

**EXCHANGING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT  
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT:**

**A Report on Seminars in Vienna in June 1995**

*by Paula Gutlove and Gordon Thompson*

September 1995

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ISBN # 0-945369-18-2

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**SUMMARY**

Seminars were held in Vienna in June 1995, to address needs and opportunities for improving the exchange of knowledge in the conflict management field. The seminars were convened by the Institute for Resource and Security Studies (IRSS) in cooperation with the Conflict Prevention Centre of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, formerly CSCE). This report provides some background information, describes the conduct of the seminars, and summarizes the discussions.

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### *About the Institute for Resource and Security Studies*

The Institute for Resource and Security Studies (IRSS) is an independent, non-profit, tax-exempt corporation. It was founded in 1984 to conduct technical and policy analysis and public education, with the objective of promoting peace and international security, efficient use of natural resources, and protection of the environment. IRSS projects always reflect a concern for practical solutions to resource, environment and security problems, and can range from detailed technical studies to preparing educational materials accessible to the public. IRSS actively seeks collaborative relationships with other organizations as it pursues its goals.

To complement its analytic and educational work, IRSS engages in public participation, dialogue facilitation, and collaborative problem-solving through its Program on Promoting Understanding and Cooperation. This program works with people of diverse perspectives and interests, to improve communication, build understanding, resolve conflicts, and promote cooperation. It designs and convenes workshops and training sessions to facilitate dialogue, promote collaborative problem-solving, and encourage cooperative actions.

### *Acknowledgements*

IRSS would like to thank the Winston Foundation for World Peace, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the One World Fund for the support and encouragement that made these seminars possible. We would also like to thank the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which co-convened the NGO-OSCE seminar and hosted the NGO seminar. Lastly, we would like to acknowledge those individuals and organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, who engage in the broad spectrum of non-violent conflict management activities in an effort to create a peaceful and sustainable world.

## EXCHANGING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: A Report on Seminars in Vienna in June 1995

### 1. Introduction

The Institute for Resource and Security Studies (IRSS), in cooperation with the Conflict Prevention Centre of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, formerly CSCE), convened a series of seminars that were held in Vienna during the period 18-20 June 1995. These seminars were held to examine needs and opportunities for improved exchange of knowledge about conflict management. For the purpose of the seminars, the term 'conflict management' was used to encompass early warning of conflict and interventions that are intended to prevent, mitigate or resolve conflict.

The Vienna seminars were a part of a program in which IRSS, in cooperation with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the OSCE, seeks to improve the effectiveness of conflict management and promote its use. This program has two parallel tracks. As a result, there were two kinds of seminars in the June series.

One track is an ongoing expert consultation that is coordinated by IRSS and the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre. This track builds upon previous IRSS collaboration with the OSCE to clarify and strengthen relationships between the OSCE and NGOs that are active in conflict management. On this track, a seminar was held on 19 June 1995, to allow OSCE officials and delegates to share perspectives with representatives of NGOs on needs and opportunities for improved exchange of knowledge about conflict management.

On the second track, IRSS works with other NGOs to enhance the effectiveness of conflict management. A major focus of effort is the improvement of information exchange among NGOs and other actors in the conflict management field. On this track, IRSS convened seminars that were held on 18 June 1995 and 20 June 1995 to identify needs and opportunities for improved exchange of knowledge about conflict management, with a view to developing specific actions.

This report provides some background information, describes the conduct of the seminars, summarizes the discussions at the seminars, and draws some conclusions. It reflects the perspective of the authors. None of the other participants in the seminars is responsible for statements made here. A recent journal article provides additional background information and the authors' views on the potential for OSCE-NGO cooperation on conflict management.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paula Gutlove and Gordon Thompson, "The Potential for Cooperation by the OSCE and Non-Governmental Actors on Conflict Management," *Helsinki Monitor*, Volume 6, Number 3 (1995), pp 52-64.

## 2. Pre-Seminar Suggestions

Prior to the seminars, IRSS provided participants with a variety of materials, including suggestions about the need for improved knowledge exchange and about potential mechanisms for achieving that improvement. These suggestions were offered to stimulate, not preclude, discussion at the seminars.

