

“Further steps have to be taken”

A Study of the Norwegian-Led Initiative to Increase Disaster Aid Through the UN,
1968-1972

Regine Landskaug



Master's Thesis in Modern International and Transnational History
Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History

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Spring 2022

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores an initiative set in motion by the Norwegian Foreign Minister, John Lyng, in 1968; an initiative which aimed to increase UN authority in favor of strengthening and improving coordination of aid in disaster situations. In order to investigate this, the thesis also briefly examines the history of the International Relief Union, which was set up as an attempt to internationalize disaster aid in the 1920s - 30s. Furthermore, for the purpose of contextualizing the initiative and what followed, several aspects of Norwegian foreign policy in the 1960s will be explored.

The thesis determines that several causes lend explanatory power to why the Norwegian Foreign Minister put in motion the initiative in 1968. First, the ongoing war in Nigeria and the subsequent famine in Biafra. All over Western Europe, the media's coverage of the aid community's failure to deliver aid to the starving population of Biafra shaped the public opinion in favor of Biafra. This was also the case in Norway, and it put pressure on the Foreign Ministry to act. Second, the UN was a cornerstone in Norwegian foreign policy. Norwegian diplomats wanted to be a driving force within the UN system, and disaster aid became the focal point for this aim. Third, the growing emphasis within Norwegian foreign policy on human rights and humanitarianism defined Norway's identity in international politics as a humanitarian advocate and a 'peace nation'.

Furthermore, the normative fabric of the Norwegian initiative and a persuasive Norwegian delegation who consequently wanted a rhetoric which included "man-made" disasters in international agreements opens for a discussion on the identity of Norwegian foreign policy and the concepts of interventionism and state sovereignty.

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In my very first year as a student at the University of Oslo I had the pleasure of attending a course called “Humanitarianism as History” led by Professor Daniel Roger Maul. Humanitarianism fast became my main academic interest, and I have written many papers on the subject since. When the time came to start working on my master thesis, I was pleased to work with Daniel as my supervisor. I thank him for his guidance and help along the way. Without his feedback, this thesis would have turned out very differently, and most certainly for the worse.

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I wish to thank my father, the one who sparked my interest in history, and whose philosophy of life is: “Learn to love books and you will never be bored a day in your life”. He was right.

Daniel, thank you for being the most encouraging partner – and proofreader – throughout the last years. Years marked by lockdown and hard work, but also magic as we welcomed our first son into the world in 2020 and will be meeting our second this fall. I am beyond grateful for the life we share.

Regine Landskaug, Oslo, June 2022

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INTRODUCTION

i. Presentation

“The ideals of human rights depend on human solidarity”¹

This thesis explores a Norwegian* initiative in the late 1960s, which aimed to coordinate and strengthen disaster aid through the UN. In the fall of 1968, the Norwegian Foreign Minister, John Lyng, spoke at the United Nations’ General Assembly’s twenty-third session in New York. Lyng painted a grim picture of ongoing conflicts at the time, exemplified by Czechoslovakia and Nigeria, and of a world in crisis and chaos. He emphasized the need to expand the authority of the UN:

“Could we not consider the possibility of giving the United Nations and its agencies (...), a stronger mandate and increased authority – for instance, by means of a special treaty – a mandate to carry out the purely humanitarian task of organizing and providing relief to a civilian population which has endured great sacrifices brought upon them by wars, conflicts or other calamities?”²

Lyng said that the Norwegian Government had consistently advocated for a more active UN as this would, according to the Minister, give UN more room to act in a crisis. Further, Lyng spoke about the need to coordinate humanitarian tasks on a global level and proposed a special mandate for the UN to act in disaster situations. If put into place, such a mandate would necessarily imply a reevaluation of the principle of state sovereignty

¹ RA/PA-1503/ I-L0007, Permanent mission of Norway to the United Nations, Madame Chairman, 1968.

*All sources in Norwegian are translated to English by me.

² UN digital archives, United Nations General Assembly, Twenty-Third Session, 1688th session, plenary meeting Wednesday, October 9th, 1968, New York, (Accessed October 2021).

The speech was followed by an initiative by the Foreign Ministry of Norway and the Norwegian Delegation to the UN in New York, led by Edvard Hambro. The government officials spent much time over the next year preparing a resolution proposal on disaster aid for the UN. This thesis traces the diplomatic trajectory of the initiative through archival studies, primarily from the archive of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, but also newspapers and other publications. The primary goal of the thesis is to contribute to the history of Norwegian foreign policy, and to show how the Norwegian initiative of the late 1960s played a role in Norway's identity as a humanitarian power and a 'peace nation' in the latter parts of the twentieth century.

Norwegian diplomats were advised by other member states to await to bring the initiative to the UN. Instead, they brought it to an International Red Cross Conference in Istanbul in 1969 as an alternative arena. It did not result in much beyond a rather diluted, non-binding declaration of principle which regards the protection and the welfare of the individual and the safeguarding of basic human rights in disaster situations.

What holds the interest of this thesis is the process rather than the outcome: the motivation, the timing, the diplomacy, and the ideas out of which the initiative surfaced. Norwegian foreign policy was heavily anchored in the UN system, and through this analysis I wish to illustrate how the centrality of the UN to Norwegian foreign policy, in combination with other factors, contributed to the growing identity of Norway as a humanitarian advocate and a 'peace nation'.

ii. Organization of the Paper

This thesis will explore the Norwegian-led initiative to increase and coordinate disaster aid through the UN, beginning with a speech to the UN General Assembly held by Norwegian Foreign Minister John Lyng, in 1968. The next part of the introduction will present the state of the art, and thereafter follows a discussion on methodology. Further, to be able to explain what informed this initiative and how it played out in the UN, and later in the International Red Cross, I found it useful to include a short sub-chapter on the attempt to internationalize disaster aid through the League of Nations' Ciraolo-project from the late 1920s to the early 1930s. The Ciraolo-project resulted in the establishment of the International Relief Union (IRU). The project was deemed a humanitarian fiasco at its close in the 1930s. Diplomatic interests and politics made it difficult for states and organizations to agree on how the IRU should be managed and financed, and on who should be on the receiving end of the enterprise. Although

unsuccessful, the project bears a resemblance with the Norwegian-led initiative decades later and say something about why the coordination of disaster aid is difficult.

Chapter One explores relevant aspects of Norwegian foreign policy in the 1960s. The chapter begins with a brief exploration of ‘the Greek case’ which illustrates how Norwegian foreign policy would continually get caught between self-interest and idealism. Some notes are made on the Norwegian Foreign Ministry’s strong belief in and desire to contribute to the UN. Lastly, the chapter explores Norwegian reactions to the Nigeria-Biafra War. Biafra is central for two main reasons. Firstly, this study identifies the Biafran crisis as the catalyst for the initiative, through the pressure put on Norwegian government officials to act, by a public faced with human suffering. Secondly, the ongoing war in Nigeria influenced the entire process of forwarding the initiative to the UN.

Chapter Two is, in its entirety, based upon the study of primary sources. Documents from the UN, the ICR and the archive of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry has been utilized to review the Norwegian initiative. The chapter explores how caution was required due to the sensitivity of the ongoing situation in Nigeria, and how the war left the UN relatively paralysed. Norway’s national discussions between its UN delegation in New York and the Foreign Ministry in Oslo was central, as was the bilateral cooperation with Canada. And ultimately, the heated diplomatic discussions during the IRC conference which resulted in a Declaration of Principles in Istanbul in 1969.

In the Third and final chapter, some points are made on UN and disaster aid in the early 1970s. Just a few years after the Norwegian initiative, another initiative surfaced, proposed by the UK and the US, and this time the level of interest was high. The UK-US initiative resulted in a resolution on disaster aid in 1971. Norway was asked to be co-proposer, but the Norwegian diplomats were unsuccessful in their attempts to get a reference to the Declaration from Istanbul into the resolution. Additionally, this chapter opens up a discussion on Norwegian moralism and interventionism and explores the paradoxicality of the Norwegian goal to weaken the concept of state sovereignty, when Norway carefully guarded its own sovereign rights.

iii. State of the Art

This study will take part in discussions within two main historiographical fields, and this section thus covers literature on Norwegian foreign policy and aid in the 1960s, and on the Biafra crisis.

Norwegian Foreign Policy

Norwegian scholar Gunnar Fermann writes about how the UN, born out of the Second World War and a solid dose of political idealism, planned to serve as a peace project, enjoyed Norwegian enthusiasm from its very beginning. As a small nation the need for cooperation and multilateral structures became evident in the post-war international system. Fermann explains how the UN serves as an arena for Norway to achieve its security policy goals and fulfill its idealistic aims at the same time. For a small nation such as Norway is “an obvious self-interest that international norms and laws are complied with.”³ Fermann’s statements resonate with what John Lyng repeatedly proclaimed in his speeches as foreign minister. He often spoke of how small nations were especially dependent on the UN and should therefore involve themselves more in UN politics.

Further, this thesis wishes to say something about, not only why Norwegian engagement in the UN was so substantial, but also why humanitarianism and human rights became a primary field of interest. John Karlsrud and Kari Osland from The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) offer one explanation. They investigated Norwegian contributions to UN peacekeeping and claimed in a 2016 article that the widespread Norwegian support for the UN is related to self-perceptions of Norway as a ‘peace nation’.⁴ This claim is supported by Hallvard Kvale Svenbalrud who, agreeing with Karlsrud and Osland, writes that in the context of the UN, Norwegians are portrayed as “great lovers of peace and international organizations.”⁵ in foreign literature.

Svenbalrud further explains that UN policy on humanitarianism and human rights have exposed division in Norwegian foreign policy, and how «Norway cautiously guards its sovereign rights,

³ Fermann, Gunnar, Norge og FN, Norges utenrikspolitikk, Torbjørn Knutsen, Gunnar Sørbo og Svein Gjerdåker (red), Cappelen Akademiske forlag, Bergen, 1997, p. 209.

⁴ Karlsrud John; Osland Kari, M, “*Between self-interest and solidarity: Norway’s return to UN peacekeeping*”, International Peacekeeping, London, 2016, Vol.23, p. 784-803.

⁵ Hallvard Kvale Svenbalrud, Fundament og ornament:” FN som hjørnestein i norsk utenrikspolitikk”, 1970-2005, Idunn, 2008, <https://www.idunn.no/doi/10.18261/ISSN1891-1757-2012-02-02>.

resonates poorly with its many appeals for a restriction of the principle of state sovereignty.»⁶ Svenbalrud further describes how Norway, already from the 1970s, was a keen spokesperson for a strengthening of state sovereignty within the General Assembly. The period investigated in this thesis begins in with Lyng's speech in 1968, and the sources reveal that the Norwegian advocacy for human rights was already well on its way in this decade. Svenbalrud further refers to historian Rolf Tamnes, who has written about how an uncompromised defense of human rights and universalism has been a key feature in Norwegian foreign policy.

Rolf Tamnes' «Oljealder» is the sixth volume in an ambitious series on the history of Norwegian foreign policy, and his work covers the years from 1965 until 1995. Tamnes identifies how the Norwegian political focus on aid intensified from the late 1960s and the African continent became the new area of focus within aid politics. Like Svenbalrud, he refers to the UN as a cornerstone in Norwegian foreign policy. Tamnes also claims that Norway increasingly strived to take on the role as a driving force in the UN and, specifically, in the organization's work to develop forums for cooperation; forums meant to solve structural problems in the international community of states.⁷ Such a forum could very well take the shape of the initiative studied in this thesis.

