

style of international diplomatic methods. This possibility will be explored further in the last section of this paper.

NGOs have several strengths which will be highlighted as we examine their four potential roles in helping to resolve complex humanitarian emergencies. At the outset it is worth outlining some potential advantages that NGOs are often citing as having over inter-governmental organisations (IGOs). The first advantage is that transnational NGOs can operate without filtering their services through governmental channels that can often hold up the delivery of services. Second, NGOs tend to have an operating culture whereby a large number of informal contacts are established between government personnel and other NGOs. In a large number of cases, individuals who have worked with NGOs move on to work with IGOs and vice-versa. This helps to create a greater understanding of how each type of organisation operates. Finally, unlike IGOs, NGOs do not necessarily depend on government establishments for their policies to be implemented (Gordenker and Weiss 1997, 446). Because of this last characteristic, NGOs tend not to become victims of the incapacities, misconduct and domination that donor agencies and recipient governments sometimes engage in as member states of IGOs and governing bodies. As we move on to examine the four roles of NGOs in addressing complex humanitarian emergencies, other assets of NGOs will become visible.

The first role to be addressed herein is the one with which we are probably most familiar: providing humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian assistance is guided by the principles of neutrality, proportionality and independence as outlined in the Geneva Convention. The Convention attempts to demarcate a clear line between the politics and the purposes and the assistance to victims (MacFarlane 1999, 538). The problem is, however, that the context of modern conflict and humanitarian emergencies create great difficulties for those trying to adhere to the principles above. As Neil MacFarlane suggests, "Whatever, the motives of humanitarian actors, their actions in today's conditions have significant political implications, and what they do is viewed politically" (1999, 539). Given these realisations, it is necessary to examine the contributions that NGOs can make with regard to humanitarian assistance in their quest to reduce human suffering whilst, at the same time, reducing the possibility of either prolonging or exacerbating the conflict in the recipient society. Despite the fact that NGOs face new challenges in their humanitarian efforts due to the characteristic of complex emergencies, they have always been faced with the possibility that their actions may affect the course and outcome of conflict. However, what is interesting is that there was little pretence of impartiality and neutrality in many pre-1990 humanitarian actions (MacFarlane 1999, 543-547). One example of this was in the case of the refugee camps that emerged in north-western Pakistan as a result of the substantial displacement of people from Afghanistan during the 1978-87 war. Here, the UN, bilateral agencies and NGOs were heavily involved in assisting the displaced but there was no effort to separate combatants and non-combatants; therefore, aid sustained the operations of one party to the conflict (1999, 547). At the same time, Western NGOs and intergovernmental agencies were not present in government-held areas. In this, and many other conflicts during the Cold War, aid was used essentially as a political instrument in pursuit of superpower aims. Impartiality was not emphasised by many; however, this being said it should be noted that some NGOs, including certain church groups, tried to remain impartial.