IRSS suggested that there is a growing appreciation of the importance of preventing and resolving violent conflict. A range of actors are now working in this field, including regional organizations such as the OSCE, governments, the United Nations, and a variety of NGOs. Systems for efficient information management and exchange will be crucial to the ability of the various actors to effectively provide early warning of conflict and to engage in interventions that prevent, mitigate or resolve conflict. Not only will improved availability of information enhance the success of these endeavors, but information on successful interventions will build understanding and support for conflict management. Overall, IRSS suggested, an improved system for knowledge exchange can serve multiple purposes, including:

- **improving the practice of conflict management**, because systematic compilation and sharing of experiences will help practitioners to learn from each others' successes and failures;
- **improving coordination within the field**, through systematic compilation and exchange of information about the plans, capabilities, resources, experiences and observations of the various actors;
- **improving the effectiveness of early warning**, by strengthening linkages among early warning efforts and between those efforts and conflict interventions;
- **establishing accountability and evaluative procedures**, which will also encourage action on early warning;
- **building political and financial support for appropriate conflict intervention**; and
- **facilitating adaptation of the conflict management regime.**

Currently, knowledge is exchanged within the conflict management field primarily through traditional mechanisms such as personal contacts, conferences, reports and books. There is limited use of electronic networks. IRSS suggested that these mechanisms do not meet present needs and will become even more inadequate as the field expands. Instead, IRSS envisioned a new knowledge exchange system that combines the selective use of modern computerized information technology with new information conventions. These conventions would include: (i) an analytic framework for the description of early warning signals or conflict interventions; (ii) a lexicon of agreed terminology, with parallel versions in each relevant language; and (iii) a set of generally accepted reporting practices.

IRSS also suggested that NGOs could play a leading role in developing a new knowledge exchange system. Specifically, IRSS suggested that participants in the NGO seminars might contemplate the development of an NGO-managed consortium, whose mission would be to facilitate the broadest possible exchange of knowledge on conflict management in the OSCE region.

### **3. The OSCE-NGO Seminar**

#### **3.1 Background to the Seminar**

The seminar of 19 June 1995, which brought OSCE officials and delegates together with representatives of NGOs, was convened as part of an ongoing expert consultation coordinated by IRSS and the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre. This joint effort by the two organizations builds upon previous successful work by IRSS's Balkans Peace Project to explore the potential for collaboration by the CSCE and NGOs on preventive diplomacy. The process began in January 1994 when the CSCE convened a seminar in Warsaw to examine 'Early Warning and Preventive Diplomacy.' At that seminar there was discussion of the prospects for increased NGO-CSCE cooperation on preventive diplomacy.

Acting on suggestions made in Warsaw, the Balkans Peace Project convened a seminar in Austria in September 1994, with the support of the CSCE Secretary General's office. Findings from the seminar were presented in November 1994 at the CSCE Review Conference in Budapest by Paula Gutlove, as a public member of the United States' delegation.<sup>2</sup>

The OSCE-NGO seminar of 19 June 1995 arose from IRSS's role in discussions at the CSCE Review Conference in Budapest regarding the potential for the CSCE to develop cooperative relationships with experts outside the CSCE. In this connection, CSCE Secretary General Wilhelm Höynck noted that research institutions have the potential to help the CSCE Conflict Prevention Centre develop a more effective system for capturing knowledge that can improve the assessment of security situations. The project also builds on IRSS work providing expert consultation to international organizations on the management of information pertinent to sustainable development.

#### **3.2 General Information About the Seminar**

The OSCE-NGO seminar was held in Vienna at the Hofburg Congress Centre, the OSCE international conference center, on Monday 19 June 1995. Approximately fifty people participated (see Annex A for a list). Participants included OSCE officials and mission heads, delegates to the OSCE, representatives of NGOs from Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and North America, and representatives of inter-governmental organizations (IGOs). Some participants represented IGOs and NGOs that are involved in humanitarian assistance and relief work. There was broad-based participation from the OSCE, including representation from diverse offices (the Conflict Prevention Centre, the Secretary General, the High Commissioner for National Minorities, the Chairman in Office, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) and from many country delegations (e.g., from western Europe, central Europe, the CIS, the Balkans and North America).

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<sup>2</sup> Balkans Peace Project, "Exploring the Potential for Collaboration by the CSCE and NGOs on Preventive Diplomacy: Summary Statement from a seminar convened by the Balkans Peace Project with the support of the Secretary General's office of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Stadtschlaining, Austria, 23-24 September 1994" (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Institute for Resource and Security Studies, October 1994).