Eriksen and Pharo wrote the fifth volume in the same series as Tamnes, on the history of Norwegian foreign policy, and covered the years 1949 until 1965.⁸ They describe the first significant aid project Norway was engaged in, in India. Norway gave ten million NOK to an Indian-Norwegian fishing project and the amount was remarkably large. This was motivated, Eriksen and Pharo explains, by the social democratic engagement with international solidarity, humanitarians, and general idealism.⁹ Norway thus became known for its idealism abroad. Eriksen and Pharo also claim that Norway's lack of obvious self interest in the 'Third World' gave Norway a unique position to be a moral agent. This statement will not stand completely unchallenged, as the source material reveals that Norwegian enterprises and missionaries were already established in several African nations by the end of the 1960s. However, it illustrates a

⁶ Svenbalrud, «Fundament og ornament»

⁷ Tamnes, Rolf, «Oljealder 1965-1995»: Norsk utenrikspolitisk historie, bind 6, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 1997, p.339.

⁸ Eriksen, Knut Einar og Pharo, Helge Øystein, «Kald krig og internasjonalisering, 1949-1965,», Serie: Norsk Utenrikspolitikk historie. Bd.5, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 1997.

⁹ Eriksen, Pharo, «Kald krig og internasjonalisering», p. 174.

rhetoric often used regarding Norway and aid – especially in the case of Norwegian self-perception.

Another aspect of Norwegian aid work was that from the very beginning, when Norad¹⁰ was established in 1962, Norway focused on multilateral agreements rather than bilateral. Norwegian historian Jarle Simensen writes about Norwegian aid history in “Norsk utviklingshjelps historie”.¹¹ He demonstrates how the UN, and the World Bank was Norway’s preferred arenas for aid.¹² Another aspect of Norwegian aid in the 1960s and 1970s, was the emphasis on Nordic cooperation, also present from the very beginning. Foreign aid stood out as a field where the Nordic countries had much to gain from cooperating with each other, and officials from the Nordic countries often coordinated their statements and engagement to the UN and the World Bank.¹³ Also in the initiative examined in this thesis, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry looked to its Nordic neighbors for support. They were, however, more cautious and chose to be bystanders, and it was Canada who became Norway's partner in the initiative. Though not a Nordic country, Canada and Norway are both social democratic nations who share an emphasis on human rights.

Biafra

The Nigeria-Biafra War lasted from 1967 to 1970 and has remained a divisive issue in academic circles. In 2016, a large group of scholars contributed to the volume “Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War” where they set out to analyse the nature, background and sentiments that have shaped the wide-ranging literature. “This kind of analysis is especially crucial because war literature is shaped by various experiences, group affiliations, and biases”¹⁴. One contribution to the literature is Brian McNeil’s “The Nigerian Civil War in History and Historiography. 1967-1970”.¹⁵ One of McNeil’s goals is to emphasize the importance of the war in global history and to re-examine the issues surrounding the war. The intent to reevaluate many assumptions

¹⁰ Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

¹¹ Simensen, Jarle, «Norsk utviklingshjelps historie 1, 1952-1975: Norge møter den tredje verden», Fagbokforlaget, Bergen, 2003.

¹² Simensen, «Norsk utviklingshjelps historie» p.106.

¹³ Simensen, Norsk utviklingshjelps historie, p. 107.

¹⁴ Falola, Toyin, and Ogechukwu Ezekwem, eds. *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*. NED-New edition. Boydell & Brewer, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt1c3gxm9>.

¹⁵ McNeil’s, Brian, “The Nigerian Civil War in History and Historiography. 1967-1970”, in *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War*, Falola, Toyin, and Ogechukwu Ezekwem, eds. NED-New edition. Boydell & Brewer, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt1c3gxm9>.

commonly made about the war is shared by other authors in “Writing the Nigeria-Biafra War” such as Ralph Njoku and Austin Okwu. This demonstrates that even though the War is well-documented through literary sources, it is still viable to continue the discussion

Irish Historian Kevin O’Sullivan’s recent publication “The NGO Moment” studies compassion as a global moment from Biafra to Band-Aid¹⁶. His initial idea behind the book was to trace how and why NGOs became the primary conduits for the global poor between the late 1960s and the mid 1980s. The turn to rights-based humanitarianism is one of the more significant changes within this period. Biafra contributed to this shift through illustrating how NGOs became unable to act in situations where governments refused to cooperate. The hopelessness of the NGO situation can be directly linked to the Norwegian response to the Biafra crisis. First, the public was outraged at seeing a starving population who were not receiving help. Secondly, Lyng used the situation in Nigeria as an example of why the UN needed to take the lead in aid operations.

All over Western-Europe, Biafra is credited for changing the public’s perception of Africa, and German historian Florian Hannig writes about how the Nigerian Civil War changed the established relief procedures in West Germany.¹⁷ He also states that the German awareness of the Biafra conflict was shaped by campaigns led by churches, Biafrans and solidarity groups. Also, the media’s bias in favor of Biafra played a prominent role in creating an unprecedented level of interest and involvement in many Western countries. In Norway, not only did the media favor Biafra, but it also targeted the Foreign Ministry, which put additional pressure on the Foreign Minister to act.

The early 2000s saw an abundance of publications on Norwegian aid which also referred to Biafra. Amongst these were Jarle Simensen’s «Norsk utviklingshjelps historie».

¹⁶ O’Sullivan, K. (2021). “The NGO Moment: The Globalisation of Compassion from Biafra to Live Aid (Human Rights in History)”. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, doi:10.1017/978110876955.

¹⁷ Hannig, F. (2016). “The Biafra Crisis and the Establishment of Humanitarian Aid in West Germany as a New Philanthropic Field”. In: Witkowski, G., Bauerkämper, A. (eds) German Philanthropy in Transatlantic Perspective. Nonprofit and Civil Society Studies. Springer, Cham. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1007/978-3-319-40839-2_12.

Simensen studied Norwegian development aid from 1952 until 1975 and argues that Norwegian aid was given renewed efforts in the 1960s, before taking a radical turn in the 1970s. Simensen's work includes Norwegian reactions to Biafra and how it shaped the public opinion on Africa amongst the Norwegian public.

Simensen also briefly discusses what stands at the core of this thesis, which is John Lyng's speech to the General Assembly and his initiative to the UN. An interesting point is that Simensen connects Lyng's initiative to humanitarian interventionism and a changed attitude towards international law and state sovereignty.¹⁸ In his review of Simensen's book, Axel Borchgrevink picks up on this: "Perhaps most striking from reading this volume is the realisation of how similar the concerns that were discussed in this period are to those that dominate current debates over development assistance». He continues: «(...)the balance between growth and distribution, the dangers of aid dependency, even 'humanitarian intervention' versus state sovereignty, were all central to the debate on development assistance in the 1960s and early 1970s.»¹⁹ Simensen and Borchgrevink's observations are relevant for this thesis, as the Norwegian initiative to a certain degree was about sovereignty. And its catalyst, the Nigeria-Biafra War, was *all* about sovereignty.

Stig Rune Pedersen wrote a thesis in history through the University of Oslo in 1998, titled "Nødhjelp og Diplomati: Norge og Biafra-krigen, 1967-1970"²⁰. His comprehensive work is published through the National Library. Pedersen systematically goes through the conflict and the Norwegian response. His final chapter is highly relevant for this thesis as it regards John Lyng's speech and the Norwegian and Canadian proposal to the Red Cross' International Congress in Istanbul. Pedersen's thesis is, however, fully focused on the Norwegian response to the Biafra crisis. This thesis differs in that it will use the war more as a catalyst, or amplifier, rather than the sole cause of the events that played out in the late 1960s.

¹⁸ Simensen, Jarle, «Norsk utviklingshjelps historie», p. 240.

¹⁹ Axel Borchgrevink (2004) "Images of Norwegian Aid, Forum for Development Studies", 31:1, 161-181, p. 164.

²⁰ Pedersen, Stig Rune, «Nødhjelp og Diplomati: Norge og Biafra-krigen, 1967-1970" Accessed from The Norwegian National Library.

iv. Methodology

Archival study is the heart of this thesis, and these sources exemplify and illustrate Norwegian diplomacy and Norwegian UN politics ‘in action’. The digital primary sources were gathered from the United Nations’ digital archives and the International Red Cross’ digital resources. The largest portion of archival material was collected from the physical archive, *Riksarkivet*, in Oslo. Hundreds of letters, memos and press releases from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Permanent Mission to the UN have been assessed through the last six months. I was also able to access John Lyng’s private archive, after signing a non-disclosure agreement. The agreement did complicate the use of some of the sources. However, the sources in his archive regarding Biafra consisted mostly of cut outs of newspaper articles, which obviously belong to the public domain and therefore the principle of non-disclosure is not relevant.

I chose to work with the sources from the Norwegian Foreign Ministry because I wanted to contribute to the historical study of Norwegian foreign policy. To investigate how the initiative was discussed internally between government officials was rewarding in that respect. Another benefit was how this made it possible to regard the people behind the case and thus adopt an actor-centric approach. “Norway” itself is not the actor in this story, but the individual people working at the Foreign Ministry, the Foreign Minister himself and several UN delegates. A more state-centric approach is utilized when dealing with other nations, such as Canada. This is due to practical circumstances, such as limited resources, but also the aim of the thesis.

One note on the work with sources from *Riksarkivet* is how they were mainly written in Norwegian. The translations have all been done by me, and I feel obliged to remind the reader that something will always be lost or altered in translation. I have been very mindful of this, and I believe my translations are faithful to the source material.

Regarding the theoretical approach that will be taken, this thesis clearly lends most to international history as the focus is on Norwegian foreign policy. However, a distinction between international and transnational history in the literature is not clear or absolute, nor is it necessary for the aim of this thesis to draw a definite line between the two. However, there are several aspects of this thesis that lend themselves to an international approach. First, there is the clear focus on Norwegian foreign policy and Norwegian diplomats. Many of the sources deal with their interactions with diplomats from other states. Diplomatic history, or the history

of foreign affairs, increasingly came to be called international history during the 1970s²¹, and one could identify a new approach to the old tradition, which focused more on the complexity of the world system and non-state actors. I believe this newer form of diplomatic history to be more fitting as a framework for this thesis.

Secondly, much of the study is based on archives from the Norwegian Foreign Ministry and are so-called official documents, which traditionally make up the source material in international history research. However, much of the source material are documents from the International Red Cross Conference in Istanbul (1969). Large conferences are typically attended by representatives of both governments and of non-governmental organizations and such was true for the conference in 1969. The conference thus represents one such crossing between the international and the transnational. Such a conference would perhaps not be of much interest for the old-school writers of diplomatic history, but inspired by the global and transnational turn in historiography of recent decades, these events can be understood in a new context.

A much-welcomed aspect of lending more to the transnational when writing foreign policy history is an increased emphasis on other actors' influence on a state's foreign policies: the media, organizations, public opinion etc. In a larger global context, these actors transcend national borders. A common pitfall when writing a contribution to one nation's history is how this state's policies, its distinctive historical background and its culture will contribute to the experience of the state as unique. To quote Akira Irye: «Exceptionalism' was thus a tendency that frequently characterized the way any nation's past was studied and understood"²². To adopt a more transnational approach is also to avoid exceptionalism to a larger degree, although it is difficult to circumvent it completely.

v. A Brief History of the IRU: Internationalization of Disaster Aid

An initiative to coordinate international relief was started in 1927 by the president of the Italian Red Cross, Senator Giovanni Circolo. As a result, the International Relief Union (IRU) was established. The primary aim of the IRU was to provide immediate and organized relief for people in disaster situations caused by natural disasters. The second aim of the Union was

²¹A. Iriye, «Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present and Future», Palgrave Pivot Basingstoke: Palgrave Pivot, 2013, p. 6.

