

The Norwegian "model" for conflict resolution

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Abstract

Senior adviser Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lisbon, 28 October 2005 Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I am honoured to have the opportunity to address this distinguished audience on a subject of outmost importance in our times: How to resolve conflict with peaceful means. I think the timing is good for summing up experiences in conflict resolution and to compare notes among countries having been involved in such endeavours. Norway is proud of the fact that our union with Sweden ended peacefully one hundred years ago, thanks mainly to the mature political wisdom of our Swedish neighbour. Norway is proud of being entrusted by Alfred Nobel to extend the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize. Norway is also proud of our efforts to contribute to building peace in various parts of the world since the beginning of the 1990'ies. In our experience, small countries can provide support that makes a difference in efforts to end conflicts. But although Norway can muster a few successes, I do not think we can attribute these to any particularly peaceful national ethos related to our own experience one hundred years ago. In this presentation, I will offer a couple of alternative explanations. **** Before I present some cases of Norwegian involvement in peace processes, and draw some lessons, I would like to refer to a recent report, the Human Security Report. Surprisingly – as it goes counter to the picture emerging from media coverage of conflicts – the report claims that armed conflict, genocide, political crises and human rights abuses have fallen sharply since the end of the Cold War. The number of armed conflicts has declined by 40% since 1992, and the deadliest of them dropped even more dramatically – by 80%. In addition, today's wars are much less deadly than before. The average number of people reported killed per conflict per year in the 50'ies was 38,000; in 2002 it was just 600 – a decline of 98%. Wars between countries now account for just 5 per cent of all armed conflicts. Most armed conflicts now take place in the poorest countries in the world, but as incomes rise the risk of war declines. Most of the world's conflicts are concentrated in Africa. In the 1950s, '60s and '70s by far the highest death tolls per battle in the world were in the wars in East and Southeast Asia. In the 1970s and '80s, most of the killing took place in the Middle East, Central and South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. By the end of the 1990s, more people were being killed in sub-Saharan Africa's wars than the rest of the world put together. But even in Africa the number of armed conflicts is on decline, it fell from 41 in 2002 to 35 in 2003. International terrorism is the only form of political violence that appears to be getting worse, but the annual death toll from international terrorist attacks is, however, only a tiny fraction of the annual war death toll.