

Norwegians keep watch at a Bosnia airbase as part of a United Nations peacekeeping operation in the '90s.

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Peacekeeping takes time and patience

Why northern countries like Norway and Canada pitch in

Over the past decades, the number of wars between states has declined considerably. The great majority of present conflicts are found within states.

Globalization has not only brought the nations of the world closer, it has made them more vulnerable to the spread of instability and insecurity.

Even countries like Canada and Norway — situated in the far north — have an interest in promoting peace in other parts of the world.

Canada and Norway share a strong commitment to democracy, freedom and human rights, and we are jointly setting the agenda in international and regional organizations. Canada and Norway have co-operated closely on solving problems caused by landmines, on limiting the spread of small arms, and on establishing international institutions for criminal justice.

Our two countries share the belief that human security should be at the top of the foreign policy agenda. Rather than focusing on the security of territory, states or governments, it puts the security of human beings at the centre. This is a much-needed approach to present-day conflicts.

Human rights, democracy and development can only be secured in an environment of peace. Therefore Norway, like Canada, is engaged in a range of efforts around the world, in close co-operation with our friends and allies. What we need to do is to prevent conflict, resolve conflict, and rebuild societies that have been torn apart by conflict.

Since the early 1990s Norway has been involved in peace and reconciliation processes in different parts of the world. Our involvement takes various forms: As official facilitator of negotiations in Sri Lanka and the Philippines; providing a backchannel for secret negotiations — the so-called "Oslo process" — in the



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Middle East, or as actor in an international coalition such as in Ethiopia/Eritrea, Somalia, Colombia, Guatemala and Sudan.

In Sri Lanka, Norway has been facilitating the peace process between the government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tigers for the past five years. Maintaining the 2002 ceasefire is an important step towards the goal of ending the civil war. An independent monitoring mission has been set up to observe the ceasefire, a mission that is headed by Norway and includes observers from the other Nordic countries.

Today, direct negotiations between the parties are suspended. The uncertain political and security situation, and the parties' need to develop confidence in one another as negotiating partners, have contributed to the delay in resuming talks.

We are prepared to continue to work closely with the parties to facilitate a return to the negotiating table. Peace facilitation is always a laborious process that requires patience. The contribution of international partners, like the important work of the Canadian government, plays a vital role in reaching a political solution.

Norway's direct involvement in the peace process in Haiti started in 1998. This took place in cooperation with, among others Canada, and developed into the promotion of political dialogue in Haiti, and between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Canada deserves credit for its firm and extensive commitment to Haiti.

Political training for national opinion leaders and other political and social actors, based on democratic values and practices, is essential for strengthening democracy in Haiti. Recently Norway has launched an initiative to promote dialogue and consensus building between political and civilian actors in Haiti. We intend to continue our commitment to Haiti, particularly with respect to reconciliation among political and civilian groups.

I am often asked, "How is it that a country like Norway has come to play a role in peace and reconciliation processes?" Norway's role as a peace facilitator is a continuation of longstanding support for the UN mandate for peace and security, and economic development.

In peace processes it is necessary to be a patient facilitator and remain engaged even at difficult stages. It takes time for the parties to build sustainable solutions.

Norway's active role is also closely linked to co-operation with non-governmental organizations. In many cases, Norwegian NGOs have been the point of entry into peace and reconciliation processes. The extensive network that the NGOs have built up abroad has given access to areas where official Norway has had little or no presence.

At the international level, Norway cooperates closely with a number of countries. Both Canada and Norway put a wholehearted effort into the labour of peace. We are trying to make a difference. Conflicts are contagious and conflicts affect us all, directly or indirectly.

It is a moral imperative to contribute to peace if one can. We have the resources — when given the opportunity to secure peace, we must seize it.

Jan Petersen is Norway's minister of foreign affairs. He will be speaking at the Canada-Norway Peace Prize Symposium at the Liu Centre at University of British Columbia today.