²² Irye, Akira, Global and Transnational History, p. 3.

facilitating the scientific study of the causes of natural disasters, to improve aid work and to strengthen preventive measures. The IRU was halted by political and financial concerns. Further, the states and organizations who committed to the project were never able to agree on what the Union should be. The IRU was ultimately perceived as a failure.

A brief mention of the project is useful for this thesis for several reasons. First, it illustrates that the Norwegian initiative was not the first of its kind. Secondly, it gives insight as to why coordination of aid between states was difficult. Thirdly, the International Red Cross and the League of Nations are both central actors in this thesis, and the enterprise damaged the relationship between the International Red Cross and the League of Nations with repercussions still felt in the period under scrutiny.

Despite much initial enthusiasm from both states and organizations the IRU did not become functional before 1932. By then, much of the enthusiasm had long faded. British Historian John Hutchinson explains: “(...) far from introducing morality into international affairs, it was paralyzed by financial weakness, political constraint, and administrative confusion, and proved unable to give even minimal assistance to victims of natural disasters”.²³ It was deemed a humanitarian flop, and some claimed that the world was not yet ready for it.

One substantial challenge had been the question of funding. A delegate from the British Red Cross referred to the IRU as “noble and ambitious scheme” but found the whole thing uncomfortable. To ask states to put money into the IRU in advance to be spent on an unspecified future crisis was, according to the delegate, a utopian enterprise.²⁴ The concerns of the British was shared by many, and unfortunately for the project they proved to be correct.

Organizational questions were also pressing. What would be the nature of the IRU? Would it be a federation of states or of Red Cross societies, or a combination of the two? Ciraolo himself had an idea that only states would belong in the Union, but with the permission to delegate responsibilities to national Red Cross societies. In the process, the Ciraolo-project thus

²³ Hutchinson, John F. “Disasters and the International Order: Earthquakes, Humanitarians, and the Ciraolo Project.” *The International History Review* 22, no. 1 (2000): 1–36. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40108290>, p. 3.

²⁴ Hutchinson, “Disaster and the International Order”, p. 4.

sharpened tensions between the Red Cross and the League of Nations.²⁵ The Red Cross did not trust disaster aid in the hands of an international organization.

A humanitarian fiasco indeed, but the history of the IRU says something about the behavior of states. No government wanted to commit itself in advance to meet unknown costs of future disasters.²⁶ If nothing else it proved that politics mattered, and that morality was a difficult currency to trade with.

²⁵ Tamnes, Oljealder 1965-1995, p. 339.

²⁶ Tamnes, Oljealder 1965-1995, p. 358.

I: “NORWAY SAVES THE WORLD, THEREFORE NORWAY EXISTS”

The ironic formulation in this chapter’s heading was written by Rolf Tamnes. It was written as a comment on the Norwegian engagement in the world and how it has often been rooted in idealism. In the same context, Tamnes explains how Norwegian foreign policy officials desired to be a driving force for cooperation and collective solutions in international politics. This desire led to an escalation in Norwegian commitment to the UN, from the mid 1960s as “the Norwegian Samaritan engagement increased in the third world.”²⁷

The Greek Case and the Pan-Scandinavian Hobby

Norwegian engagement on the world stage changed in the decades after the Second World War. It expanded beyond military interests and NATO. Advocacy for human rights questions was adopted as a central part of this new foreign policy agenda. In balancing its new foreign policy identity, Norway routinely was caught between idealism and self-interest. For example, Norway criticized Greece, Spain, Portugal and Turkey regarding human rights matters.²⁸ All the mentioned countries were Norwegian allies in NATO, which complicated the balance between human rights advocacy and self-interests. This balancing act could further be illustrated by the “Greek Case”.

After a military coup in Greece in 1967, Norway’s condemnation of its NATO-ally was harsh, and the request to re-establish democracy firm. Denmark was the only other nation which adopted the same tough stance as Norway. However, the Norwegian government found itself in a predicament. A Norwegian wharf was in the process of delivering six motor torpedo boats to Athens when the coup happened. Five out of six boats had already been delivered. The Norwegian oppositional parties, which was even more anti-Greece than the Norwegian government, demanded that the sixth boat should be detained. This would be a strong political statement and put pressure on the Junta. The Norwegian government disagreed, because doing so would be contesting international law. Governmental officials also emphasized how small nations had a special obligation to obey international law.²⁹ The sixth boat was delivered to the

²⁷ Hutchinson, “Disaster and the International Order”, p. 3.

²⁸ Hutchinson, “Disaster and the International Order”, p. 4

²⁹ Tamnes, *Oljealder 1965-1995*, p. 358.

Junta, and the sitting government, led by Morten Borten survived a no-confidence motion by two votes.

The second dilemma for the Norwegian government was regarding a proposal to complain the colonel-led rule into the Human Rights Commission in the Council of Europe. In this matter, Sweden was the chief advocate. The Norwegian Foreign Minister, John Lyng, was skeptical at first. However, he changed his position when he realized that such a complaint could very well serve Norwegian ideals as much as Norwegian interests. Two Norwegian diplomats led the Scandinavian team to prosecution, which positioned Norway at the very center of the matter, and Lyng, as well as Norway, gained “good will” as a result.³⁰ The process was repeated when Sweden proposed to forward a motion to remove Greece from the Council of Europe. Norway was hesitant at first, but then changed its tune and became an advocate. Greece withdrew from the council before anything happened,³¹ and Norway again gained “good will” at a very low cost.

Balancing between self-interest and idealism is not unique to Norway, but it is perhaps a more prominent feature in Norwegian foreign policy than in that of other nations. In this case, the Norwegian’s desire to be an advocate for human rights clashed with the desire to obey and respect international law. The Greek-case also exemplifies how Norwegian cooperation in foreign affairs was often with other Scandinavian countries. Lyng wrote in one of his publications an anecdote of a conversation between himself and the Austrian Foreign Minister, Lujo Toncic-Sorinj. According to Lyng, his Austrian colleague had asked him a question regarding humanitarian aid to Africa: “What does lie behind this demonstrative will to clean up messes in faraway nations?” He continued: “Is it a pan-Scandinavian hobby?” Lyng replied: “That is one way to look at it.”³²

³⁰ Tamnes, *Oljealder 1965-1995*, p. 358.

³¹ Tamnes, *Oljealder 1965-1995*, p. 358.

³² Lyng, John «Mellom Øst og Vest, *Erindringer 1965-1968*», J.W. Cappelens Forlag A.S, Oslo, 1976, p. 172.

UN and Multilateralism

In addition to its Nordic neighbors, Norwegian foreign policy was heavily anchored in the UN system and a belief in multilateral cooperation. Lyng was a firm believer in, and a defender of, the UN. Regarding criticism towards the organization, often based on its tendency to be slow-paced and to push problems away, Lyng claimed this criticism should not be directed at the organization itself nor its administrators. It was the great powers that posed the real challenge to the UN system, and according to him, their inability to grant the organization power of attorney and more effective instruments could serve as brake pads. Lyng explained his faith in the UN in this way: “I have previously uttered that the UN serves as a leaf thin wall of division whereas on one side you have the relative chaos of the world today and on the other: complete breakdown. It is not much – but it is something.”³³ He also commented that it had been a consistent goal for Norwegian diplomats to expand UN authority and strengthen its remedy.

In 1966, a year prior to the Nigeria-Biafra war, a committee was appointed by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry to evaluate the future development of Norwegian aid. The committee commented on the peculiarity of Norwegian aid. Norway’s official aid had almost exclusively been given through multilateral financial channels. Compared to other states, this was an unusual practice.³⁴ Another observation made by the committee was that nearly all contributions made by Norway was due to its membership in the United Nations and its special organizations. Thus, Norway had not initiated any comprehensive development aid on its own. The committee did point to the Norwegian India-project as an exception, but that project was also partly initiated by the UN.

The reason why Norwegian aid efforts had been through multilateral channels, was according to the committee: “(...) the desire to contribute to the recognition of the tasks international character.”³⁵ The committee further explained that Norway’s means had been too limited for it to contribute bilaterally. This was changing, however, and the Norwegian aid administration was becoming more developed. The Committee noted that Norwegian bilateral aid could be

³³ RA/PA672/ /F/Fk/L0064/0005 Utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse i stortinget, 13.november, 1969, p. 16.

³⁴ RA/PA-0672/F/FI/L0073/0001 Retningslinjer for den videre utbygging av den norske hjelp til utviklingsland, p. 2.

³⁵ RA/PA-0672/F/FI/L0073/0001 Retningslinjer for den videre utbygging av den norske hjelp til utviklingsland, p. 3.

strengthened in the coming years, and that this form of aid also allowed it to be linked to the distribution of Norwegian goods and services.³⁶

The Biafran Crisis

Erling Wikbord, who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs in Lyng's government, uttered in context of the Palestinian refugee problem in 1957: "As a small nation, without any special interest, and without the fear of suspicion, we have a certain 'task' in these situations"³⁷. This was a common rhetoric used regarding Norway and aid. Thus, a common assumption when the Nigeria-Biafra War entered people's homes through television screens in 1968 was that Norwegian interests in Africa were non-existent. Even though Norwegian interests on the African continent were few, they existed.

In the 1960s, Nigeria was the largest Norwegian market for dry fish, Norwegian consultant companies were at work, and along the coast of West-Africa sailed Norwegian cargo ships.³⁸ The Norwegian embassy in Lagos was established in 1960, the very year of Nigerian independence. And when the Norwegian Government first granted aid to Biafra, it donated millions worth of dry fish to the total sum of NOK 22.4 million; the single largest sum of aid the Norwegian state had granted outside of its own borders.³⁹ However, it was no coincidence that it was dry fish that was donated to a country where Norway already had a large dry fish market. Norwegian Foreign Minister, John Lyng, have at a later point uttered that Biafra was the case which he had spent the most time on.⁴⁰

The Eastern Region of Nigeria, renamed Biafra by the rebels, declared independency after years of violent conflict and chaos.⁴¹ The Nigerian government responded by imposing a blockade on Biafra, as part of their military strategy. The hope was to starve the rebels into submission. Consequently, millions of people were in danger of dying of hunger and disease. The conflict's focus on tribal and ethnic boundaries and the threat of failed states and sovereignty posed

³⁶ RA/PA-0672/F/FI/L0073/0001 Retningslinjer for den videre utbygging av den norske hjelp til utviklingsland, p. 8.

³⁷ Eriksen and Pharo, «Kald krig og internasjonalisering», p.183.

³⁸ Simensen, «Norsk utviklingshjelp historie», p. 118.

³⁹ RA/PA-0672/F/FI/L0073/0001 Utkast til utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse 22. august, 1965.

⁴⁰ Simensen, "Norsk utviklingshjelps historie" p. 234.