### **3.3 Summary of Discussion**

#### **3.3.1 Opening Remarks by the OSCE Secretary General**

The meeting began with welcoming remarks by OSCE Secretary General Wilhelm Höynck, who pointed out that current security challenges demand ambitious, imaginative but realistic approaches. To meet the challenge of preventing violent conflict, Höynck said that the OSCE must use all the capabilities at its disposal, including judicious cooperation with NGOs. The Secretary General noted that the OSCE's information needs in the conflict management area include: (i) earlier access to information; and (ii) availability of information in a form that is better tailored to the OSCE's specific tasks. He also pointed out, in connection with early warning, that the critical step is not to obtain warning of incipient violent conflict but to make the move from early warning to early action.

#### **3.3.2 NGO Overview of Conflict Management Activities**

The next phase of the seminar featured presentations on NGO conflict management activities. NGO representatives began by noting that advances in technology, in the area of information processing, storage and networking, constitute an information revolution. This revolution can either drown us in information or, if well managed, can provide us with crucial information upon which to base cooperative, coordinated actions.

Several NGOs have developed processes for cooperative work in conflict management. Experience with such work was described by representatives of the Coordinating Committee for Conflict Resolution Training in Europe (CCCRTE), the Partners for Democratic Change (PDC) and the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER). Each of these three NGOs works in Europe in conflict resolution or related fields, doing so through a cooperative, coordinated effort by local offices or member organizations. These NGOs provide training in conflict resolution skills, or organize workshops, seminars, and round table discussions. Their representatives noted that information exchange, within their organizations and more broadly, was less than optimal. One of these NGOs has an electronic list server based in Warsaw to facilitate information exchange among its offices in Europe, but nevertheless perceives a need for improved information exchange within a much larger circle. All three NGOs feel the need to know more about what other organizations are doing in their areas of operation, and hope to see coordinated strategies. Consequently, they perceive a need for easily accessible information exchange mechanisms.

Some NGOs have developed multi-organization consortia focussed on a particular conflict area. The examples cited were in Cyprus, Burundi and Rwanda. In these cases, coordination has been effected across institutional lines. NGOs, IGOs and governments have shared information and, at times, developed coordinated action plans. Other instances of cooperation by NGOs, IGOs and governments to share information were also discussed. For example, the Council of Europe's North-South Centre has offered to act as a clearinghouse for NGO information.

In the general discussion that followed the NGO presentation of conflict management programs, several key needs were identified, including:

- the need to improve the flow of information from NGOs to policy makers;
- the need to filter the potential flood of information so that people get what they need;
- the need for neutral, impartial, or bias-corrected, information; and
- the need to segregate confidential information from open information.

Regarding confidentiality, it was noted that, although governments, IGOs and NGOs differ in their views as to which information should be confidential and which should be openly available, in practice their information needs are frequently quite similar.

### **3.3.3 OSCE Overview of Conflict Management Activities**

Following the presentation of NGO activities, OSCE speakers presented an overview of the OSCE's conflict management activities. This began with a brief description of OSCE field missions, which are both long term and short term. Eight long term missions were noted, in Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Skopje, Estonia, Latvia, Tajikistan and Sarajevo. Three additional missions, in Kosovo, Sanjac, and Vojvodina, were withdrawn when the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia refused to prolong the memorandum of understanding with the CSCE in June 1993.

Each OSCE mission has a specific mandate which can at any time be amended. The mandate of each mission is shaped by the political situation and the relationship between the host country and the OSCE. Mission mandates can focus on the monitoring of a country's borders or can have a broader emphasis on early warning of conflict in the region, dealing with ethnic, economic and social tensions. Missions are required to send formal reports to the OSCE Secretariat and confidential reports to the OSCE Chairman in Office.

Many heads of missions recognized NGOs as key players in the conflict management field, and noted an increase in the number of NGOs working in conflict-prone areas in recent years. In some cases it was felt that these NGOs need improved coordination amongst themselves. Sometimes their sheer numbers have the potential to overwhelm indigenous populations. Furthermore, mission heads noted that it is important for OSCE missions to know what work NGOs are doing in each mission's area of responsibility, and that a flow of useful information between the missions and NGOs can be crucial to the success of both parties' operations. However, for many missions, the amount of unusable information that they already receive is overwhelming. One mission head estimated that eighty percent of the information received is unfiltered, unreliable, and unusable.

