborated with UNHCR and the Geneva office in gathering information on refugees and internally displaced people, respectively. The target groups were the media, educational institutions, decision-makers and others with an interest in international issues. The main focus of the "Global Displacement Overview 2004" was return and repatriation, and the publication contained background articles about 74 countries around the world. It received extensive media coverage and was to become an annual publication in the years that followed.

NRC did not take as central and actively influential a role in Norwegian refugee policy in the 2000s as it had in the 1990s. This was partly due to the fact that some important individuals had left the organisation, but there was also a concern that an overly active presence in the Norwegian asylum debate would contribute to many people perceiving NRC as an organisation that worked with refugees and asylum seekers in Norway. This was especially relevant to the marketing department, which believed that such a perception would make fundraising work more difficult.

However, it did not lead to NRC withdrawing completely from the Norwegian refugee debate. Ahead of the parliamentary elections in 2005, the organisation conducted a review of the parties' political programmes in the refugee field, which received much attention.

CENTRE OF EXPERTISE ON INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

The centre of expertise on internally displaced people in Geneva, called the *Global IDP Project*, began as a project in 1998. Eventually, it became clear that there was a need for the centre's services on a more permanent basis. Elisabeth Rasmusson, who later became Secretary General of NRC, took on the responsibility of leading the work in Geneva in 2001. Together with a committed and knowledgeable staff, she set about developing the project further and ensuring reliable funding. Eventually, NRC received signals from several countries' authorities that they were willing to support the centre financially over several years, which made it possible to make longer-term plans.

Since this was no longer a short-term project, the name was changed to the *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre* (IDMC) in 2006. The centre expanded its work to cover all countries with internally displaced people, enabling it to present a total estimate of the number of internally displaced people worldwide for the first time. The database was updated on a continuous basis, and the centre produced an annual publication giving a complete global overview.

IDMC was also an active advocate in relation to national authorities and international organisations, offering courses and seminars in countries with many internally displaced people. It emphasised the importance of the individual country's responsibility for providing protection to internally displaced people, and the legal framework that should safeguard their rights, summarised in the UN's *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. IDMC published thorough reports based on its seminars, with detailed recommendations to various actors.

It worked closely with Walter Kälin, who in 2004 took over from Francis Deng as the UN Special Representative for Internally Displaced Persons.

ANNIVERSARY YEAR: Elisabeth Rasmusson, Secretary General of NRC, in conversation with the Director of OCHA, John Holmes (left), and the UN High Commissioner for refugees, Antonio Guterres, during the tenth anniversary celebrations in Oslo for the UN Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons. Photo: Truls Brekke/NRC

HUMANITARIAN AND MILITARY OPERATIONS

> If humanitarian efforts were to succeed and ensure that aid workers could operate in reasonable security, there would have to be no links between the humanitarian actors and military interests.

In 2003, NRC participated in the Peace Initiative together with around 190 voluntary Norwegian organisations to protest against the US war plans in Iraq. The anti-war work was an expression of NRC's responsibility to warn against situations that could create streams of displaced people. When the occupation became a fact, NRC was quickly in place in Iraq to assist with the return of refugees and internally displaced people.

But the deep distrust of American and other Western occupiers made work in the field impossible, and NRC's staff were putting their lives and health at risk. Consequently, the organisation chose to withdraw from Iraq until further notice. If humanitarian efforts were to succeed and ensure that aid workers could operate in reasonable security, there would have to be no links between the humanitarian actors and military interests. NRC therefore protested against the deployment of Norwegian soldiers in Iraq and the fact that they were given "humanitarian" tasks. Mixing military and humanitarian roles was considered unacceptable, and an undermining of both the security and trust that aid workers must have among the local population in order to carry out their work.

The US forces wanted the humanitarian actors to share information about where they were running schools in Iraq so that the attacks would not affect schoolchildren. UNICEF and other organisations agreed to share this information, but for NRC, this was impossible because the organisation would not be able to claim it was neutral if it shared information with armed forces.

The occupation of Iraq and the attack on Afghanistan illustrated the conflict between military and humanitarian operations, a debate that is still ongoing.

There was strong engagement with the issue and emotions ran high both in NRC and in the other humanitarian organisations. Therefore, it was important to present the facts and keep a factual tone. There was no disagreement that the normative basis for work to protect and safeguard human dignity should be the UN Charter, the Geneva Conventions and the UN Declaration of Human Rights. According to these sources, human development and human rights are linked to human security. As such, it is no coincidence that the use of military force is recognised as legitimate, and the UN has a mandate to both support and deploy military forces. The use of military force must therefore, under certain conditions, be seen as a desired and necessary part of the work for human dignity.

Prior to the massive terrorist attack on the United States on 11 September 2001, such discussions were largely related to military intervention in so-called complex humanitarian crises, where the combination of armed conflicts, abuses against the civilian population, disasters and inaccessibility to humanitarian organisations means that large ethnic groups were threatened and military force was needed to safeguard the security of the population and their access to aid.

However, this does not mean that all actors involved in promoting human dignity – which includes human development, rights and security – are the same and can therefore switch between each other's roles and tasks. NRC believed that, from such a holistic perspective, it is necessary to maintain the different roles and mandates of different actors. Although the military always represents a superior physical power, with financial and material resources of an order of

magnitude completely unknown to humanitarian actors, when entering a situation they must adapt to the context. Other actors must be given the space they need, while the military must also understand its own limitations.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE UN CHARTER

The attack on the United States in 2001 had created a different context for this discussion. First and foremost because the war on terror did not have a humanitarian justification for military intervention, but a traditional security justification. It further complicated the situation that the invasion of Iraq did not have a legitimate mandate in international law. Military intervention presupposes compliance with the UN Charter, i.e. as self-defence or in order to prevent genocide, and with authorisation from the Security Council.

In the early 2000s, the discussion of the mixing of military and humanitarian roles quickly became linked to the situation in Iraq, where there was no legal mandate for war. The situation in Afghanistan was better suited for a principled discussion, since it could be argued that the US-led intervention was legitimate.

Terrorism and the fight against it created a new situation. The West and rich countries were also affected. It was clear that conflict and unrest in one part of

Norsk FN-topp får Afghanistan-kritikk

Den norske FN-toppen i Afghanistan, Kai Eide, har mistet styringen med det humanitære hjelpearbeidet. Det mener en rekke hjelpeorganisasjoner.

■ ZLATA TURKANOVIC
■ JAN INGE KROSSLI

19 norske og internasjonale hjelpeorganisasjoner går i et felles brev hardt ut mot FNs humanitære innsats i Afghanistan, som er ledet av nordmannen Kai Eide.

FNs hjelpearbeid er for dårlig styrt, og FN har ikke nok ressurser til å håndtere den humanitære krisen i det krigsherjede landet, Organisasjonene krever at FNs humanitære innsats skilles fra den politiske og militære.

– FOR OPPTATT AV POLITIKK

Flyktningehjelpen, Redd Barna og Care Norge er blant organisasjonene som står bak brevet til Eide. De mener at FN og Eide har vært for opptatte av politikk, og ikke har oversikt over den humanitære situasjonen.

Tørke og høye matpriser har forverret hverdagen for Afghanistans allerede lidende befolkning.

– Vårt poeng er at man ikke må glemme de humanitære behovene til befolkningen. Vi mener at FN har vært alltfor opptatt av utvikling, mens de ikke har satt inn nok ressurser eller oversikt til å møte den humanitære krisen, sier generalsekretær Elisabeth Rasmussen i Flyktningehjelpen.

FNs spesialutsending, Kai Eide, er ansvarlig for både det politiske og humanitære arbeidet for alle FNs hjelporganisasjoner i Afghanistan. Organisasjonene mener det er en uheldig rolleblanding, som gjør det vanskeligere å nå fram med humanitær hjelp.

«(...) det viktigste nå er å få på plass en sterkere humanitær innsats for å koordinere den humanitære responsen», skriver Mette Gerhardsen, generalsekretær i CARE Norge i et innlegg i Dagsavisen i dag.

De frivillige hjelpeorganisasjonene mener at FNs nødhjelpskoordinator John Holmes og hans kontor må få dette ansvaret, slik de har i Somalia og Sudan.

BESØK I AFGHANISTAN

Rasmussen i Flyktningehjelpen har nettopp kommet tilbake fra en fire dagers reise i Afghanistan, sammen med nettopp Holmes. Han overtok jobben som FNs visegeneralsekretær for humanitære spørsmål og koordinator for nødhjelp etter Jan Egeland i fjor. Det er første gangen Holmes besøker Afghanistan.

De to besøkte flere frivillige organisasjoner, flyktningleire, sivile myndigheter og militærbasen. Turen har skapt usikkerhet om mattilgang for 3,5 millioner afghanere, samtidig som kamphandlinger har drevet 160.000 på flukt til nærliggende av landet, 650 sivile har blitt drept hittil i år.

– Vi ønsker at FN får økte ressurser slik at de får bedre forståelse for den humanitære krisen. Situasjonen er uoversiktlig og tallet på interntflyktninger er underrapportert, sier Rasmussen.

Utenfor Jalalabad, som ligger mot Pakistan, besøkte Holmes og Rasmussen en leir med afghanske flyktninger som har blitt sendt tilbake fra Pakistan. 360 familier hadde slått seg ned i erkenen og levde under provisoriske telt.

– Det var en fransk organisasjon som kjørte inn vann til dem, ellers fikk de ingen hjelp. FN mangler tilgang til 45 prosent av landet, mens mange internasjonale og afghanske hjelpeorganisasjoner har mer tilgang. Med bedre koordinering og større ressurser fra FNs side kunne hjelpen nådd flere, sier Rasmussen.

rasmus@reliefgroup.no

«FN mangler tilgang til 45 prosent av landet, mens mange internasjonale og afghanske hjelpeorganisasjoner har mer tilgang.»
Elisabeth Rasmusson, generalsekretær i Flyktninghjelpen

Se også debattinnlegg på side 3.

Generalsekretær i Flyktninghjelpen, Elisabeth Rasmusson (t.v.) har nettopp kommet tilbake fra Afghanistan. Sammen med FNs visegeneralsekretær for nødhjelpsarbeid, John Holmes, håper hun at FN får større ressurser til å møte den humanitære krisen.
FOTO: SILJE VIK PEDERSEN/FLYKTNINGHJELPEN

Iørkenen utenfor Jalalabad i Nordøst-Afghanistan har 360 familier slått seg ned etter at de ble returnert fra Pakistan. FN har ikke oversikt over hvem flyktningene er og hvor de befinner seg, mener hjelpeorganisasjonene.
FOTO: SILJE VIK PEDERSEN/FLYKTNINGHJELPEN

FN I AFGHANISTAN

- United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) ble etablert i 2002. Kai Eide ble utnevnt til FN spesialutsending til Afghanistan 7. mars 2008, og overtok ledelsen for UNAMA.
- UNAMAs oppdrag er todelt. Det skal ta seg av politiske spørsmål, og koordinere hjelpearbeidet til FNs organisasjoner som Unicef, Verdens matvareforvd, Verdens helseorganisasjon osv.
- UNAMA skal også samarbeide tett med den internasjonale freidsbevarende styrken (ISAF) der Norge bidrar med 530 soldater.
- Kontoret til FNs visegeneralsekretær for humanitært arbeid (OCHA), der britten John Holmes er leder, jobber vanligvis mad å koordinere FNs humanitære innsats. De har ikke vært til stede i Afghanistan.

CRITICISM OF THE UN IN AFGHANISTAN:
NRC, together with a number of other Norwegian organisations, criticised what they thought was an unfortunate mixing of roles, and demanded that the UN's humanitarian efforts be separated from any political and military activity. Facsimile: Dagsavisen, 7 July 2008

> We will stand up as brave advocates for those who have been deprived of the right to vote in their own lives.

the world could quickly have consequences elsewhere. The international rules of the game seemed to no longer apply. Organisations and agreements that existed to ensure cooperation and peace were under threat. Terrorist groups without names and addresses created fear and unrest across the globe.

This was met with highly debatable countermeasures by heads of state in Moscow, Tel Aviv, Washington DC and other capitals. A changing world influenced attitudes and the political climate. But the war on terror mainly affected the civilian population in countries where terrorist groups had a foothold. Changing attitudes in wealthy countries would soon affect those migrants and refugees who were willing to sacrifice their lives to try to find protection in Western countries.

NRC saw the writing on the wall early on and knew that it would face major challenges. Its 2003 annual report states:

Our job is to be present for people who are forced to flee due to human-made crises: war, civil war, oppression, ethnic and other conflicts. We will provide humanitarian aid and guidance. We will stand up as brave advocates for those who have been deprived of the right to vote in their own lives.

PROGRAMME WORK IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

At the beginning of the 2000s, NRC's work in the Balkans still accounted for almost half of its activity, but from 2002 onwards, this was gradually phased out as a programme area. There was a clear ambition to increase activity in Africa, a continent with a number of neglected displacement crises. In the years that followed, NRC initiated projects in several African countries. However, world events led also to strong growth in NRC's involvement in Asia throughout the 2000s.

AFGHANISTAN

Following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the United States attacked the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. At a board meeting on 2 October, five days before the US attack, NRC decided to restart aid work in Afghanistan, after it had previously transferred its programmes in the country to Norwegian Church Aid in the mid-1990s. The organisation also decided to establish an office in neighbouring Pakistan, to provide assistance to newly arrived refugees from Afghanistan.

The board decision highlighted the fact that there was a danger Afghanistan "could develop into the biggest humanitarian catastrophe in recent times". The need was urgent and NRC decided to start work even before donors had granted funding, by using funds from the 1998 Norwegian national telethon (TV-aksjonen). NRC started up all four of the core activities that had recently been adopted.

SOUTH-EAST ASIA

In 2001, NRC, the Danish Refugee Council, the US-based International Rescue Committee and the Dutch Stichting Vluchteling, established the *Consortium for Assisting the Refugees and Displaced in Indonesia* (CARDI). The consortium began aid work in the Maluku Islands, which had been ravaged by civil war. Later, the work was extended to several conflict-affected areas of the country.

In 2006, NRC also started programme work in East Timor.

PROPERTY DISPUTE: Many Palestinians have been evicted from their homes in East Jerusalem, where they had lived for generations. NRC has been assisting Palestinians at risk of eviction with free legal aid since 2009. Several cases have been brought before the Supreme Court of Israel. One of the most talked about cases is the evictions from the Cliff Hotel, which is located close to the Israeli border wall. Photo: Inbal Rose

MIDDLE EAST

NRC had not had any of its own programmes in the Middle East for many years. When it started working in Iraq in 2003, it quickly withdrew again. However, the many refugees and internally displaced people in the Middle East had an enormous need for assistance, and NRC believed that it had built up the expertise that would allow it to supplement the work being offered by other organisations.

In 2006, NRC started working in both Lebanon and Palestine. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA) became an important activity. NRC chose a form of work that few other organisations had attempted. By providing legal assistance, it helped Palestinian families have their cases tried in the Israeli judicial system, in order to stop evictions by the Israeli authorities. Several cases were taken all the way to the Supreme Court. The Cliff Hotel lawsuit in particular received a great deal of international attention.

In Lebanon, NRC chose to prioritise the southern parts of the country, which were controlled by Hezbollah and where there were few other organisations present. An important priority was to help returning refugees to rebuild their homes after the devastation of the war in the summer of 2006.

DR CONGO

For a long time, DR Congo was on the list of countries where NRC was considering becoming involved, but the extremely difficult security situation in the east of the country made it impossible to start up before the autumn of 2001. Shortly after starting work in the country, a volcanic eruption covered the city of Goma in lava, and NRC's country office was completely destroyed. This further delayed the start-up. But in the years that followed, the programme in DR Congo was to become one of NRC's most important. The unrest in the country has persisted, and the organisation still maintains an active presence in 2021.

POWERFUL ENCOUNTER WITH VICTIMS OF CIVIL WAR: NRC invited Siv Jensen, who was then parliamentary leader of the Norwegian Progress Party, to Gulu in Uganda in 2005. The encounter with wounded child soldiers made a strong impression. During her visit, she stated to the Norwegian newspaper VG that she thought it would be possible to convince the other centre-right parties to maintain a high level of aid in the forthcoming government negotiations. After her visit, she also said that she had seen with her own eyes that grants to NRC were money well spent. In this photo, Jensen meets women who use dance as part of their therapy, after having been abducted by the armed group known as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Photo: Helge Mikalsen/VG

UGANDA

NRC started working in Uganda in the 1990s. At the beginning of the 2000s, it distributed food to several million internally displaced people in the northern parts of the country over a period of several years. This was the largest food distribution operation in the world at that time. As the 2000s progressed, the focus of the international community increasingly turned to the suffering of the civilian population in the north of the country. Among other things, NRC contributed by means of a hearing in the European Parliament in 2006.

In 2005, Siv Jensen, who was then deputy leader of the Norwegian Progress Party (FrP), visited NRC's work in northern Uganda together with Raymond Johansen. The Norwegian newspaper VG was also on the trip. It was noteworthy that, after the visit, Jensen guaranteed that the Progress Party would favour maintaining Norwegian humanitarian aid if it came into government. She also emphasised that, based on her experiences in Uganda, money channelled through NRC was money well-spent which reached those who needed it most.

SOMALIA

NRC started projects in Somaliland in 2004. In southern and central Somalia, however, it had long been nearly impossible to carry out humanitarian aid work due to the ongoing civil war, and no international aid organisations had offices in the country. NRC nevertheless made a great effort to gain access to the country, and negotiated directly with the *Islamic Courts Union* (ICU), which had taken control of the capital Mogadishu.

As the first international organisation, NRC received permission from the ICU to start aid work in southern and central Somalia in 2006, but only a few weeks later, Ethiopian forces entered the country and removed the ICU from power. NRC nevertheless started work in Mogadishu and several other places in southern and central Somalia.

UGANDA, 2005: At the beginning of the 2000s, NRC distributed food to one million internally displaced people in the northern parts of the country over a period of several years. This was the world's largest food distribution operation at the time. Photo: Roald Høvring/ NRC

NEGOTIATED ACCESS: Jens Mjaugedal, Director of International Programmes at NRC, signs a letter of intent with representatives of the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia, November 2006. Photo: NRC

COLOMBIA, 2003: A family who have been displaced following a massacre of 17 farmers in a village in Antioquia, January 2003. Between 1994 and 2004, the number of displaced people here increased from 300,000 to over three million. Photo: Jesus Abad

Hassan Khaire was key in enabling NRC get started so quickly in the area. He had come from Somalia to Norway as a refugee in the 1990s. After working at NRC's head office in Oslo for a while, he went on to join the Somalia office in 2006 and later became head of NRC's regional office for East Africa in Nairobi. It was not standard practice for humanitarian organisations to hire people from the exile community to lead the work in their original home country.

SUDAN

In the spring of 2004, NRC established a presence in Sudan, with programmes in Rumbek in southern Sudan, the capital Khartoum and in the province of Darfur. The conflict in Darfur went from bad to worse in 2004. NRC was responsible for the operation of Kalma camp, which was the largest camp for internally displaced people in the world at the time.

The Sudanese authorities, who played an active role in the conflict in Darfur, were sceptical of the humanitarian organisations that reported abuses and violations of human rights in the province. In 2006, NRC withdrew from the province after the authorities had prevented organisations from working in Kalma camp over a long period of time. Work in Khartoum and South Sudan continued, but in 2009, NRC was expelled from Sudan, along with several other humanitarian organisations. This came after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for war crimes in Darfur.

COLOMBIA

After the peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla forces broke down in 2002, the fighting escalated. More and more people were forced to flee, and by 2004, the number had reached three million. The vast majority were internally displaced, but increasingly, people also began crossing the border to neighbouring countries. Since the mid-1990s, NRC had supported various projects in Colombia and neighbouring countries through the consortium *Project Counselling Service* (PCS), which consisted of a number of international humanitarian organisations.