⁴¹ Barnett, Michael, «Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism». Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 135.

challenges to the international community.⁴² The famine became worldwide news in early 1968⁴³, and even though the international community was in uproar, the United Nations remained calm. UN Secretary General U Thant argued that Biafra was an internal affair and the UN's mandate did not include domestic politics. He also actively discouraged members of the Security Council to bring Biafra before the council, and so: "The UN assumed its traditional "make no waves and do not call attention to yourself" posture."⁴⁴

Official statements on the Norwegian position on questions regarding the conflict were given through a collective Nordic statement. As such, the pan-Scandinavian approach to the 'Third World' prevailed. The first shared official statement from the Nordic countries informed that the suffering imposed on the civil population due to the conflict in Nigeria sparked public attention within all the Nordic countries to the people in Biafra. Further, the statement uttered hope that the humanitarian aspects of the war were given the highest priority considering how the human tragedy was becoming a serious international problem. Full support was given to the UN and humanitarian aid organizations with hope that the utmost possible would be done to bring supplies to the people in need.⁴⁵

Regarding Biafra's claim for diplomatic recognition, Norway acted in line with the international response, which was to not grant Biafra recognition. Lyng explained how a recognition would lead to a breach in the Norwegian connection to Lagos and thus compromise the possibilities to bring help to the suffering population in the affected areas.⁴⁶ The Norwegian Christian Democrats (KRF) were continuously supportive of the Biafran's fight for independence, and especially their Youth Organization tried to pressure the government in that direction. In an open letter to John Lyng, in July 1969, they demanded recognition of Biafra, and for the Norwegian Foreign Minister to address the conflict in international forums.⁴⁷ Lyng's answer came the following day: «The Civil War in Nigeria depends on factors which the Norwegian

⁴² O'sullivan, Kevin. "Biafra: Ireland, Nigeria and the Politics of Civil War." In *Ireland, Africa and the End of Empire: Small State Identity in the Cold War 1955–75*, 83–106. Manchester University Press, 2012.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt2121626.9>, p. 84.

⁴³ Barnett, "Empire of Humanity", p. 134.

⁴⁴ Barnett, "Empire of Humanity", p. 138.

⁴⁵ RA/PA672/ /F/Fk/L0064/0005 Utkast til utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse, 22. august 1965, p. 4.

⁴⁶ RA/PA672/ /F/Fk/L0064/0005 Utkast til utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse, 22. august 1965 p. 7.

⁴⁷ RA/PA672/ /F/Fk/L0064/0005 Åpent brev til John Lyng fra KrFs ungdomsorganisasjon, 30. juli, 1968.

government has no influence over.»⁴⁸ He continued to explain how the government were worried about the situation, but that the conflict first and foremost had to be addressed and solved regionally. Furthermore, the Organization for African Unity⁴⁹ was hard at work on both sides of the conflict.

Not only representatives from political parties pressured the government to act regarding Biafra. All over Western Europe the war sparked outrage and public debate. Two of the states who were most heavily involved was Ireland and West-Germany. The example of Ireland is an interesting one as it had developed an intense relationship with the short-lived Republic of Biafra due to several factors. One of the most important factors was Ireland's missionary history in Africa, and this "(...)helps to explain how local structures provided access to the events as well as a framework that enabled the transformation of the distant conflict into a local concern (...)”⁵⁰ The Irish government also followed international example and refused to acknowledge Biafra. Popular opinion in Ireland was overwhelmingly in support of Biafra. When the war broke out in Nigeria, a strong popular identification with the breakaway state emerged in Ireland, which was engaged in shaking off its own colonial past and finding its place in the European and international community.

The Biafra crisis drew more public attention than any other conflict on the African continent had done before.⁵¹ The concern was large, also in Norway. Regardless of an established missionary practice in Nigeria or colonial past, the Western countries shared one experience with Biafra: It was the first crisis that was broadcasted into people's homes through the medium of television. This effectively changed the public opinion regarding Africa.⁵² In West-Germany, the media adopted a clear pro-Biafra approach which contributed to why West-Germany became the biggest humanitarian contributor to Biafra.

Like in the case of West-Germany, the Norwegian media adopted a pro-Biafra approach and held the Foreign Minister accountable. *Morgenbladet* published a note in September 1968 titled

⁴⁸ RA/PA-0672/F/Fk/L0064/0005 John Lyngs svar til KrFs ungdomsorganisasjon, 31. juli, 1968.

⁴⁹ Organisation of African Unity (OAU) - formed in 1963, a set of norms slowly emerged to govern the relationships between the new African states.

⁵⁰ Bateman, Fiona, "Ireland the Nigeria-Biafra War: Local Connections to a Distant Conflict", in *New Hibernia Review*, Vol 16. No 1, 2012 pp. 48-67.

⁵¹ Hannig, "The Biafra Crisis and the Establishment of Humanitarian Aid in West Germany".

⁵² Simensen, «Norsk utviklingshjelps historie», p. 234.

“Hurry up!”⁵³, demanding that the Norwegian government, especially the Foreign Minister, should take independent, political action regarding the Nigeria-Biafra question. The authors claimed that there was a certain level of slowness about Norwegian foreign policy which led to few positive surprises. In *Aftenposten*, Sverre Munck posted an opinion piece in June 1969 with the title “What is our government doing? Allowing the mass murders to continue?”⁵⁴ He pointed to the unwillingness to act from both the Norwegian government and the UN. He referred to UN as a con organization and he accused the Norwegian Foreign Ministry of lacking foresight and initiative, as well as common sense and humanity.

John Lyng commented on the role of Norway in the UN regarding Biafra. According to Lyng, there had been considered a joint Nordic initiative to the UN. The Nordic ministers had discussed the possibility to bring the matter to UN Security Council, where Denmark had a seat at the time. The Danish had discussed this possibility with other members of the Security Council, and they had been firmly advised that a Nordic initiative was not preferable. They were told it would be completely different had it been an African initiative.⁵⁵ On this matter Lyng stated that: “It is in this context an important reminder that the UN is an organization of sovereign states who often jealously guard their rights, and who are anxious that a case of this nature will create a precedence that could come back to haunt them at a later time.” He proceeded: “It is, in other words, not formalistic considerations which hinders us to bring the matter to the UN, rather political realities which are regrettable.”⁵⁶

This did not mean however, according to Lyng, that the UN was without any power or means of actions, but that the situation was a testament to how the UN was not an organization which existed independently of its members, with the self-determination and political authority to push through decisions despite the wishes of the majority. A moral authority was, however, constituted in the UN Charter, Lyng explained, which one must try to utilize in a situation of this character. Further, he claimed that experience proved that this moral authority was best served through the quiet diplomacy of the Secretary General, distant from the public attention and without the heavy weight of prestige.⁵⁷

⁵³ RA/PA-0672/F/Fk/L0064/0005 Utklipp fra Morgenbladet, 4/9, 1968.

⁵⁴ RA/PA-0672/F/Fk/L0067/0004 Utklipp fra Aftenposten, 20.juni, 1969.

⁵⁵ RA/PA672/ Fk/L0064/0005, Utkast til utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse 22. august 1965, p. 5.

⁵⁶ RA/PA672/ Fk/L0064/0005 Utkast til utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse, 22. august 1965, p. 6.

⁵⁷ RA/PA672 Fk/L0064/0005 Utkast til utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse, 22. august 1965, p. 6.

II: THE INITIATIVE

John Lyng gave a foreign policy statement on the 13th of November 1969, his first after the election. In the statement he sums up why he believed it to be of great importance for Norway to be a driving force in UN politics. He explained that smaller nations have the largest need for international cooperation; on their own they have little to zero influence over geopolitical and social matters. Their possibility to influence the international development is through cooperation.⁵⁸ Lyng proclaimed that a main goal in Norwegian foreign policy – and a perspective for the future – was to utilize the Norwegian position within the international forums to promote the Norwegian ideals and the Norwegian appreciation of peaceful and constructive multilateral cooperation.⁵⁹

Two decades after the failure of the League's IRU project, a group of Norwegian diplomats, led by Lyng himself, initiated an idea to increase international disaster aid through the UN. The reception was lukewarm at best, but it did result in collaboration with the Canadian Foreign Ministry. The collaboration resulted in a declaration on disaster aid presented at the International Committee of the Red Cross' Conference in Istanbul in 1969. The conference led to tense debate and diplomacy between representatives of different nations, and especially the Nigerian and British delegations were dismissive of the suggestion. After rounds of discussion, the goal was achieved, and a declaration was signed.

John Lyng's speech to the United Nations General Assembly

In September 1968, a year into the Nigeria-Biafra War, the Norwegian Foreign Minister spoke at the UN General Assembly's Twenty-Third Session.⁶⁰ Lyng began his speech by complementing the UN on choosing its highest officials from smaller member states, as "the smaller nations, if left to themselves, have only limited possibilities to assert themselves in international politics"⁶¹ A statement which echoed Lyng's previous statements on how smaller nations, like Norway, are most dependent on international cooperation. He went on to the main theme of his statement: The possibility of the United Nations settling conflicts – particularly

⁵⁸ RA/PA-0672/F/FI/L0073/0002, utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse, 1969, p.15.

⁵⁹ RA/PA-0672/F/FI/L0073/0002 utenrikspolitisk redegjørelse, 1969, p. 15.

⁶⁰ UN digital archives, United Nations General Assembly, Twenty-Third Session, 1688th session, plenary meeting Wednesday, October 9th, 1968, New York, (Accessed October 2021), <https://undocs.org/en/A/PV.1688>).

⁶¹ UN digital archives, United Nations General Assembly, Twenty-Third Session, p. 10 .

conflicts which threaten the freedom or the existence of smaller nations. He devoted some time to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and confirmed Norway's position that the sitting government should not face any interference from «The West» before he proceeded to the situation in Nigeria.

Lyng explained the tragic fate of the populations, due the 'unfortunate circumstances', and mentioned the pure humanitarian motives of the large-scale operations to bring relief, by many governments and humanitarian organizations. The phrasing 'unfortunate circumstances' can be assumed a way to not address the civil war in Nigeria too directly. He underlined that these operations held no political motives: "But this relief has not been sufficient to prevent the tragedy from reaching frightening dimensions. Several governments and organizations have tried again and again to improve the possibilities for the transportation of effective help."⁶² Lyng underlined that the five Nordic countries had jointly taken a very active part in those efforts.

Lyng also referred to the wars in Vietnam and the Middle East, and that all these conflicts highlighted the need for the inquiry he wished to raise to the Assembly. Lyng raised a question that had been raised by many before him: How can the UN be developed and strengthened, and thus enabling it to play a more active role in settling conflicts and alleviating human suffering? The Minister proceeded: "The Norwegian Government has consistently advocated for a gradual expansion of the authority of the United Nations. This is however a difficult and time-consuming task, and we have no guarantee that it will ever succeed."⁶³ According to Lyng, in the years to come, international developments would confront the world with problems of such magnitude that they could not be solved without an organization of a truly global character with sufficient powers. What were the steps that should be taken to strengthen the organization's powers? Lyng suggested a measure that he considered to be a relatively limited measure. His suggestion reads:

"Could we not consider the possibility to give the United Nations and its agencies, the Secretary General, UNICEF, the World Food Program, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a stronger mandate and increased authority –for instance, by

⁶² UN digital archives, United Nations General Assembly, Twenty-Third Session, p. 11.

⁶³ UN digital archives, United Nations General Assembly, Twenty-Third Session, p. 11.

means of a special treaty – a mandate to carry out the purely humanitarian task of organizing and providing relief to the civilian population which has endured great sacrifice brought upon them by wars, conflicts of other calamities?”⁶⁴

Lyng, who had been rather careful with his rhetoric regarding the war in Nigeria previously, now stated to the Assembly that the tragedy in Nigeria demonstrated the need for an extension of the United Nations' authority. He refers to the United Nations charter as a flexible instrument which was:

“(…) set up by its member states to develop those powers, which, though not expressly provided in the Charter, are conferred upon the United Nations by necessary implications as being essential to the performance of its duties, but which have not yet been formulated in international agreements”⁶⁵

Lyng's entry demonstrate a strong Norwegian belief in solutions through international cooperation, and primarily through the UN. In the aftermath of his speech he reactions were lacking, and no great powers demonstrated any interest in the Norwegian Foreign Minister 's plea for action. The political implications of the ongoing war in Nigeria, which the UN had been extremely cautious to get involved in, could offer an explanation for the lukewarm reception. Another facet of UN politics is the relevance of not only *what* is suggested, but from *whom*.