One specific request from the OSCE was that the NGO community provide a 'profile' and a 'job description' for each non-governmental conflict management actor. Also, the OSCE could use help in identifying pools of experts. These kinds of information could be useful to the OSCE when it plans its activities and seeks staff for its missions.

### **3.3.4 Current Information Exchange Mechanisms and their Effectiveness**

This session began with a description of what constitutes a good information system, namely one that supplies information that is **credible, timely, and packaged so that is useful**. In order for information to be credible, it must stand up to critical assessment, perhaps through corroboration from multiple sources, and be defensible over time. Corroboration will be much easier to obtain if there are standardized information collection formats and a lexicon of agreed terminology. The need for such information conventions becomes especially important for information that is multi-disciplinary and multi-faceted, as is the case for conflict management. For information to be timely, it must be disseminated to decision makers in time for them to deal with operational as well as political realities. For information to be useful, the raw stream must be filtered and the selected items packaged in a way that meets user needs. Information conventions will assist this process.

NGOs, governments and IGOs have developed information exchange systems in areas related to conflict management. These areas include human rights, humanitarian assistance and relief work. The following examples were discussed:

- The Human Rights Documentation System International (HURIDOCS) was established in 1982 to facilitate information exchange in the human rights field. A task force worked for five years to develop standardized reporting formats. The HURIDOCS system provides training in the use of its documentation tools.
- ReliefWeb (formerly ReliefNet) is a system to exchange information in the field of humanitarian assistance and relief. Currently administered by the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the system is being developed through extensive discussions, initiated in 1994, that involve governments, NGOs and IGOs. The scope of ReliefWeb is being expanded to include early warning, and may eventually encompass crisis prevention.
- The Network on Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning of Conflict is an NGO effort that began in 1993.<sup>3</sup> It involves a network of conflict management specialists throughout the CIS, and has two functions: to promote the use of conflict management; and to facilitate information exchange. Training sessions for network participants have addressed, among other matters, an analytic framework and vocabulary for conflict management.

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<sup>3</sup> The Network on Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning is part of the larger Project on Ethnic Conflict Management in the Former Soviet Union, a cooperative effort by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Conflict Management Group, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Network's electronic mail system has been developed in close collaboration with the VeGa International Laboratory, Moscow.

It was generally agreed that creation of a successful information system on conflict management would require collaborative efforts by the concerned players to establish information conventions, including a shared analytic framework, standardized reporting practices and a common lexicon. An underlying principle of the system would be the open, broad-based exchange of knowledge, with the understanding that at times some information must be confidential.

Concerns were raised about how information, even if credible, timely and well packaged, translates into political action. Information is a necessary but not a sufficient factor in the prevention of violent conflict. Also required is the political will to act and the capability to take appropriate actions. In response to these concerns it was pointed out that politics and information relate closely to each other. For example, information dissemination to the general public can profoundly influence a nation's politics.

### **3.3.5 OSCE Information Capabilities and Needs**

The need for a useful conflict management information system was broadly acknowledged by OSCE participants. OSCE capabilities in information technology were discussed briefly. It was noted that the Conflict Prevention Centre is linked to the governments of thirty-nine participating states through a private, secure electronic network that is used to exchange information on arms control and confidence building. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has electronic mail access at its Warsaw office but, as the office does not have its own 'server', the system is overburdened and frequently 'jams'.

OSCE personnel acknowledged that the organization needs to improve its internal and external information management. In particular, the missions need information that is better selected and organized, and hence more useful. The missions' efficiency would also be enhanced if they had Internet connections. Thus, there would be great advantage to the OSCE in associating with, and drawing from, an NGO information system that focuses on conflict management.

The Conflict Prevention Centre endorsed the concept of an NGO consortium to develop such an information system, and offered to help shape the consortium's activities so that they will be compatible with OSCE information needs. The OSCE does not have the staff to filter and analyze information, but if timely, credible information is submitted to the OSCE in a well-analyzed and well-packaged form, the OSCE will disseminate it to missions, delegations, the Chairman in Office, the High Commissioner for National Minorities, and the various branches of the Secretariat. Furthermore, such information could be useful in the establishment of an OSCE data bank.

In seeking ways to encourage open channels of communication between the OSCE and the NGO conflict management community, and to further the prospects for NGO-OSCE cooperation in conflict management, the OSCE suggested periodic meetings with key NGO representatives. NGOs were also encouraged to make contacts directly with delegations as well as to work through the OSCE Secretariat.