In 2004, NRC took over the work for Colombian refugees in Panama, Ecuador and Venezuela, with the assistance of local partners. In 2005, it pulled out of the consortium and established its own projects inside Colombia, where the core activities of education, legal assistance and shelter formed the backbone of its work.

NRC also worked actively to strengthen local organisations and the role of civil society. This strategy was highly successful and the organisation quickly became an important humanitarian actor. Martha Rubiano Skretteberg was Country Director for NRC Colombia during this period. She grew up and was educated in Colombia. It was the first time NRC had employed a country director with a minority background, and an example of the importance of local knowledge, cultural understanding and language skills to navigate local contexts.

NRC also played a key role when UNHCR arranged a conference in Mexico in 2004 to mark the 20th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration, a regional refugee agreement for Latin America. Raymond Johansen, who was NRC's Secretary General at the time, received a special invitation and was able to present NRC's views to government representatives from all over Latin America.

THE REFUGEE BOY WHO BECAME AN AID WORKER

DARFUR IN SUDAN, 2006: Alfredo Zamudio was popular with the internally displaced people in Kalma camp. The leather bags he has around his neck in the photo contains Muslim prayers he has received from the residents of the camp. Many a newborn boy was named Alfredo during this period. Photo: Roald Høvring/NRC

> "My father is dead. But for me, this is a way to repay the many people who helped Father and me in the years when our lives were turned upside down."

Alfredo Zamudio was 12 years old when his father was arrested, following General Augusto Pinochet's military coup in Chile in 1973. While his father was in prison, Alfredo had to support himself as best he could, and had to travel around to be close to the various prisons that his father was moved to at different times.

"Father was sentenced to 11 years in prison. But after he had served three years, it became possible to have his prison sentence commuted to deportation. In prison, he was visited by the Norwegian ambassador Frode Nilsen. The ambassador recommended Father as a resettlement refugee. In Norway, we were received by the Norwegian Refugee Council. Then our life of freedom began."

As an adult, Zamudio has dedicated his life to working for human rights and assisting displaced people. After working for several other organisations, he was hired by NRC in 2005 and was given the responsibility of coordinating the aid work in Kalma refugee camp in Sudan, which was the world's largest refugee camp at the time.

Zamudio was a towering figure in the camp, and not just because he was well over two metres tall. He had a hand in everything that happened in the camp, and was nicknamed "The Caretaker of Kalma". Among other things, he demanded that the female refugees in the camp be involved in decision-making processes.

From 2007 to 2011, Zamudio was NRC's Country Director for East Timor. He has also been sent as an expert from NORCAP to support UNHCR's work in Colombia. From 2013 to 2016, he was head of NRC's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in Geneva.

Since 2016, Zamudio has been Director on Mission at the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue, which assists with dialogue processes in conflict-stricken countries around the world. Through this work, he also had the opportunity to work in his original homeland.

"A year ago, at the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue, we were asked by the Chilean president if we could assist Chile with conducting talks after the riots in 2019. Since then, a team in Chile and I have, among other things, arranged over 30 dialogue meetings between civil society, the government and academia. We have been asked to continue this work until Chile's new constitution is ready in 2022.

"My father is dead. But for me, this is a way to repay the many people who helped Father and me in the years when our lives were turned upside down."

TSUNAMI AND RAPID RESPONSE

On Boxing Day 2004, South-East Asia was hit by a violent tsunami. Worst affected were Sri Lanka and Aceh province in Indonesia, where several hundred thousand people lost their lives. In both countries, NRC was already present to provide assistance to the victims of war and conflict.

NRC had never before worked with victims of this type of disaster, but quickly decided that it had an important role to play in these two countries – partly because it was already present and partly because humanitarian aid work in areas that were also marked by armed conflict was particularly challenging and something with which the organisation had long experience.

Only three months before the tsunami hit, NRC had participated in a crisis drill in Norway, under the auspices of the UN, where the participants trained in providing humanitarian aid to victims of disasters, while also having to deal with an ongoing armed conflict.

Between Christmas and New Year, NRC sent emergency teams to both Sri Lanka and Indonesia to map needs and investigate how it could provide assistance. In a short time, NRC signed an agreement with the Sri Lankan authorities to rebuild 30 schools that had been destroyed in the tsunami. In Indonesia, NRC distributed mattresses and other necessities to 70,000 people who had become homeless after the tsunami.

The tsunami showed that NRC had the ability to respond quickly when serious crises arose, and that the organisation had a decision-making structure that enabled it to respond faster than many others. The external evaluation report drawn up in the aftermath of the tsunami response, which was aptly titled *"We landed on our feet again"*, however, stressed that pragmatism and the will to act quickly came at the expense of necessary planning and organisation of work. The main conclusion, however, was that NRC had made an important contribution in the aftermath of the tsunami, and that the organisation's choices had largely proved to be sensible, despite the inadequate decision-making process.

Following the tsunami response, NRC considered becoming more involved in disaster areas. However, the board concluded that it was only natural to provide humanitarian aid in connection with disasters in countries where the organisation was already established to assist victims of war and conflict.

In the late autumn of 2005, a severe earthquake occurred in the mountainous region of Pakistan, and NRC again chose to provide assistance. This time, the main challenge was to transport humanitarian aid and building materials to remote areas in the mountains. NRC used both military helicopters and donkeys to transport corrugated sheet metal, so that families could repair their homes

ACEH IN INDONESIA, 2004: The tsunami required a rapid response, and NRC sent emergency response teams to both Indonesia and Sri Lanka a few days after the disaster. Photo: NRC

SRI LANKA, 2006: NRC provides legal aid to internally displaced people, both those who have fled due to the ongoing conflict and those who have fled as a result of the tsunami. Photo: Thomas Haugersveen

PAKISTAN, 2005: NRC had to use a helicopter to transport building materials to earthquake-affected areas in the mountains. Photo: Torgrim Halvari

NORWAY'S PRIME MINISTER IN PAKISTAN, 2005: Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg meets survivors of the earthquake in Pakistan, who are receiving assistance from NRC. Photo: Sveinung Uddu Ystad/NTB

before winter set in. NRC also sent a team of six mountain experts to Pakistan to conduct intensive training of aid workers in those earthquake-stricken areas that were over 2,000 metres above sea level. Norway's Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg visited NRC's project in the mountains and praised its efforts:

Before Christmas in 2005, I was in Pakistan to meet the victims of the earthquake disaster in the mountainous areas of Kashmir. Coming from the safety of Norway and meeting people who have lost everything, and then returning home, is a mentally demanding journey. When we left, it was good to know that the victims of the disaster were not being left on their own. NRC was there, in the same way that NRC has been there for people in times of war and crisis for 60 years. With a high level of professional expertise and an important mandate, NRC has both a proud history and important tasks ahead. Good luck. Best regards, Jens Stoltenberg, Prime Minister

A MORE COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE FOR NORCAP

In 2001, NRC's provider of expertise, NORSTAFF, marked its tenth anniversary. Both NORSTAFF and NORAFRIC, which recruited African personnel, would grow steadily in the years that followed. That same year, one of the envoys from NORSTAFF died when the car he was in drove over a mine in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The tragic death highlighted the need to strengthen security training, which became included as a standard part of the basic training.

In 2002, NRC signed a formal agreement with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This contributed to increased predictability for the providers of expertise, which were later merged under the umbrella of NORCAP, and emphasised the Norwegian authorities' desire to build on the good collaboration.

> In 2002, NRC signed a formal agreement with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This contributed to increased predictability for the providers of expertise, which were later gathered under the umbrella of NORCAP.

Several international incidents contributed to a great demand for these expert personnel. In addition to contributing to the *Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission* (SLMM) and the *Joint Military Commission* (JMC) in Sudan, NRC established regional providers of expertise in the Middle East and Asia, called NORMIDEAST (2005) and NORASIA (2007) respectively.

In 2005, Darfur in Sudan was one of the world's biggest crises, which clearly illustrated that there was a gap in humanitarian response when it came to protecting internally displaced people. None of the UN organisations had a mandate with responsibility for internally displaced people. There was a great need for more expertise in protection, as well as better collaboration across organisations, so that they would take joint responsibility.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) contacted the new Director of NORCAP, Benedicte Giæver, and asked if NORCAP could send more experts to Darfur. Giæver's colleagues thought NORCAP could meet this need and she agreed to the request, although in retrospect, it turned out that there were few candidates with the senior expertise required.

NORCAP had many experts with good knowledge and skills, but very few who had the experience needed in this case. So instead, NORCAP approached OCHA in Geneva and proposed it create its own expert force that everyone could use specifically for the protection of internally displaced persons. NORCAP sent Atle Solberg, who had extensive experience of aid work in different parts of the world, on assignment to Geneva with the task of creating a joint project, owned by all the organisations that were involved in protection.

The joint project was named the *Protection Standby Capacity Project* (ProCap), and led to many discussions with the organisations involved. Benedicte Giæver says that ProCap met a lot of opposition in the early years, not only with regard to the mandate, but also how the project should be managed and how the expertise should be used at a strategic level.

It was challenging to convince strong organisations, which were concerned with promoting their own agendas, to work together in this way. In addition, ProCap worked within a cumbersome UN system, which didn't facilitate effective collaboration across organisations. At the same time, it was an easy choice for NORCAP to prioritise this work. Experts in the field reported that there was duplication of work in some areas, and large gaps in the response elsewhere.

"There was a lack of senior-level expertise in the UN, and in particular, there was a need to ensure better protection of internally displaced people by promoting inter-organisation collaboration among humanitarian working groups. We wanted to implement a more holistic approach, which the international community had so far failed to achieve. ProCap, and later the *Gender Standby Capacity Project*(GenCap), were a start. They broke with the approach that each organisation worked for itself, and focused on more effective coordination and better cooperation and quality," says Executive Director of NORCAP Benedicte Giæver.

The establishment of ProCap also helped to lift NORCAP from merely providing operational support to UN organisations to becoming a more strategic player. There was little focus on protection, gender and equality in the overall humanitarian response in discussions around the world, and NORCAP used this as a call to action. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was a close and important sparring partner for both ProCap, and later GenCap, and contributed with

financial support and discussions of new approaches with NORCAP.

Despite some initial difficulties in establishing ProCap, NRC saw the value of raising protection to a higher level. In 2007, GenCap was also established, as part of the IASC. The request for a separate provider of expertise on gender and equality came from the then head of OCHA, Jan Egeland, and built on the ProCap model, sending out senior experts to advise humanitarian teams in the field on how better to include protection, gender and equality in a humanitarian response.

NORCAP was well suited to take on these initiatives because it was seen as a neutral and constructive sparring partner with which the larger UN organisations could work. NORCAP had, and still has, a broad partner base and many different types of projects. A large number of these projects are a consequence of NORCAP seeing needs, based on analyses and information received from the field. NORCAP sees the context and brings together partners to find sustainable solutions that provide better assistance to people in crisis.

The need for a greater focus on gender and equality became particularly apparent during the emergency response after a major earthquake in Pakistan. A mapping team consisting solely of men, who were flown in by helicopter to a traditionally conservative part of Pakistan, were unable to gain access to talk to women about their needs. It became obvious that there was a need for more women, both on these teams and in several other areas, to ensure that vulnerable groups were heard and their needs met.

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE: NRC's centre of excellence was inspired by the holistic refugee perspective that was launched in the 1990s. Photo: NRC

A NORWEGIAN PROGRAMME

Despite the fact that NRC deliberately chose to play a more withdrawn role in the Norwegian refugee debate in the 2000s, there was also a desire to expand programme activity in Norway. INCOR continued its work of counselling refugees who were considering returning to their home country into the 2000s, and its experiences led NRC to see the potential in expanding its programme work in Norway to new areas.

In 2002, NRC's board decided to establish a Norwegian programme based on the expertise within NRC's four core activities, and to try to find relevant partners in various fields in Norway.

Initially, NRC established a centre of expertise that would hold courses and provide training for refugee workers in Norway. An "information corps" was also formed, which consisted of people who had worked for NRC in programme countries or had been sent out by the providers of expertise. These individuals gave lectures at schools, associations and organisations and conveyed their experiences from the field.

NRC also considered starting up its own refugee reception centres in Norway, but the board concluded that this was not appropriate.

UGANDA, 2005: Jan Kolås (middle), one of the veterans of NRC, informs Secretary General Tomas Colin Archer (right) about the organisation's programme in Uganda. Photo: Roald Høvring/NRC

CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP

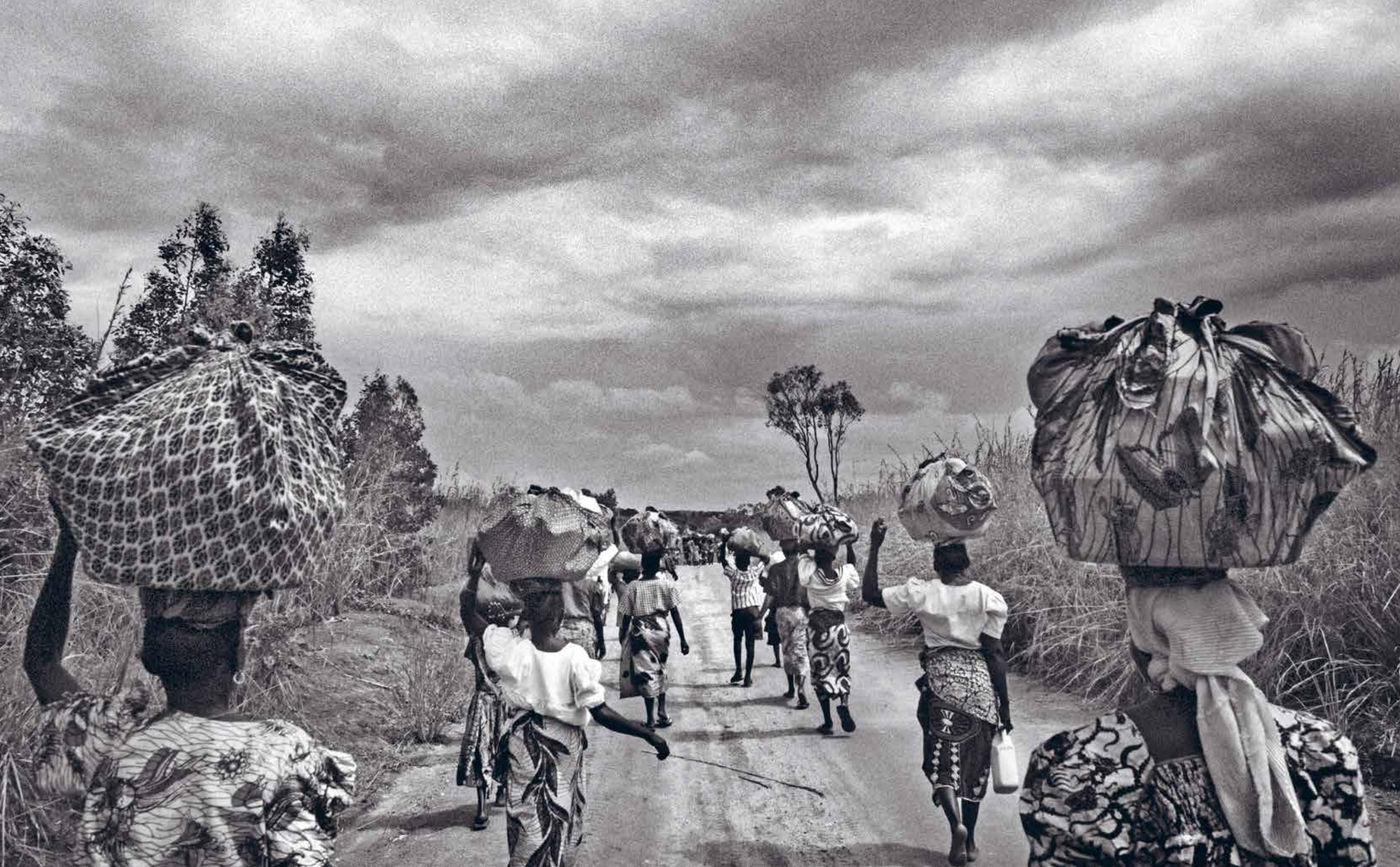
After the change of government in the autumn of 2005, Raymond Johansen was appointed State Secretary in Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and resigned as Secretary General of NRC at short notice. Assistant Secretary General Torill Brekke was Acting Secretary General until Tomas Colin Archer took over in the spring of 2006.

Archer had had a long career in the Norwegian Air Force and had held a number of top military positions, including Inspector General of the Air Force and Director of Joint Operations Headquarters. He was considered a hot candidate to take over the job as Chief of Defence, but when Sverre Disen was appointed instead in 2005, Archer chose to leave the Norwegian Armed Forces.

Archer had received several distinctions during his time in the Norwegian Armed Forces, including an international award for the results he had achieved with the "balanced scorecard" management tool. One of the first things he did as Secretary General of NRC was to introduce the very same balanced scorecard tool and professionalise the organisation's reporting and control routines.

Although Archer's military background and leadership skills contributed to the organisation initiating a necessary renewal process, at the same time dissatisfaction grew among the management team and parts of the organisation against what they perceived as a lack of understanding of humanitarian work. There was also a concern that NRC was not making a clear enough distinction between military and humanitarian responsibilities under Archer's leadership.

After a long period of unrest, when, among other things, the Director of International Programmes chose to go on leave, Archer announced in 2007, after just over a year at NRC, that he had resigned from his job as Secretary General.



◀ **DR CONGO, 2006:** A few weeks after fleeing the raging violence, these Congolese people return home to vote in the election. They walk for several days in a row to reach their destination, and on the way, have to defy both militias and soldiers to cast their vote. Photo: Marcus Bleasdale

2007–2013: NRC BECOMES MORE INTERNATIONAL

A NEW SECRETARY GENERAL WITH A LONG CAREER IN THE ORGANISATION

When Elisabeth Rasmusson took over as Secretary General of NRC in 2008, she had already had a long career in the organisation. She had been responsible for NRC's work in Latin America in the early 1990s and took on multiple assignments for the global providers of expertise. From 2001 she headed up the Geneva office, where she developed a close relationship with both UNHCR and the High Commissioner himself. NRC was seen as a crucial source of information when it came to gaining an overview of the situation for internally displaced people. This gave it a higher status, and it was considered more than just a service provider.

The number of internally displaced people continued to rise globally, and UNHCR had to take more responsibility. Still, refugees were given higher priority than those who were displaced in their own country. An important reason was probably the UN's dependence on having a good relationship with all countries' authorities. It was more complicated and sensitive for the UN than for voluntary organisations to insist that the authorities take greater responsibility for the protection of internally displaced people, while at the same time avoiding undermining relations with the same authorities.

The *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre* (IDMC) provided training in the most important rights of internally displaced people in many countries. The *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* stipulate the duties of the authorities and armed groups in all phases of displacement, and it was crucial to convey this information. Subsequently, IDMC wrote reports with recommendations that were also very well received within the UN system, especially by UNHCR.

Rasmussen's ambitious work to promote IDMC, make IDMC self-financed and build international networks, along with her good knowledge of NRC's working methods and mandate, generated confidence among NRC's staff and led her to apply for the position of Secretary General of NRC.

Just before Rasmusson took over, NRC's financial situation had worsened. In 2007, the organisation operated at a loss of 10 million, and an even larger loss was expected in the next few years unless dramatic measures were taken. This was partly due to the fact that NRC had not succeeded in compensating for the loss of the income from the Norwegian national telethon, which had now been used up. At the same time, revenues from slot machines had fallen significantly. NRC had also set aside money to cover a tax claim from Uganda, which contributed to weakened results. It was preparing for potentially similar claims from several programme countries.