John Lyng, however, was firm in his belief and kept working towards turning his ideas into a tentative international agreement, with substantial support from ambassador Edvard Hambro.

Edvard Hambro's Speech to the UN

Only a few months after Lyng's speech to the General Assembly, in December of 1968, Edvard Hambro, Norwegian ambassador to the UN in New York, carried Lyng's torch and gave a speech to the third committee. The committee meeting was on the topic disaster aid in natural disasters. Even though his speech was meant to be on natural disasters, Hambro chose to cover all kinds of disasters regardless of their cause, including armed conflicts. He pointed to the fact

⁶⁴ UN digital archives, United Nations General Assembly, Twenty-Third Session, p. 11.

⁶⁵ UN digital archives, United Nations General Assembly, Twenty-Third Session, p. 11.

that from 1864 to 1949, a series of humanitarian conventions that had tried to introduce an element of civilization into the actual conduct of armed conflict, and how this could be further built on. He continued by stating that in any armed conflict, great masses of civilians are deprived of their livelihoods and subjected to inhuman suffering, referring to Vietnam as an example. According to Hambro, Lyng's speech pointed to the fact that even though much good work was being done, it was not enough: "In a wider context, our humanitarian efforts are modest, and we are also at times guilty of deficiencies in our coordination of various relief programs."⁶⁶

The ambassador said: "The Norwegian people feel that a new deal is called for. We must reexamine the political and legal framework for all international relief assistance."⁶⁷ He also claimed that his government were not alone in recognizing this need. In an international conference on human rights in Teheran, the matter had been discussed, and the possibility to conduct a study on international relief work was one of the measures up for debate. In the opinion of the Norwegian government, Hambro stated, the most fruitful developments in the humanitarian field have been through international agreements, such as the Hague and Geneva conventions, where states have accepted specific rules of conduct. The proposition from the Norwegians was: Would it not be possible in any way to agree on some international mechanism whereby governments would allow certain pre-arranged procedures to be carried out in the cases where, due to unforeseen and exceptional circumstances, a humanitarian problem arose of such a magnitude that it would be natural to call on the resources of the entire international community to provide help.⁶⁸ "Perhaps this concept, when properly developed, might be a new departure in our search for a better organization of international relief work."⁶⁹

He finished his statement by pointing out that this was a very preliminary line of thought, and that any study carried out should work based on "the charter of our organization and fundamental rules of international law". Also, the Norwegian Delegation would like to bring

⁶⁶ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1295/2/26.8/45, Statement by Ambassador Edvard Hambro in the third Committee, p. 3.

⁶⁷ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1295/2/26.8/45, Statement by Ambassador Edvard Hambro in the third Committee, p. 3.

⁶⁸ RA/S-6794/Dab-L1295/2/26.8/45, Statement by Ambassador Edvard Hambro in the third Committee, p. 4.

⁶⁹ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1295/2/26.8/45, Statement by Ambassador Edvard Hambro in the third Committee, p. 4.

the matter up again at an appropriate time and in an appropriate forum if the situation should call for it. In a confidential note to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian UN delegation explained their thoughts behind the speech, and made clear that no references to Nigeria would be made, and that the delegations had worked hard to make sure no misunderstandings would appear in that regard: “It is a strong wish to avoid replica exchange that can only be harmful.”⁷⁰ It is made clear in the note that the point of the statement was to make the Norwegian primary mindset known, not necessarily to clarify any future Norwegian engagement on the matter.

In the first actual draft of what could become an international agreement on humanitarian aid, Hambro and his delegation stated that the primary objective would be a commitment by states to be open to receiving representatives from certain international aid organizations on their sovereign territory and grant them observational rights and the opportunity to report on the situation.⁷¹ The state would also commit to cooperate with the aid organs and to make available local aids. A committee would also be appointed, which would represent the aid agencies included in the agreement, as well as a representative from the Secretary General. Primarily, the committee’s task would be the practical delegation of aid agencies and their activities. Another possible responsibility of the committee would be to delegate tasks to UN member states regarding aid.⁷² The Norwegian draft made several references to the Convention on human rights, which they hoped could be an inspiration for their initiative.

The Norwegian delegation further believed it would be appropriate for the committee to have the authority to decide whether a humanitarian crisis was in fact happening based on several criteria. If they deemed it to be a humanitarian crisis, this would automatically trigger an aid response. However, as the delegation pointed out itself, such a solution would mean a breach of the principles regarding states’ sovereign rights and non-intervention in states’ internal affairs, as it the UN charter clearly states. The delegation pointed out how such a breach of previous interpretations of the non-intervention principle would bare political consequences.⁷³

The Norwegians had not yet reached a solid plan by the fall out 1968. Several options were

⁷⁰ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1295/2/26.8/45, FN-del til UD, 12.12.68

⁷¹ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/26.8/45, FN-del til UD, 15. oktober 1968, p.1.

⁷² RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/26.8/45, FN-del til UD, 15. oktober 1968, p. 2.

⁷³ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/26.8/45, FN-del til UD, 15. oktober 1968, p. 3.

discussed, such as: an international treaty; a series of dependent declarations from individual states; or a UN declaration which would grant certain rights to international aid agencies and that would hold states accountable to certain commitments.⁷⁴ So far in the process, the Norwegian delegation had been contacted by Denmark and Canada. In the summer of 1969, the Foreign Ministry could inform the UN delegation that two Nordic ministry meetings were held where the Norwegian initiative had been discussed. Some worries were uttered by representatives from the other Nordic countries regarding timing and even though both the Swedes and the Danes saw the initiative as realistic,⁷⁵ no joint Nordic front would be advocating this initiative.

Cooperation with Canada

Norwegian foreign politics often intertwined with other Scandinavian countries, and the Nordic countries had shared statements concerning the war in Nigeria. In the case of the initiative, however, the other Nordic countries had taken on the roles as observers, and the Norwegians had to find a co-proposer further from home. The Canadians had from an early point expressed keen interest in the Norwegian initiative. Canada, although geographically far away from Norway, shared its interest in disaster aid, and the two governments were able to cooperate to create a Norwegian-Canadian initiative.

Canada drafted their own proposal of what an international agreement on disaster aid should look like, and it became evident that there was work to be done before the two states could agree on an actual joint initiative. Canada suggested, amongst other things, that the parts in the statement regarding human rights needed to be removed.⁷⁶ Canada had not adopted the same uncompromising attitude towards human rights as Norway and the Canadians thought too many references to human rights could create potential problems with the Nigerian government and other countries with regards to minority rights.

Given the possible legal implications of the initiative, the legal department of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs worked closely with Hambro and the Canadians. The legal department posted a note to the Foreign Minister on 7th of December 1968. It was made very

⁷⁴ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/26.8/45, FN-del til UD, 15. oktober 1968, p. 3.

⁷⁵ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/26.8/45, Fortrolig melding fra Utenriksdepartementet til FN-delegasjonen, 30.07.69.

⁷⁶ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/ 26.8/45 Juridisk avdeiling til utenriksministeren, 7. desember, 1968.

clear that this was a confidential note, and that their thoughts regarding the initiative to the UN should not, at this point, reach the public. Jens Evensen, the author of the note, had worked closely with his bureau leader Underland and working bureau leader Hjort-Johansen. They claimed that it would be tactically right to present the work within the framework of the UN charter. This would demonstrate how the initiative was in line with the UN's own policies. Article 1 states that the purpose of the UN is, amongst other things, to foster multilateral cooperation in order to solve social and humanitarian challenges and to promote respect for human rights. Article 1, nr. 4 states that the UN shall be a center for coordination for the work of nations to serve this purpose. The legal department also referred to articles 55, 56 and 57, which all address the aim to strengthen and expand the UN and its organization through increased authority. They further noted how the Norwegian and Canadian delegations' work was within a limited but significant field. The work had to be of a strictly humanitarian character without any political background, and its aim should be to protect fundamental human rights.⁷⁷

Furthermore, the legal department pointed out that for political reasons, the work should not solely focus on civil war and armed conflicts. It should be "relief situations" which also include civil war and inter-state war.⁷⁸ A resolution which primarily focused on war and civil war could create unnecessarily heated discussions in the General Assembly. The legal department disagreed with Canada and advised the Norwegian Foreign Minister that the work should to the highest possible degree deal with human rights problems and the declaration of human rights.. However, reactions from Nigeria were regarded as a concern also by the Norwegians: "We must assume that Nigeria, supported by other developing countries will react to any such initiative within the UN system. They would indirectly see the initiative as a criticism towards the conditions in Biafra." ⁷⁹Nevertheless, a note was added on how the situation in Biafra, like the situations in Vietnam, Tibet and Korea previously, proved the very need for sensible measures within the UN system.

The Canadians had proposed that the initiative should take the form of a resolution. The Norwegians argued that the obvious weakness of the type of resolution was how it would not be binding to the member states, nor would it serve as an instrument which encourages ratification. What it could become, though, according to the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, was

⁷⁷ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/ 26.8/45 Juridisk avdeiling til utenriksministeren, 7.desember, 1968, p 2.

⁷⁸ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/ 26.8/45 Juridisk avdeiling til utenriksministeren, 7.desember, 1968, p.2.

⁷⁹ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/ 26.8/45 Juridisk avdeiling til utenriksministeren, 7.desember, 1968, p.4.

a first step towards the creation of a larger treaty framework. The aim was to achieve a framework similar to the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which in turn led to the European Convention, and the UN Convention on Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms.⁸⁰ In the opinion of the Legal Department, the Norwegian idea was larger than the suggested Canadian resolution, and a convention should be the goal of this initiative: A “(...) convention on humanitarian aid in catastrophes. A convention like this could be seen as a natural addition to the already accepted human rights convention in the UN-system.”⁸¹ The thoughts behind such a convention was to grant the UN aid organizations a stronger position and increased authority in disaster situations. From the Norwegian point of view, a convention joined by member states was needed to serve this purpose. The convention should hold states responsible for providing help. Also, the state affected by the disaster situation should be demanded to accept the aid provided on a humanitarian basis through the UN system. The latter would be difficult to defend in the UN, due to the situation in Biafra, but simultaneously the situation also proved why this needed to be part of the convention.⁸²

The Canadian ambassador acknowledged the Norwegian idea of a convention as an ideal future goal but argued that, for the time being a model agreement might be more feasible. The model agreement would work in the following way: Funding through states would grant facilities to internal disaster relief units which could be used whenever a country requested assistance following a major disaster. The ambassador also pointed out the need to proceed cautiously due to African and particularly Nigerian sensitivity over Biafran issues.⁸³ The Canadian delegation wanted to know if the Norwegians were having any second thoughts on putting forward their initiative due to Nigerian pressure. Hambro assured the Canadian delegation that the Norwegian delegation still wanted to proceed.