## **4. The NGO Seminars**

#### **4.1 General Information About the Seminars**

NGO seminars were convened in the evening of 18 June 1995 and during the day of 20 June 1995. The goal of the seminars was to identify ways to improve the effectiveness of conflict management through improving information exchange among NGOs. In contrast to the OSCE-NGO seminar, which was held simply to allow an exchange of perspectives, the NGO seminars were held with a view to developing specific actions.

While the seminars are described here as NGO seminars, the participants included two representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (an IGO). These two participants were fully active in the discussions. A majority of the seminar participants represented organizations that are directly involved in conflict management. Other participants represented organizations that are engaged in information management, research, or humanitarian assistance and relief work. The various organizations that were represented are based in Europe, the CIS and North America; some work regionally and some internationally. NGO participation in these seminars was similar to, but not identical with, NGO participation in the OSCE-NGO seminar of 19 June 1995. A participant list is provided in Annex B.

#### **4.2 The 18 June 1995 Seminar**

The seminar during the evening of 18 June 1995 was primarily an opportunity for people to meet each other and to prepare for the OSCE-NGO seminar the following day. The evening began with a discussion about terminology. One participant questioned the use of the term 'conflict management' as a catch-all phrase to encompass early warning of conflict and interventions that are intended to prevent, mitigate or resolve conflict. Other terms, including 'conflict transformation', 'peace building', and 'peace making' were discussed. In the end, agreement was reached on the use of the term conflict management for the purpose of the seminars. This initial discussion pointed out the need for clarity and consistency in terminology within the field.

Further, it was noted that NGOs are not sufficiently informed about the substance of each other's work, and that information is needed in a number of categories, including: early warning, conflict management interventions, analytic information, and evaluative information.

A point of discussion at this seminar, and again at the NGO seminar on 20 June, was the extent to which new, formal mechanisms are required to ensure that knowledge is exchanged within the NGO community. This point was raised by a practitioner who has been working in the conflict management field for many years and has developed informal networks that meet many of his information needs. As the discussion proceeded during the two seminars, participants eventually agreed that the need for new, more formal information exchange mechanisms becomes greater when: (i) new practitioners enter the conflict management field; (ii) the number of conflict management actors increases; or (iii) the number, scope and complexity of interventions increases. Each of these conditions is currently operative.

#### **4.3 The 20 June 1995 Seminar**

During the day of 20 June 1995 an NGO seminar was held in a meeting room provided by the OSCE Secretariat. The agenda, developed at the beginning of the day, was a sequence of four broad questions about the information needs of the NGO conflict management community. The questions were:

- what do we have;
- what do we need;
- how do we get what we need; and
- what do we do now?

#### **4.4 Summary of Discussion on 20 June 1995**

##### **4.4.1 NGO Information Capabilities (what do we have?)**

Existing capabilities in information management were reviewed. A number of NGO efforts to compile relevant information were identified, but after examination it was clear that none of these efforts meets present needs for knowledge exchange in the conflict management field. Several organizations represented at the seminar have established electronic information systems for their internal use. Information tracked by these systems includes institutional profiles, confidential evaluative information, funding information, practitioner profiles, and project descriptions. The representative of one NGO that has compiled a large data base was concerned about the consistency, timeliness and quality of the information in that data base. Some participants felt that this concern reflected the fact that there have been no information conventions among conflict management NGOs up to this point. For those organizations with small internal information systems, there was a concern about the difficulty of adapting their systems for external use.

One seminar participant represented a research institute (the Open Media Research Institute) which monitors local media, maintains extensive electronic archives, and produces publications. As the incoming material is collected from local media, it does not have any standardized format. Because the material is not indexed, the only way to access specific information in the archives is through a word search, which inevitably produces a vast quantity of unfiltered information.

##### **4.4.2 Needs for Knowledge Exchange (what do we need?)**

Clearly, while there are efforts to compile information about conflict management, there is at present no system to generate and exchange the kind of credible, timely, well-packaged information that was discussed at the OSCE-NGO seminar the day before. As a step toward specifying such a system, the group discussed needs for knowledge exchange. The discussion addressed two key questions. First, who are the potential users of information? Second, what types of information are needed by each category of user?