The turbulent period within the organisation also contributed to unsatisfactory financial control. The board therefore demanded that the administration take the necessary steps to balance the organisation's finances by 2010. The board emphasised that financial restrictions should affect operational work as little as possible, and that any downsizing should therefore take place at the head office in Oslo. There were sharp cuts to activities in Norway in particular. From the start, the Norwegian programme had aimed to be self-financing, but this had proved difficult in practice. Consequently, the centre of expertise was closed down. The position of Refugee Legal Adviser was also terminated, despite considerable internal opposition.

> NRC was seen as a crucial source of information when it came to gaining an overview of the situation for internally displaced people.

COLOMBIA, 2009: Elisabeth Rasmusson, Secretary General of NRC, is on her way to visit programmes in Nariño, south-west Colombia, which is only accessible by boat. She is in conversation with NRC's regional coordinator, Andrés Liñeiro. The armed conflict was at its most intense, and the country had the largest number of internally displaced people in the world. Photo: Truls Brekke/ NRC

Under Tomas Colin Archer's leadership, NRC had established a youth organisation to strengthen local support in Norway. It wanted to be able to participate in coordinated activities together with the four other large humanitarian organisations, all of which had youth branches. In a time of financial challenges, however, NRC did not have the financial capacity to make the investments necessary to create an active youth organisation, and it was formally closed down in 2008.

PRIVATE DONORS

For many years, NRC had had a small, loyal group of private regular donors, but the number had not increased as expected. In 2008, the organisation decided to take the necessary steps to increase its income from private sources.

NRC's first Artist Gala – a televised celebrity fundraiser – on Norwegian television channel TV2 in December 2008 marked the start of a new drive to recruit regular donors. There were internal discussions prior to the decision to participate in the Artist Gala concept. Many were afraid that human suffering would be turned into entertainment. Some were also concerned that Norwegian celebrities would be in the spotlight, with the refugees merely as a backdrop.

The broadcast received very high ratings, and recruited almost 10,000 new regular donors, far more than expected. The conclusion was that NRC had succeeded in presenting an important message to a target group that it had traditionally struggled to reach. Although this did not silence all objections, there was

broad support in the management team and the board for the organisation to continue to participate in this type of project.

In the years that followed, TV2 arranged Artist Galas twice a year. NRC and four other Norwegian organisations were awarded the Artist Gala every two and a half years. The Artist Galas continued to produce good results, and were for many years the most important recruitment channel for new regular donors.

In 2010, NRC was awarded NRK's national telethon for the fifth time, a record among Norwegian organisations. There had been large-scale fundraising campaigns earlier in the year for the earthquake survivors in Haiti and the flood victims in Pakistan. Prior to the telethon, there was tension about whether this had led to "donor fatigue". However, the amount raised ended at NOK 209 million, the second highest result for the telethon up to that time.

An important reason for the strong results was record-breaking media coverage ahead of the fundraiser. Queen Sonja of Norway was the royal patron of the telethon and visited NRC's work with Somali refugees in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. The meeting made a great impression on the Queen, and NRC's Country Director for Kenya and Somalia, Hassan Khaire, was invited to an audience at the Royal Palace when he was in Oslo in connection with the fundraiser.

ROYAL VISIT: Her Royal Highness Queen Sonja in a warm meeting with one of the inhabitants of the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, in connection with the Norwegian telethon in 2010. Photo: Erlend Aas/ NTB

LOCAL RESOURCE PERSON: Mohamed Abdi rose in rank from being a junior assistant for NRC in Somalia, to being Country Director in Yemen. During Abdi's time as Country Director, NRC's operation in Yemen tripled in the space of three years, and by 2020 it was among the organisation's largest. Abdi is from Kenya, but has roots in Somalia, the country in which he will be Country Director from 2021. Photo: Ahmed Aref/ NRC

LOCAL STAFF TAKE A MORE PROMINENT ROLE

Hassan Khaire was one of several people with a refugee background who gained important leadership positions in NRC's programme countries in the 2000s. Khaire's knowledge, cultural understanding and network of contacts proved invaluable for navigating a complex landscape. His contribution led to more people with a displacement background being seen as an important resource when NRC came to recruit people for senior positions in programme countries. NRC acknowledged that it had not sufficiently utilised the competence of local employees. For a long time, it was the practice for leadership positions to be filled by international staff, among other things to reduce the risk of local employees coming under pressure from the local community, with an increased risk of corruption.

As a result, talented individuals were not given sufficient opportunity to develop or be promoted. From 2008, NRC began to systematically develop local expertise, including through a new development programme. As a result, a number of positions previously reserved for international employees were filled with local staff. It also helped to somewhat reduce the pay gap between international and local employees.

In January 2010, NRC started a leadership training programme with the aim of getting more of its local staff into management positions. The aim was partly to facilitate a long-term career path, but first and foremost to ensure a professionalisation of NRC's operations, so that key personnel in the field could perform well in demanding circumstances. Seven locally employed people in leadership positions in the Somalia/Kenya programme participated. Later, the programme was extended to ten more countries.

Local employees were also encouraged to apply for leadership positions in other programme countries. In the early years, it was especially the programmes in the Horn of Africa that succeed in promoting skilled, local employees. One of these was Mohamed Abdi, who, after holding several key positions in Kenya and Somalia, was appointed Country Director in Yemen, and from 2021 in Somalia.

COMPREHENSIVE HUMANITARIAN REFORMS

During the 2000s, the situation in many crisis areas showed that international aid work needed to be improved. The need for increased efficacy, better coordination and common goals and principles, not least on the ground, was clear.

Too many organisations operated on the basis of their own agendas of an economic or political nature, with highly varying quality and without coordination with either the authorities, the UN or other organisations. One of the many crises that illustrated this issue was the lack of coordination of the international response to the 2004 tsunami.

The comprehensive humanitarian reforms initiated by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator in 2005 aimed to make international humanitarian work more predictable and effective for people in need, regardless of the circumstances or geographical location. New coordination mechanisms, such as the cluster approach, meant that the various organisations were organised into clusters based on the sector in which they operated. Other examples of what came out of the reform process included the strengthening of OCHA and the establishment of new and innovative financing schemes such as the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and humanitarian country funds. In addition, the reforms aimed to improve the management of humanitarian efforts in the field, through local and humanitarian coordinators. The reforms also reflected the somewhat unrealistic mindset that partnerships between the UN and voluntary organisations should be equal.

> The comprehensive humanitarian reforms aimed to make international humanitarian work more predictable and effective for people in need, regardless of the circumstances and geographical location.

NRC participated in the reform discussions at all levels, with the Geneva office as the main contributor to the process, in addition to NRC's country offices. For instance, NRC adopted a policy that it would actively participate in the clusters at various levels. It was a conscious strategy for NRC to be elected into the *Humanitarian Country Teams*, in which the leaders of the UN humanitarian agencies and international voluntary organisations participated. This was important for gathering information, conducting advocacy, finding donors and achieving status.

The reform process was a huge boost for the entire humanitarian sector. It was time consuming and costly, but absolutely necessary. The process undoubtedly put NRC on the map as a driving force for humanitarian principles, streamlining and an sector with a more responsible, honest and open way of working. NRC's specialisation in specific core activities also contributed to it being seen as an important partner. NRC was asked to take on leadership roles in the various clusters in a number of programme countries.

The cluster reform improved predictability, but it also created additional bureaucracy in an already cumbersome UN system. As a result, NORCAP was initially sceptical about supporting the clusters. In addition, many organisations were given a cluster responsibility in a country where they did not have resources, or enough resources, to follow up work in a responsible manner. Strengthening coordination on the ground gradually became one of NORCAP's main focus areas. At the same time, there were more and more requests from various partner organisations to bring people with expertise in information management or coordination into the clusters.

When NORCAP first decided to support the clusters, it went to great lengths to recruit and send out people with specialised expertise and relevant experience for the positions they were to fill. Evaluations and feedback have shown that where experts from NORCAP have held key positions in the clusters, the level of tension between the organisations has been lower than where they have not been present. NORCAP experts are largely seen as neutral because they are not bound by the interests of a single organisation.

> NORCAP experts are largely seen as neutral because they are not bound by the interests of a single organisation.

This neutrality has been crucial to NORCAP's success in cooperating with national authorities. While UN organisations may be met with scepticism and political motives in a crisis, it is often easier for a country's government to accept an offer of expert assistance and capacity building from NORCAP. This was the case during the European refugee crisis in Greece in 2015, when various UN organisations argued about who should bear the main responsibility for the humanitarian response, and thus created an unsuitable basis for cooperation with local and national authorities.

In this climate, it has also been important for NORCAP to mark its neutrality in relation to NRC. NORCAP experts on assignment in various UN organisations have sometimes been caught between two stools when conflicts of interest or political disagreements have arisen between the UN organisations and NRC's country programme.

NORCAP has experienced that its experts have been used to influence one party or the other, which puts them in a very difficult situation. Therefore, from NORCAP's point of view, it has been absolutely crucial to have a clear distinction between the work that NRC does on the ground, and the contributions that NORCAP's experts make.

EVOLVING CORE ACTIVITIES

A major concern in the discussions about programme activities during this period was the desire to reduce the dependence on development assistance among those whom NRC was trying to help. In 2012, the core activity "distribution" was changed to "food security". The object was twofold. Firstly, food distribution was to be put into a broader context. The goal was still to prevent hunger, but in a way that created as little dependency as possible. The programme activity should rather be preventive, by supporting local food production and contributing to jobs and self-reliance. Secondly, the idea was to adjust the terminology to what eventually would become an industry standard.

Other parts of the original core activity "distribution", such as the distribution of emergency supplies, were simultaneously incorporated where relevant in the other core activities.

The idea of providing cash assistance began around 2006–2007, and was, like the change in food distribution, driven by the desire to reduce aid dependency, strengthen the local economy and production, and give recipients greater freedom to choose how to use the aid. With modern technology, such as payment for goods by mobile phone, money transfer was also a good method in areas where aid workers had access problems due to security. NRC gradually tested the method over the years, and eventually implemented it as a tool in all core activities.

NRC had begun to develop an educational programme for children affected

FROM FOOD DISTRIBUTION TO ELECTRONIC COUPONS: In North Kivu, DR Congo, families can buy what they need using electronic coupons. NRC makes agreements with local merchants and buys goods that are sold on the market. The photo is from 2017. Photo: Christian Jepsen/NRC

JOURNALIST: Maryan, 17, wants to become a journalist. Only 16 years old, she left her family and fled all alone from Mogadishu in Somalia to the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. Here she is participating in a one-year course in journalism under the auspices of NRC, with a view to becoming a presenter at the radio station Radio Gargar in Dadaab. The photo is from 2016. Photo: Fredrik Lerneryd/NRC

by war as early as the mid-1990s. Skilled employees in the field had argued that schooling was an important form of protection for children in conflict areas. Children and young people without the opportunity to go to school were easy prey for crime, radicalisation, recruitment as child soldiers and prostitution, and often remained an untapped resource when society was to be rebuilt after the end of the conflict. NRC therefore created the *Youth Education Pack* (YEP).

The object was to use intensive programmes to give young people a one-year education, with basic knowledge in a practical subject, combined with reading, writing and arithmetic. The goal was for them to find work or start their own business after completing their education. The idea was clearly a good one, but there were several challenges. The programme was expensive, partly because it required relatively large investments in technical and mechanical equipment and premises. The cost meant that the number of students was therefore much lower than in primary and lower secondary education.

The programme was designed in close collaboration with local leaders and authorities, to ensure that it was in line with local needs for skilled labour. The choices made were traditional and not very forward-looking. The main trend was hairdressing and sewing for girls and carpentry for boys. This was knowledge that already existed and was well covered in the local communities. There was insufficient evidence of how many students found work after completing their education or to what extent it contributed to local innovation and development.

Although NRC's vocational training for young people in a refugee and conflict situation was groundbreaking, development organisations had been offering this type of training in poor countries for years. It gradually became clear that NRC had not learnt as much as it should have done from the experiences of other organisations, causing it to make the same mistakes.

There was a growing recognition that law and rights were central issues in all the core activities, and that NRC, with its information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA) activity, was in a unique position to contribute in this area. Legal disputes were often related to land and property, and ICLA was an important resource for returned refugees to recover their homes and their land, so that

they could grow their own food. For children and young people, identity papers were important for gaining access to education.

NRC received much recognition for its ICLA work in the Balkans, and later in the Caucasus and Afghanistan. As a result, donors were positive about providing similar assistance in other parts of the world. During the 2000s, NRC started ICLA activities in a number of African countries, such as Liberia, Uganda and Somalia. Here, the organisation adapted its activities to local conditions, and often used traditional African litigation principles in areas where the national legal system did not suffice.

Camp management was defined as a new core activity in 2004, and in 2012 water and sanitation (WASH) was established as NRC's sixth core activity. Water drilling, construction of sanitary facilities and latrines as well as hygiene training were things that NRC had considered to be satisfactorily covered by other organisations. Over time, however, it turned out that, in many of the areas where NRC operated, there were often few who offered these services. NRC therefore gradually chose to take on this responsibility.

LEBANON, 2006: Mother and child sit in what is left of their house, in a devastated city in southern Lebanon. The five-week-long war caused enormous damage, and NRC set up programmes in the country with a focus on providing shelter for people who were left without a roof over their heads. The country office in Lebanon gradually became larger, and equipped NRC for the great refugee crisis that was to come with the war in Syria. Photo: A. Branthwaite/UNHCR

HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES: AN IMPORTANT TOOL

One challenge was to improve humanitarian aid work by professionalising and streamlining programme activities. An even greater challenge was to gain access to those affected by war and conflict, and at the same time safeguard the security of aid workers. In 2008, 260 humanitarian aid workers were attacked, of whom 122 were killed, 76 injured and 62 kidnapped. That was nearly four times as many as ten years earlier. It was clear that respect for giving aid workers free access to assist people in need, without being involved in conflict, had weakened.

NRC made it clear that there had to be a marked distinction between military and humanitarian operations. As a humanitarian actor, NRC could not accept that political and military goals overshadowed and controlled humanitarian needs. It has repeatedly emphasised the internationally accepted principles that humanitarian aid should be neutral, independent and impartial. Humanitarian aid must be governed solely by the needs and rights of civilians during times of war.

One example of how sticking to one's principles is both complicated and demanding is from Sri Lanka in 2009. In the last phase of the brutal war between the Tamil Tigers and the government, around 300,000 Tamils were displaced to a large refugee camp, Menik Farm, in the north of the country. The camp was fenced in and was strictly guarded by government soldiers. Menik Farm was in fact a prison camp, where soldiers and police carried out systematic arrests and committed assaults.

This was in direct violation of international conventions on the treatment and protection of refugees, and humanitarian organisations protested. Hoping that the authorities would ease the restrictions, and comply with the humanita-

CLOSED CAMP: NRC faced a major dilemma in its aid work in Sri Lanka, and in September 2009 withdrew from the Menik Farm camp after just a few months. At that time, Menik Farm was the world's largest camp for internally displaced people. Photo: Joe Klamar/AFP/NTB

rian commitment to save lives – the humanitarian imperative – aid organisations agreed to provide tents, food and health care in the camp in the acute phase. However, the authorities did not ease the restrictions and did not contribute to the subsistence of the refugees.

The international aid organisations ended up in a dilemma. Should they adhere to humanitarian principles or be used by one party to the conflict? NRC first chose quiet diplomacy with the UN and the Sri Lankan authorities, while providing humanitarian assistance in the camps. Eventually, NRC took on the role of a clear and principled advocate for pulling international organisations out of the camp, in order to pressure the government to change its policy towards the Tamil refugees.

The result was that NRC and a few other organisations withdrew, while some other organisations chose to stay. Their reasoning was that their continued presence had a protective aspect, that is, they could be "eyes and ears". After some time, the government chose to open up the camp.

This coincided with the refugees being gradually repatriated to their homes, or forced to settle in new places because the authorities had confiscated their land and houses. NRC then chose to work in the areas to which people had returned, but even there, it had to make difficult choices so as not to operate as a "useful idiot" in facilitating forced return and other rights violations.

It is difficult to draw any final conclusion about the effect of the two different approaches by the humanitarian organisations, but it is quite clear that NRC's role and position generated discussions both inside and outside the country's borders. As a result, NRC took the initiative for an external evaluation of the choices the organisation made in Sri Lanka, in order to learn lessons that could be used in other operations. The conclusion of the evaluation by Roger Nash, of *Fieldview Solutions,* was that NRC carried out important and principled work as an advocate, but that it should have withdrawn from Menik Farm much earlier.

DECREASING HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

The situation in Sri Lanka was far from unique. In Pakistan, at least 300,000 people were displaced in South Waziristan after the authorities' offensive against the Taliban. Aid organisations were denied access to the areas where the displaced people were staying. In Somalia, the security situation became so unsustainable that most aid organisations, with the exception of NRC and a few others, withdrew their people from the country. In a country where the humanitarian crisis at the time was described as one of the worst in the world, only very few people were able to receive assistance.

In several places, aid organisations found that "humanitarian access" to victims of wars and conflicts was increasingly limited. Many displaced people were left to fend for themselves, without receiving help with the most basic things – such as shelter, food, water and health care. Although this was not a new challenge, since humanitarian aid work is by definition conducted in complicated and somewhat dangerous areas, it was a growing problem. These challenges were to grow greater throughout the next decade.

One of the reasons was that, since the 1990s, aid organisations had increased their activities in war zones with major security challenges, which naturally had also led to greater problems in reaching people with humanitarian aid. An increasing number of internal conflicts also meant that aid organisations had to negotiate with non-state armed groups, which were often a motley assortment of actors. Such groups paid less attention to international humanitarian law, which regulates warfare between states and requires the parties to ensure a humanitarian space.

There were several examples of the authorities in different countries denying aid organisations access to the civilian population, by denying the needs existed or by adding bureaucratic obstacles, such as stopping emergency shipments in customs or delaying money transfers. Moreover, the conflict situation was often confusing, with many actors and fronts, and the picture could change quickly. In some places, aid organisations were also perceived as less neutral, impartial and independent than before. NRC was keenly aware of the fact that its independence could be challenged. The organisation was guided by humanitarian principles in all its work in the field. Only in this way could NRC maintain and possibly expand the humanitarian space it required to be able to reach those affected by conflict.

The protection of refugees and internally displaced people had always been at the core of NRC's mandate. In 2012, this was further emphasised when *Rights respected, people protected* was adopted as a new vision for the organisation.

RECEIVING ASSISTANCE: Seven-year-old Yasamin returned from Pakistan with her family to the Tangi district in Afghanistan in 2008. Her family received a roof over their heads thanks to NRC. The organisation's shelter projects helped not only internally displaced people, but also refugees who had returned and people in the local community. The photo was taken in 2012. Photo: Farzana Wahidy/ NRC

CONSTRUCTION WORK: Returned refugees, Afsar, 50, and Aziz, 47, take part in the construction of their new homes, which are being set up under the auspices of NRC. The work of giving internally displaced people and returned refugees a roof over their heads included both short-term shelter and more permanent structures. The photo is from 2012. Photo: Farzana Wahidy/ NRC

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

NRC collaborated closely with Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs at various levels. NRC's Secretary General met regularly with members of the Ministry, and occasionally the Minister. Johan Kristian Meyer, of the Section for Humanitarian Affairs, took over responsibility for the Ministry's relationship with NRC in 2008. In 2010, his role was changed to Director of Refugee Affairs, one of the first director-level positions in the Ministry. Meyer continued in this position until 2015. In a conversation with NRC in January 2021, he emphasised that the close cooperation he experienced between the Ministry and NRC served both parties well.

For a period, Ministry staff were included in the annual meetings that NRC held with its country directors. The Ministry also obtained perspectives from NRC in advance of meetings of UNHCR's executive committee.

The Ministry also wanted to use the agreement and the relationship with NORCAP to obtain information and situational awareness. Meyer wished to access reports and meet expert deployees when they were in Norway, since they could be a source of knowledge about the organisation they worked for and the country they worked in. He emphasised that the Ministry often knew very little about what was going on, not least in the UN bodies that Norway supported.