The two delegations reached an agreement on that the initiative should exist in the form of a resolution which declared that it was the moral responsibility of states to cooperate through the UN in order to relieve suffering and meet humanitarian needs in areas stricken with catastrophes. Also, it identified the need to create a standing committee and regarded it as crucial for the success of the initiative. The committee was going to consist of representatives

⁸⁰ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/ 26.8/45 Juridisk avdeiling til utenriksministeren, 7.desember, 1968, p.6.

⁸¹ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/ 26.8/45 Juridisk avdeiling til utenriksministeren, 7.desember, 1968, p.6.

⁸² RA/S-6794/Dab-L1294/ 26.8/45 Juridisk avdeiling til utenriksministeren, 7.desember, 1968, p. 7.

⁸³ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/26.8/45 Canadian Ambassador to Hambro, 24th of December 1968.

from the different aid organizations and representatives for the Secretary General.. They thus followed the same model which had been used to create a committee in the IRU in the past. The primary task for such a committee was practical coordination of aid in disaster areas. Also, the resolution should, according to the legal department, decide that the member states would be obliged to assist in any appropriate way, for example through material contributions, funding, airport accessibility etc.⁸⁴

The next question was where the resolution should be presented. The UN had originally been the plan, but the delegations accepted how the timing might make it difficult to bring it up at the time being. In correspondence they had also been advised by other member states to await bringing the suggestion to the UN. The International Red Cross was discussed as a possible alternative platform. However, the IRC's experience with the IRU decades prior had made the organization cautious of such enterprises. The Canadians first contacted the International Red Cross but they were met with no enthusiasm from the organization.

Ambassador Hambro had a longer conversation with Mr. Claude Pilloud from the ICR to discuss the International Red Cross Commission's take on the Norwegian initiative. Pilloud informed that he had already told the Canadian delegation that he was not at all positive towards the suggestion.⁸⁵ The International Red Cross past experiences with the League of Nations' International Relief Union had convinced him that international action led by an international political organization would only hurt humanitarian relief work. Pilloud pointed out how the UN was even more politically charged than their predecessor and how this emphasized his concerns regarding the UN organizing relief operations.⁸⁶ His main concerns were political. Even to appoint a committee of inquiry for the project would, according to Pilloud, be extensively political in character. It would have to be comprised of representatives from several states and it would inevitably be affected by political and geographical considerations. Hambro tried to reassure Pilloud that the Norwegian initiative in no way aimed for the UN to take the leading role in all relief work, but it was rather a suggestion to coordinate relief work across IGOs, NGOs and states.⁸⁷ This made Pilloud somewhat more positive to the idea and informed

⁸⁴ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1294/ 26.8/45 UD's legal department to the Foreign Minister ,7th of December 1968, p. 5

⁸⁵ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L129/26.8/45 Norsk initiativ om katastrofe-bistand, notat 6.12.68, p. 1.

⁸⁶ RA/ S-6794A/Dab-L129/26.8/45 Norsk initiativ om katastrofe-bistand, notat 6.12.68, p.2.

⁸⁷ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L129/26.8/45 Norsk initiativ om katastrofe-bistand, notat 6.12.68, pp. 1-2.

Hambro about a huge upcoming International Red Cross Conference which was to be held in the fall of 1969. He hinted towards the possibility of airing the initiative there. He also claimed it would be easier to bring the proposal to the UN after it had been reviewed by several states at a Red Cross Conference.

Hambro expressed that he was open to all possible arenas to forward the initiative and communicated this to the Canadians. The Canadians thought it could be wise to first take the proposal to the Red Cross Conference, but they hoped it could later be presented to the UN's Economic and Social Council. After attending an IRC expert meeting in Geneva, Ambassador Hambro was certain: "The best way to forward the initiative, which was originally presented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, would be to bring it to the Red Cross Conference in Istanbul, and then decide if it should be taken to the ECOSOC or the General Assembly."⁸⁸ The two delegations were in agreement, and the Canadians made the following note after the Secretary General of the United Nations had addressed human rights in armed conflicts: "The Canadian authorities appreciate that the Secretary General of the United Nations is also studying the question of human rights in armed conflicts."⁸⁹ They continued: "However, for the very reason that led the Canadians and the Norwegian authorities to conclude that the Red Cross conference was the best forum for progress in the field of international humanitarian relief, the Canadian authorities still think that the United Nations will be unable to discuss the question on a reasonably non-political basis."⁹⁰

Prior to the Conference in Istanbul, the resolution was changed to a declaration. The Canadians wanted to keep the agreement a resolution, but the Norwegians had now decided that it was more purposeful to present a declaration to the ICR. The Norwegian delegation claimed that it could be more difficult to bring the suggestion to the UN later in the form of a resolution rather than a declaration. Representatives from the IRC agreed that the Norwegian suggestion of a declaration of principles was the best way forward. ICR-representative Claude Pilloud met with Hambro and said that the International Red Cross would support the Norwegian proposal in Istanbul. He did, however, utter worry that the Norwegians and Canadians would meet strong opposition from representatives of other governments as they might find it difficult to commit

⁸⁸ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L129/26.8/45, FN-del til UD 21.april 1969.

⁸⁹ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L129/26.8/45, FN-del til UD 21.april 1969.

⁹⁰ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L129/26.8/45, FN-del til UD 21.april 1969.

to providing aid in advance.⁹¹ This sounded like an reprise of the discussion on funding of the IRU three decades prior.

The Norwegian Foreign Ministry made it clear in their correspondence with the UN delegation that even though the Red Cross conference was the right place to present the declaration, a window should be held open to the possibility to later bring the topic back to the UN.⁹² Further, the Foreign Ministry encouraged Hambro and his team to contact other nations to get their input and, hopefully, their support. The letter also reads: “The Norwegian Foreign Ministry supposes that, in this initial round, one should not contact the Nigerians nor the Israelis”.⁹³ The Norwegian delegation agreed. The Canadian on the other hand, had from an early stage in the process uttered that Nigeria should be included. Therefore, the Nigerians were contacted along with several other countries.

The two delegations reached out to other nations’ government officials and embassies to seek support for the initiative as the conference was approaching. Many of them could, in principle, support the declaration, but had reservations regarding specific parts of the text. The hardest opposition came from the Nigerian and the British governments.⁹⁴ The British even argued that the proposal should be withdrawn altogether. All other countries did not wish to take a stance before the actual conference.

After rounds of discussions, meetings and correspondence between the Norwegian and Canadian delegations, the initiative was ready to properly see the light of day. Without any real reassurance of support from other states, it was a deceleration of principles the two delegations brought to Istanbul in the fall of 1969.

Istanbul: A Time for Diplomacy

The International Red Cross held its conference in Istanbul from 6th to 13th of September 1969, just short of a year after Lyng’s speech to the UN General Assembly. 700 delegates represented 92 states and 84 national leagues. Also present were representatives from the ICRC and the

⁹¹ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L129/26.8/45, Notat Hambro, 22.07.69

⁹² RA/ S-6794/Dab-L129/26.8/45, /UD til FN-delegasjonen, 24.07.69, p. 1.

⁹³ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L129/26.8/45, /UD til FN-delegasjonen, 24.07.69, p. 1.

⁹⁴ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1467/3/27.10/5, Rapport fra den norske regjeringsdelegasjonen til den 21. Internasjonale Røde Kors Konferanse, p. 3.

League of Red Cross Societies. In his introductory speech, the president of the ICRC spoke of how the world was characterized by a series of conflicts that the states involved in regarded as strictly their internal affairs and not as international conflicts.⁹⁵

Edvard Hambro led the Norwegian Governmental delegation. The delegation consisted of Hambro himself, and two other delegates from the foreign ministry.⁹⁶ In the delegation's official report, it is stated that the work towards acceptance for the Norwegian-Canadian initiative was the most important and the most challenging during the conference. The work had resulted in the "Declaration of principles for international humanitarian relief to the civilian population in disaster situations".

One of the central topics of the conference was relief in natural disasters. However, the Norwegian and Canadian delegates wanted their initiative discussed as an individual point in the General Committee. This was because they wanted the declaration to be understood as also related to armed conflict, not merely natural disasters. The IRC' Standing Committee decided that the declaration would be discussed in the General Committee, under bullet point 4c: "International Relief Actions in Natural Disaster". The delegations did not see this as a perfect match, but the placement did not create any real challenges.⁹⁷

The draft declaration was handed out as a conference document Monday 8th September. The very same day, the Norwegian and Canadian government delegations had their first meeting with the Nigerian government's delegates. The Nigerian delegates immediately adopted an adversary stance towards the declaration. From the Nigerians' point of view, it was excessive and unnecessary to make references to the Geneva Conventions. More importantly, though, to them a declaration of such a nature as the Norwegian-Canadian proposal could open up for intervention in other nations' internal affairs. The initiative could even be viewed as an invitation to organize a 'catastrophe' in a country with the intention to later intervene. In specific cases, it would be next to impossible for a developing country to stand up against the

⁹⁵ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L129/26.8/45 Norges Røde Kors, Rapport fra den XXI internasjonal Røde Kors konferanse i Istanbul 1969, p. 1.

⁹⁶ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1467/3/27.10/5, Rapport fra den norske regjeringsdelegasjonen til den 21. Internasjonale Røde Kors Konferanse, p. 2.

⁹⁷ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1467/3/27.10/5, Rapport fra den norske regjeringsdelegasjonen til den 21. Internasjonale Røde Kors Konferanse, p. 3.

moral pressure they could be objected to, due to such a declaration. In short, the declaration was a “demonstration of white, western thinking, which was completely foreign to African states”.⁹⁸ In other words, the first meeting with the Nigerian delegations was far from successful.

The same day, the Norwegian and Canadian delegations also met with the British delegation. The British were skeptical towards the arrangement as their bonds to Nigeria were strong, and they had also uttered this in their written correspondence with Norway and Canada before the conference. The main concern of the British was regarding sovereignty. Concrete objections and suggestions for rephrasing certain parts of the declaration were made. Their chief demand was that it should be clearly stated that international relief should not hurt countries' sovereign rights. After the first rounds of dialogue with the British and the Nigerian delegations, a revised proposition was handed over to the committee. From conversations with other countries' delegations, it became evident the Nigerian stance would be decisive. The Nigerian side would garner widespread support. Several Arabic and African countries stated that they would only vote for the suggestion if Nigeria voted for it. Eastern European countries were awaiting and skeptical, while Asian countries more comprehensive. Latin-American countries and Western countries were, for the most part, eager to support the declaration.⁹⁹

A new round of discussions with the Nigerian delegation was unavoidable. Luckily for the Norwegians and Canadians, the second meeting with the Nigerians was far more positive than the first one had been. Specific words and phrases were discussed and quite a few disagreements were cleared out. One phrase that would be changed was: «All authorities in areas of disaster without prejudices to the sovereign rights of states should allow the transit admission and distribution of international relief supplies.»¹⁰⁰ This formulation, according to the Red Cross, could be understood as a direct criticism towards the Nigerian government and the question regarding humanitarian aid to Biafra. In the final declaration, the sentence was altered to: «All

⁹⁸ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1467/3/27.10/5, Rapport fra den norske regjeringsdelegasjonen til den 21. Internasjonale Røde Kors Konferanse, p. 4.

⁹⁹ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1467/3/27.10/5, Rapport fra den norske regjeringsdelegasjonen til den 21. Internasjonale Røde Kors Konferanse, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1467/3/27.10/5, Rapport fra den norske regjeringsdelegasjonen til den 21. Internasjonale Røde Kors Konferanse, p. 8.

states are requested to exercise their sovereign and other legal rights in a manner which allows the transit admission and distribution of international relief supplies.».¹⁰¹

In the end, the document handed out in the committee was a drastically modified version of the first Norwegian-Canadian draft. It was Ambassador Hambro who presented the initiative to the committee. He made sure to acknowledge the formidable efforts already made through the UN and the Red Cross in the humanitarian field. However, he pointed out that one could still witness men, women and children being the subject of great misery and need. That was the background for the proposed declaration. He underlined that it was not a legally binding document at that point in time, but a morally and psychologically binding declaration of principles.