Participants proposed that potential users of information about conflict management will include NGOs, governments, IGOs, people in conflict situations (the present or potential 'clients' for conflict management), scholars, and the media. Each category of

user, and each individual within that category, will have particular needs. These multiple needs provide a challenge to anyone who seeks to create an information exchange system. Nevertheless, NGOs who engage in information exchange must try to meet the needs of a variety of users.

Part of the discussion addressed the underlying motives that drive NGOs and other conflict management actors to seek information. For NGOs, motives include a desire to improve the effectiveness of their interventions, a desire to direct their efforts most appropriately, and a desire to establish strategic coalitions. For the OSCE, an important motive is the desire to obtain analyses of conflict situations and of a range of potential response options. For people in conflict situations, an important motive is a desire to know what conflict management has achieved in similar situations, and what instruments might be brought to bear on their situation.

In short, there are varied information users with diverse motives for acquiring information and, therefore, with diverse information needs. The discussion identified several categories of information that might meet those needs, as follows:

**Organization-focussed information:**

- general profiles of NGOs and other organizations involved in conflict management;
- descriptions of the interventions that each organization has undertaken or is planning, including where, when, how, and with whom; and
- indigenous and external evaluations of the short and long-term results of each intervention.

**Situation-focussed information:**

- early warning signals and ongoing information about conflict situations;
- requests and proposals for specific conflict management interventions;
- descriptions of interventions that have been undertaken or are planned for each conflict situation, including who (the intervening body), when, how, and with whom; and
- knowledge and perceptions that local people have regarding conflict management.

**Practical information:**

- sources of funding for conflict management;
- descriptions of materials (e.g., training materials) that are available for various conflict situations, cultural contexts, and linguistic contexts; and
- 'context-setting' information.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The discussion about HURIDOCS that is reported in Section 4.4.3 identified the importance of 'context-setting' information but did not define it. In the conflict management field, context-setting information might be regarded as including

#### **4.4.3 Developing Improved Knowledge Exchange (how do we get what we need?)**

In the preceding list of desired information, evaluations of interventions are particularly important and especially difficult to obtain. Participants agreed that practitioners, clients and others must have access to the lessons of experience, and that evaluation information can serve multiple purposes. However, there is no broadly accepted methodology for assessing the benefits and costs of intervention, nor are there mechanisms to collect and disseminate this information. Currently, the majority of evaluative processes rely on self-evaluation, which is often unreliable and potentially biased.

Concern was expressed about placing evaluative information in an open data base, because this might violate European privacy and libel protection laws. On the other hand, making a data base as transparent as possible can enhance the reliability of the data. Also, it was felt that interdisciplinary and objective analysis would be helpful in the evaluation process.

If needed information is to be appropriately collected, filtered, analyzed and packaged, information conventions must be developed. In this context, the experience of HURIDOCS with standardization of information formats is instructive. Experience has taught HURIDOCS personnel that information conventions must be developed collaboratively by the parties who will use them. When conventions are imposed by an outside party, they are usually not adhered to. In illustration of this point, one NGO network that assembles information on early warning sought to employ information conventions, but the conventions were imposed 'from the top' and were not followed. Also, it has been the experience of organizations like HURIDOCS that **training in the use of information conventions must be integrated with the participatory development of those information conventions.** This is because participants in the process need to see the conventions as a part of a larger picture; only in that context will the appropriate value be attached to the conventions.

Conventions will not be established quickly. HURIDOCS' experience has been that the development of an integrated strategy involving information conventions and training required a task force working over a five-year period. Also, when an information system becomes operational, a skilled administrator is needed, someone who understands both information technology and the language of the field. A 'context-setting' data base is also fundamental to successful operations, but such a data base requires ongoing attention if the information in it is to be current and accurate.

One participant felt that experience with information management in the human rights field may be relevant in the case of conflict intervention but less so in the case of early warning. Human rights events can be described within the legal framework provided

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geographic, demographic, political, economic and historical information for regions of interest.

by national laws and human rights conventions, while early warning of conflict relies upon a variety of predictive indicators.

#### **4.4.4. Next Steps (what do we do now?)**

Participants agreed that NGOs and other entities working in the conflict management field would benefit from improved knowledge exchange. It was further agreed that NGOs could take the lead in developing an information exchange system for the field. However, participants also noted the financial and time constraints under which non-governmental conflict management practitioners labor. These constraints will affect the priority that NGOs assign to new information management initiatives.

There was discussion about the kind of information effort that is most appropriate at this time. Some felt that a 'minimalist' approach would be adequate. This approach could take the form, for example, of distributing a one-page questionnaire to conflict management NGOs throughout a wide geographic area. Others disagreed, stating that such a geographically broad but superficial approach is typical of current arrangements, which are not working. Many organizations are circulating such questionnaires and obtaining little information of lasting value from them.

An alternative that was suggested is a pilot project to develop an in-depth information exchange approach in a circumscribed geographic area. Several participants argued that this approach would give the field an opportunity to develop information conventions and to see what benefit is truly derived by international and indigenous practitioners from the use of an information system based on such conventions. Other participants suggested that both the broad, superficial approach and the targeted in-depth approach should be tried simultaneously.

Time constraints at the end of the meeting did not allow the group to reach consensus about which approach, or combination of approaches, to take next. There was consensus, however, that the next steps should involve a collaborative effort seeking input from as many of the NGOs in the field as possible. This collaboration should function through a relatively small representative task force. Furthermore, IRSS was asked to take the lead in developing the next steps. Participants agreed to send to the IRSS the information formats that are currently in use within their organizations. IRSS also obtained agreement, in principle, from participants that they would be willing to have their organizations represented on, or contributing to, the task force.

## **5. Conclusions**

For many of the OSCE and NGO participants, the seminars were their first exposure to the concept that careful attention to information generation and processing can yield credible, timely, accessible and conveniently packaged knowledge. For them, the meeting was truly an eye-opener, shattering assumptions about the inevitability of either doing without vital information or drowning in the increasingly abundant stream of random information that is available through ever-advancing technology. For those participants who had previously taken part in the development of information conventions and systems for information management, for example in the context of

human rights or relief work, the meetings were an opportunity to share the lessons they had learned and to confirm what they had achieved.

Participants broadly agreed that the information needs of the conflict management field are great and growing, and that the potential for addressing those needs lies within our grasp, particularly if the lessons learned in other areas are applied here. One key lesson, oft repeated, was that the introduction of information conventions, and training in their use, cannot be done effectively through an arbitrary or top-down approach. Instead, there must be broad participation in developing a conceptual structure for the field and the information conventions which flow from that structure.

As governments, inter-governmental organizations and non-governmental bodies search for ambitious, imaginative but realistic approaches to conflict management, they must use all the capabilities at their disposal. They must seek judicious cooperation across institutional lines and the broad sharing of useful knowledge, including the lessons of practical experience. Also, if current political challenges are to be met, there must be increased understanding throughout countries and governments about the causes of violent conflict and the options available to prevent it. Systematic knowledge exchange can help to create that understanding.

Conflict management, like many public-interest enterprises in the crowded, turbulent world of the coming decades, will yield its best fruits if pursued cooperatively by everyone who can make a difference, whoever and wherever they are. Centralized control of the field is neither feasible nor desirable. It has been said many times that knowledge is power. In the conflict management field, shared knowledge is the power that will drive civilizations to sustainable peace.

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**EXCHANGING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT  
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT:  
A Report on Seminars in Vienna in June 1995**

**Annex A: Participants in the OSCE-NGO Seminar**

**NOTES:**

1. The OSCE-NGO seminar was held on 19 June 1995.
2. This is not a complete list of participants, because some participants did not sign the attendance sheet.

**OSCE OFFICIALS:**

**György Balogh**, Representative of the Chairman in Office

**Tore Bogh**, Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje

**Philipp Hahn**, Former Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova

**Wilhelm Höynck**, Secretary General

**Jan Kubis**, Director, Conflict Prevention Centre

**Uwe Mahrenholtz**, Representative of the Chairman in Office to the Estonian Government Commission on Military Pensioners

**Elizabeth Winship**, NGO Liaison Advisor, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

**Rob Zaagman**, Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities

**MEMBERS OF DELEGATIONS:**

**Hasan Aygün**, Delegation of Turkey

**Paraschiva Badescu**, Permanent Mission of Romania

**David Barry**, Delegation of Ireland

**Anton Bazoulev**, Delegation of the Russian Federation

**Christos Botrios**, Head of the Greek Delegation

**Emmanuel Cohet**, Delegation of France and the European Union

**Gordon Crack**, Delegation of the United States

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**Martin Dahinden**, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland

**Alexandre Egorov**, Delegation of the Russian Federation

**Johannes Eigner**, Delegation of Austria

**Bent Graff**, Delegation of Denmark

**Adam Halacinski**, Delegation of Poland

**Keith Morrill**, Delegation of Canada

**Robin Quinville**, Delegation of the United States

**Jean-Daniel Ruch**, Delegation of Switzerland

**Mario Sica**, Head of the Italian Delegation

**Aleksandar Tavciovski**, Delegation of the Republic of Macedonia

**Yönet Tezel**, Delegation of Turkey

**Stefan Vassilev**, Delegation of Bulgaria

**Manne Wängborg**, Delegation of Sweden

**IGO REPRESENTATIVES:**

**Bohdan Nahaylo**, Senior Advisor on CIS countries, UNHCR, Geneva, Switzerland

**Sharon Rusu**, Chief of Documentation, Center for Refugees, UNHCR, Geneva,  
Switzerland

**Antonio Tarelli**, Secretariat, Council of Europe

**NGO REPRESENTATIVES:**

**David Atwood**, Coordinating Committee for Conflict Resolution Training in  
Europe, Netherlands

**Alexandra Belyaeva**, VeGa International Laboratory, Moscow, Russia

**Diana Chigas**, Conflict Management Group, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

**Jean Freymond**, Centre for Applied Studies in International Negotiations, Geneva,  
Switzerland

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**Paula Gutlove**, Institute for Resource and Security Studies, Cambridge, MA, USA

**Debra Guzman**, Human Rights Network, Hannover, Germany

**P. Terrence Hopmann**, Center for Foreign Policy Development, Brown University,  
Rhode Island, USA

**Ferenc Melykuti**, Project on Ethnic Relations, Budapest, Hungary

**Michael Mihalka**, Open Media Research Institute, Prague, Czech Republic

**Agneta Pallinder**, Practical Management, Bishop Auckland, UK

**Francois Perez**, International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva, Switzerland

**Barnett Rubin**, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, USA

**Ilana Shapiro**, Partners for Democratic Change, San Francisco, CA, USA

**Gordon Thompson**, Institute for Resource and Security Studies, Cambridge, MA, USA

**Natalia Voronina**, Institute of Ethnology & Anthropology, Moscow, Russia

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**EXCHANGING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT  
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**Annex B: Participants in the NGO Seminars**

**NOTES:**

1. NGO Seminars were held on 18 June and 20 June 1995.
2. Two representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) attended the seminars and were full participants in the discussions.
3. Participants listed here attended both seminars except where indicated as follows: a - attended 18 June seminar only; b - attended 20 June seminar only.

**NGO PARTICIPANTS:**

**David Atwood**, Coordinating Committee for Conflict Resolution Training in Europe, Netherlands

**Alexandra Belyaeva**, VeGa International Laboratory, Moscow, Russia

**Diana Chigas**, Conflict Management Group, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

**Jean Freymond**, Centre for Applied Studies in International Negotiations, Geneva, Switzerland

**Paula Gutlove**, Institute for Resource and Security Studies, Cambridge, MA, USA

**Debra Guzman**, Human Rights Network, Hannover, Germany

**P. Terrence Hopmann**, Center for Foreign Policy Development, Brown University, Rhode Island, USA

**Ferenc Melykuti**, Project on Ethnic Relations, Budapest, Hungary

**Michael Mihalka**, Open Media Research Institute, Prague, Czech Republic

**Agneta Pallinder**, Practical Management, Bishop Auckland, UK

**Francois Perez<sup>b</sup>**, International Committee of the Red Cross, Geneva, Switzerland

**Barnett Rubin**, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, USA

**Jan Ruysenaars<sup>b</sup>**, International Alert, London, UK

**Ilana Shapiro**, Partners for Democratic Change, San Francisco, CA, USA

**Gordon Thompson**, Institute for Resource and Security Studies, Cambridge, MA, USA

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**Arno Truger<sup>a</sup>**, Austrian Study Center for Peace & Conflict Resolution, Schlaining,  
Austria

**Natalia Voronina**, Institute of Ethnology & Anthropology, Moscow, Russia

**IGO PARTICIPANTS:**

**Bohdan Nahaylo**, Senior Advisor on CIS countries, UNHCR, Geneva, Switzerland

**Sharon Rusu**, Chief of Documentation, Center for Refugees, UNHCR, Geneva,  
Switzerland

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