NRC even set up a digital reporting system to facilitate access. However, this did not entirely work out, since the experts had principled objections. These staff were paid by the Ministry, but did not actually work for them. But according to Meyer, the main reason was probably a lack of capacity and time at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for staff to read reports or meet the experts.

The Ministry supported NRC's goal of increasing the proportion of women, both on emergency response teams and in programmes. The same applied to the desire to get more people from the Global South into leadership positions.

”
The Ministry supported NRC's goal of increasing the proportion of women, both on emergency response teams and in programmes.

MORE INTERNATIONAL EMPLOYEES

The recruitment drive was successful. And at the head office in Oslo, the proportion of international employees increased sharply. To use Meyer's own words:

"In 2015, there were so many foreign names, both in NORCAP and in the programme companies, that one had to really look through the staff lists to find Norwegians. This was something the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wanted, but I don't think it was the driving force for the change. Rather, I experienced that it was driven by NRC, and that it was reinforced by operating in an international labour market. It became a kind of virtuous circle. The bigger and better-known you became, and the more you expanded, the more people wanted to work for you. This internationalisation is perhaps the foremost characteristic of change that I noticed. At the same time, I think we need to call it professionalisation. My impression is that the organisation fundamentally changed. It went from being primarily Norwegian, to becoming truly international. By the end, we only rarely used Norwegian as a working language."

Unlike many other international aid organisations, NRC did not favour its own country's citizens in its recruitment processes, and the strong Norwegian currency made it an attractive employer in terms of salary levels. This eventually led to only a minority of international employees in its country offices being Norwegians. After English was introduced as the working language at the head office, the proportion of international employees increased yet further.

The great breadth of national backgrounds, not least in leadership positions, proved to have a positive effect on the ability to obtain funding agreements with new donors. Swedes, Britons, Canadians and Americans brought with them important knowledge and contacts at institutions in their home countries. This contributed to a sharp growth in new donors, which took off in a big way during the first decade of the new millennium.

MORE DISPLACED PEOPLE – BUT FEWER IN EUROPE

Throughout the 2000s, the number of refugees in Asia and Africa gradually began to gain greater attention. Compared to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Somalia, the former Soviet republics in the Caucasus ended up in the shadows. In 2006, NRC conducted a critical review of its programme activities in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The aim was to assess whether continued operations were relevant, in light of the organisation's criteria for winding down operations. Following the ceasefire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1994, Armenia continued to control the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The conclusion was simple: there was no longer a need for NRC in Armenia. A possible return of Armenians in light of a peace agreement with Azerbaijan was highly uncertain. Everyone who could be given new, permanent housing had received it. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered to continue its funding, but NRC refused. The Armenia office was closed in the summer of 2007.

One year later, NRC also closed down operations in Azerbaijan, where it had assisted people in returning to their homes near the conflict areas with Armenia. The challenge was that, although people had moved back home, the authorities maintained their status as internally displaced people pending a "final victory" over Armenia. Consequently, the number of displaced people within Azerbaijan increased from year to year, as they had children. The authorities used the increase as an argument for continued financial support. But both Armenia and Azerbaijan lacked the social solutions that could have evened out the differences between internally displaced people and the rest of the population. Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had a strong desire for NRC to remain in the area, the organisation nevertheless chose to conclude its work in line with the criteria for winding down operations.

NRC decided to wind down its operations in Georgia as well, but over a slightly longer period of time – both because the programme was larger and because NRC wanted to contribute to the authorities' work on new national legislation for internally displaced people. The winding down was delayed by several years due to the war between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia in 2008, in which 80,000 people were forced to flee. NRC finally left Georgia at the end of 2013.

AT SCHOOL: Regional Director Hassan Khaire reads for pupils during a visit to NRC's school in Mogadishu, Somalia in 2014. The pupils received intensive education to make up for lost schooling due to the famine and conflict in the country. Photo: Christian Jepsen/NRC

FROM ASYLUM SEEKER TO PRIME MINISTER

Hassan Khaire arrived as a refugee from Somalia at the refugee reception centre in Vestre Slidre in Valdres, Norway in 1989. After studying in Oslo and Edinburgh, and serving two years as Director of the Norwegian-Somali Council, he began working as Coordinator for NRC's global providers of expertise at the head office in Oslo in 2002.

In 2006, Khaire was given the responsibility of establishing NRC's humanitarian aid work in civil war-torn Somalia. His in-depth knowledge of Somali society was decisive when NRC, as the first international organisation, was permitted to establish an office while the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) controlled the country.

Ahead of the Norwegian national telethon in 2010, Khaire received Queen Sonja of Norway and showed her around the Dadaab refugee camp for Somali refugees in Kenya. Later that year, the Queen invited Khaire to an audience at the palace.

In 2011, Khaire was hired as NRC's first regional director with responsibility for the programmes in the Horn of Africa. The following year, he was in the vehicle procession when NRC employees were attacked by armed men in Dadaab and one driver lost his life. Khaire was in the vehicle that managed to escape the attackers. He actively contributed to the later release of the hostages, but also had to respond to criticism for how security was maintained during the visit.

In 2017, Khaire, who is both a Norwegian and a Somali citizen, was appointed Prime Minister of Somalia by the President of the country. In 2020, he was forced to resign after a vote of no confidence in parliament.

COLOURFUL: Through an art project, Afghan children in Iran receive psychosocial support. Together with partner organisation CREART, NRC works to give refugee children the opportunity to use art to talk about themselves and their lives. The photo is from 2015. Photo: Afsaneh Moghayeri/NRC

GREATER FOCUS ON AFGHANISTAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST

From the end of the 2000s and into the new decade, there was a greater focus on parts of Asia and Africa, not only because of the increase in humanitarian needs, but also because of the political agenda where the fight against terrorism was at the top of the list. In Afghanistan, NRC worked to maintain its reputation as an impartial and independent actor. Humanitarian principles were under pressure and the international media wrote that aid workers were increasingly seen as part of a "Western agenda", with reference to various reports and studies. This was particularly evident in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia.

In Afghanistan, the NATO-led military force, the *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF), had a mandate from the UN. At the same time, the UN was also to conduct neutral and independent aid work through its humanitarian organisations, such as the World Food Programme. NRC's Global Displacement Overview for 2009 describes the situation as follows:

The aid organisations arrive in villages in armoured vehicles, perhaps escorted by ISAF, which itself conducts occasional aid work, and the vast majority are white Americans and Europeans. It is a chaos of actors that makes it very difficult to appear neutral, impartial and independent.

At the same time as we are neutral, the UN and its aid organisations must maintain a dialogue with all sides in a conflict. This also includes those who are unpopular and even considered terrorists by Western authorities. According to international humanitarian law, all armed groups that control an area have a duty to provide access to aid workers. That is why we must also negotiate with them, whether the Taliban in Afghanistan or Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

NRC's Secretary General Elisabeth Rasmusson visited Afghanistan several times. She was interviewed by the media and had meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Norwegian Parliament. Time and again, she stressed the importance of following humanitarian principles, and that humanitarian coordination must be independent of the UN's political structure in order to be perceived as neutral.

NRC appointed a country director in Pakistan in 2010. The organisation had operated in the country since 2001–2002, providing aid for Afghan refugees and after the earthquake in 2005, but had a shared country director with Afghanistan. This change made it possible to implement relief measures for the ever-increasing number of internally displaced people in Pakistan, which was a result of the military's major offensive against non-state armed groups in 2009.

As early as the autumn of 2008, NRC began working to regain access to Iran. This coincided with the authorities inviting voluntary organisations to participate in a joint needs assessment. It was the beginning of a series of trips to the country, which culminated in NRC being registered by the Iranian authorities in the autumn of 2010 and the establishment of an office in 2011. In this way, NRC gained a presence along the entire Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran axis. NRC was one of the first international organisations to establish a presence in Iran, actively supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Operating an office in Tehran was difficult, not least because of the strict international sanctions which, among other things, prevented money transfers.

In Iraq, NRC launched programmes for internally displaced people in Baghdad in 2010. Initially, this involved camp management, but quickly came to include additional core activities.

In the spring of 2011, NRC sent new personnel to its office in Beirut, as part of a restructure to generate more activity. This was just before the Arab Spring, and 18 months later, Lebanon was the largest operation in NRC's history.

NRC was one of the first international organisations to establish a presence in Iran, actively supported by Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

PROGRAMMES IN THE HORN OF AFRICA PAVE THE WAY

From 2008 to 2010, NRC was present in around 20 countries at any given time. New programme countries were added, while the organisation wound down operations elsewhere.

In Africa, NRC withdrew from the Central African Republic (CAR) and Burundi during the same period. Both countries were to return the refugee map only a few years later. NRC re-established a presence in CAR in 2014, and started humanitarian aid work for Burundian refugees in Tanzania in 2016.

Nearly half of NRC's programme countries in 2010 were in Africa – nine out of 21 countries. Several of the conflicts in Africa were protracted, as in DR Congo and Somalia. Many crises were severely underfunded and received little attention, either from the media or from politicians. For the next decade, Africa would dominate the list of "neglected refugee crises" that NRC published each year.

From 2008 onwards, the programmes in the Horn of Africa saw major growth, and NRC started working in Ethiopia in 2011. An increasingly demanding security situation in the region, and conflicts that led to mass displacement from and in several neighbouring countries, placed great demands on NRC's internal coordination. The need for more efficient management of country programmes led to a regional office being set up in Nairobi on a trial basis. This covered the country offices in Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Yemen, Djibouti and South Sudan, and eventually also Tanzania, Uganda and Sudan.

The move proved to be highly successful, and the programmes in the Horn of Africa became a major part of the organisation's work in key areas. The regional programme in the Horn of Africa was also a "laboratory" for the further development of NRC's core activities, especially in areas such as water and sanitation, food security and the use of modern technology in various activities.

The programmes in the Horn of Africa and the experiences gained from the region laid the foundation for the establishment of a regional model in the Middle East, which has been crucial in helping to manage NRC's extensive work for refugees in and from Syria.

In the autumn of 2008, NRC established a presence in Myanmar, after the country was hit by Cyclone Nargis in May of the same year. The scale of the disaster was enormous. At least 2.4 million people were affected and an estimated 150,000 lost their lives. In addition to the aid work related to the cyclone, NRC's long-term ambition was to position itself to work with displaced people in the conflict-stricken areas in the south-east of the country. This was a wise strategy,

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, 2014: Schools are destroyed, burnt and looted. Violence and instability deprive children of learning, security and the opportunities that school provides them. Chaibou (right) still dreams of the future and wants to become a pilot when he grows up. Photo: Vincent Tremeau/NRC

which later gave NRC access to areas that were considered very sensitive.

The programmes in Nepal and East Timor were completed in 2009 and 2010, respectively, while NRC withdrew from the Philippines and Kyrgyzstan in 2011. The Philippines operation was a fiasco and the organisation withdrew in 2010, after only six months, as the estimates of the needs that NRC had received from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) proved to be misleading.

In 2008, NRC had 2,600 employees at home and abroad. The level of activity increased sharply during this period, and NRC's total turnover nearly doubled from NOK 750 million in 2007 to NOK 1.4 billion in 2012. The numbers were impressive, but they were just the beginning of the growth that was to come.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISPLACEMENT

As climate change began to receive greater attention throughout the 2000s, so did the term "climate refugees", which was increasingly used in the public debate. However, it was unclear what the concept meant. How many people had already been displaced due to climate change, and not least, what was the potential scope of the problem in the years to come?

Both political parties and humanitarian organisations warned of large flows of people who would flee in desperation when their livelihoods were destroyed by climate change, creating the impression that Europe would experience a major influx of refugees from hard-hit countries in Africa and the Middle East. To nuance this picture, NRC published the report *Future floods of refugees* in 2008.

The report takes issue with the concept of "climate refugees". Firstly, the concept gives the false impression that people flee their homes due to one factor alone, while in reality it is usually a combination of several factors. The authorities' responsibility to assist those members of their own population that are hardest hit by climate change is crucial to prevent the struggle for scarce resources from leading to violent conflict.

NRC was also against the proposal to renegotiate the Refugee Convention to include "climate refugees". The fear was that established rights would be weakened in the event of a revision. At the same time, NRC emphasised that many of those who would be displaced as a result of climate change would be entitled to protection under the existing convention. NRC also emphasised that most people who fled due to climate change were internally displaced, and that there was a need to strengthen their demands for assistance and legal protection.

The report *Future floods of refugees* highlighted the lack of data on climate-related displacement. NRC's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), in collaboration with OCHA, therefore took the initiative for the first comprehensive overview of the number of people who had been displaced due to disasters. The report was published in 2009.

The report showed that 36 million people had been displaced by disasters in 2008 – and 20 million of these were related to climate-related disasters, such as droughts, floods and hurricanes. In the report, NRC emphasised that it was not possible to estimate how many of them could be directly linked to climate change.

In 2011, IDMC published a new report, which dealt with displacements in 2009 and 2010, and since 2012, the centre has published annual figures on people displaced following disasters.

"NRC was also against the proposal to renegotiate the Refugee Convention to include "climate refugees". The fear was that established rights would be weakened in the event of a revision.

MYANMAR, 2010: Two years after Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar, half a million people are still without a roof over their heads. NRC contributes to the reconstruction of damaged houses. Photo: Martin Suvatne/NRC

ASSISTING PEOPLE DISPLACED BY DISASTERS

NRC co-organised the conference *GP10 – Ten years of Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Persons*, which was held in Oslo in 2008. One of the main conclusions from the conference was that the guiding principles are just as relevant to people displaced by disasters as to those displaced by war and conflict.

In 2011, NRC, CICERO and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised *The Nansen Conference – Climate Change and Displacement in the 21st Century*. This conference culminated in ten principles for how authorities should meet future displacement as a result of climate change. Following the Nansen Conference, *The Nansen Initiative* was established as a consultative process between the participating countries with its own secretariat in Geneva.

Ahead of the climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009, NRC participated in expert meetings in Poznan, Bonn, New York and Barcelona. In Bonn, NRC also arranged a high-level panel debate on displacement related to climate change. As the only Norwegian organisation, NRC was invited to participate in the *UN Leadership Climate Change Forum* in New York the same year. NRC also organised a separate side event during the climate summit in Copenhagen.

The Nansen Initiative, and what became the *Platform on Disaster Displacement* in 2016, is one of the clearest examples of the value of NRC's advocacy work. Today, there is a widespread understanding in most countries and in the UN of the fact that climate changes will lead to forced migration.

In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, NRC decided that it should assist in disasters only if it was already present in the country.

An apparent exception to this rule was NRC's initiation of humanitarian aid work in Myanmar following cyclone Nargis in 2008. Among other things, NRC helped rebuild destroyed houses and schools, and ensured that they were solid enough to withstand new cyclones in the future. An important reason why NRC chose to establish a presence in Myanmar was that the organisation had long wanted to start programmes for people who had been internally displaced as a result of conflict in the country.

In countries such as Somalia, people were increasingly being forced to flee by a combination of drought or floods and conflict. This was not least due to the fact that parts of the country were inaccessible to aid organisations as a result of the security situation, which led to people affected by disasters having to flee to other parts of the country to receive humanitarian aid.

FLOOD IN PAKISTAN, 2010: The flood is the worst in the country's history, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee their homes. NRC's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) warns that people who are already fleeing conflict in the country are being hit especially hard. Photo: Rune Eraker

SOUP KITCHEN IN HAITI, 2010: With funds raised during an artist gala at the Norwegian Opera after the earthquake, NORCAP sent a team of five, who ran a kitchen for people who had lost their homes. After a while, the kitchen was transformed into a school kitchen in collaboration with the World Food Programme, and delivered 12,000 meals daily.
In the photo to the right are NORCAP's Jørn C. Øwre and Knut Thindberg.
Photo: Anneli Lyster/NRC

> The response in Haiti is a good example of how NORCAP strengthens the capacity of national authorities.

THE EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI

The powerful earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010 killed 300,000 people before relief efforts began. The earthquake also led to acute food shortages, after around three million people saw everything they owned destroyed. In line with the adopted Policy Paper, NRC did not initiate programme work in Haiti, but NORCAP started intensive aid work in collaboration with other partners on the ground, and took on a more independent and operational role than had normally been the case until then.

The need for food was enormous, and in such a crisis, it is not enough to just hand out sacks of rice. People had lost their homes, including everything they needed to actually cook food. In the first phase, NORCAP sent a team of five experts to Haiti, who had fully equipped mobile kitchen units and water tanks. The equipment was donated by the Norwegian Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs covered transport and other expenses that were necessary to get the field kitchens up and running. Initially, the experts set up four large mobile kitchens, each producing 10,000 meals a day. The kitchens were powered by brought-in diesel engines and therefore did not burden the already hard-pressed infrastructure.

The people of Haiti had long suffered from a lack of food and drinking water. Before the earthquake, 1.9 million people were dependent on food aid to prevent starvation, and half of the country's inhabitants lacked drinking water. After the earthquake, even more people became dependent on humanitarian aid to get enough nourishment. The children in particular were already suffering from malnutrition in Haiti.

It was crucial to ensure that the massive relief effort in Haiti took place in a well-coordinated manner. Accordingly, NORCAP collaborated with the World Food Programme and local Salvation Army organisations on food distribution. NORCAP's experts also helped train the local population to ensure a sustainable response.

The UN lost around 100 people in the earthquake, and many UN staff members were sent out of the country due to the trauma they experienced. This contributed to the important initial response being delayed. Three weeks after the earthquake, there were 1,300 national and international NGOs registered in Haiti. The organisations were quickly deployed on the ground, but their presence strained the overall coordination effort. The need for effective cooperation was great.

Experiences from previous crises showed the importance of effective coordination between organisations on the ground. It therefore became NORCAP's main priority to ensure that different actors agreed on who was to do what, when and where.

Experienced NORCAP experts with high technical competence were sent out as cluster coordinators for a number of fields, such as protection, food security, shelter and camp management. They helped to improve interaction between organisations and avoid duplication of work in the humanitarian response. This was well received by the UN system and other organisations on the ground. NORCAP was a neutral and experienced partner, which made it an effective partner in the field, as there was no disagreement about mandate and role.

The response in Haiti is a good example of how NORCAP strengthens the capacity of national authorities. As a neutral actor, NORCAP was more readily

accepted by the authorities than other organisations. Among other things, NORCAP supported the Haitian government with a special adviser to the Prime Minister. NORCAP's expert helped the Prime Minister to put the Haitian authorities in the driver's seat for reconstruction and development work, by strengthening existing coordination mechanisms and ensuring that the ministries took ownership of activities that were their responsibility.

The senior expert also served as special adviser to the Norwegian government, and contributed to shaping Norway's response. The bulk of Norwegian funding was channelled to specific regions to provide for water management, sustainable agriculture and disaster risk reduction.

The earthquake in Haiti also highlighted the need for a faster transition from a crisis phase to an early reconstruction and development phase. It was difficult to coordinate the large number of organisations working in Haiti, which in turn prolonged the crisis phase.

For the locals, it was first and foremost about meeting basic needs such as food and shelter. The dismantling of camps for internally displaced people required large resources, and there was a particular need to secure land and housing rights, as well as to clear areas so that people could rebuild homes, livelihoods and social networks.

Based on experiences from the earthquake response in Pakistan in 2005, NORCAP made it a priority to secure long-term support for at least two to three years after the earthquake, as this was crucial for rebuilding affected areas and strengthening the capacity of the authorities. The context in Haiti was nevertheless far more challenging due to the lack of well-functioning institutions before the earthquake.

The UNESCO office experienced little physical damage during the earthquake and was in operation at an early stage, but the need for educational support was great. NORCAP therefore sent several experts to UNESCO, who assisted in coordinating the education cluster, in addition to contributing to teacher training and psychosocial support for children.

The schools contributed with education, psychosocial support and follow-up through a school food programme. In addition, they provided relief for the parents who could focus on restoring normality in their family situation, knowing that their children were safe at school.