After a plenary discussion, it was once more in the hands of the Nigerian delegation. This time it was not their governmental delegation, but delegates from the Nigerian Red Cross who wanted a revision. A meeting was held where it was decided to change the formulation “(...) disaster situations, regardless of the cause” to “natural and other disaster situations”.¹⁰² After the final modification was finished, the declaration was adopted without further discussion or debate, and with no votes against the declaration. Only one country abstained from voting, and that was Hungary.

The “Declaration of principles for international humanitarian relief to the civilian population in disaster situations” was thereby accepted. The Declaration begins by stating that “(...) in the present century the international community has accepted increased responsibility for relief of human suffering in any form”¹⁰³. It goes on: “Affirming that one of the major purposes of the community of nations as laid down in the Charter of the United Nations is to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, cultural or humanitarian nature”¹⁰⁴. Before the principles adopted are listed, the declaration states that

¹⁰¹ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1467/3/27.10/5, Rapport fra den norske regjeringsdelegasjonen til den 21. Internasjonale Røde Kors Konferanse, p. 8.

¹⁰² RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1467/3/27.10/5, Rapport fra den norske regjeringsdelegasjonen til den 21. Internasjonale Røde Kors Konferanse, 7.

¹⁰³ IFRC, Declaration of principles for international humanitarian relief to the civilian population in disaster situations, XXIst International Conference of the Red Cross, Istanbul, September 1969. <http://ifrc.org/Docs/idrl/149EN.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴ IFRC, Declaration of principles for international humanitarian relief to the civilian population in disaster situations.

“recognizing that further steps have to be taken by the international community (...)”. The statement echoed John Lyng's speech one year prior, but this time the wording was more cautious.

Six principles were agreed upon in the declaration. The very first regarding how the fundamental concern of mankind and thus the international community in disaster situations is to protect the welfare of the individual and the safeguarding of basic human rights. The second and third principles address impartial humanitarian organizations and how they should be treated as non-political. The fourth sounds: “Disaster relief for the benefit of civilian populations is to be provided without discrimination and the offer of such relief by an impartial international humanitarian organization ought not to be regarded as an unfriendly act»¹⁰⁵ The fifth principle begins: “All States are requested to exercise their sovereign and other legal rights to facilitate the transit, admission and distribution of relief supplies provided by impartial international humanitarian organizations (...)” and the sixth and final principle concludes the declaration: “All authorities in disaster areas should facilitate disaster relief activities by impartial humanitarian international organizations for the benefit of civilian populations.”¹⁰⁶

In the report written by the delegation from the Norwegian Red Cross after the conference, it was revealed that the initial Norwegian-Canadian suggestion, before discussions and revision, wanted to include all catastrophes “natural or man-made” and this was regarded as the biggest modification.¹⁰⁷ Especially the Norwegian government delegates had been advocates for including the phrase “man-made disasters”, and had fought harder than the Canadians to keep this in. It did, however, quickly become evident that no agreement would be reached, especially with the Nigerian, British and Arabs, if this phrasing was not altered. East-Germany had also rejected the initial “man-made” formulation and declared it impossible to adopt a declaration if the phrase was not removed.

Additionally, the Norwegian Red Cross delegation made a note of how Sweden had also put forth an initiative on medical assistance in armed conflicts. According to the delegation the

¹⁰⁵ IFRC, Declaration of principles for international humanitarian relief to the civilian population in disaster situations.

¹⁰⁶ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L129/26.8/45 Norges Røde Kors, Rapport fra den XXI internasjonale Røde Kors konferanse i Istanbul 1969, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1467/3/27.10/5, Rapport fra den norske regjeringsdelegasjonen til den 21. Internasjonale Røde Kors Konferanse, p. 8.

conference had therefore proven that it was possible for the Nordic countries to affect international resolution work to a great extent. And even though the Norwegian-Canadian declaration had been diluted through discussions, the Norwegian Red Cross saw the event as positive for Norway and the Nordic countries: “It was very clear that the Nordic countries' work within the Red Cross is highly appreciated and provides good-will. It is now crucial that the Nordic countries' possibilities to actively influence international humanitarian law, is preserved.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ RA/ S-6794/Dab-L1467/3/27.10/5, Rapport fra den norske regjeringsdelegasjonen til den 21. Internasjonale Røde Kors Konferanse, p. 10.

III: POST-INITIATIVE: NORWAY, THE UN AND DISASTER AID, EARLY 1970s

The Norwegian-led initiative never made it to the UN, and the declaration signed in Istanbul was a result of several rounds of negotiation and was therefore diluted. The Norwegian delegation did however view it as a small victory, and their plan was to keep pushing their case in the UN. However, the Norwegian diplomats struggled to make their mark, and no reference would be made to the Norwegian-Canadian suggestion when a new resolution on disaster aid surfaced in 1971. However, the Norwegian delegation continued to focus on aid also in ‘man-made’ disasters within the UN. The continued effort of the Norwegian diplomats to include “man-made” disasters in disaster aid-resolutions raises some interesting questions regarding Norwegian foreign policy interests and interventionism and state sovereignty.

A New Resolution from Great Powers

In May 1970, a few months after the war in Nigeria ended, the Secretary General gave an interim report in the United Nations’ Economic and Social Council regarding assistance in cases of natural disaster. The report stated how developing countries were experiencing disasters on a large scale and how the economic and humanitarian implications could not be disregarded.¹⁰⁹ The Secretary General discussed how nations across the globe were already involved in disaster aid, and mentioned several nations specifically. Regarding Norway he mentioned how reparations to meet natural disasters and research concerning their causes and early manifestations have already been undertaken in Norway, even though the country itself was rarely threatened. He continued: “The Government of Norway, however, takes an important interest in providing relief assistance to other countries which suffer from major natural disasters (...)”¹¹⁰. There is also the mention of a fully equipped Norwegian Surgical Disaster Unit and Field Hygiene Team, which had been made available for relief work in disaster areas.

The report also noted how some disasters may be predictable, but could not be prevented or controlled, namely emergencies which arise out of situations other than natural disasters. In conclusion, the Secretary General stated that:

¹⁰⁹ RA/ S-6794/Dbb-L1179/2/26.8.45, Interim report of the Secretary General, United Nations’ Economic and Social Council, Forty-ninth session, Agenda item 22, 12. May 1970.

¹¹⁰ RA/ S-6794/Dbb-L1179/2/26.8.45, Interim report of the Secretary General, United Nations’ Economic and Social Council, Forty-ninth session, Agenda item 22, 12. May 1970. p. 27.

“Disaster situations calling for resources far beyond the capacity of the countries involved will continue to occur, and Governments will look to the United Nations for direct assistance and for assistance in mobilizing aid for the world community.”¹¹¹

Furthermore, continued the Secretary-General, cases may occur where international action is needed in emergencies due to other causes, including civil conflict. In such cases, arrangements within the United Nations designed to meet the impact of natural disasters might be brought into effect if required by the government concerned. This note was of special interest for the Norwegian diplomats who had been working with this exact argument. Assistance in “natural and other disaster situations” was the phrasing in the declaration from Istanbul after rounds of negotiations. However, the first Norwegian draft had included “man-made” situations, and throughout the process the Norwegians had consistently argued that the focus should be elevated from natural disasters to *all* disasters. This work was continued by Norwegian diplomats to the UN in the years after the Red Cross Conference.

Edvard Hambro addressed the UN on the topic of natural disaster, this time in the 49th session of the Economic and Social Council. Hambro’s speech was part of the preparations for the Secretary General’s final comprehensive report on assistance in cases of natural disasters, which was to be presented in the 51st session. Hambro’s speech was meant as a last effort to make a mark on the Secretary General’s final report. Hambro stated: “It has for some time been the conviction of my government that there has been a certain lack of coordination and centralization in this work and that the authority of the United Nations in international disaster relief should be strengthened.”¹¹² He then made a reference to Lyng’s entry to the General Assembly, and the following Norwegian-Canadian initiative in Istanbul: “May we suggest that the United Nations in such a situation and for such purposes, would be characterized as an impartial international humanitarian organization?”.¹¹³

¹¹¹ RA/ S-6794/Dbb-L1179/2/26.8.45, Interim report of the Secretary General, United Nations’ Economic and Social Council, Forty-ninth session, Agenda item 22, 12. May 1970, p. 51.

¹¹² RA/ S-6794/Dbb-L1179/2/26.8.45, ECOSOC’ 49th Session, Statement by Ambassador Edvard Hambro, p. 2.

¹¹³ RA/ S-6794/Dbb-L1179/2/26.8.45, ECOSOC’ 49th Session, Statement by Ambassador Edvard Hambro, p. 3.

In the late fall of 1970, Norwegian Ambassador Ole Aagaard addressed the UN's Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee. He wished to propose the creation of a resolution that was concerned with the protection of civilians and their human rights in armed conflicts, and Aagaard reassured that such a resolution would be of a purely humanitarian character.¹¹⁴ The ambassador also stated that human rights and the way they are formulated and accepted by such means that they are fully applicable in armed conflict. Finally, he made a reference to the Declaration of Principles regarding humanitarian aid, based on the Norwegian-Canadian initiative, and issued that the declaration had to be applied also in armed conflicts, and that all parties in a conflict must do what they can to comply with these principles.¹¹⁵

Aagaard and the Norwegian delegation's proposed resolution did not make it past the idea phase. However, another resolution, Resolution 2816 "Assistance in cases of natural disasters and other disaster situations", was adopted in the General Assembly the following year, in 1971. Norwegian member of parliament, Odd Vigestad spoke in the third committee in November 1973, where he uttered how pleased his delegation had been two year prior when the resolution was accepted by the Assembly, as this was an important cause for the Norwegians. However, Norwegian influence on the process was, in the end, limited, even though Norway had been a co-proposer of the resolution.

Before the twenty-sixth session where Resolution 2816 was accepted, the Norwegian delegation in Geneva had been contacted by the British and the Americans, who were the proposers of the resolution, with "elaborate recommendations" for Norway to be co-proposer of the resolution.¹¹⁶ The Norwegian Foreign Ministry accepted the role as co-proposer. They also held a hope that the proposed resolution would include a reference to the Istanbul-Declaration. The Ministry highlighted that this resolution resembled what Hambro and Lyng had been working towards for years and a reference to their work would only be natural. Ambassador Hambro made several appeals to the Americans and British to include a reference regarding the Istanbul-Declaration, but this proved impossible. Hambro informed his government of this, and wrote that he expected great support for the resolution given that "two major, western powers are the

¹¹⁴ RA/ S-6794/Dbb-L1179/2/26.8.45, Pressemelding fra FN-delegasjonen i New York, 11.11.70, s p. 2.

¹¹⁵ RA/ S-6794/Dbb-L1179/2/26.8.45, Pressemelding fra FN-delegasjonen i New York, 11.11.70pp. 3-4.

¹¹⁶ RA/ S-6794/Dbb-L1179/ 26.8/45, FN-Bistand ved Katastrofer.

proposers, together with Norway as co-proposer”¹¹⁷, and that he was sorry not to get a reference to the deceleration from Istanbul.