A total of 40 experts were sent to Haiti in 2010, the largest number of NORCAP experts sent to a single country that year. Between 2010 and 2013, NORCAP sent experts on a total of 68 assignments, and Haiti is thus one of the largest responses in NORCAP's history.

EDUCATION EXPERT: Annelies Ollieuz has been deployed to several major humanitarian crises. In 2015, she was on assignment for NORCAP in Liberia during the Ebola epidemic. The schools had been closed for more than seven months, and Oullieuz assisted the authorities with the reopening. Photo: Eirik Christophersen/NRC

2.5 MILLION CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL

"Getting children back to school after a disaster is important to help them through the trauma. The earthquake destroyed the country's infrastructure. Many buildings collapsed and nearly 4,000 schools were destroyed," says Annelies Ollieuz, one of NORCAP's education experts who was stationed in Haiti in February 2010.

She was responsible for improving the contact between the different clusters, especially the education cluster, which consisted of several aid organisations. After the earthquake, more than 2.5 million primary school children lacked access to education. The challenges were many and sometimes unforeseen.

"There were factors that affected the progress of our coordination work to a greater extent than first assumed, such as difficulties in clearing space to set up temporary school tents. Later, land rights became a major problem. For example, we had to prevent new school buildings from being used for purposes other than education, since the person who had accepted the building plan often turned out not to be the rightful owner," Ollieuz says.

She had many tasks during her six-month assignment for UNICEF. Initially, she played an important role in ensuring that education was part of the plans for new camps. She also became responsible for establishing and coordinating educational facilities in the new camps and worked closely with various voluntary organisations. She collaborated with Haiti's Ministry of Education at both national and municipal level to plan school openings.

"It was important to map out needs, at the same time as we made sure to avoid overlaps or people not receiving the assistance they needed. For example, we didn't want two different organisations to build classrooms at the same school. Identifying our additional needs was as important as filling in the gaps. All efforts were focused on one thing: getting children back to a safe school as soon as possible. The longer they are away from school, the greater the risk that they will never return," Ollieuz explains.

NRC UNDER ATTACK

Although aid workers in conflict areas have always had to live with the risk of violent attacks, the situation deteriorated drastically throughout the 2000s. In the past, the biggest risk was being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Now, aid organisations were increasingly becoming the direct targets of various armed groups in Afghanistan, the Middle East and several parts of Africa. While humanitarian organisations previously experienced a degree of protection as long as they made their identity clear, they now began to remove logos from vehicles and keep as low a profile as possible so as not to attract attention.

NRC was more vulnerable than many organisations, because it worked in the most dangerous areas in the world. Accordingly, NRC began strengthening its security measures early on, by establishing a separate security section at the head office and hiring security managers at all country offices.

Since 2007, NRC has arranged HEAT courses (*Hostile Environment Awareness Training*) for its own staff and the staff of other humanitarian organisations. At the courses, participants receive training in how to act in order to minimise the risk of ending up in dangerous situations. They also learn how to act if the worst happens and they are attacked or kidnapped.

On 29 June 2012, Secretary General Elisabeth Rasmusson was to visit the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, near the border with Somalia. The visit was decided a short time in advance, due to the mass displacement following the major drought disaster and acts of war in Somalia.

NRC considered using an armed escort during the visit, but concluded that it could increase the risk of an attack, since Kenya had recently declared war on the non-state armed group al-Shabaab. The Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders didn't use armed escorts in the area at that time either.

Inside the camp, NRC's three vehicles were shot at and attacked. The vehicle in the middle, where Rasmusson and Regional Director Hassan Khaire were sitting, managed to escape, while the drivers of the other two cars were shot. One driver died of his injuries.

The attackers hijacked the rear car and kidnapped four foreign aid workers: a Norwegian, a Canadian, a Filipino and a Canadian-Pakistani. They were driven at breakneck speed in the direction of Somalia.

After the vehicle broke down, the hostages were forced to walk. Both of the men who had been kidnapped had gunshot wounds to their legs and were struggling to keep moving. The Filipino aid worker had to be supported by the other hostages in order to keep up.

The year before, two people from Doctors Without Borders had been abducted in the same area and were still being held captive. Therefore, considerable resources were mobilised to free the hostages before the kidnappers could transport them deep into Somalia. After four days, the good news came that the Kenyan military, with the support of the militia group Ras Kamboni, had succeeded in locating the kidnappers and releasing the four aid workers.

CRISIS DRILLS: Since 2007, NRC has held HEAT courses (*Hostile Environment Awareness Training)* for its own staff and those of other humanitarian organisations. The course combines theoretical instruction with highly realistic simulations of the dangers that aid workers may encounter in the field. Photo: Hanne Eide Andersen/NRC

ATTACKED: The attack in Dadaab in 2012 was one of the most serious incidents in the history of NRC. "We can't go back in time and prevent what happened, but the organisation has learnt from the incident, and we are still learning," stated NRC in 2017. Photo: AP/NTB

LAWSUIT, SELF-EXAMINATION AND A CHANGE OF ROUTINES

Shortly after the tragic incident, NRC launched an internal investigation to identify how it could happen and how the organisation could prevent something similar from happening again. The report presented 130 follow-up points. One of the most important conclusions was that information security had failed, allowing potential attackers to become aware of the impending visit.

Several of those affected by the attack were critical of NRC's security routines, and asked in particular why the organisation had not provided armed escorts and why they had not been given the opportunity to withdraw from the visit to the camp when the decision not to have armed escorts was made. They also wanted the organisation to set up an external investigation. However, NRC argued that an external investigation would not contribute any important additional information, and pointed out that an external security expert had reviewed and approved the internal evaluation.

One of the survivors after the attack, Steve Dennis, filed a lawsuit against NRC in 2015, demanding compensation for lost earnings and injuries as a result of physical and mental injuries after the attack. He also demanded a formal apology from NRC for what he believed was a serious failure in security routines. NRC met Dennis and negotiated with him on his financial demands, but could not agree to take responsibility for the tragic outcome.

The case therefore ended up in Oslo District Court, where Dennis was awarded NOK 4.4 million (plus interest and court costs) in compensation. The court also ruled that NRC had acted with gross negligence. The NRC's board stated that they did not want to appeal the verdict, but that they did not agree with the court's assessment of gross negligence. NRC came to an agreement with the other survivors after the attack, and they were awarded increased financial compensation.

Following a 2017 report on the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation's (NRK) investigative documentary series Brennpunkt about NRC's handling of the dra matic attack, NRC concluded in a statement on its website that much could have been handled better both before and after the attack:

"The Dadaab attack and the court case have been an opportunity for managers and staff to discuss how we can build a stronger culture of trust and achieve the best risk management, security work and staff care possible."

The Dadaab attack and the court case have been an opportunity for managers and staff to discuss how we can build a stronger culture of trust and achieve the best risk management, security work and staff care possible.

MALI, 2013: Abderrahmane Maiga stands in front of her ruined shop in Gao, 23 February 2013. The shop was destroyed in battles between Islamists and French and Malian government soldiers. NRC established a presence in the country in 2013. Mali is located in the Sahel belt, which runs across the African continent just south of the Sahara, and is described as the world's largest contiguous humanitarian crisis area. Photo: Joe Penney/ Reuters/NTB

THE ARAB SPRING: MAJOR NEW CONFLICTS BREWING

Large demonstrations and popular uprisings broke out in several countries in North Africa and then in the Middle East in 2010–2011, which became known as the Arab Spring. There were massive political changes, which led to regime change in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. In Yemen, Libya and Syria, the uprisings led to civil war and international military intervention. In Libya, the state almost disintegrated, and in many of the countries, the unrest proved to be fertile ground for extremist groups. In Syria, Yemen and Libya, the situation developed into a humanitarian catastrophe, and the countries were to dominate the news and become a major challenge for the international aid apparatus throughout the decade 2010–2020.

Another area where conflicts increased and the security situation deteriorated dramatically during this decade was the Sahel – an area that stretches from West Africa across the African continent. After Boko Haram launched its armed uprising in north-east Nigeria in 2009, violence escalated. Three years later, an

uprising in northern Mali took the international community entirely off guard. Mali, considered by many to be the region's beacon of democracy and stability, developed in a direction that created rising unrest in the western part of the Sahel belt. Neighbouring countries such as Burkina Faso and Niger would soon feel the consequences in the form of refugees and increasing violence.

It was especially the Middle East, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, along with DR Congo, Colombia and the flow of migrants and refugees across the Mediterranean and through Central America, that were to shape the humanitarian agenda during this decade. The world's wealthy countries were put to a humanitarian test, but neither Europe nor the United States passed.

In 2002, NRC's annual budget was less than NOK 400 million. By 2011, the budget had grown by a factor of three. The number of employees and institutional donors had also increased. How would the organisation meet the enormous challenges created by its own growth, greater complexity and the increased numbers of displaced people? There was obviously a need for extensive organisational development to ensure that NRC would continue to be a responsible organisation for displaced people, donors and partners.

In 2011, NRC initiated an internal project to analyse its operations and core processes. Unclear roles between the head office and the country offices, and also within the head office itself, were identified as the main cause of inefficiency. All this resulted in new principles for decision-making responsibility between the head office and the country offices, where the object was to decentralise decision-making authority.

As a pilot model, NRC established a regional office in Nairobi, which was responsible for all activity in the Horn of Africa: Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Yemen and Djibouti.

STRENGTHENING CRISIS RESPONSE

The organisational analysis also led to an internal discussion about whether the NRC should have ambitions to be a relevant actor in the acute phase of humanitarian aid work, in addition to sending personnel from NORCAP to various UN organisations and other actors. As previously mentioned, NRC had a good reputation for responding to new crises in countries where it already had an established country programme, such as the tsunami in South-East Asia (2004), the earthquake in Pakistan (2005), the drought disaster in the Horn of Africa (2011) and the influx of refugees from the Ivory Coast to Liberia (2011). At the same time, NRC was perceived as effective to a lesser extent in the acute phase of humanitarian aid work.

In 2011, NRC launched a project to evaluate emergency capacity across the organisation. The project identified challenges related to coordination: the ability to quickly put personnel in place, limited logistics capacity, and time-consuming decision-making processes. The conclusion was that all NRC's core activities were relevant in the acute phase of a humanitarian crisis, but no modules had been developed that could be rolled out quickly.

Experience from previous years showed that NRC had several organisational weaknesses. One of them was that it took too long to respond to new crises in new countries. An example of this was the Philippines, where it took nine

RAPID RESPONSE TEAM IN SOUTH SUDAN, 2012: Shelter specialist Ghada Ajimi Oliver and logistics expert Zoran Filipovic are returning to the capital Juba after a visit to the state of Upper Nile, where they have mapped the humanitarian needs of refugees from Sudan. Photo: Christian Jepsen/ NRC

months before NRC managed to send a team to Mindanao to consider initiating operations. This is because the organisation had to wait until technical advisers were available. Another weakness was that, even in countries where NRC was already present, it took far too long before personnel were sent to respond to completely new needs.

The management team believed it was necessary to develop a stronger emergency aid culture in the organisation, and to incorporate a more holistic approach to emergency situations. In order to have emergency response systems and response capacity in line with the organisation's ambitions, it was necessary to implement a number of measures. A separate Emergency Response Section was established. It was given responsibility for coordinating emergency response, methodology, resource mobilisation and response capacity.

NRC recruited a dedicated emergency response team, with specialist expertise in water and sanitation, shelter, logistics and distribution. Just a few weeks after the team was in place, it was sent to Mali and Burkina Faso to perform a needs assessment, before moving on to South Sudan. The team was later central in the

development of NRC's response to the flow of refugees from Syria to Jordan, and helped build up the operation inside the northern parts of Syria, which was controlled from the Turkish side of the border.

As part of this work, NRC made prior arrangements with suppliers of emergency items and later established logistics capacity in Dubai. NRC's core activities were further developed to be relevant in the acute phase of crises as well.

The first assignments for the emergency response team were financed by funds from the Norwegian national telethon and TV2's Artist Gala, but eventually also with earmarked funds for emergency preparedness and emergency response in the framework agreements NRC had with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the *Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency* (Sida). From 2013, NRC was selected as one of the humanitarian organisations pre-approved by the British *Department for International Development* (DFID) as a partner in acute crises. An extensive evaluation process concluded that NRC met DFID's quality standards regarding a number of technical, logistical, financial and administrative standards, including the involvement of refugees and internally displaced people in the programme countries.

AN EXPERIENCED LEADER: Toril Brekke joined NRC in 1997, and held a number of key positions in the organisation until she left in 2017. She led the reorganisation project from August 2013 to January 2014, was acting Secretary General twice, Assistant Secretary General, Director of International Programmes for two terms, acted as Director of the Emergency Response Department and was Country Director in Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka. In the photo, we see her in Darfur, Sudan, in 2004. Photo: Patrik Ekløf/NRC

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

> Gradually, NRC built up internal expertise in change management and organisational development.

In the spring of 2013, the board decided to take organisational development one step further. NRC initiated a collaboration with *Boston Consulting Group* (BCG), which assisted the organisation pro bono. The aim was to establish an overall management model, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the head office and the other parts of the organisation, while also improving the head office's organisation and working methods – among other things, to counteract the trend of strong but somewhat inefficient growth in the number of staff. At the beginning of the project, clear criteria and goals were drawn up, to focus on strengthening the head office's strategic leadership function, developing cooperation across departments and with regional and country offices, ensuring good control systems, and establishing mechanisms for organisational learning and innovation.

With a decentralised decision-making structure in the new business model, it became important to introduce a common approach to how NRC's country programmes should be organised. Without standardised functions, the 25 country offices would develop in different directions and the head office would have limited scope for control. Following the reorganisation of the head office, a new process was initiated in 2014 to define a model built on a common template, but still flexible enough that it could be adapted in both small and large country programmes.

The organisational model was based on common principles for all levels and specific guidelines for how it could be implemented in different contexts. Following a pilot project in Lebanon, the model was gradually introduced in all of NRC's country programmes during 2015 and 2016, and in the regional offices in 2016. The project was led from the head office and included, among other things, improvement projects related to leadership, common digital monitoring and reporting systems, and global schemes for salaries and compensation. In parallel, measures related to other global IT systems, mechanisms for internal audits, risk management, evaluation systems and strategy work were also implemented.

The change processes were both resource-intensive and stressful for the entire organisation. Change takes time, and NRC carried out this work with its own internal resources, while the organisation continued to grow strongly and responded to major crises around the world. BCG were valuable partners in parts of this work. Gradually, NRC built up internal expertise in change management and organisational development. This later turned out to be important in dealing with the size and complexity of the organisation as it is today, and in making continuous organisational adjustments.

◀ THE HORRORS OF THE WAR IN SYRIA: The conflict in Syria has had enormous humanitarian consequences. The photo shows Palestinian refugees in a food queue in the Yarmouk camp on the outskirts of Damascus, 31 January 2014.NORCAP envoys with various types of expertise worked in this camp for several years. Photo: UNRWA/NTB

2013–2021:
MAJOR CRISES PUT NRC TO THE TEST

JAN EGELAND TAKES THE HELM

Toril Brekke was Acting Secretary General from the beginning of March to August 2013. Then, on 12 August, Jan Egeland took over. After just three weeks in post, Egeland announced the new business model. The task of implementing the changes started immediately. This involved extensive work with process descriptions, new reporting lines and role mandates, and the entire staff of the head office received new job descriptions. In addition, in the winter of 2014, the head office moved to new premises at Prinsens gate 2 in Oslo. Despite all the changes in the staff's daily work, this process took place quickly and without much resistance.

Jan Egeland had a long career and extensive experience from international work in the humanitarian field. From 1990 to 1997, he was State Secretary in Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and was a leader in the development of the "Norwegian model" in Norwegian foreign policy. In a nutshell, this involved using NGOs and conducting activist peace diplomacy in which actors outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were given important roles. He had become familiar with NRC during the Kurdish refugee crisis in Iraq in 1991.

"When I called around to various humanitarian organisations on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to recruit personnel for the crisis areas, NRC's Trygve Nordby immediately said yes. I was impressed by NRC's willingness to take risks and the desire to be involved," Egeland recalls.

From 2001 to 2003, Egeland was Secretary General of the Norwegian Red Cross, and from 2003 to 2006, he was the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. During those years, he was a leader in the work of streamlining international aid work in major, acute crises and worked on the UN's reform of the humanitarian system in 2005. He later became Director of the Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs (NUPI) in Oslo, before taking the position of European Director of Human Rights Watch. From there, he came to NRC. Egeland had a large network in the UN system and was well known in the international media.

It was this background that motivated NRC's then Chair, Idar Kreutzer, to call Jan Egeland one spring day in 2013. Kreutzer spoke of a well-run, growing organisation with enormous potential. He believed that Egeland's background was perfect for the phase that NRC was in. A few months later, Jan Egeland was introduced as NRC's new Secretary General at an all-staff meeting, accompanied by a music video about Egeland by the Norwegian comedy duo Ylvis.

SYRIA RESPONSE, 2013: Jan Egeland's first field trip was to visit NRC's programmes for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. In Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, Regional Director Carsten Hansen gives a tour of the organisation's activities in the camp. NRC had set up tents for 50,000 Syrian refugees so far that year. Also in the photo are Security Manager Glenn Pettersen (left) and Head of Advocacy and Information Rolf A. Vestvik. Photo: Ken Opprann/NRC

LEFT HER MARK: Magnhild Vasset joined NRC in 1999 and had a number of assignments for the NRC's standby roster, including in the Balkans and Uzbekistan. She was Country Director of Uganda for a three-year term until 2006. This was followed by several years as Head of Section and Deputy Director of International Programmes at the head office in Oslo, before returning to the field as Country Director for Afghanistan and Liberia. As Director of Field Operations in NRC from 2013, she has had a major responsibility for further developing and establishing new country programmes during the largest growth period in the organisation's history. Photo: Gøril Trondsen Booth

STORMS ON THE HORIZON – NRC STANDS READY

Major humanitarian crises in the making, in the Middle East and the Sahel especially, and an increasing number of refugees, put the entire international aid apparatus under great pressure during this period. NRC had previously demonstrated its ability to "seize the day", such as when it established a standby roster in 1991. Its willingness to constantly evolve – through extensive reorganisations, a new Policy Paper, the development of cutting-edge expertise and the constant expansion of its network – was among the reasons why NRC had now grown into a major international humanitarian actor.

Another important factor in NRC's development was that it had gained control over its finances, partly thanks to its large donor portfolio. In the early 2000s, NRC set a goal to have a maximum of 50 per cent of its funding coming from Norwegian sources. Other Norwegian organisations had focused almost exclusively on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norad and their own fundraising efforts. NRC realised early on that non-Norwegian donors would be even more demanding than Norwegian partners, and it set aside resources to deal with this.

It was important to have some relatively large, well-established donors as partners and deliver good results in the projects they supported. Successful results would make it easier to find new partners, since donors often discussed the qualities of the various organisations with each other. The more new non-Norwegian donors NRC acquired, the more new requirements the organisation had to comply with. This forced a "professionalisation" process at a significantly earlier stage than in most other Norwegian organisations.

NRC's decision to focus on a limited number of core activities was of great importance, since specialisation was something donors looked for. It was especially important that the organisation had cutting-edge expertise in legal assistance, a niche where NRC was a leader.

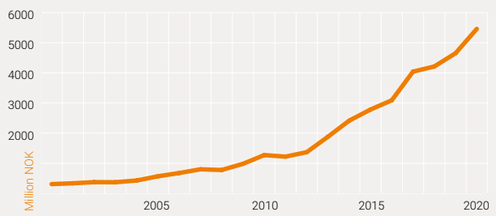
Internationally, NRC benefitted from the fact that Norway was viewed positively in humanitarian contexts. NRC was known as a strong advocate of humanitarian principles. This contributed to many donors, who wanted humanitarian aid to be independent, choosing NRC. The Geneva office played an important role both in this work and in other parts of the organisation's policy work. One example is the work to limit negative humanitarian consequences as a result of the donor countries' fight against terrorism. Ingrid Macdonald, who led the humanitarian policy work at the Geneva office, helped NRC take a leading role.

The fact that NRC operated major country programmes and had direct access to up-to-date information from the field was also a resource. This was something many donors did not have, due to a lack of embassies, travel restrictions to conflict zones and insufficient human resources to be involved in all processes and discussions. NRC became an important source of information and analysis, especially for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also for ECHO, Sida and other donors. The organisation provided relevant input in advance of donor conferences, the UNHCR Executive Committee (ExCom) and other important meetings in which the UN and major donor countries participated.

With a large number of donors, NRC had to have a good overview of the various requirements set out in the application and reporting procedures. This

allowed the organisation to work strategically to encourage donors to simplify their requirements. NRC could negotiate more regarding the text of agreements than other organisations and its ideas were often approved. Among other things, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Sida approved funding based on NRC's country strategies instead of individual, detailed applications. Nevertheless, much remains to be done before donors' systems and requirements are harmonised.

NRC was well equipped to meet the future. In 2012, the organisation had a turnover of NOK 1.39 billion, and assisted over three million people in 20 countries. The following year, turnover was NOK 1.8 billion, and 4.5 million people in 25 countries received assistance. The humanitarian crisis we saw in 2012 and 2013 was to accelerate further. NRC was to be put to its biggest test ever.



INCREASED TURNOVER: NRC's turnover was 18 times higher in 2020 than at the turn of the millennium. The strong growth is due both to the fact that the need for assistance has increased sharply and that NRC has worked determinedly since the mid-2000s to obtain funding from foreign institutional donors.

THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS: PRIORITY NUMBER ONE

Since the start of the conflict and crisis in Syria in 2011, the scale of humanitarian needs across the country has remained overwhelming. Now in 2021, over ten years on, more than 11 million people are in need of assistance, including 6.1 million who are displaced within the country. NRC is one of only a few agencies operating across the whole of Syria, working to provide emergency, transitional and longer-term assistance to people in need.

Up till 2012, NRC had a limited presence in the Middle East, with small programmes in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. Developments in Syria led to dramatic changes, and within a few years, the Middle East became NRC's largest region by far, in terms of turnover, number of employees and number of people who received help. NRC's programmes in Iraq and Lebanon were rapidly strengthened to assist Syrian refugees, and in 2012, the organisation started programmes in Jordan for the first time. In 2013, NRC established a regional office for the Middle East in Amman, Jordan, based on a model from the pilot project in the Horn of Africa.

SYRIA, 2013: More than 33,000 refugees crossed the border in just five days when the border post at Sahela, between Syria and the Kurdish areas of Iraq, was reopened in August 2013. In the camp that awaited the refugees, NRC worked to secure them a roof over their heads, clean water and proper sanitation. Photo: Christian Jepsen/NRC

REFUGEE CHILDREN TO WASHINGTON DC: "We must give hope to the six million Syrian children affected by the war," said Jan Egeland in an appeal to US elected representatives in 2014. A few months earlier, a meeting with the Syrian refugee girl Mirijam, 8, in Lebanon had made a strong impression. Photo: Ingrid Prestetun/NRC. Screenshot: United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee

At the beginning of 2013, some 800,000 people had fled Syria, while more than three million were internally displaced. Those who were internally displaced lived under extremely difficult conditions and received virtually no assistance from international humanitarian organisations. Shortly after Egeland took over as Secretary General, he travelled to Syria's neighbouring countries to inspect NRC's work for Syrian refugees. At his first meeting with the board, he announced that NRC's priority task in the future would be to provide assistance inside Syria. The crisis in Syria was to dominate Egeland's agenda for several years to come.

NRC was the only international organisation to have large humanitarian aid programmes throughout the country. It was very demanding and risky to carry out aid work in a conflict situation with different actors and an ever-changing context.

In 2015, Egeland was appointed Special Adviser to the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura. Egeland's UN assignment gave NRC an even more central role, especially as an advocate for the humanitarian needs in Syria. Nevertheless, there was initial concern within NRC that it could be demanding to combine the position as NRC's Secretary General with an international executive position in the UN system.

NRC made a strategic choice during the reorganisation in 2013 to strengthen its efforts to promote its work in the international media. Hiring Egeland gave this work additional momentum. Within a few years, NRC was more often quoted in international media than in Norway, and NRC and Egeland were often used as commentators on important international issues.

NRC also became a key provider of premises for important international decisionmakers. In 2014, Egeland was invited to give a presentation to the US Senate in connection with the hearing on the US handling of the crisis in Syria.

> NRC was the only international organisation to have large humanitarian aid programmes throughout Syria – both in government-controlled and non-government-controlled areas.

SYRIA, 2018: Children in Harasta, Eastern Ghouta, are flocking to school to catch up on their missed education after years of siege have come to an end. This school housed 725 children, with parts of it completely destroyed and others badly damaged. Photo: Karl Schembri/NRC

WAR SCARS THE LANDSCAPE: Beneath the helicopter are burnt out villages, apparently void of people. However, many people are displaced and in hiding. In 2018, it was estimated that 800,000 people were completely cut off from humanitarian aid in north-east Nigeria. Photo: Beate Simarud/NRC

IN THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS AREAS: Chima Onwe from NRC's office in Maiduguri, north-east Nigeria, is on his way to the field office in the city of Dikwa in December 2018. In the city, there are 120,000 internally displaced people who are impossible to reach without a helicopter. Dikwa is located on the Yedseram River, which flows into Lake Chad, one of the hardest-hit areas in the region. Photo: Beate Simarud/NRC

SAHEL – THE WORLD'S MOST NEGLECTED REGION

Armed conflicts, extreme poverty, terrorist groups, organised crime and large flows of migrants and refugees had already affected the enormous Sahel region for years when the 2011 regime change in Libya and the 2012 uprising in northern Mali put the area firmly on the humanitarian agenda.

Climate change and a lack of opportunities for education and work, along with rapid population growth, amplified the challenges over time, causing millions of young people to lose hope in the future. Many young people from countries in the Sahel region embarked on life-threatening journeys in the hope of reaching Europe. The number of people who have lost their lives on their way through the Sahara or in the internment camps in Libya is unknown.

Fear of international terrorism and the flow of migrants and refugees towards Europe was the main reason for a growing European interest in the political situation in the Sahel. To stop the flow of migrants and refugees, Europe allocated large sums of money to strengthen security measures in the Sahel and North Africa, but there was less interest in funding the large gap between these allocations and humanitarian needs. From 2012 onwards, about 50 per cent of humanitarian appeals have been related to various of these conflict areas.

For decades, humanitarian crises in African countries have received little attention from both the media and politicians. Following the uprising in Mali, countries in and around the Sahel region continued to dominate NRC's annual list of neglected crises. But NRC began working on several levels to raise awareness about the crises in the Sahel – and it quickly yielded results.

As early as 2012, NRC started programmes for Malian refugees in Burkina Faso, and eventually also for internally displaced people in Mali itself. On Thursday 29 May 2014, the organisation received a tragic reminder that aid work in conflict areas is risky. On that day, two of NRC's national employees were killed when their vehicle was hit by an explosion in the Timbuktu region of Mali.

The establishment of a dedicated emergency response section played an important role in NRC's work to establish programmes in a completely new region.

The emergency response team was gradually expanded with a French-speaking team, which was important in the Sahel, which with a few exceptions is French-speaking. The purpose was to assess the situation in humanitarian crisis areas where NRC was not present and start up operations in new countries or strengthen existing country offices.

NRC restarted its work in the Central African Republic in 2014 – a country where it had also had programmes from 2007 to 2009. Lack of funding was one of the reasons why NRC withdrew. Returning to the Central African Republic also gave NRC the opportunity to assess the situation around Lake Chad in more detail, where Niger, Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon were facing a growing humanitarian crisis. Tens of thousands of people had absolutely no protection from abuse and kidnapping, and very few received any humanitarian aid.

In 2015, NRC established a presence in the conflict areas in north-east Nigeria, where the fighting between the non-state armed group Boko Haram and Nigerian government forces had increased. The humanitarian needs were enormous. In the years that followed, neighbouring Niger, Chad and Cameroon were gradually drawn more into the conflict. The aid work around Lake Chad became one of the most striking examples of how to reach people with humanitarian aid in the most inaccessible areas. In several places, supplies had to be flown in by helicopter since the security situation made road transport impossible.

Even with increased capacity, with two emergency response teams, NRC saw that the situation around Lake Chad presented far greater challenges than first thought. In 2017, NRC decided to recruit a separate team to cover this area. In the years that followed, NRC expanded its activities in the Sahel to include Cameroon and Niger. NRC became one of the largest humanitarian actors in several of the most important conflict areas in the Sahel.

NRC became one of the largest humanitarian actors in several of the most important conflict areas in the Sahel.

A GLOBAL CRISIS WITHOUT A GLOBAL RESPONSE

Throughout 2015, the global refugee crisis escalated. Over 60 million people were displaced due to war and conflict. In addition, millions of people were forced to leave their homes due to disasters.

As well as Syria, the UN defined three conflict areas as top-level crises: Iraq, South Sudan and Yemen. NRC operated in all of these countries. In addition, NRC conducted aid work in countries with long-term displacement crises, such as Afghanistan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Palestine. An important reason for the increase in the number of refugees worldwide was the lack of political solutions to old conflicts. Those who had been forced to flee could not return home.

In 2014, an armed conflict broke out in eastern Ukraine between separatist groups and government forces. As one of just a few international organisations, NRC sent an emergency response team in the autumn of 2014. At the same time, NORCAP sent personnel to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) civilian observer force in Ukraine.

NRC established a presence in Honduras in 2015 to assist victims of both violence and disasters, which constantly afflicted the region. An important part of

DISPLACED BY CRIMINAL VIOLENCE: Soldiers outside a school in Tegucigalpa, Honduras in 2016. Criminal gangs are fighting for control in the area, and the children are scared to walk to and from school. A large number of Hondurans flee every year because of the violence. Others choose to emigrate because they feel their future is hopeless. Photo: A. Aragon/EU

EBOLA RESPONSE, 2014: West Africa was hit by the most serious Ebola outbreak in history, which killed more than 11,000 people in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. NORCAP sent out experts to support different UN organisations in the fight against the epidemic. Here, Director of NORCAP Benedicte Giæver visits Liberia. Giæver has been the head of NORCAP since 2001. In the background is the equipment experts use to protect themselves against infection. Photo: Trude Bruun Torstensen/ NRC

EASTERN UKRAINE, 2018: Liudmyla is on her own. Her house was completely destroyed in an air raid in 2014, and eight months later, she lost her husband to cancer. NRC helped Liudmyla and her son rebuild the house, but later, she also lost her son to illness. "Now my heart and soul are petrified with grief," she says during an interview. Photo: Ingebjørg Kårstad/NRC

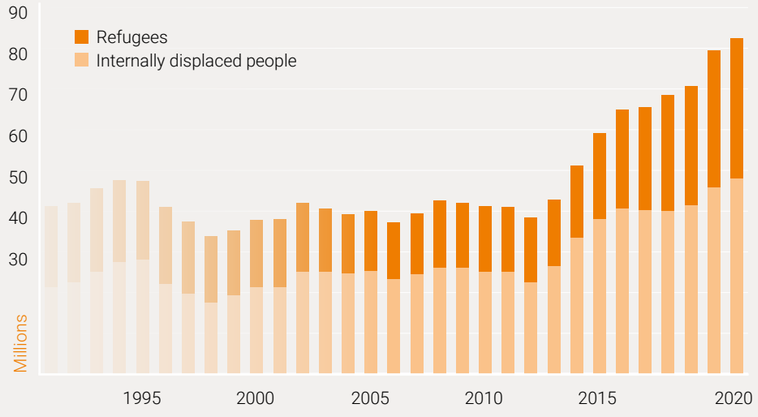
NRC's advocacy work was to draw attention to the situation and gain international recognition of the extent of the crisis. The target group was internally displaced people, refugees, people in need of international protection and people who had been deported. The flow of refugees from the Middle East to Europe had received a great deal of media attention in recent years, overshadowing the situation in Central America. However, the flow of migrants and refugees coloured the political debate in the United States, just as the influx of migrants and refugees across the Mediterranean influenced European politics.

In 2015, NRC managed to provide assistance to nearly 5.4 million people in 31 countries. In addition, NORCAP sent out experts on almost 800 assignments in 70 countries. The majority of NORCAP's assignments were in connection with the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East, the earthquakes in Nepal and the refugee crisis in Europe – with a focus on Greece and the Balkans. After 12 years, NRC closed down its programme activities in Liberia in 2015.

An important part of NRC's advocacy work for Syria was the effort to secure increased humanitarian access, as well as measures to make it easier for displaced Syrians to cope in their daily lives. In Europe, NRC advocated for sufficient search and rescue capacity in the Mediterranean, decent reception conditions in Europe, and for asylum and return policies to follow international law and not break with the Refugee Convention. Other important issues included the rights of people displaced by disasters, and education in war and crisis situations. In addition, the organisation highlighted the fact that anti-terrorism measures were increasingly at risk of undermining refugees' right to protection and assistance.

”

An important part of NRC's advocacy work for Syria was the effort to secure increased humanitarian access, as well as measures to make it easier for displaced Syrians to cope in their daily lives.



DISPLACED PEOPLE
There are now more displaced people recorded than at any time since World War Two. The number of internally displaced people increased the most up to 2014, but the war in Syria has led to the number of refugees also reaching new record levels in recent years. The number of internally displaced people before 1998 is based on estimates. Source: UNHCR, UNRWA, IDMC

THE REFUGEE CRISIS REACHES EUROPE

After four years of conflict, many Syrian refugees had used up all their savings, while a lack of international funding had forced the UN to cut back on food and other aid. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians therefore saw no other way than to embark on the perilous journey across the Mediterranean. Over one million migrants and refugees arrived in Europe in 2015. Syrians comprised the largest group, but there were also a large number of Iraqis and Afghans. Large streams of people crossed the sea from Turkey to the Greek islands of Lesvos, Kos, Chios and Samos. Many also travelled through Turkey, via the Greek border crossing in Evros, and into the Balkans, with the aim of progressing further into Europe.

For Greece, which had major economic challenges and limited experience with emergency response and asylum processes, it was an painful transition to have to deal with the ever-increasing needs. The country was already housing a large number of asylum seekers who had been waiting for a long time to have their applications processed, but as long as they stayed in Greece, it wasn't seen as a problem for Europe. In addition, the authorities didn't have enough resources or people to receive, register and process asylum applications. Several European countries closed their borders to prevent refugees from moving further north.

In 2015, NRC started an aid programme for refugees and other migrants who arrived on the Greek island of Chios. In Serbia, NRC worked with the local organisation Praxis to provide assistance to refugees and migrants who had experi-

NORCAP IN GREECE, 2015: Patric Mansour was one of the first experts NORCAP sent to Greece. Mansour and other experts working on the refugee crisis reacted strongly to the refugees' poor living conditions and Europe's inability to help Greece. Photo: Raymond Aaserud/ NRC

GREECE, 2016: Fatima collapses as she finally sets foot on the European continent. Together with her family, she has fled Afghanistan. As an Afghan, she is not covered by the EU's relocation scheme for asylum seekers and risks having to wait more than two years to have her asylum application processed in Greece. Meanwhile, many asylum seekers are sent to live in miserable and unhealthy conditions in overcrowded camps. Photo: Jim Huylebroek/NRC

> NORCAP responded quickly to the growing needs in Europe by sending experts to Greece, Italy, Hungary, Macedonia and Morocco.

enced great dangers and suffering on their way to Western Europe. Praxis was established in 2004 to continue NRC's legal assistance programmes in Serbia when the organisation phased out its work in the Balkans.

NORCAP took the initiative and responded quickly to the growing needs in Europe by sending experts to UNHCR, IOM and other UN partners in Greece, Italy, Hungary, Macedonia and Morocco. In addition to continuous negotiations with both central and local Greek authorities, international aid organisations also had to deal with a new challenge, namely flocks of European volunteers.

People who until now had enjoyed Greece as a holiday paradise wanted to help boat refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, and they collected both money and equipment. In some cases, the volunteers were able to put in place a response before the UN apparatus, which had to go through the usual diplomatic channels and systems. But the many volunteers also complicated the process, especially with regard to coordinating the work and making sure that the refugees were met by an experienced aid apparatus.

In the beginning, Greece needed help setting up and organising camps. Most of NORCAP's experts in the field were from countries in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, and it was virtually impossible for them to obtain a Schengen visa so that they could work in Greece. The solution was instead to focus on European expertise. Patric Mansour was one of the first experts NORCAP sent to Greece.

"I was shocked that a democracy like Greece – and a Europe where there had been no war or disasters in the run-up to the refugee crisis – couldn't provide a better response and share responsibility for people in need," says Mansour.

NORCAP carried out an evaluation of the Greece project together with UNHCR in July 2016, which showed that NORCAP's contribution in the early phase of the crisis was crucial and was highly valued by UNHCR. In particular, language skills, flexibility and fast processes were highlighted as strong advantages, in a response that was characterised by frequent personnel replacements and a lack of communication between the head office in Athens and the field offices on the islands.

The limited capacity of the Greek authorities meant that NORCAP quickly examined the possibility of implementing a project to increase knowledge about the reception and protection of refugees. In a new partnership with the Greek *Reception and Identification Service*, NORCAP contributed by training staff at the reception centres. The staff gained knowledge about, among other things, international humanitarian standards and principles, protection of people with special needs and identification of people who have been subjected to human trafficking or sexual violence. They also received help to set up systems for asylum processes. Throughout 2016, NORCAP thus worked on two fronts in Greece – by supporting UN organisations in the refugee camps and by supporting the authorities.

In 2018, NRC ended its programme in Greece and handed over operations to local partners and UNHCR, after ECHO made the decision to reallocate funding and provide it directly to the Greek authorities. NORCAP also phased out support for the UN organisations because of their reduced presence in the country, but further developed projects to support government agencies in the years to come.

Despite a good relationship with its Greek partners, NORCAP found that it took time for the experts to become trusted by the Greek government apparatus. It was therefore decided to recruit Greek experts, who understood Greek bureaucracy and culture and spoke the language, making it easier for Greeks to accept external aid and increasing the efficiency of the work done by the experts.

PROTEST AGAINST CLOSED BORDERS: Asylum seekers in Belgrade go on a hunger strike in protest at closed borders in the EU and the Balkans in August 2016. The photo was taken by the Serbian organisation Praxis, which evolved from NRC's legal aid programmes in the country in the 1990s. From 2015, NRC worked again with Praxis to provide information, humanitarian aid and shelter to refugees and asylum seekers on their way through Serbia. Photo: Gustavo Vilchis/ Praxis

DIRECT FROM AFGHANISTAN: In 2013, Jan Egeland visited NRC in the field in Afghanistan. Back at the office in Jalalabad, he does interviews with the international press. Photo: Christian Jepsen/NRC.

NRC RE-ENTERS THE NORWEGIAN REFUGEE DEBATE

Until 2013, NRC kept a low profile in the Norwegian refugee debate. One reason was that INCOR and most other parts of the Norwegian programme had long since been dismantled. The organisation did not have the necessary practical experience related to Norwegian refugee policy. NRC was also concerned that an active role in the Norwegian refugee debate would make it difficult for people to understand that the organisation assisted internally displaced people and refugees in their areas of origin and not in Norway.

However, a number of people in the organisation believed that it was important for NRC to help nuance the Norwegian refugee debate. Refugee issues were mainly discussed in a Norwegian context, both in the media and at a political level, and NRC had to participate in these discussions to elucidate the international refugee perspective. In 2013, NRC therefore created a role that would be responsible for Norwegian refugee policy.