The adopted resolution 2816 stated: “Recognizing further necessity to ensure prompt, effective and efficient response to a government’s need for assistance, at the time of natural disaster or other disaster situations (...)”¹¹⁸ and that one of its aims was: “To mobilize, direct and co-ordinate the relief activities of the various organizations of the United Nations system in response to a request for disaster assistance from a stricken State”¹¹⁹ The parallels to the declaration from Istanbul were obvious.

What played out regarding the resolution on disaster aid in the early 1970s, showcased how Norwegian diplomats craved recognition for their work in the field. The declaration from Istanbul was not mentioned when the UNSC adopted resolution 2816 regarding assistance in cases of natural disasters and other disaster situations, although the parallels were obvious, and regardless of efforts made by ambassador Hambro. It was not until two major Western powers initiated a similar resolution that the UN member states were ready to listen. This offers some insight into the balance of power within the UN system, and how this will always be important regardless of the cause. Britain, which had been one of the toughest opponents in Istanbul were suddenly the proposer of a similar proposal. This illustrates how the Nigeria-Biafra war had been a political stumbling block, especially to the British who had economic interests in their former colony. Furthermore, it illustrates how the conflict had touched upon the core issues of state sovereignty and interventionism.

Interventionism

The Nigerian delegation at the Red Cross Conference in 1969 had opposed the declaration when it made references to man-made situations. This could according to the Nigerians, in the worst case, be seen as an invitation to organize a ‘catastrophe’ in another state with the intention to later intervene. Consequently, in some cases, it would be next to impossible for a developing country to stand up against the moral pressure they could be objected to. The same worries

¹¹⁷ RA/ S-6794/Dbb-L1179/ 26.8/45, FN-Bistand ved Katastrofer.

¹¹⁸ United Nations’ digital library, *A_RES_2816(XXVI)-EN*, «Assistance in cases of natural disaster and other disaster situations.» Adopted at the 2018th plenary meeting, 14 Dec. 1971. In: Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly during its 26th session, 21 September-22 December 1971. - A/8429. - 1972. - p. 85-87. - (GAOR, 26th sess., Suppl. no. 29). p.86

¹¹⁹ United Nations’ digital library, *A_RES_2816(XXVI)-EN*, p.86.

surfaced decades later, when the UN's rather controversial Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle was up for discussion. The principles of sovereignty and non-intervention was severely challenged in the 1990s and early 2000's. Especially after the Rwandan genocide in 1994 the discussions were given more attention. The Norwegian initiative and the discussions it spurred, proved that the ideas which informed debates on humanitarian interventionism in the 1990s and early 2000's were already existing. Biafra had after all been all about sovereignty.

The Norwegian diplomats had been aware of the challenges imbedded in the cause they advocated for and discussed state sovereignty in a letter to the Nordic ministers in 1970. The Norwegian Foreign Ministry made a reference to the principle in the UN Charter paragraph 2,7, which stated: "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state (...)"¹²⁰ This was the formulation, according to the Norwegians, that had made it difficult to bring certain matters to the UN, such as the Norwegian initiative to strengthen UN authority in disaster situations.¹²¹ Nevertheless, the Norwegian UN delegation kept advocating disaster aid to also include war and civil war, in UN forums.

During the 26th General Assembly in 1972 it was decided to create a position within the UN secretariat as UN-coordinator for disaster aid. This position had been agreed upon in resolution 2816 which endorsed the Secretary General's proposal for an adequate permanent office in the UN which would be the focal point in the UN's system for disaster aid. Further, the resolution recommended that this office should be led by a Disaster Relief Coordinator, located in Geneva.¹²² Turkish ambassador Faruk Berkol was appointed the very first person to fill this position.¹²³ In a Norwegian statement to the General Assembly regarding the election of Mr. Berkol, Norwegian diplomats reminded the member states that it had been a priority for the Norwegian delegation for years, to coordinate efficient UN disaster relief. It was also underlined that from Norwegian point of view, the resolution's formulation "in natural disasters and other situations" was interpreted as such: the coordinator's mandate and area of

¹²⁰ The United Nations digital library, The Charter of the United Nations, October 24, 1945, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>.

¹²¹ RA/ S-6794/Dbb-L1179/26.8/45, Telegram fra utenriksdepartementet til Nordiske ministere, 2.2.70.

¹²² United Nations' digital library, *A_RES_2816(XXVI)-EN*, p.86.

¹²³ RA/ S-6794/Dbb-L1179/26.8/45, FN-del til Utenriksdepartementet, 29.12.72.

responsibility was not limited to that of natural disasters, but also included disaster situations caused by war or civil war. Put in other words, disaster situations created by humans; “man-made disaster situations”.¹²⁴

At the same time as Norwegian diplomats and the Norwegian Foreign Minister advocated for a stronger mandate and increased authority for the UN, battles for borders and sovereignty at sea was being fought at home. The Norwegian diplomats consistently advocated alteration in principle of state sovereignty regarding disaster aid, both natural and man-made. It was however extremely unlikely that Norway would find itself in a position where any intervention caused by disaster would be probable. Set aside from war, the threats to Norwegian security were little, which was the reason why NATO had been top priority in Norwegian foreign policy. Civil war and natural disasters; two phenomena estrange to the Norwegian people, and thus it could be assumed that alteration in UN authority in cases of disaster aid was a high reward - low risk project for Norway to advocate to the UN.

This argument does resonate with the literature. Simensen wrote in his account on Lyng's speech to the UN General Assembly in 1968 how it and the subsequent initiative had contributed to changed ideas on humanitarian interventionism and changed attitude towards international law and state sovereignty.¹²⁵ Also Svenbalrud made a note about how “Norway's cautiously guards its sovereign rights, resonates poorly with its many appeals for a restriction of the principle of state sovereignty”.¹²⁶ He also stated that Norway from the 1970s became an advocate for altering and increasing the concept of state sovereignty in UN forums. The preceding account on the Norwegian initiative and the Norwegian diplomat's rhetoric in the UN, resonates with his argument. It also demonstrates that Norwegian efforts to decrease the understanding of sovereignty through extending UN authority, began before the 1970s. Lyng held his speech in 1968, and made references to an already established Norwegian foreign policy culture to advocate increased UN authority.

Regarding Lyng and his initiative, Simensen also wrote that it did not result in much at the time, but it cast long shadows. The R2P concept, which was endorsed by the UN in 2005, did not come about in isolation: it was affiliated by many older norms and ideas around human rights

¹²⁴ RA/ S-6794/Dbb-L1179/26.8/45, FN-del til Utenriksdepartementet, 29.12.72, 3.

¹²⁵ Simensen, «Norsk Utviklingshjelps historie», p. 240.

¹²⁶ Svenbalrud, «Fundament og ornament».

and human security.¹²⁷ The growing idea of human security in the 20th century, grounded in the idea that people have a moral responsibility to one another, fast became part of the identity of Norwegian foreign policy. Historically, states have acted out of rationality, not responsibility.¹²⁸ To allow increased UN authority, such as Lyng and Hambro advocated, would also imply assigning the member states the role to manage that authority. As such, Norwegian government officials put much faith in the UN system, and its member states, to act as moral agents. In a letter from the Norwegian delegation to the UN, from 1968, the following was stated: “The ideals of human rights depend on human solidarity.”¹²⁹ This will stand as an example of Norwegian idealistic policies.

¹²⁷ Zähringer, Natalie, “Norm evolution within and across the African Union and the United Nations: The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) as a contested norm”, in *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 20:2, 187-205, DOI: 10.1080/10220461.2013.811336, p.189.

¹²⁸ Hehir, Aidan, “Introduction: Libya and the Responsibility to Protect”, p. 1-16 in *The Responsibility to protect and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention* Aidan Hehir and Robert Murray, 1-15, Palgrave MacMillan 2012. p.16.

¹²⁹ RA/PA-1503/ I-L0007, Permanent mission of Norway to the United Nations, Madame Chairman, 1968.

IV: CONCLUSION

No initiative to coordinate and internationalize disaster aid succeeded, neither in the 1930s nor in the 1960s. The Ciraolo-project had been initiated by the president of the Turkish Red Cross, someone who worked closely with disaster situations and human suffering. When the Norwegian Foreign Minister spoke to the UN, some forty years later, he was not a representative of the humanitarian community, but rather a representative of the Norwegian government. Norway had little previous experience with disaster aid. The question this thesis want to answer is why the Norwegian government initiated this enterprise when it did.

The thesis has examined three trajectories in this regard. First, the Biafran-crisis. Lyng referred to the situation in Nigeria when he spoke to the UN on *why* expanding UN authority was a pressing matter. Although the Norwegian government abstained from getting politically involved in the Biafran-crisis directly, I argue that the conflict worked as a catalyst for Lyng's speech to the UN General Assembly and the consequent initiative on disaster aid. However, to claim that the entire process was a direct reaction to the situation in Nigeria would be too simple. 'Timing is everything' and this is also true for politics. When the aid community was haltered to help the starving population in Biafra due to diplomatic interests, the public reacted with rage and demanded action from the Foreign Ministry. Yet, this situation was not unique for Norway and many Western countries shared this experience. In both West-Germany and Ireland, public engagement was significant. Consequently, the explanation as to why Norway went to the UN General Assembly calls for further explanation.

The second part of the explanation outlined Norwegian foreign policy's reliance on the UN, and Norway's desire to be a driving force within the organization. The literature claims that the UN was a cornerstone in Norwegian foreign policy, and this thesis supports that claim. Lyng consequently spoke of how important the UN and international cooperation was for small nations such as Norway. The Foreign Minister defended the UN when the organization was accused of being slow paced and when it was criticized for inaction. Lyng defended the UN by blaming the states rather than the organization.

Ironically, the UN was not very receptive of Lyng's proposal in 1968. And even though his goal for the initiative was a UN convention on disaster aid, it never evolved past the Istanbul-Declaration. The thesis thus reveals a slight paradox between the Norwegian belief in the UN

as a global democracy, on one hand, and Norway preemptively moderating and adjusting their policy to accommodate international law and great power interests, on the other.

The third part of the explanation revolves around the identity of Norwegian foreign policy. At the time of the initiative, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry was already in the process of expanding their policies beyond NATO and security policy. Human Rights rapidly became a field of interest during this expansion. An image of Norway as a good Samaritan with no self-interest in the 'Third World' was evolving. Norway is perceived as a 'great lover of peace' in foreign literature and the Norwegian self-perception is that of a 'peace nation'. One can wonder why disaster aid was such a pressing matter for a nation rarely threatened by disaster.

An aspect of the new identity of Norwegian foreign policy was the emphasis on morality and idealism. Both in the literature and in the sources one can find references to Norwegian representatives gaining "good will" for accomplishments within international politics. Also, Lyng refers to the moral authority which he believed the UN to possess through the UN Charter. One can question why the Norwegians would put so much faith in states' ability to act morally when diplomatic interests are concerned. The efforts by Lyng and Hambro to assure that any international agreement on disaster should also apply in "man-made" situations further complicated the moral authority. The ongoing Nigeria-Biafra war clearly demonstrated how politics and morals are not parallels.

The idea that Norwegian foreign policy was rooted in morality, and a desire to "do good", influenced not only the politics in the presence, but also how these policies have been perceived in the aftermath. Norway has for the latter part of the twentieth century been referred to as a 'peace nation' and an advocate for human rights. The Norwegian-led initiative can very well be identified as a contribution to the construction of this new identity of Norwegian foreign policy. An identity which has shaped how Norway has been perceived from the outside, but also shaped Norwegian 's own self-perception.

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