This was in many ways a re-establishment of Trygve Nordby's focus on the importance of a comprehensive Norwegian refugee policy, where international assistance to displaced people and Norwegian asylum policy were seen in context. Secretary General Jan Egeland worked closely with Nordby in the 1990s when he was State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Egeland himself was known for being a fearless advocate and wanted NRC to take a clearer role. He worked closely with Pål Nesse, who was given the responsibility for following up Norwegian refugee policy. An important prerequisite for this advocacy work was that all criticism of Norwegian policy should be followed by concrete, realistic proposals for alternative solutions.

> An important prerequisite for this advocacy work was that all criticism of Norwegian policy should be followed by concrete, realistic proposals for alternative solutions.

Shortly after NRC had again joined the debate on Norwegian and European refugee policy, what would soon be referred to as the "refugee crisis" began. In the autumn of 2013, a ship sank off the Italian island of Lampedusa, about halfway between the Italian mainland and the coast of Libya. While 155 people were rescued, more than 360 drowned. For several years, Italy had had an arrangement with Libya's former leader Gaddafi regarding substantial oil imports from Libya. In return, the Libyan authorities were to prevent migrants and refugees from leaving the country by sea for Italy. For fishermen and others at sea, Italian law actually prohibited them from providing assistance to migrants crossing the Mediterranean by boat. After the Arab Spring, the fall of Gaddafi and the conflict in Syria, the number of people attempting to cross the Mediterranean increased.

For the seafaring nation Italy, the shipwreck off Lampedusa was a political wake-up call. The government launched operation "Mare Nostrum" (Our Sea) with significantly strengthened search and rescue operations under the command of the Italian Coast Guard. At the same time, Italy emphasised that, through EU and Schengen cooperation, the waters formed the whole of Europe's border to the south – and were not just Italy's responsibility. They asked other countries to contribute vessels and crews. But with the exception of a small Icelandic vessel, there was no support to be found. At the same time, crossings increased significantly in 2014 – as a prelude to the great influx of refugees and migrants to Europe in 2015. A Norwegian ship was repeatedly involved in dramatic rescue operations and rescued over 1,900 migrants and refugees.

NRC believed that Norway should strengthen cooperation and responsibility-sharing in Europe – from a humanitarian as well as a political point of view. This was the main argument for participating in the Norwegian debate. NRC advocated for Norway to send a ship, and entered into a dialogue with the Norwegian Shipowners' Association to try to find a suitable search and rescue vessel.

The government decided to send a specially adapted ship, with crew from the shipping company, the Norwegian Armed Forces and the police, to work under the leadership of the Norwegian National Criminal Investigation Service and in close cooperation with the Italian Coast Guard.

In addition, the Norwegian Society for Sea Rescue sent a rescue boat to the waters between Turkey and Greece, a crossing made by nearly one million refugees and migrants in 2015. In total, the Norwegian boats rescued more than 60,000 people in distress at sea until the conclusion of the mission in 2018.

Images and reports of refugees and migrants who crossed the sea to Europe dominated the news from the autumn of 2014, and NRC was often used as a commentator in various media to explain what was happening and why so many people didn't see any future in the countries to which they had first fled. NRC and NORCAP's encounters with refugees and migrants in Greece and the Balkans were crucial for the organisation's credibility.

Eventually, asylum seekers also began to come to Norway. A group of volunteers started *Refugees Welcome to Norway,* the Red Cross mobilised, and private individuals offered food, assistance and shelter, while the official reception system under the National Police Immigration Service and the Directorate of Immigration appeared to be surprised and paralysed by the influx of asylum seekers.

In the wake of this strong public engagement, NRC decided in the spring of 2015 to run a campaign to strengthen Norwegian efforts for Syrian refugees. The campaign had two main goals: to increase overseas aid by NOK 1 billion, and for Norway to receive 10,000 resettlement refugees. Several Norwegian organisations joined the campaign, while NRC coordinated messaging and communication.

NRC cooperated closely with the youth wings of Norway's political parties – from the Young Conservatives to Red Youth – which became key drivers in their respective parties in advance of decisions adopted at national party conferences, especially with regard to increasing the number of resettlement refugees. In June, a majority of parties negotiated a compromise of 8,000 resettlement refugees from Syria for the period 2015 to 2017.

In order to prevent asylum seekers who didn't need protection from coming to Norway, the government decided that those with a low chance of being granted asylum should have their applications processed first. The result was that large groups of asylum seekers with a strong claim, such as Syrians and Eritreans, had to wait a long time to have their applications processed. They were forced to wait for months for their first asylum interview. This approach was strongly criticised by NRC, based on its experiences of camp management internationally, where activation is given priority over passive receipt of food and other benefits. In addition, it is not very cost-effective and inhibits future integration.

During a parliamentary seminar on refugee policy in 2015, NRC was challenged by the Liberal Party to come up with a concrete and realistic proposal that would improve the situation for the refugees who had come to Norway. NRC proposed temporary work permits from day one. The proposal received support from several politicians and a number of organisations. Following preparatory work in the Ministry of Justice and public consultations, the Norwegian Immigration Act was amended and the scheme was introduced in 2017.

”
NRC and NORCAP's encounters with refugees and migrants in Greece and the Balkans were crucial for the organisation's credibility.

COLOMBIA BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE

On 10 December 2016, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos received the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to end the civil war in Colombia. Two and a half months earlier, the government and the FARC guerrillas had signed a peace agreement after years of negotiations. The peace agreement was hailed as a historic breakthrough, after more than 50 years of armed conflict, which had cost 260,000 lives and forced more than seven million people to flee. Only Syria had more internally displaced people.

After NRC left the *Project Counselling Service* (PCS) consortium in 2005 and established its own projects, it quickly became a leading humanitarian actor, not only in Colombia but also for Colombian refugees in neighbouring Panama, Ecuador and Venezuela. In addition to providing assistance to internally displaced people in rural areas, NRC was engaged with assisting displaced people in urban areas, where many Colombians had sought safety during the conflict. Since 2009, NRC, in collaboration with international partners, had prepared guidelines to meet the special needs of internally displaced people who sought refuge in cities. They included registration, land and property rights, subsistence, relationships with other residents, and not least protection.

Despite great optimism, the peace process soon encountered major challenges. The Colombian government's inadequate follow-up of the intention behind the peace agreement, the killings of demobilised guerrillas and social leaders, and the lack of government presence in former FARC areas created increased polarisation. It was obvious that Colombia needed more time to build trust and reconciliation after nearly 60 years of conflict. It didn't get any easier when the crisis in neighbouring Venezuela escalated dramatically, and a large number of refugees began to cross the border into Colombia. In 2019, NRC established a separate country office in Venezuela.

AT SCHOOL: Former FARC soldiers have replaced their rifles with pen and paper in schools under the auspices of NRC. The peace process has been difficult, with little trust between the parties. More than 50 years of armed conflict have cost over 260,000 lives, and when this photo was taken in 2017, almost seven million people were still displaced. Photo: Ana Karina Delgado Diaz/NRC

INCREASED CRISIS RESPONSE

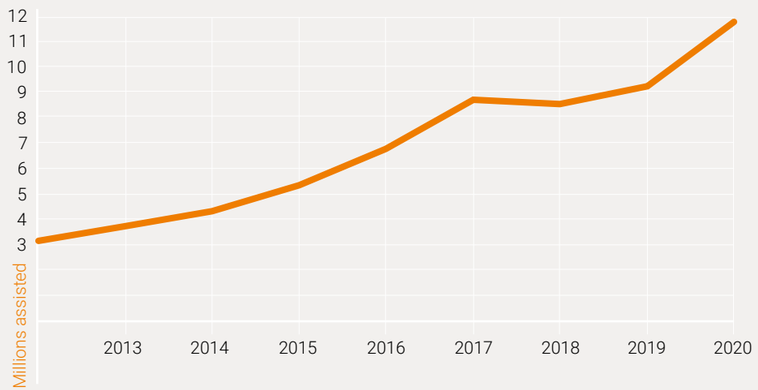
From 2016 to 2020, many crises competed for funding and attention. NRC saw an increased need to balance its efforts between disasters that received a great deal of attention and more protracted and often neglected crises.

At the beginning of 2016, more than 65 million people were displaced by war and conflict worldwide, and the war in Syria was still among the crises that had displaced the most people. The following year, the lines of conflict shifted, but the human suffering remained acute. Government-backed military groups recaptured large tracts of land from the opposition forces, and half a million people were trapped in besieged areas in 2017.

NRC distributed food and provided support for local agricultural production. In addition, it rebuilt schools and other local facilities that had been destroyed. Alongside the crisis in Syria, the situations in Afghanistan, Burundi, Iraq and Yemen developed from bad to worse. NRC had started its humanitarian aid work in Yemen back in 2011. In 2015, the conflict escalated and developed into what the UN described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. In 2016, Yemen was the country where NRC assisted the largest number of people – as many as 1.4 million.

After the Saudi-led coalition introduced a blockade of sea, land and air transport to the country in 2017, the humanitarian crisis worsened further. The war and the blockade of both commercial and humanitarian goods to Yemen led to an acute shortage of water, food and fuel. The result was a widespread human-made crisis. In 2017, as many as 22 million people were in need of humanitarian aid. NRC stepped up its aid operations in the country and intensified its advocacy work. NRC demanded that the coalition ease the blockade and that the parties refrain from military operations that could further affect the civilian population.

FAMINE IN SOUTH SUDAN, 2017: Nyagoah Gatluak has been given food for her family's children in Ngop in Unity state. Together with her relatives, she hurries home. Hunger has claimed the lives of four children in her immediate family in recent months. A famine has been declared in an area not far away, and NRC is working to prevent the people here from facing the same fate. Photo: Albert Gonzalez Farran/NRC



MASSIVE INCREASE IN AID WORK: In recent years, NRC has provided assistance to more and more people. In 2020, the organisation assisted nearly 12 million people in 34 countries, more than ever before in the organisation's 75-year history.

Violent conflicts in DR Congo and South Sudan also restricted humanitarian organisations' access to those in need. In South Sudan, three million people were forced to flee the conflict, of which two million were internally displaced. The country became an independent state in early 2011, and a power struggle between the president and vice president plunged the country into a bloody conflict in 2013. In 2016, NRC provided assistance to almost one million people in South Sudan, including through mobile emergency response teams, and expanded its aid work for refugees from South Sudan in Uganda.

The drought in the Horn of Africa affected several countries, and continued to displace people into 2017. In Somalia, a combination of drought and armed conflict displaced more than 1.1 million people. Most fled from the rural areas, which were not possible to reach with humanitarian aid due to the security situation, and settled in large makeshift camps around the cities.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in parts of Central America went from bad to worse.

There had been migration from Central America to the United States for many years, but in 2017 and 2018 another type of mass migration was seen from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, the so-called the Northern Triangle countries. Thousands of people gathered in caravans before starting the march north. This gave them greater security, and they could help each other along the way. Where

CARAVANS HEADING NORTH: Thousands of people rest along the road between Mapastepec and Pijijiapan in Mexico, on their way to the US border. Glenda Escobar, 33, and her son Adonai from Honduras are among them. Adonai stays awake every night to make sure his mother gets some sleep. The journey is strenuous and dangerous, and many people are exploited by human traffickers and people smugglers. Photo: Ueslei Marcelino/Reuters/NTB

they had previously met with goodwill, they now encountered frustration among local communities along the route. In addition, there was growing xenophobia in both the United States and Mexico, and increasingly tough border controls.

In the countries where NRC worked, there was an growing tendency to close borders and return refugees without proper protection procedures. This particularly affected Syrians, Afghans, Somalis in Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp, and people on their way to Europe. NRC warned of this through local, regional and global advocacy work.

A stated goal for NRC was to reach more people in areas where humanitarian access was limited. Extreme risks, lack of permission from authorities and parties in conflicts and destroyed infrastructure were among the obstacles the organisation faced in trying to reach vulnerable and isolated displaced groups. NRC continued to increase its crisis response and, in particular, strengthened its national advocacy work to ensure that the rights of refugees and internally displaced people were safeguarded, and that such people had better living conditions.

At the start of 2017, the world was facing several potential famines, and NRC was part of an international effort that helped to avert or reduce food crises in Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen and Nigeria. In the areas around Lake Chad the violence escalated further, and the population suffered from food shortages and cholera. In Nigeria, NRC's crisis response team provided lifesaving assistance, while staff working on food security and livelihoods provided start-up assistance to help people become self-sufficient.

In 2017, NRC established a country office in Cameroon to expand its work with the crisis around Lake Chad. In Burkina Faso, however, the organisation closed its offices and transferred its programmes to international and local partners.

NRC continued to expand its work and reached a record number of displaced people. In total, the organisation assisted 8.7 million people in 2017.

A stated goal for NRC was to reach more people in areas where humanitarian access was limited.

LEGAL AID IN YEMEN, 2019: Legal aid officer Nuhad Mubarak talks passionately about the importance of having legal documentation and birth certificates, and is pleased to see that the work she does has a direct impact on the lives of people who have been forced to flee their homes. "It makes me feel like my contribution is not going to end once we leave. It's something that lasts a lifetime, that people are able to exercise their rights in their country forever," she says. Photo: Ingrid Prestetun/NRC

At the beginning of 2018, NRC set new strategic goals for the next three years. It wanted to work more with neglected crises and reach out with help to more people in hard-to-reach areas, as well as making a stronger contribution to lasting solutions. In addition, NRC aimed to strengthen the interplay between various programme components within different sectors in order to be able to offer more comprehensive assistance.

But exactly where this assistance was distributed was about to change somewhat. There was a reduction of activity in the Middle East, while East Africa – including South Sudan – and Yemen saw an increase. The same was true of Asia, Latin America and Central and West Africa. The latter were a result of the growing crises in Venezuela, DR Congo and the areas around Lake Chad. The reduction in the Middle East was largely due to a changed conflict situation and a decline in large-scale humanitarian aid programmes in Iraq and Syria. To further strengthen its presence in Central and West Africa, NRC established a regional office in Dakar, the capital of Senegal, in 2018.

NRC strengthened its work with neglected crises in 2018. For example, it established a presence in Tripoli and Benghazi in Libya, where its focus was on providing assistance to internally displaced people. In addition, it considered relief measures for migrants who were stranded in Libya. NRC was also registered in Niger in 2018, but didn't open an office there until the following year.

Since 2017, NRC had worked through a local partner to provide assistance to Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh, but at the end of 2018, all the paperwork was in order, and in 2019 the organisation was able to start its own programmes in the country. Nearly one million Rohingya refugees were living in Cox's Bazar after fleeing extreme violence in Myanmar. In 2018, NRC ended its programme in Greece and handed over operations to local partners and UNHCR.

AFGHANISTAN, NOVEMBER 2018: A cold winter has already claimed human lives. Bashir, 14, is standing in front of the tent village where internally displaced people will spend the next few months. NRC distributed winter tents to 3,000 families this winter. Photo: Enayatullah Azad/ NRC

More resources and more funding meant that NRC could assist more people in need, with higher quality services. In 2019, NRC worked in 33 countries and provided assistance to over nine million people, an increase of 6.7 per cent compared to 2018. The organisation started work on re-establishing a presence in Sudan after the regime change in Khartoum and opened an office in 2020. Together with several other organisations, NRC had been expelled from Sudan in 2009. NRC also re-started its activities in Burkina Faso, while expanding its programmes in Cameroon and the Central African Republic.

In 2020, NRC provided assistance to close to 12 million people in 33 countries. A total of 15,000 people worked with and for displaced people on behalf of NRC. It was obvious that the organisation had pressed the right buttons after the great "refugee crisis" of 2015 and was receiving greater international recognition than ever. The organisation's ambitions have constantly increased. Now it is CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera that are the focus of NRC's media work. Former Director of Media and Advocacy Tuva Raanes Bogsnes was instrumental in professionalising NRC's global media work and bringing the organisation's message to the international media.

It is important to point out that NRC's growth was only possible thanks to its solid foundation. Previous strategy choices and organisational changes have proved successful, in the sense that they have enabled the organisation to handle huge growth and stay relevant in an increasingly demanding world.

It is important to point out that NRC's growth was only possible thanks to its solid foundation.

A NEW FOCUS ON PRIVATE FUNDING

From 2014, NRC intensified its efforts to recruit regular donors directly, after previously relying more on event-based recruitment, especially through Artist Galas, which no longer had the same potential. In 2017, NRC also started recruiting regular donors in Sweden. Recruitment has been very successful, and as of 2021, NRC has 29,000 regular donors in Norway and 19,000 in Sweden. An increasing need for flexible funding for NRC's work has led to it expanding its fundraising work to other countries.

The organisation must constantly evaluate how much it should invest in securing private funding. In total, private income amounts to only 4 per cent of NRC's income, but it is an important supplement to the funding from institutional donors. Because private funds are unrestricted, they enable NRC to start aid work quickly, without having to wait for a promise of other funding.

Income from the business sector has also increased significantly during this period. NRC acknowledged earlier than most other Norwegian organisations that classic sponsorship cooperation was not the way to go. Instead, the organisation focused on partnerships that included pro bono agreements, financial support and programme development, where partners contributed their expertise, products or services to support NRC's work. This has been particularly successful in terms of collaboration with technology companies, which have contributed to the digitalisation of humanitarian aid.

MASS DISPLACEMENT: Increased conflict in the state of Rakhine in Myanmar during August 2017 forced more than 700,000 people to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh. Nearly all of them were from the Rohingya Muslim minority. Here, an elderly man receives help from another refugee on the last stretch to Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, 12 November 2017. Photo: Tomas Munita/The New York Times/NTB

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

In early 2020, the coronavirus began to spread to country after country. Around the world, government authorities introduced strict infection control measures, which at times shut down society. The coronavirus pandemic worsened the humanitarian situation for people already living in extremely difficult conditions, while for aid organisations, it became even more difficult to gain humanitarian access to the most vulnerable groups. Accordingly, NRC quickly drew up a response plan with four main focus areas for how the organisation should deal with the pandemic:

1. collaborate with health actors to increase access to health services
2. reduce the spread of infection in camps and densely populated areas
3. reduce the negative effects of government shutdowns and closed borders
4. prevent the pandemic from leading to increased abuse, violence and human rights violations for displaced people

In the summer of 2020, NRC conducted an evaluation of its early efforts to meet the challenges of the pandemic. The evaluation showed that the organisation had not been sufficiently prepared to face a pandemic and that its work lacked central coordination. The unclear division of responsibilities between the head office, regional offices and country offices were highlighted as a challenge. The evaluation recommended that the Emergency Response Section at the head office be given a clearer responsibility for coordinating the work in future crises of a similar nature.

Despite external restrictions, for example in connection with travel, NRC still managed to maintain planned programme activities to a degree. In addition, the organisation implemented targeted measures to limit the spread of the pandemic. NRC's investments in digital programme activities and long-term efforts to create humanitarian access proved to be crucial in reaching people with assistance in this extraordinary situation.

The education sector was particularly hard hit by the pandemic, and NRC had to temporarily halt educational activities or offer digital solutions in many countries. Closed schools and limited instruction meant that children lost access to vital education. Consequently, NRC has worked to ensure that children and young people can return to school quickly after the pandemic.

While many other providers of expertise called home their experts when the coronavirus pandemic broke out, NORCAP to a large extent maintained the principle of staying behind and delivering services. The reason for this was that NORCAP also runs its own projects, and therefore chose to keep people in the field, in order to be able to perform this work as far as possible and justifiable. Experts who were in risk groups or were in areas with extremely low access to medical treatment were quickly evacuated, although many continued to work online from their home countries, and the majority of NORCAP's experts remained on their assignments. An important goal for NORCAP during this period was to strengthen the knowledge and capacity of local organisations and authorities, at a time when quarantines and travel restrictions made it difficult for international humanitarian organisations to operate as usual.

Despite external restrictions, for example in connection with travel, NRC still managed to maintain planned programme activities to a degree.

SYRIA, 2021: "Coming to office every day is a scary thing, but as a humanitarian and education worker, the fact that children and youth are not going to receive the quality education they deserve is scary too," says Marwa Alsharqawi, who works as Education Coordinator for NRC in Syria. Photo: Tareq Mnadili/NRC

SYRIA, 2021: "A seat belt is no longer enough to keep you safe," says driver Walid Debess. He has been given extra responsibility for the safety of his NRC colleagues in Syria during the coronavirus pandemic. Before each trip, both the car and equipment must be disinfected. Photo: Tareq Mnadili/NRC

AFGHANISTAN, 2020: "We see thousands of people getting affected by Covid-19, but there is no space in the hospitals. We see thousands die without their families being able to afford a proper burial, we see the poor not getting food to eat, we see people selling their children to feed remaining family members. The situation is frightening because the risk of getting the virus is higher for humanitarian workers than anyone else – we sometimes meet hundreds of people in a day – but this can't stop me from helping." Noorina Anis, NRC in Kabul. Photo: Enayatullah Azad/NRC

COLOMBIA, 2021: The children in Chocó show how they have learnt to wash their hands. The red liquid represents virus and disease, and with the help of soap and water, they keep their hands clean and avoid falling ill. Photo: Milena Ayala/NRC

FIELD VISIT: Chair of NRC Idar Kreutzer meets internally displaced people at the UN base in Bor in South Sudan in February 2014. Photo: Christian Jepsen/NRC

ASSISTANCE FROM THE BOARD TO PROFESSIONALISE NRC

NRC had been through a turbulent period before Elisabeth Rasmusson took over as Secretary General in 2008, and Chair Marianne Johnsen wanted the new Secretary General to replace some of the management team. Rasmusson, however, chose to keep the existing team, which led to Johnsen resigning as Chair. Bernt Bull took over, and the board was eventually supplemented with members with a broad background and expertise that was important to the organisation.

It was a recognition that the board's significance had changed as NRC had grown in size and complexity. While previously it was mainly people with a background in foreign aid and political work who were elected to the board, the emphasis eventually turned to bringing in board members with solid experience from leading large organisations, including from various research environments, business and the humanitarian sector.

In 2011, Idar Kreutzer was elected as the new Chair. Kreutzer had previously distinguished himself as CEO of Storebrand, a Norwegian financial services company, and made it clear that the business community could play an important role by taking social responsibility. Under Kreutzer's leadership, the board took a clearer role in NRC's strategic work, at the same time as they became less and less involved in issues related to employment and day-to-day operations.

Harald Norvik, who took over as Chair after Kreutzer in 2017, had also held a number of executive positions in Norwegian businesses. Both Kreutzer and Norvik have been crucial to NRC's growth and development over the previous ten years, introducing strategic thinking and implementing control routines, which are crucial for a large international group with an annual turnover of several billion Norwegian kroner and thousands of employees worldwide.

ANTI-CORRUPTION AND INTERNAL AUDITING

NRC was the first Norwegian aid organisation to make public an annual overview of corruption cases. At the same time, NRC established a dedicated unit responsible for internal auditing. This work was crucial in gaining the positive feedback that NRC received from major institutional donors, such as ECHO, in the years that followed.

ECHO had been an important donor to NRC since the early 2000s, and supported NRC for the first time in the former Yugoslavia. Today, it contributes funding to most of NRC's operations.

ECHO has different and stricter audit requirements than other donors. Their audit is based on NRC's own guidelines. This means that, if the guidelines state that specific documents must be included in a tender process, the entire cost will be disqualified if ECHO finds that one of the documents is missing.

ECHO requires all documentation to be sent to the head office and be ready for auditing within 30 days. Security challenges and lack of access to archives in some of the programme countries led NRC to start the project *Securing Supporting Documentation* in 2016. All documents connected with a transaction are now scanned and stored in a central electronic archive. Another goal of the project was to create better reconciliation routines for what was purchased and what was delivered. Based on subsequent audits, this project has proven to be highly successful.

ECHO conducted audits at the head office in Oslo in 2006, 2011, 2015/2016, 2019 and 2020. In addition, they have carried out a number of audits in the field. The 2015/2016 audit was particularly demanding, and almost EUR 8 million were rejected in the first round of auditing. Final repayment ended at just under EUR 700,000, after NRC gained better access to documentation and invested more resources both globally and locally, especially on projects in Pakistan.

The strengthened control procedures have led to ECHO approving nearly everything in recent years' audits, while audits for US institutional donors, which also have very strict guidelines, have resulted in all costs being approved.

NRC works in many of the most corrupt countries in the world, in areas that are also ravaged by war and conflict. The strict requirements set by institutional donors have contributed to a high degree of professionalisation. At the same time, they affect the organisation's ability to respond quickly and effectively, especially in conflict areas where it is difficult to gain humanitarian access. Consequently, it is a dilemma that fighting corruption can lead to vulnerable groups not receiving assistance in situations where it is impossible to guarantee that money does not go astray.

There is an ongoing discussion related to how much financial risk an organisation like NRC should be willing to take in order to reach the most vulnerable people. Donors' zero tolerance approach to corruption means that NRC bears the entire risk if something goes wrong.

NRC'S WORK MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

NRC has been through a challenging and eventful 75-year journey. From Europahjelpen (Aid to Europe) to today's NRC, the organisation has gone from being a fundraising campaign, to a semi-governmental umbrella organisation, to standing on its own two feet. NRC's formidable growth, especially in the last ten years, is unparalleled in the history of Norwegian humanitarian organisations' international efforts. From being a little brother among the "big five" organisations in the 1990s, NRC is today larger than the other big Norwegian humanitarian actors combined.

As of 2021, NRC has 15,000 humanitarian aid workers, including people who are temporarily involved in specific projects in programme countries. Many of them are refugees and internally displaced people – or people from the local communities where we work. NRC has programmes in 33 countries and representative offices in Berlin, Brussels, London, Geneva and Washington, along with a budget of over NOK 5 billion kroner. NRC's size and diversity has made it important to work continuously to ensure the organisation presents a consistent brand and message. This has been a crucial factor in increasing NRC's income from private donors.

Throughout its existence, the organisation's development has reflected trends and contemporary upheavals, both in Norway and internationally. There are many examples of tugs of war between various interests and forces, especially in the time leading up to NRC becoming a foundation in 1997. The field of dispalcement work overlapped the boundaries between public and private activities, humanitarian and legal work and professional and voluntary efforts.

A striking feature of the organisation, especially since early 1990s, has been its remarkable ability to seize the day at strategically important times, and to land on its feet after difficult periods. Timing has been a keyword, from the decision to establish the providers of expertise in 1991 to the role the organisation plays in the current crises in Syria and Yemen.

In today's complicated conflicts, there are far more people who are internally displaced than those who have crossed an international border. This trend was already becoming evident in the 1980s and 1990s. NRC's early efforts to put internally displaced people higher on the political and humanitarian agenda are little known, but have played a very important role. Being an active advocate for those who are neglected is in line with Fridtjof Nansen's spirit – when, from the speaker's rostrum in the League of Nations, he called for countries to take responsibility for people fleeing abuse and violence after the World War One.

However, although NRC has grown as an organisation, the humanitarian challenges it was created to address have grown even more. The number of displaced people is higher than ever and many of them receive very limited or no assistance whatsoever.

> In its 75th year, NRC is stronger than ever, with greater resources, a greater number of highly qualified humanitarian aid workers and the confidence of donors and sister organisations.

Against the background of a growing global gap between needs and available resources, in its anniversary year 2021, NRC formulated several ambitions that set out a direction for its efforts towards 2030.

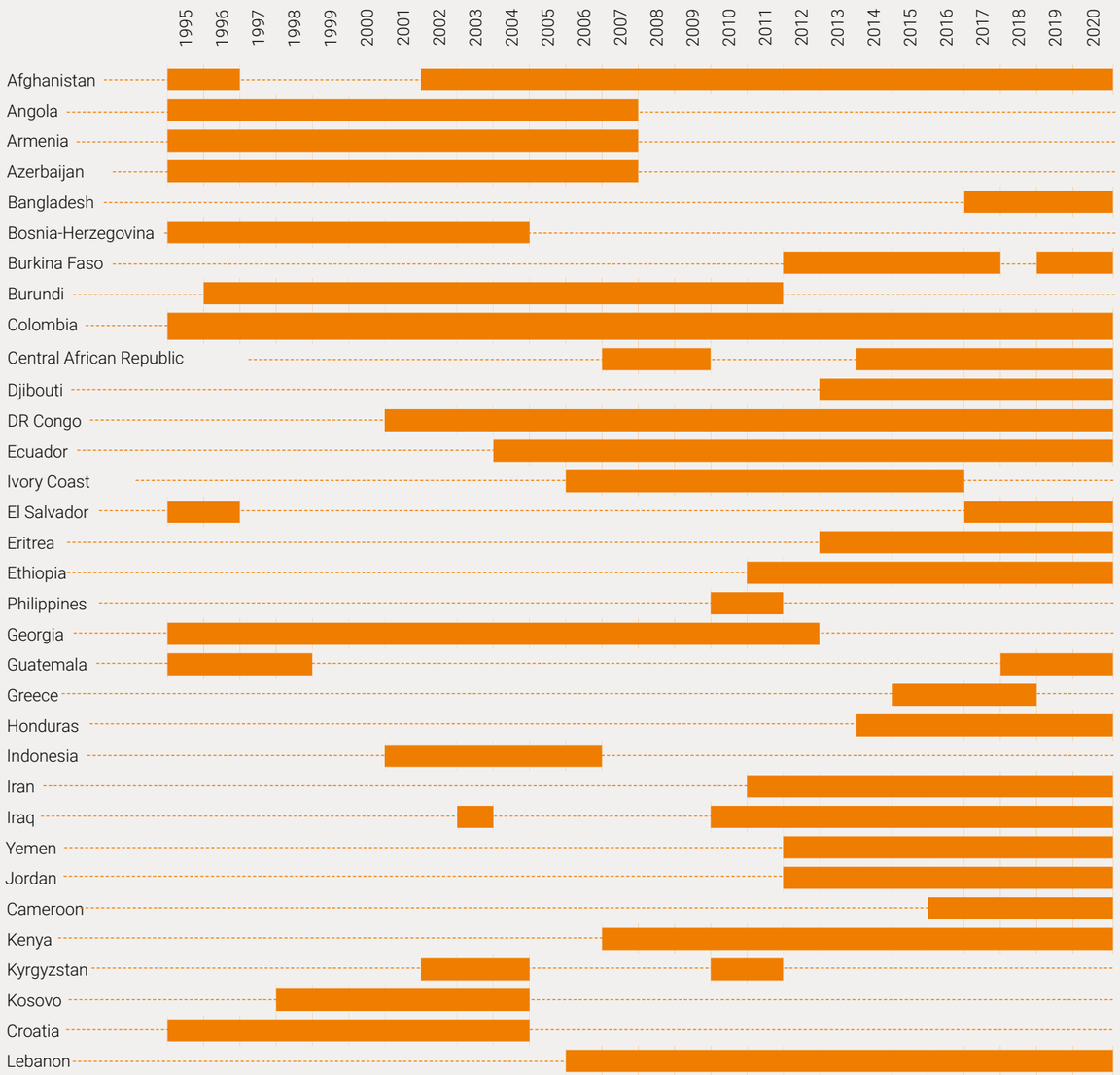
There are three key ambitions:

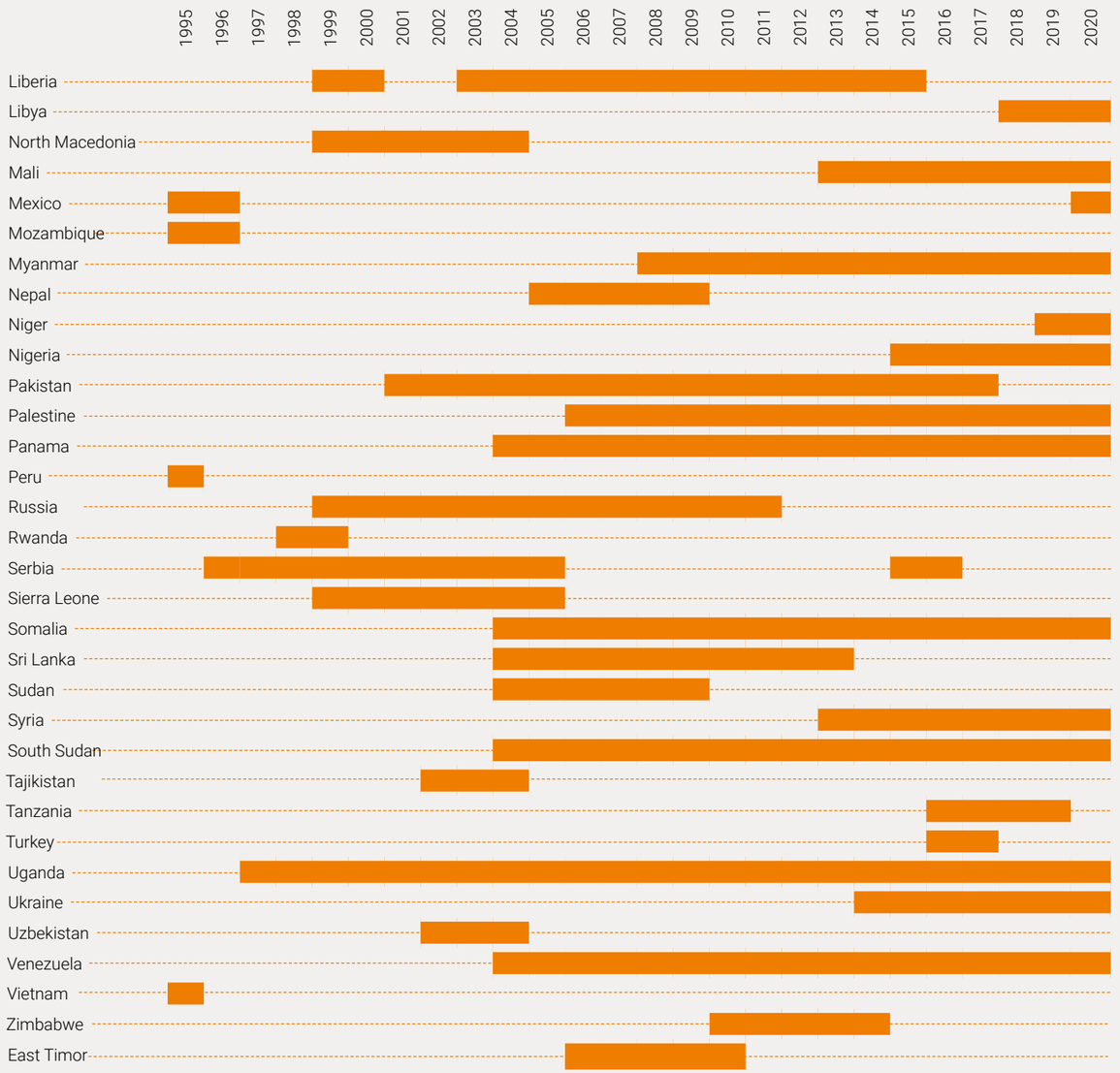
1. Streamline aid and protection efforts through continuous consultation with the people NRC is trying to assist.
2. Reach more people with unmet needs through new partnerships and new technology.
3. Prevent displacement and abuse through media and advocacy work, research, and proposals for lasting solutions.

In its 75th year, NRC is stronger than ever, with greater resources, a greater number of highly qualified aid workers and the confidence of donors and sister organisations. At the same time, the organisation is in a period of self-examination: What will be the role for large, international and western-based aid organisations in a world where more emphasis is placed on local actors and where national authorities place greater restrictions on international organisations? To what extent should NRC work with or through local organisations and institutions in its programme countries? How and how quickly should it achieve the goal of becoming carbon-neutral? How can NORCAP's expert envoys and country programmes create synergies? What functions and tasks should be assigned to the head office in Oslo, the regional offices and the country offices?

The questions and challenges that await NRC in the coming years are many. However, NRC's main purpose will be to continue to provide assistance and protection to displaced people. Not least, the organisation will prioritise lifting people out of the refugee statistics, either by giving them the opportunity to return safely to their home country, or by ensuring that they have a full life in the place where they have sought refuge or in a new home country.

NRC'S PROGRAMME COUNTRIES 1995–2021





SECRETARIES GENERAL
1953–2021

KNUT OKKENHAUG
Secretary General,
1953–1956

Photo: Bjørn Sigurdsøn/NTB

RUTH A. RYSTE
Secretary General,
1980

GUNNAR F. ANDERSEN
Acting Secretary General,
1994–1995

ARNE FJELDBU
Secretary General,
1956–1960

EVA DUNLOP
Secretary General,
1981–1990

OLA METLIAAS
Secretary General,
1997–1999

WILHELM S. BØE
Secretary General,
1960–1980

TRYGVE G. NORDBY
Secretary General,
1990–1997

TOM EMIL ASP
Acting Secretary General,
1999

STEINAR SØRLIE
Secretary General,
2000–2002

Photo: Aleksander Andersen/NTB

TORIL BREKKE
Acting Secretary General,
2005–2006 and
March 2013 – August 2013

RAYMOND JOHANSEN
Secretary General,
2002–2005

Photo: Kristin Svorte

ELISABETH RASMUSSON
Secretary General,
2008–2013

TOMAS COLIN ARCHER
Secretary General,
2006–2008

Photo: Beate Simarud

JAN EGELAND
Secretary General,
2013 >

CHAIRS OF THE BOARD
1953–2021

ERLING STEEN
1953–1958

SIGURD HALVORSEN
1958–1977

HENRIK HAUGE
1977–1982

ARNE BONDE
1982–1986

TORE NYSETER
1986–1987

R.K. ANDRESEN
1987–1990

KJELL HOLLER
1990–1997

GRO BRÆKKEN
1998–1999

SIRI BJERKE
1999–2000

GERHARD HEIBERG
2000–2002

JAN A. ERICHSEN
2002–2007

MARIANNE ELISABETH JOHNSEN
2007–2009

BERNT BULL
2009–2011

IDAR KREUTZER
2011–2017

HARALD NORVIK
2017 >

THANK YOU!

We would like to thank the following current and former employees of the Norwegian Refugee Council and other contributors for their valuable input and contributions:

Trygve G. Nordby, Steinar Sørlie, Raymond Johansen, Elisabeth Rasmusson, Toril Brekke, Magnhild S. Vasset, Pål Nesse, Harriet Rudd, Ida Fossvik Lomholt, Svein Beksrud, Oddhild Günther, Mads Henrik Almaas, Jannicke Storm, Turid Lægreid, Tove Skarstein, Skjoldvor Fjeldvær, Petra Storstein, Eldrid Kvamen Midttun, Jens Mjaugedal, Vikram Kolmannskog, Nina M. Birkeland, Tia Kristine Karlsen, Alfredo Zamudio, Berit Faye-Petersen, Beate Simarud, Roald Høvring, Thale Solnørdal Jenssen, Ina Eriksen Eines, Paul Ireland, Bjørn Falck Pedersen, Espen Ruud, Hallvard Skaar Pedersen, Naeem Hayat, Benedicte Bakkeskau, Johan Kristian Meyer, Geir Olav Lisle, Karoline Rønning.

SOURCES

This book is mainly based on input from, and interviews with, current and former employees of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), listed above, in addition to annual reports and board minutes from the relevant period. The Global Displacement Overview 2004–2020 was also an important source of information.

The first chapter largely builds on the book ***Hjelp og beskyttelse*** (Help and Protection), written by Hege Roll-Hansen and Eva Helene Østbye, and published by NRC in 1996.

GRATITUDE. Ahmed Suleiman kisses his mother Dalal in pure gratitude and joy after they arrive safely into port on the Greek island of Lesvos. The small family fled the war in Syria and across the Mediterranean in 2015, as did hundreds of thousands of others. Photo: Tiril Skarstein/NRC

NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL