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Political Neutrality and Humanitarian Aid: Practical Implications of Organizational Ideology

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*Political Neutrality and Humanitarian Aid:
Practical Implications of Organizational Ideology*

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty

of the Graduate Center for Social and Public Policy

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

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Master of Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the different ideological interpretations of the principle of neutrality affect the practices of humanitarian aid organizations in conflict situations. Specifically, I study the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders/MSF). Additionally, I seek specific examples from the current conflict in Darfur, Sudan to illustrate my findings.

The purpose of this study is to determine how the organizations deal with delivering aid in a highly politicized environment while maintaining neutrality. It seeks to articulate the current dilemmas facing aid organizations that work to save the lives of those who suffer. Understanding the manner in which neutrality impacts practice is an essential step in the process of determining the most effective and humanitarian means of delivering aid.

I interview staff members at the ICRC and MSF and collect operational reports from each organization. I conduct a qualitative analysis of the interviews and documents by coding the information according to six categories: 1) Neutrality, 2) Coordination and Collaboration, 3) Political Factors, 4) Unintended Consequences of Aid, 5) Genocide, and 6) Human Rights. After the information is separated in these themes, I search for emergent themes in the data and articulate the policy dilemmas that arise.

I find that organizations identify neutrality as simply not taking sides in a conflict. The manner in which neutrality impacts practices depends on the goals and mission of the organization. This study demonstrates that humanitarian aid organizations consistently struggle with the question of how neutrality should impact practice. ICRC adheres more strictly to the principle of neutrality because of its international mandate to promote international humanitarian law and its dependency on access to victims to fulfill this mandate. There are two main schools of thought regarding neutrality within MSF. There are those who assert that MSF should maintain neutrality to the same extent as ICRC; and there are those who argue that MSF should take the role of public advocate for victims by denouncing abusive practices.

I conclude that neutrality impacts practice, depending in part on the organization's goals, by enhancing the level of organizational responsibility for aid's impact, minimizing its coordination with other aid agencies, states or international organizations, and either eliminating the freedom to denounce abusive practices or causing dilemmas within organizations over whether or not to publicly denounce the parties to a conflict. Neutrality is more often a pragmatic means to an end rather than a theoretical ideal. Additionally, the neutrality of an organization depends not only on its intention but also on how it is perceived by the parties to the conflict.

I. INTRODUCTION

The principle of neutrality has guided humanitarian action since the 19th century. The notion of neutrality is grounded in the long tradition of dualism, characteristic of early Western political theorists. This tradition of dualism is expressed in the theology of St. Augustine, as the notion of a fallen world and the separation of that fallen world from the City of God (Warner 1999: 2). Because this world is fallen, the tradition goes, human beings are restricted in what they can accomplish without divine intervention. Any solely human action, therefore, is inherently incomplete and flawed (Warner 1999: 2).

The concept of dualism is pervasive in the humanitarian effort to separate war and violence from humanitarian assistance. This effort is most prevalent in the creation of a “humanitarian space” as an apolitical area in the midst of a war, where non-combatants could be free from harm and aid organizations could attend to the victims. According to this world view, war or any other extension of the political is tainted because the very world in which it occurs is fallen. Thus, in order to maintain the purity of humanitarian action, it must be completely devoid of the political affairs of the world (Warner 1999: 2).

This research seeks to illuminate the manner in which an organization’s ideological interpretation of the principle of neutrality impacts its practice in conflict situations. Neutrality means to refrain from taking sides in a conflict or from acting in a way that furthers the interests of one party over the other. Specifically, how does a

strictly neutral organization administer aid differently than an organization with a more fluid definition of neutrality?

To assess the impact of neutrality on organizational practice and to determine if neutrality is an appropriate principle for humanitarian aid organizations, one must understand its origins. The concept prevailed in Europe during the 19th century when there was a clear distinction between combatants and non-combatants and wars were fought between professional armies on a designated battlefield. Neutrality, in this age, pertained to a third party arbitrator who was called upon to work out problems when one side violated the rules of war. Henceforth, neutrality became an important component of international law. Under international law, a sovereign state could declare its neutrality when other states were at war. This declaration required the neutral state to remain “strictly impartial towards the belligerent parties, refraining from any official act that favored one side over the other” (Terry 2000: 1). The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) proposed that this idea of neutrality, as understood in international law, be extended to impartial humanitarian organizations.

Unlike the time when neutrality first emerged as a component of humanitarian aid, today’s conflicts are more often internal as opposed to international. Additionally, contemporary conflicts tend to involve “ideological, economic, religious, and political stakes that are played out in urban, rural, populated and unpopulated arenas alike” (Terry 2000: 2). According to former director of research for Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders/MSF), Fiona Terry, humanitarian action can never be neutral in situations of total war, when the primary objective of war is to kill the members of the

other side. In such a conflict, neutral intentions of the organization, whether expressed through action or inaction, have political implications because they impact this objective (Terry 2000: 3).

Aid organizations questioned the value of neutrality while assisting suffering populations during the Biafran famine in 1968 (Chandler 2001: 683). This famine occurred in Southeastern Nigeria as a result of the war for independence waged by the Biafran people against the government. It was the first real test of efficiency and ability for humanitarian non governmental organizations (NGOs) because it was the first case in which NGOs were responsible for the majority of the humanitarian aid effort. Additionally, it was the first case that provoked a split between the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and other major NGOs over the nature of neutrality in humanitarian action (Chandler 2001: 684).

The Biafran famine was the first African famine to receive extensive news coverage in the West. This exposure generated criticism that characterized Great Britain's support of the Nigerian government as "complicit in genocide by starvation" (Chandler 2001: 684). Several NGOs working in the region argued that the only ethical option was to solely assist the Biafran population, thus withholding humanitarian resources from the contending federal party. During this crisis, the ICRC maintained its neutrality despite efforts by other NGOs to take a public stand condemning the Nigerian government on behalf of the Biafran population.

As evident from this example, depending on an organization's mission, neutrality can mean various things in practice. The ICRC is the guardian of international

humanitarian law and in order to fulfill this mandate, it must have access to the victims of a conflict and be able to talk to the authorities and belligerents. ICRC strictly adheres to the principle of neutrality because it sees neutrality as an operational tool for securing access to victims and maintaining dialogue with belligerents. Thus, in Biafra, the ICRC did not speak publicly about the Nigerian government's responsibility for the Biafran peoples' suffering. Additionally, neutrality necessitates obtaining permission from local authorities before intervening in a conflict zone. Thus, ICRC waited until the government gave it permission to intervene before beginning aid operations.

A disagreement over how to respond to the Biafran situation led French doctor and ICRC member, Bernard Kouchner, to resign from the ICRC and found Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders/MSF) in 1971. Kouchner declared that the ICRC's silence during the Biafran famine made its workers "accomplices in the systematic massacre of a population" (Benthal 1993: 125). Furthermore, according to MSF, waiting for permission from those who may be responsible for the suffering compromises the humanitarian imperative to save lives. Thus, MSF started a new type of humanitarian organization *without borders*. Since its commencement MSF's work has been characterized by some of its staff as representative of the *new humanitarian* efforts (125).

The division between the traditional and new humanitarian approach was affirmed during the 1990s when severe human rights abuses in Rwanda, Kosovo, Srebrenica and elsewhere, presented unprecedented challenges to aid organizations' neutrality. When tensions arise between strictly adhering to principles and acting in the best interest of the

victims, the diverse mass of aid organizations respond very differently. Despite reported divergent perspectives between the ICRC and MSF, both organizations claim to operate according to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence.

In this research, I examine the policies and practices of ICRC and MSF through an inductive study using in-depth interviews with the organizations' staff and document analysis of their reports. I chose these organizations because they are consistently referred to as leaders on opposite sides of the debate over neutrality in literature on the topic of humanitarian aid. I examine the organizations' practices in conflict situations, using examples from the current Darfur conflict in Western Sudan. First, I review pertinent literature on the topic of humanitarian aid and the principle of neutrality. Second, I provide a description of the ICRC and MSF, including their mission, structure and relationship to the United Nations (UN). Third, I provide a brief background to the Darfur conflict and comment on its relevance to this study. Fourth, I explain the research methodology used to acquire the data which I report in the proximate section. Next, I offer conclusions and highlight the policy implications that these conclusions support. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the research and emerging ideas for future research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed discusses how aid organizations' policies on neutrality work in practice. Specifically, it addresses dilemmas that arise when aid organizations operate in a politicized environment and face the possibility of their aid being misused or having unintended consequences. Additionally, the literature posits that coordinating aid

efforts with military operations could mitigate the unintended negative effects of aid. Finally, it addresses the various attempts to form international guidelines, in the form of international humanitarian law and UN resolutions, to structure humanitarian aid responses in conflict situations.

Unintended Consequences.

I focus my research on humanitarian aid in violent civil conflict because this is the predominant form of conflict in the post-Cold War era. Moreover, civil conflicts pose a particular set of dilemmas for aid agencies because the organizations have to operate so close to the fighting, thus pushing the humanitarian space right up against the politicized environment in which it occurs. Some of the literature questions the ability of neutral organizations to achieve their goals amidst violent civil conflicts. In the article “Collateral Damage,” Sarah Lischer (2003), a political scientist, explores the possibility that aid cannot be neutral (81). Lischer notes that even though organizations claim to operate in a neutral manner, they cannot assume that the impact is also neutral. If all members of an organization assume that its aid can not have a biased effect, Lischer suggests that “group think” emerges and causes organizations to overlook possible biased, and often negative, effects of aid (2003: 81). To emphasize her point, Lischer denotes four ways in which humanitarian aid can actually exacerbate the conflict. Aid can feed militants, sustain or protect the militants’ supporters, contribute to the war economy, and provide legitimacy to combatants (Lischer 2003: 83-86). Feeding militants can occur unintentionally when militants hide among refugee populations undetected; or

it can be intentional when organizations strictly interpret and follow the principle of impartiality. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) legitimizes feeding militants saying that, “[E]ven the guilty need to be fed” (Lischer 2003: 83). This understanding of impartiality differs from other aid organizations that adhere to the principle but only assist non-combatants intentionally.

Contributing to the war economy is an unintended but often unavoidable result of humanitarian aid. Refugee leaders often take “a portion of all rations and salaries” and “control the distribution process.” The secretary general of MSF recognized this pattern in the Rwandan refugee camps in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), saying “food represents power, and camp leaders who control its distribution divert considerable quantities toward war preparations.” The ICRC experienced this misuse of its humanitarian resources in Zaire, reporting that:

The level of diversion by the factions had reached a systematic and planned level, that was integrated into the war strategy. . . It had become obvious that the factions were opening the door to humanitarian aid, up to the point where all the sophisticated logistics had entered the zones: cars, radios, computers, telephones. When all the stuff was there, then the looting would start in a quite systematic way (Lischer 2003: 84).

Lischer asserts that regardless of the portion of the war economy that is generated through the misappropriation of aid, organizations have a responsibility to lessen this effect. Ideas about responsibility, as they apply to humanitarian aid organizations, are fundamentally linked to understanding of the purpose and limits of humanitarian action. For some, responsibility may mean that the organization is accountable for the impact of their aid. For others it is limited to alleviating suffering in the short term, while still others advocate incorporating aspects of conflict management into aid operations (Terry

2002: 18). Lisher asserts that aid agencies should take responsibility for their impact by working to prevent unintended negative consequences. The stolen resources not only promote the war effort, but they decrease the resources available to the suffering populations, so “absolute,” or that which is taken to support the war effort, as well as “relative,” or that which is not received and used by the victims, must be considered (Lisher 2003 84). Furthermore, if the stolen food, medicine and other supplies are not sold, they provide the militants the added benefit of physical strength, while contributing to the degradation of the health of the civilian refugees.

The unintended consequence of providing legitimacy to combatants occurs when the recipients of aid assume that those in charge of distributing it are also providing it. Thus, combatants who seize control of humanitarian resources gain legitimacy as responsible leaders who are providing for civilian needs (85).

The unintended, negative consequences of aid present a dilemma for neutral organizations. Depending on the organization’s understanding of neutrality and how it impacts practice, it may assume that its responsibility ends after the distribution of aid or it may take responsibility for the long-term impact of its aid on the conflict situation. This research will examine how neutral aid agencies deal with the potential for an unintended, biased impact. It is relevant because organizations can distribute aid with neutral intentions, but if aid is misappropriated and becomes political because it enhances the power of one group over the other- is the organization still neutral?

Collaboration and Coordination

Several articles and books explore the possibilities of how unintended negative consequences, such as feeding militants, sustaining or protecting the militants' supporters, contributing to the war economy, and providing legitimacy to combatants, can be mitigated. Chester Crocker (2001) suggests that collaborative intervention by a coalition of states and NGOs using both military intervention and humanitarian assistance is the most effective way to mitigate the potential for negative consequences of aid. For example, if a state government is unable or unwilling to impose order, then aid is more likely to be looted and used to empower one group. Collaborative intervention, according to Crocker, requires political, military and humanitarian actors to coordinate their efforts. If a state imposes political order and a military enforces it, then humanitarian aid agencies would be able to ensure that aid went to the intended recipients. Crocker summarizes this point saying that "hard and soft" powers are interdependent and "an awareness of what they all share is the beginning of wisdom" (2001: 236). This awareness, according to Crocker, must continue after intervention occurs so that each intervening group can collectively work to promote conflict resolution.

The Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (JEEAR), a commission that explored the possible reasons for an ineffective humanitarian response during the Rwandan genocide, found evidence of a disjointed relationship between humanitarian and military aid. Its research states that "humanitarian action in Rwanda

was used as a substitute for, rather than alongside, political and military action,” by the UN Security Council (Houghton, 2004: 22). This lack of coherence between humanitarian action and political and military intervention has encouraged support for a more integrative approach to providing aid during conflict. This notion of integrating state, military and humanitarian response threatens the neutrality of aid organizations that would be working in conjunction with highly political entities.

Two academics in the field, Smillie and Minear (2003: 2) summarized the changes in Western perspective of humanitarian motivated military intervention following the Cold War:

National Sovereignty has lost much of its sanctity and sovereign authorities have more widely accepted humanitarian and human rights obligations. There is more discussion about, if not significantly more resources devoted to, the prevention of conflict. Interactions between humanitarian activities and political-military strategies have increased. Effective humanitarian action is now seen variously as a complement to political objectives and as a substitute for political action at the preventive and even remedial stages of protracted emergencies (Smillie and Minear 2003:2).

The Active Learning Network and Accountability Project for Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), is a research group made up of member agencies that conduct research on humanitarian aid and share the evaluations with the other members. The ALNAP report for 2004 asserts that the integration response to conflict assumes that the objectives of aid, diplomacy and military are compatible, or that foreign policy is humanitarian (Houghton 2004: 23). Some political scientists in the field assert that the increasing politicization of aid has led to the end of the age of independent humanitarianism. Woodward (2001: 261) comments, “The NATO bombing operation “Allied Force” against Yugoslavia in March-June 1999 represents the final disappearance of the

narrowing divide between humanitarianism and politics: a war initiated and justified on humanitarian grounds.” The politicization of humanitarian aid evident in Western governments’ use of aid as part of their overall geo-political strategies threatens the very nature of humanitarian aid.

According to Crocker (2001: 242-243), one can assess the success of a humanitarian intervention on two levels. First, did the intervention save lives? Second, was the political foundation laid for solving the root problems responsible for the conflict (Crocker 2001: 242-243)? Implicit in this evaluation is that when one organization or state acts alone, it is not likely to succeed. However, neutral aid agencies argue that this is neither their goal nor their responsibility. Crocker cites the United Nations’ peacekeeping presence in Cyprus as an example of an incomprehensive intervention. He states that their thirty-year effort

has played a useful role of the traditional blue-helmet variety through confidence building, cease-fire monitoring, and violence reduction. But its success in these terms has, if anything reduced the pressures among the parties and the Western powers to push for a real settlement (2001: 243)

It is apparent from this statement and the discussion above, that Crocker advocates the notion of humanitarian aid that assumes responsibility, not only for the impact of aid, but also for the implementation of conflict resolution operations.

Some political scientists mentioned above stress the end of the Cold War as precipitating the collaborative responses to conflict. Hugo Slim (2004: 5) argues that since humanitarian aid has always existed within highly politicized and highly militarized environments, nothing has really changed. In fact, he recounts, during the fifty years of the Cold War, the United States government used the “carrot and stick” approach

throughout Central America. Often, the same governments that provided humanitarian resources were also supporting the militant factions that created the need for aid. Thus, perhaps it is not the politicization of humanitarian aid that has changed, but the awareness of this political strategy by the general population. Moreover, only recently was it given the name “new humanitarianism” and endorsed by some aid agencies (Duffield 2001: 269).

Political scientist Tony Vaux (2004) discusses the principles of neutrality and impartiality in relation to intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. He divides humanitarian actors into two main categories. First, there are those who accept that humanitarian aid can be used to protect Western national interests, but are concerned “that personal objectives of politicians rather than national interests are driving discussions.” Second, there are those that assert the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence but are influenced by governments that fund their operations.

Pamela Aall (2001: 368) justifies the notion of politicized humanitarian aid saying that humanitarian NGOs can play an essential, but not solitary, role in conflict resolution. She suggests that humanitarian organizations’ intimate involvement with the conflicting parties enables them to alert others of a looming battle, act as intermediaries between the parties, and serve as mediators or facilitators in non-official, or track two, negotiations.

Contrary to the opinions of those cited above who reject the idea of integration, Aall’s research suggests that humanitarian aid organizations can maintain a neutral semblance while cultivating an environment in which negotiations between the conflict parties are able to occur, thus indirectly working towards a political resolution without

overtly having a political agenda (2001: 379). Organizations can plant the seeds for working relationships in the post-conflict period by training locals to function in a civil society and fostering the development of collaborative relationships across party lines (379). Additionally, organizations can adjust their programs by distributing identifiable goods so agencies can recognize them on the market and hold thieves accountable or by delivering aid directly to the recipients rather than to a third party who may hoard the resources to mitigate negative consequences and enhance the positive effects of their aid (Aall 2001: 370).

According to Aall, collaboration is particularly important because non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which are organizations that are not a part of any government and are generally involved in addressing social issues either domestically or internationally, cannot provide security. However, the dilemma that arises is that a military presence in a humanitarian operation implies that the aid organization has political goals. Aall does not seem to see the incompatibility between coordination and neutrality, stating that an integrated response by states, militaries and NGOs would be the most effective. When they do not work together, major state powers often perceive the humanitarian presence in a conflict as a sufficient reason for their inaction, thus the political aspects of a conflict go unaddressed. Furthermore, these states blame the NGOs when humanitarian efforts prove insufficient (Aall 2001: 370). Aall suggests that humanitarian NGOs need to be adaptable to “prevent or counteract the negative effects of their work.” It is this adaptability that will enable organizations to be successful in the aid efforts as well as in conflict resolution. Aall seems to be operating from the

assumption that aid organizations have an interest in conflict resolution. However, many neutral organizations assert that such a project would be too political, thus compromising their neutrality.

The Evolution of International Guidelines for Humanitarian Aid

The international and political environment, through the passing of laws and resolutions, impacts humanitarian aid organizations. When designing policies to guide humanitarian aid, organizations are influenced by the guidelines set forth by the international community. International guidelines have evolved in response to the change in predominance of international to internal conflict. The question of if and in what capacity it is appropriate to intervene militarily in a civil conflict is addressed in Article 2(7) of the United Nations charter. This article advises that nothing would “authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state” (Steiner and Alston 2000: 1366). The notion that sovereignty is sacred and must be protected was widely supported during the Cold War. During this era humanitarian organizations gained prominence due to their willingness to assist those in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, the West African Sahel, and Cambodia in a politically neutral manner despite the international geopolitical divide (Chandler 2001: 680-681).

Following the Cold War, the nature of violent conflicts changed drastically from international to civil wars generating massive numbers of displaced people and civilian victims of war. NGOs that had previously operated according to a strict interpretation of the principle of neutrality began to question whether neutral aid could meet the needs

generated by this shift. In an effort to clarify the role of the international community via the UN, the General Assembly passed resolution 46/182 in 1991 to set forth principles to guide humanitarian assistance in disaster and conflict situations (United Nations 1991). This resolution seeks to protect both the sovereignty of the affected state and the members of organizations that enter the conflict zone to deliver aid. According to this resolution, the affected state has ultimate responsibility to protect and provide for its people during conflicts. If the state is unable to protect civilians, it must request the aid of (NGOs). It is through this process of requesting aid that the affected state permits humanitarian NGOs to access the affected population.

The resolution further delineates operational guidelines for NGOs once they enter the affected state. These guidelines require that humanitarian assistance is “provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality” (OCHA 2005). The principle of humanity refers to the “humanitarian imperative” to provide assistance wherever it is needed and asserts the “right to receive, and to offer, humanitarian aid” (Terry 2002: 19). Impartiality refers to the commitment to distribute aid based solely according to needs, without consideration of the recipient’s political affiliation. As mentioned previously, neutrality means to refrain from taking part in the conflict or from acting in a way that furthers the agenda of one party. Based on Lischer’s research suggesting that aid can unintentionally empower one side over the other, and that such unintended consequences are more likely when aid is distributed to, or stolen by individuals who are taking part in the conflict, it seems irresponsible, and potentially not neutral to provide assistance impartially because aid can support the group that is doing

harm to another group enabling it to continue abusive practices. Perhaps in contemporary civil conflicts, these principles become contradictory.

The United Nations proposed its *Agenda for Peace* in a reaction to the international community's ineffective response to the emergence of "new and particularly deadly" conflicts of the early 1990s (Studer 2002: 371). The *Agenda* was indicative of the changing nature of peace-keeping operations. It sought to fuse humanitarian issues with problems of peace and security. Its purpose was to put the UN's crippled past behind it and achieve an organization "capable of maintaining international peace and security, of securing justice and human rights and of promoting. . . social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom" (United Nations 1992). The Organization must never again be crippled as it was in the era that has now passed. This, along with other similar efforts marked the United Nation's attempt at an integrated approach to peace-keeping which would combine military and humanitarian efforts (Studer 2002: 371).

After the *Agenda* was signed in 1992, however, against the backdrop of an international debate over the nature of humanitarian assistance, the horrific human-rights abuses in Rwanda, Kosovo, Bosnia and Somalia further elicited heightened international expectations for effective, collective action in instances of severe rights violations. The effect of the international community's failure to respond effectively in such cases was starkly evident in the Rwandan genocide.

According to the report, *Responsibility to Protect* by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), the United Nations knew that government officials in Rwanda were planning genocide. ICISS is a commission

that supports intervention in sovereign states on humanitarian grounds. It asserts that the UN Security Council had the resources and the knowledge to prevent, or at least drastically reduce the genocide that ensued, but refused to act (Evans and Sahnoun 2002: 1).

According to the ICISS report, a “parallel transition from a culture of sovereign impunity to a culture of national and international accountability” continues to emerge (Evans and Sahnoun 2002: 13). It is pertinent to be familiar with the changing perspectives among state actors because states are pushing the coherence agenda, or the integrative response to conflict. Moreover, “[i]nternational organizations, civil society activists and NGOs use the international human rights norms and instruments as the concrete point of reference against which to judge state conduct” (Evans and Sahnoun 2002: 13). Thus, an aid agency may be more inclined to break the principle of neutrality to speak out against a harsh government, if there was an international norm that condemned the behavior. Additionally, the degree to which an organization adheres to the principle of neutrality may be evidenced by how much they challenge states to intervene in a conflict because a strictly neutral organization would not do so, due to the political implications involved. Additionally, states are the battlegrounds on which civil conflicts occur and the boundaries within which humanitarian organizations operate.

Rwanda was one of several instances in which a vague definition of the term “genocide” and deference to state sovereignty paralyzed the United Nations. The notion of justifying intervention on humanitarian grounds politicizes humanitarianism. However, following the intervention in Kosovo, which according to some, ended

independent humanitarian aid, the UN began to wonder if perhaps the coalition had authority and sufficient warrant to intervene in a sovereign state without UN approval (Evans and Sahnoun 2002: 1). Neutral aid organizations do not want to be part of an humanitarian/political intervention, but state governments are taking it upon themselves to integrate the two. A dilemma arises concerning whether aid agencies should collaborate with political entities in the headquarters and try to assert their independence on the ground, or if they should refrain from collaborating at all. Both options threaten their ability to maintain neutrality because if organizations remain detached, the actions of militaries in the name of humanitarianism could be mistakenly linked to aid agencies.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his Millennium Report to the General Assembly articulated the question inherent in the divergent views between intervention and state sovereignty:

... if humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica- to gross and systematic violations of human rights that offend every precept of our common humanity? (Evans and Sahnoun 2002: 2)

It is evident from Annan's statement that states and NGOs, as well as international organizations, are still attempting to find some middle ground between respect for state sovereignty and a responsibility to protect individuals from abusive governments. In 2000, the United Nations advanced efforts to implement the *Brahimi Report*, which "calls for a more comprehensive approach to peace-keeping, one that takes into account the humanitarian aspects" of its missions (Studer 2001: 369).

According MSF's, Nicolas de Torrente (2004), the UN's concerted efforts to ensure that the United Nation's various mechanisms are integrated are steps in its pursuit

of “comprehensive, durable, and just resolution of conflict” (1). The unfortunate implication of the coherence approach, is “that meeting lifesaving needs is too limited in scope, and that the principles of impartiality, neutrality, and independence that have typically characterized humanitarian action should be set aside in order to harness aid to higher goals of peace, security and development” (Torrente 2004: 3). In practice this means that rather than impartially, aid is distributed conditionally. The states’ political interests determine who gets assistance, often without regard to need (4).

The literature divides into three main categories: unintended negative consequences of aid, coordination and collaboration as a means to integrative response to conflict and a discussion on the United Nations’ and aid agencies’ efforts to deal with contemporary conflict including instances of genocide and human rights abuses. As discussed above, all of these topics provide dilemmas to organizations that adhere to the principle of neutrality. Thus, they provide the basis of my interview questions to be discussed in the research findings.

III. THE ICRC, MSF AND HUMANITARIAN AID

Before I discuss in detail the manner in which each organization deals with the above mentioned dilemmas, one must understand the origin, structure and mission of each organization. Despite the United Nations’ search for a balance between what is political and what is humanitarian, as discussed in the literature review, aid agencies have not altered their missions. While Crocker and Aall suggest a model that is interventionist rather than neutral, victim-biased rather than impartial, and cooperative rather than

independent, both the ICRC and MSF continue to be guided by the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence even when responding to violent civil conflicts. Despite the moral integrity that intervention on humanitarian grounds seems to possess, the genuinely compassionate notion of giving all aid resources to the victims of the conflict, and the seemingly pacific idea of international collaboration on behalf of the oppressed, aid agencies assert that neutrality, impartiality and independence enable them to serve the suffering populations to the fullest extent possible. These principles, they claim, are invaluable when working amidst politicized conflict.

Rationale for studying the ICRC and MSF

I chose to study humanitarian aid organizations' policies and practices through an in-depth study of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders/MSF) because political scientists as well as some staff members within the organizations refer to these aid agencies as the leaders on opposite sides of the debate over the nature of neutrality in humanitarian assistance. Fiona Terry, among others, characterized ICRC as strictly adhering to the principle of neutrality and prioritizing state sovereignty in its operations; while she portrayed MSF as taking a more lax stance on neutrality and prioritizing individual human rights through their practice of medicine without borders. What remains unclear in the literature and the question that I address in this research is the impact that these differences have on organizational practice.

Mission

The ICRC was formed in the 19th century to assist wounded soldiers following the battle of Solferino during the Franco-Austrian War (ICRC 2005). In its early years, the ICRC cared for injured combatants and victims during World War I. Throughout the past 100 years, the organization has grown tremendously and has worked in nearly every conflict or disaster situation. ICRC's mission is to "protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance" (ICRC 2005).

MSF is an independent international humanitarian aid organization that serves over 80 countries. Its primary objective is to rebuild health structures in regions affected by natural disasters or conflict. In addition, MSF strives "to alleviate human suffering [and] to protect life and health" (MSF 2005). MSF seeks to "restore and ensure respect for the human beings and their fundamental human rights" by raising awareness about the suffering populations with which it works (MSF 2005).

Structure

The organizational structure of the ICRC is "hierarchical with a territorial logic" (ICRC: I:3:2). For example, there are delegates who work in the field in Darfur and they report to the head of delegations for Darfur. This individual then reports to the head of delegation for Sudan, who reports to the head of delegations for Africa, who then reports to the head of operations. This hierarchical line is referred to as the "red line." The "blue line" contains program coordinators for each service (water, construction etc), support services, administration, and logisticians. In the ICRC the "red line" has authority over

the “blue line,” and the field has autonomy (ICRC: I:3:2). This essentially means that those in the field can use their discretion to make choices without first calling the headquarters to ask permission.

Like ICRC, MSF is a field based organization. There are 18 headquarters in 18 countries. Five of these “sections” actually run operations and 13 support the operational “sections.” The five MSF locations that run operations are all based in Europe. There is an international office based in Geneva and its mandate is to coordinate the MSF country sections on policy making. However, MSF’s operational sections are ultimately independent from one another. Each operational section has its own operational policies. Therefore, if MSF-Paris is in charge of operations in Colombia, it will make all of the decisions on how the operation will run. At the same time, MSF is inter-dependent because it is seen as only one organization by the outside (MSF: I:1:1-2). Thus, when one MSF location makes a statement, it reflects on the entire MSF organization.

The Legal Status of the ICRC and MSF

The ICRC is unique among humanitarian aid organizations because, through the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Protocols, the international community has legally mandated the ICRC with specific tasks. The Geneva Conventions, which are a binding instrument of international law, mandate the ICRC with “visiting prisoners, organizing relief operations, re-uniting separated families and similar humanitarian activities during armed conflicts” (ICRC 2005). The ICRC’s statutes, which have a “quasi-legal or soft law status,” encourage the ICRC to take the abovementioned role in

situations where the Geneva Conventions are not applicable, such as “situations of internal violence” (ICRC 2005).

The Geneva Conventions mandated the ICRC to promote international humanitarian law. The ICRC fulfills this mandate by challenging parties to a conflict to distinguish between combatants and civilians during conflicts, following these guidelines (ICRC 2005):

- Attacking solely against military objectives
- Protecting non-combatants and treating them with humanity
- Do not attack an adversary who surrenders or can no longer fight
- Do not use unnecessary force or cause excessive suffering
- Collect and care for the wounded and sick
- Respect prisoners of war and protect them from violence

The ICRC is atypical in that it is not an NGO or an intergovernmental organization (IGO), but is a hybrid of the two. Like an NGO, it is a private and independent organization, but like an IGO it is mandated by states to serve certain functions. This unique status is interesting for this research because the ICRC is actually legally bound and legally protected as a *neutral* organization.

Following the Cold War, the ICRC was given observer status at the United Nations General Assembly. Before October 1991, the ICRC had consultative status and had to rely on states to voice its concerns at meetings. This new status demonstrates the UN’s desire to cooperate with the ICRC. As an observer the ICRC can attend any meetings with the General Assembly and speak to the Assembly on its own behalf (Rona

2004). This is important because as discussed above, the UN has been advocating an integrative approach to conflict situations while the ICRC wants to maintain its independence. With the ICRC involved in the UN discussions, perhaps it will be able to convince the General Assembly that humanitarian aid must be kept separate from military operations.

MSF is an international NGO. In addition to the three primary principles, it follows two principles that distinguish it from traditional humanitarianism. They are the *freedom to criticize* and the *right of intervention*, which suggest an activist role for MSF in the international community. James Orbinski, president of MSF-USA, explained the first principle when he accepted the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of MSF. He said that the *freedom to criticize*, or *denunciation*, is compatible with the principle of neutrality, because neutrality, contrary to popular belief, is not synonymous with silence.

Silence has long been confused with neutrality, and has been presented as a necessary condition of humanitarian action. From its beginning, MSF was created in opposition to this assumption. We are not sure that words can always save lives, but we know that silence can certainly kill (Orbinski 1999: www.nobel.no/eng_lect_99m).

The second principle is the *subsidiarity of sovereignty* or the *right of intervention*, which states that organizations have the right to intervene when a state is abusing its citizens, regardless of the state's status as sovereign (Chandler 2001: 685). It is the international community, not the state, which is ultimately responsible for protecting the human rights of all people. Moreover, the end of human rights violations and the struggle against oppressive governments is essential to their mission (Chandler 2001: 685). These organizations may make political statements condemning the abusive regime if doing so helps them achieve their goals of access and delivering aid to victims of conflict.

Former director of research and doctor for MSF-Paris, Fiona Terry (2002: 20) suggests that strict adherence to the principle of neutrality can “[compromise] the humanitarian imperative to save lives if . . . permission [to deliver aid] is not forthcoming.” MSF does not advocate delaying assistance in the event that permission is denied, indicating that MSF places “the needs of victims above concerns of state sovereignty and neutrality” (Terry 2002: 21). MSF asserts that it should go into a country to deliver aid even if it is not authorized. Moreover, MSF sees speaking out against abuses as “part of its responsibility rather than a last resort” (Terry 2002: 21). Furthermore, Terry asserts that humanitarian actors “need to reclaim their activist role reminding states that failure to meet their higher responsibility is what allows crises to unfold in the first place” (Terry 2002: 217).

The nature of warfare following the Cold War presents challenges to MSF’s neutrality. In situations of total war, when the objective of the war is to kill members of the other side, and the line between combatants and non-combatants is blurred, some members of MSF question the relevance of neutrality. Additionally, when denouncing abusive regimes will lead to the denial of access for MSF, some argue that it should maintain neutrality and continue its work while others argue that if victims are more likely to die from violence than from starvation, MSF must speak out.

Obviously ICRC and MSF are two very different organizations. However, they are both committed to the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. The ICRC is a very centralized organization with a legal mandate from the Geneva

Conventions. MSF is decentralized and appears to have more freedom in its operations due to its independence from a legally binding mandate.

IV. CASE STUDY: THE DARFUR CONFLICT

It is important to study organizational practices in a conflict setting to illustrate how ideology is made manifest in field work. Thus, when relevant and available, I offer specific examples from the conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan. Darfur is an appropriate context for this research because its status as a contemporary, humanitarian crisis, resulting from a violent civil conflict presents various dilemmas pertaining to politicization and neutrality.

The conflict in Darfur began in February, 2003. The Northern Arab Muslims and the Southern black African Christians were in the midst of signing a resolution to end the long term Sudanese civil war. The Black Muslims in the North-West region of Darfur felt ostracized and cheated during the North/South negotiations. In response, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), made up primarily of Black African tribes, attacked government targets demanding recognition, a “share in Sudan’s wealth and better services for the region” (Kahn 2004: 1961). The government-supported Arab militia (Janjaweed) reacted harshly to the uprising. The Janjaweed killed thousands of civilians and burned villages populated by African tribes, forcing thousands to flee their homes (Marshall 2005: 553).

As mentioned previously, the crises of the 1990s influenced perceptions of the debate concerning politicization versus neutrality or responsibility versus sovereignty.

Thus it is important to study the humanitarian organizations in a contemporary situation to more fully understand the practical implications of organizational ideology and make policy recommendations for the future. Additionally, since the conflict is current, the respondents will be able to provide explicit descriptions of how policy impacts practice, thus deepening the validity of their responses.

It is important to study the organizations in a dire humanitarian crisis because it is under extreme situations that the organization's commitment to its guiding principles is tested. Although Darfur has been described as a humanitarian crisis, there is not a mechanism to move the international community beyond recognition, to intervention (Straus 2005: 123). There is, however, such a mechanism if a situation is declared a genocide. Darfur is a valuable context for this research because of the debate over whether or not the violence qualifies as genocide. The UN Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crimes of Genocide, which was established in 1948, in reaction to the Holocaust requires signatory states to use military intervention to stop situations of declared genocide (Singh 2004: 230).

The issue of genocide affects humanitarian aid organizations in conflict situations because organizations may respond according to their understanding of neutrality. For example, a more politically inclined organization may attempt to influence states to declare genocide and shame the states if they do not respond. Conversely, a strictly neutral organization may remain absent from the genocide debate or conclude that moving the international community toward a declaration of genocide is neither its goal nor its responsibility. An understanding of how states respond to such humanitarian

crises is essential to this research because state actors ultimately have the capacity to act politically via policy changes or a military intervention. The level of cooperation between states and aid agencies depends on the organization's understanding of neutrality and how it impacts its practices.

In July 2004, US Congress passed a resolution labeling the events in Darfur, Sudan that had (up to that point) led to the killing of "more than 70,000 civilians and uprooted an estimated 1.8 million more since February, 2003 as genocide." Contrary to the Genocide Convention's intentions and the international community's expectations, this label did not push signatory states to intervene in Sudan. In July, 2004 before President Bush or Colin Powell ever spoke the word "genocide" the UN Security Council had passed a resolution condemning Sudan and giving the government a month to stop the militias. However, "that deadline passed without incident" (Straus 2005:123). The genocide debate involves issues of political sovereignty, individual rights, and international response. Genocide is a situation in which some sectors of the international community, through the establishment of the Genocide Convention and the ICISS report, has already agreed that political and humanitarian responses should be integrated. Thus, a study of humanitarian organizations operating in the context of this debate will further enhance the value of this study.

Finally, it is important to study the organizations within the context of a violent conflict rather than in a natural disaster. In civil conflict the political implications of aid are most profound and the principle of neutrality is most applicable and most stringently tested. The principle of neutrality is especially important in civil conflicts because the

state government is involved and some part of the population is suffering. Can an organization respect the sovereignty of a state that is killing its citizens? Does the organization still need to abide by the government's rules and respect its authority to deny aid organizations access to the suffering population? These questions add to the relevance of the Darfur conflict and allow me to apply the research findings to other civil conflicts.

V. METHODS

Data Collection

The literature reviewed above raises several issues that I address in this research. The research builds on Lischer's research on unintended consequences by examining how ICRC and MSF deal with the potential for negative impacts of aid. Additionally, I expand on the integration literature by explaining the ways in which humanitarian organizations' interpretation of the principle of neutrality impacts their practices of collaboration with other organizations or *civil militaries*. Civil military is a term used to indicate a military that does work which is generally left to civilians. For example a military that runs a humanitarian aid operation is a civil military. Finally, I incorporate current events concerning Darfur, including the genocide debate and concern over human rights, in an effort to highlight the impact of neutrality on the organization's practices of speaking publicly about violations of International Humanitarian Law or human rights.

Sample

I selected a purposive sample from each organization to ensure that the interviewee was able to offer insight into the areas of concern and to ensure that I had a range of perspectives within each organization. I began by contacting the United States headquarters for each organization. I asked for the name of an individual who could speak about the policy of neutrality and the organization's practices in Darfur. When speaking with the first interviewee, I requested the names of individuals who were, or had recently, been working in the Darfur region of Sudan. I continued to use the snowball sampling technique until I identified four qualified, knowledgeable staff members in ICRC and three in MSF. I interviewed staff from the administrative level as well as field workers. The purpose of interviewing administrative and field staff was to account for differences that may be dependent on one's position in the organization. My sample size was seven interviewees.

All of the interviewees from ICRC have worked in the field in many countries at various times in their careers. Their current positions are as follows:

- 1) The Spokesperson for ICRC in the United States and Canada
- 2) The Head of Delegation for the Continent of Africa
- 3) The Head of Delegation for the country of Sudan
- 4) The Head of Delegation for the field in Darfur

The interviewees from MSF also had a wide range of international experience.

They occupy the following positions:

- 1) Program officer at MSF, New York with MSF-USA
- 2) Former director general in Darfur, current executive director of Darfur for MSF-Sweden.

- 3) Head of missions in Darfur (2004), currently a researcher at the MSF Foundation

In addition to conducting in-depth interviews with the above-mentioned individuals, I analyzed organizational reports and articles written by staff members concerning neutrality and organizational practices. The articles analyzed for this research are the following:

ICRC

- 1) International Humanitarian Law: Answers to Your Questions.
- 2) Annual Report on Operations in Sudan
- 3) The ICRC and Civil-Military Relations in Armed Conflict (Meinrad Studer)
- 4) Crisis in Darfur: ICRC Action in Facts and Figures

MSF

- 1) The Principle of Neutrality: Is it Relevant to MSF? (Fiona Terry)
- 2) Humanitarianism Sacrificed: Integration's False Promise (Nicolas de Torrente)
- 3) Security Council Veto Power Hindering Protection of Civilians: Humanitarian Aid Must Not be Subordinate to Political Objectives
- 4) Annual Report on Operations in Sudan
- 5) The Crushing Burden of Rape: Sexual Violence in Darfur

Procedures for Obtaining Informed Consent

I e-mailed a copy of the research description and the consent form to the interviewees prior to the interview. Since the interviews were conducted by phone and five were international, I asked each interviewee if they had reviewed the form and if they permitted me to tape record our conversation immediately after turning on the tape recorder. This tape-recorded oral agreement provided me with the permission to conduct, record, transcribe and use the interviews for research purposes.

Confidentiality

Once the interviews were completed, I transcribed them and used the transcriptions as my data. All tapes, notes, and transcriptions remained under my control at all times and were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. In all work derived from the research (e.g., graduate thesis, oral presentations, and discussions with my advisors), I maintained the anonymity of the interviewees. (See Appendix B for a copy of the consent form).

Data Analysis

The research process was inductive in nature. I conducted a qualitative study using in-depth interviews with the organizations' administrative and field staff. I then coded the responses according to six categories: neutrality, coordination and collaboration, unintended consequences of aid, genocide, human rights and political influences. The interview questions allowed me to draw conclusions about how the organizational ideology affects practice in Darfur in each of the above mentioned categories.

Unintended Consequences of Humanitarian Aid. The literature offered examples of how aid can inadvertently exacerbate the conflict including theft, feeding militants and supporting the war economy. This category addresses questions concerning the organization's response to potentially harmful consequences. For example, do they monitor the effects of aid? Do they adjust or learn from their experiences on the ground?

Do they have policies that guide the individuals in the field on how to prevent or deal with misuse of aid?

Coordination and Collaboration. The literature suggested that coordinated humanitarian responses are more effective than solitary efforts. This category addressed the issues involved in coordinating humanitarian aid efforts with other aid agencies, local authorities, the UN, states and *civil militaries*. Specifically, respondents addressed how the organization deals with ideological differences among aid agencies when working side by side on the ground. Additionally, respondents commented on how the organization's interpretation of neutrality impacts its level coordination with the above mentioned entities.

Genocide. I used the term genocide as it was broadly defined by the Genocide Convention as “any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such: a) killing members of the group; b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” (Steiner and Alston 2000: 122). This category addressed questions regarding how neutrality impacts the organization's involvement in the genocide debate in Darfur and its practices concerning the issue of genocide in general.

Human Rights. I used the term human rights in this research to mean *equal protection* which is the only substantive human right mentioned in the UN Charter

(Steiner and Alston 2000: 1371). This includes such non-derogable civil and political rights as the right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, “the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law”, “the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” (Steiner and Alston 2000: 1383-1386). For the purpose of this research I did not include economic, social or cultural rights when using this term.

Political Influences. This section addresses the issue of donor states influencing aid agencies to act according to the states’ political interests. Additionally, it deals with the topic of aid organizations as mediators in conflict resolution attempts. Specifically, do aid agencies take a role in influencing the political landscape in a covert manner as Aall (2001) suggests?

Genocide, human rights and political influences are immensely important to this research because aid agencies enter states that have tenuous political systems. Violations of international humanitarian aid and human rights are occurring, whether through genocide or less harsh means, and aid will likely impact these situations, either positively or negatively. The organization must decide if its role will be to deliver aid strictly according to its mandate, regardless of its impact; or if it will assess its impact and push local and international state governments to make policy changes that will positively impact those suffering in the conflict zone. Aid agencies may not be able to prevent genocide or human rights abuses, nor can they end the political tyranny of a state government, but they can take responsibility if their aid’s impact is unintentionally enabling or exacerbating such abuses.

I coded the organizations' reports and articles according to the same six categories mentioned above. I then searched for emerging themes that answered my research question. I stated my research findings about the differences or similarities between the two organizations for each category. I then extrapolated these findings and drew general conclusions about the impact of organizational ideological understandings of the principle of neutrality on humanitarian aid practices in conflict situations. Finally, I offered original policy recommendations for aid agencies, the United Nations and the states.

VI. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Neutrality

According to both the ICRC and MSF neutrality means that the organization does not take sides in the conflict (ICRC: I:1:2) (ICRC:I:2:4) (ICRC:I:4:2) (MSF:I:1:1) (MSF: I:2:1) (MSF: I:3:1). Moreover, neutrality means that the organization must refrain from “engaging in controversies of a political or ideological nature” or from questioning the motivation of the conflicting parties (ICRC: I:3:11). Finally, to be neutral implies that the organization must have permission from the authorities before distributing aid in a sovereign state (Terry 2002: 20). This section will address the organizations' understanding of neutrality as it applies to the organizational goals. Additionally, it discusses the principles of impartiality and independence and how these principles relate

to neutrality. Finally, it addresses the internal conflict that arises within organizations concerning the applicability of neutrality to the organizations' practice.

The definition of neutrality does not differ from one organization to another. The manner in which the definition impacts practice varies in the organization's willingness to speak publicly to condemn the practices of an abusive party. In practice, the principle of neutrality is one aspect of the triad of neutrality, impartiality and independence (ICRC:I:1:2) (ICRC: I:2:9) (MSF:I:2:2) (MSF:I:1:2). One ICRC respondent explained that the principles of impartiality and independence are operative, meaning they explicitly direct the practices of the organization. Impartiality implies that the organization provides assistance on the basis of need, regardless of political affiliation. The third principle refers to the organization's independence from both the states that fund their operations and the states in which they work (ICRC:I:1:2-3), (MSF:I:2:2), (MSF:I:1:2). These principles are interdependent because an organization that distributes aid impartially and is independent of political entities is more able to maintain neutrality.

ICRC's fundamental goal is to maintain access to vulnerable populations. Respondents assert that neutrality is central both to the ICRC's identity and the manner in which it works (ICRC: I:1:3). Delivering adequate assistance depends on the organization's ability to access the individuals in need, evaluate the situation and determine the appropriate response (ICRC: I:2:4), (ICRC 2005). If the organization values access, it must "guarantee to every party to the conflict that [it is] not [seeking access to further] its own agenda . . . but rather, its only concern is [to assist and protect] the people in need" (ICRC:I:2:4). ICRC's respondents and written reports consistently

referred to the principle of neutrality as pragmatic, or as enabling their primary goal of access to the victims of conflict because the authorities or the rebel groups are more inclined to allow a neutral organization access to these populations, rather than one that is overtly political (ICRC:I:1:2), (ICRC:I:2:4).

Although the principle of neutrality has existed since the 19th century and is adopted by all humanitarian aid agencies, internal conflict regarding the relevance of neutrality is prevalent among organizations that work in politicized conflict zones. Thus, even though neutrality is a deep-rooted guiding principle, organizations continue to struggle with its applicability to contemporary conflicts in which the objective is often to kill the opponent, and violations of international humanitarian law are rampant. These individuals advocate the removal of neutrality from the Charter completely, while others would like to see MSF “adhering to a spirit of neutrality,” following some of the aspects of neutrality but adopting a more fluid definition of the principle (Terry 2000: 1). These disagreements were evident in the inconsistent responses that I gathered from MSF interviewees and written reports.

Some staff members of MSF adopt ICRC’s perspective, stating that “MSF should remain neutral because it would be difficult to deliver aid in conflict situations without following this principle” (MSF:I:2:2). This is the most common argument for maintaining adherence to the principle of neutrality. It is based on the notion that neutrality is a “useful operational tool to facilitate access to populations and to avoid giving belligerents a pretext for blocking aid or attacking aid organizations.” However, Terry argues that if MSF accepts neutrality as an operational principle, it must also accept

that it will have to adjust practices to maintain neutrality. She explains, “neutrality does not only need to be asserted, it needs to be proved by aid organizations, and believed by parties to the conflict” (6). Thus it needs to be applied to field practices or it is ineffectual in attaining the organization’s goals (Terry, 2000:6).

Contrarily, according to one MSF interviewee neutrality is not operational, but rather is a “very general principle that really has no significance when viewed alone” without impartiality and independence (MSF:I:1:2). It must, according to such perspectives, be understood as a general way of being, rather than informing specific practices. This respondent seems to suggest that neutrality can be a theoretical perspective without directly impacting practice. For example, an organization can refrain from taking sides in theory, but does not necessarily adjust practices to assure that the conflicting parties also perceive it as not taking sides.

Terry insists on the essentiality of consistency between an organization’s policy and its practice primarily because the *perception* of an organization is immensely important in conflict situations. For example, the ICRC rarely makes public denunciations because it adheres strictly to the principle of neutrality. This absence from the public domain ensures that the ICRC maintains the *perception* of neutrality at all times. Moreover, it protects the ICRC from the “risk of manipulation and the risk of misperception” of such denunciations (ICRC:I:2:4). This *perception* then enables the ICRC to establish trusting relationships with the parties to the conflict (ICRC:I:2:4). From Terry’s perspective, it follows that if MSF is going to denounce governments for

abusive practices then its perception of neutrality will be tarnished and is therefore not relevant to its mission.

To further elucidate MSF's difficulty in applying neutrality to conflict situations, Terry reminds us that MSF was created by former ICRC doctors who were frustrated by the limitations that neutrality imposed on their ability to deliver aid to areas restricted by the Nigerian government during the Biafran famine. Terry asserts that there is a contradiction within the organization when it claims to follow the principle of neutrality while simultaneously vowing to practice medicine *without borders*. This notion of being without borders "puts the needs of people . . . above the respect for the rules of states." Conversely, the principle of neutrality assumes deference to state authority (Terry 2000: 1). Thus, there are those within MSF who point to the origin of MSF as supportive of a more outspoken role in conflict situations. Likewise, there are those who assert that the story is an oversimplified version of how MSF has come to exist. One interviewee stated that:

above all, you will soon find that MSF and ICRC hold today very similar positions regarding neutrality and independence, for reasons that have to do with the evolutions of the international political and legal environments in which both organizations intervene as well as their own internal evolutions (MSF:I:3:1).

This interviewee stressed the importance of the change in the nature of conflict since the impetus of MSF. Specifically, he noted that the war on terrorism has made MSF more conscious of its perception of neutrality because when there is an outside occupying force in the region, outside humanitarian aid agencies run the risk of being associated with the military agenda. In Darfur, the Sudanese militias are supported by the Sudanese government. And to those in Darfur, the actions of the militias resemble those

of an occupying force. Thus, the “political significance of where you stand and who you help is very similar... to a situation of occupation” (MSF:I:3:3). Clearly there are two distinct views of neutrality within MSF: those who align themselves with ICRC and argue that neutrality is essential to its mission; and those who stress a *new humanitarian* or advocacy role for the agency to fulfill the aspect of the mission that calls for freedom to denunciate abusive practices. Finally, there are those who assert that it is not contradictory for the agency to maintain neutrality while also publicly denouncing abusive practices.

Unintended Consequences of Humanitarian Aid

In the above-mentioned discussion, the importance of perception emerges. When an aid agency is concerned about whether outside entities perceive it as neutral, it is essential that it closely monitor the impact of its assistance programs. The literature discussed in the review suggests that despite humanitarian organizations’ adherence to the principle of neutrality, aid can have political consequences. Lisher (2003) asserts that if misuse of aid is widespread it can actually do more harm than good. In this section, I will discuss how neutrality relates to the manner in which aid organizations respond to the potential for unintended consequences of assistance.

Both MSF and ICRC are aware that aid can be detrimental if military groups use it to further their own agendas. This awareness motivates each organization to be vigilant regarding the impact of their work in situations of immense violence and political unrest (MSF 3:6-8). In Darfur, and other contemporary civil conflicts, it is difficult to ensure

that resources are not misused because many civilians who seek assistance during the day are combatants by night (ICRC:I:3:6). An MSF interviewee explained, “Claiming that . . . [MSF’s] help has never been misused would be hypocritical and completely illusory” (MSF:I:3:6-8). He recognizes that the risk always exists and aid is always misused in part because the organizations work in very politicized situations where they are often “not dealing with governments and official armies but with rebel groups and civilian warriors” which makes it difficult to track aid (MSF:I:3:6-8).

Both the ICRC and MSF have operational guidelines which the organizations assert help to reduce the potential for negative effects. In reducing the unintended consequences, the organizations are actively attempting to maintain their neutrality. These operational tools include delivering aid directly to the beneficiaries, monitoring for aid’s impact, delivering only that which is necessary when it is necessary, and providing assistance that helps the recipients to become more autonomous. ICRC respondents rationalize the effectiveness of the first guideline saying that the organization independently delivers aid resources rather than depending on local authorities or NGOs to lead the distribution because when aid is delivered “directly to the hands of every single family” it reduces the likelihood that it will be diverted from the victims or sold somewhere else (ICRC:I:2:7-8), (ICRC:I:1:5).

The second guideline, to monitor the impact of aid, is essential to humanitarian assistance. The organizations must be able to access the people, “to assess an area . . . to evaluate and to monitor the assistance they provide” (MSF:I:1:4). ICRC interviewees agreed that assessment is a very important tool. Initially the organization assesses the

needs of the community to determine the appropriate response (ICRC:I:3:3-4). After aid is distributed, organizations return to the location to follow up, talk to the recipients and ensure that they reaped the benefits of the resources (ICRC:I:1:6), (MSF:I:1:4). Being on the ground, close to the people “allows you to get very direct, very focused information about the needs, and [ICRC tries] to react accordingly” (ICRC:I:1:6).

An ICRC respondent explained that the organization works solely in emergency situations. Once the initial needs are met and the situation is no longer an emergency, the ICRC stops delivering aid. Moreover, it is easier for individuals to sell aid resources on the market when there is more than what is needed. Thus, by working only in emergency situations and delivering only that which is necessary during these times, ICRC attempts to reduce the potential for aid to become part of the war economy (ICRC:I:1:5).

The fourth practical guideline is to provide aid that can help families to gain independence (ICRC:I:2:7-8). For example, ICRC gave recipients two bags of grain and two bags of wheat- one for consumption and one for cultivation. This guideline, along with delivering the “least possible amount of external aid” encourages some level of independence (ICRC:I:3:3-4). An interviewee explained that there is no way to ensure that the family is not robbed of aid on their way home, but so far in Darfur the ICRC has not seen this on a massive scale (ICRC:I:2:7-8).

If, despite following these operational guidelines, aid is being misused, an ICRC respondent explained that it “would not retire the aid, [it] would refocus the resources” (ICRC:I:3:3-4). However, if the situation cannot be remedied by adjusting the relief

program or if the organization is not able to access the populations to assess the situation, both organizations would regretfully pull out of the situation (MSF:I:1:4). For example, in Darfur the ICRC “did decide not to deliver assistance when the beneficiaries were asking” the organization not to give them aid because it was making them targets to looting by militia groups (ICRC:I:3:6). Then, five months later, the ICRC decided to try to restart assistance to the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. It did so only after having a meeting with the government and the armed militias to tell them that ICRC would continue to distribute aid in Darfur “only if [they] swore on the Koran that these camps will not be attacked and will be respected as neutral areas” (ICRC:I:3:6). Fortunately, the respondent continued, “it worked” (ICRC:I:3:6).

The literature suggested that the best way for aid organizations to counteract unintended consequences is to work collaboratively with militaries and state governments. However, both organizations follow the principles of neutrality and independence which makes coordinating activities with a political entity problematic.

Coordination and Collaboration

Both the principles of independence and neutrality impact practice by influencing the manner in which the organization collaborates with other humanitarian organizations or coordinates with militaries. Essentially, I found that both organizations are dedicated to helping victims in conflict situations and if coordinating efforts enables them to better serve the victims without compromising the basic principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality, they will do so.

National Red Cross Societies. The National Red Cross or Red Crescent society is the ICRC's consistent partner in every country. The ICRC prefers to work with the national societies rather than going to a local NGO or the government because it values its independence (ICRC:I:1:3). The Red Cross and Red Crescent societies exist in nearly every country in the world and are components of the same movement from which the ICRC comes. Each society works in its home country according to the principles of international humanitarian law and the statutes of the International Movement. Each entity is independent, but the ICRC will provide "funds, training, materials, relief supplies and technical support" to assist the National Red Cross and Red Crescent's efforts in responding to emergencies (ICRC 2005). Although some ICRC interviewees insisted that the organization does not work with other entities, one operations report states that along with its partners in the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the "ICRC coordinated [its] activities closely with UN agencies [and] non-governmental organizations. . . to further develop its programs to protect and assist victims" (ICRC 2005).

NGOs and IGOs. I found that the ICRC and MSF work in an unofficial capacity with NGOs in the field. The ICRC explained that it must work on an *unofficial* basis only because it does not want to be perceived as sharing the opinions of other organizations. For example, if an organization starts to have armed escorts from the African Union then the ICRC is not able to work with it in the field. Likewise, if an organization decides to speak publicly, then it is difficult for the ICRC to work with it. Being associated with such political sentiments would certainly damage the ICRC's

ability to maintain access to the victims (ICRC:I:2-4). One ICRC respondent explained the organization's attitude towards coordination saying that its

culture of independence, sometimes seen as isolationist, further [fosters] the perception of neutrality. By relying exclusively on its own means to ensure the logistics and security of its operations and the assessment of the humanitarian situation, the ICRC is seen as a predictable and reliable partner (ICRC: I:3).

An MSF respondent gave an example of this notion of unofficial collaboration, stating that, "in Darfur we collaborate to provide material support when working on the ground" (MSF:I:2:2). MSF also works in an unofficial capacity with other organizations such as those that run the HIV-AIDS program in Africa. But, he continued, MSF does "not document that [it works] with other NGOs- it is unofficial" (MSF:I:2:2). Like ICRC, MSF's collaborative efforts remain unofficial because "it is difficult to coordinate with others when you are working in a crisis situation" (MSF:I:2:2). Moreover, the organizations may have a "conflict of opinion" and would not want to be associated with the other (MSF:I:2:2).

The ICRC and MSF frequently work together in the field. One MSF respondent explained that although the organizations may have "differences of interpretation or differences of analysis," sometimes the things that differentiate the organizations actually make them complimentary in some conflict situations (MSF:I:3:6). For example, when the organizations were working in Rwanda, MSF had a difficult time asserting its neutrality because it was a French organization attempting to work in a region where the French government had been a colonial power and in a state where the French had collaborated with the Hutus, who were in political power at that time. According to this interviewee, the "ICRC is more easily perceived as a neutral organization" (MSF:I:3:6).

So while in Rwanda, MSF decided that in order to continue a humanitarian presence, it would “work under the umbrella of ICRC” (MSF:I:3:6). MSF’s collaborative relationship with ICRC enabled it to continue working in Rwanda. However, when MSF realized that the situation in which it was working was a genocide, it stepped out from under the ICRC umbrella in order to speak publicly about the violations that were taking place. MSF decided that it could not “continue to work in a genocide situation because [one] cannot cure someone and. . . then give him back to. . . be executed” (MSF:I:3:6).

This relationship worked for both ICRC and MSF. MSF was able to continue working as long as it deemed its efforts beneficial. And when MSF decided to speak out, ICRC supported its decision to do so saying, “Go ahead, we cannot do it, but you should” (MSF:I:3:6). Thus, in a situation where MSF’s origin created suspicion about its intentions and ICRC’s legal mandate prohibited it from speaking out, they had a complimentary working relationship (MSF:I:3:6). It seems logical to suggest at this point that perhaps MSF and ICRC could maintain a working relationship in the future that would allow both organizations to assist populations in need by maintaining access, and would also give MSF the freedom to denounce abuses if they become apparent. If such a relationship were established, however, ICRC would likely be associated with MSF’s public denunciations and would lose credibility as a neutral organization. Genocide is a very relevant issue in humanitarian aid and will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

United Nations. It is difficult for neutral aid agencies to assess the degree to which they will cooperate with the United Nations because although it has humanitarian

aid organizations within it, it is clearly a political organization. Both organizations assert that they maintain distance from organizations with political agendas in order to protect the perception of their own neutrality. However, the ICRC and MSF will collaborate with the humanitarian organizations that are part of the United Nations because they interact with organizations such as The World Food Program (WFP) in the field every day. Thus the organizations exchange information about the nature of the needs in areas where one organization may not have access. The information is always limited “to exclusively humanitarian topics” because violating the confidentiality of parties to the conflict regarding other issues would threaten ICRC’s neutrality (ICRC:I:2:4-5). The ICRC will always deal directly with the authorities regarding violations of international humanitarian law.

The ICRC does not coordinate with the political or security branch of the United Nations. According to one respondent, these UN branches have over-reacted about the situation in Darfur and the ICRC does not want to be linked to the UN’s actions or statements. For example, there was concern over the security of a main road in Darfur because several NGOs were being stopped and looted. So the security branch of the UN “decided to first stop the movement on the road,” which seemed like an appropriate response. But then the UN requested that the African Union use its helicopters to evacuate the people that were based in the town south of El Geneina. According to the ICRC, this was over-reacting and sending a message that security was worse than it actually was (ICRC:I:4:2-3). Subsequently, the respondent continued, the political wing of the UN (via Mr. Eglund), made a statement concerning security for West Darfur. He

said that “humanitarians were in danger and they were directly targeted by the Janjaweed” (ICRC:I:4:2-3). According to this interviewee, the statement was written for politicians in the Security Council to give them an incentive to come up with a strong resolution. It is important for aid organizations like the ICRC and MSF to stay away from politically motivated actors because, as this example illustrates, they can amplify a situation and put the aid workers in danger if they are somehow seen as connected to the UN (ICRC:I:4:2-3).

Local Authorities. Both MSF and ICRC emphasize the importance of coordinating with local authorities. One MSF interviewee explained that as soon as the organization arrives in the field, it locates and discusses the aid program with the local authority, whether it is a “government, military group, rebel group, local authority or local chief” (MSF:I:1:3). Ultimately the authorities are in charge of the well-being of the local populations, and since MSF’s work is “a work for the people, together with the people,” and the authorities can decide if MSF stays or goes, it is important to maintain open communications with them (MSF:I:1:3).

One ICRC interviewee made a very interesting point about the lack of aid agencies’ collaboration with the local people on a policy level. He said that he has attended several meetings in Khartoum. Each time he encounters a “table of 50 people- among whom 38 are Caucasians, no Sudanese, and all of them [are] talking about Sudan and how to administer it” (ICRC:I:3:10-11). They theorize about “how to solve the problem. . . and most of the time they forget to invite the Sudanese themselves” (ICRC:I:3:10-11). Perhaps the organizations conduct meetings without local

involvement because they want to remain separate from local politics. But this interviewee suggests that such meetings are often full of “white Western Christians seeking the high moral ground denouncing third world governments about anything and everything” (ICRC:I:3:10). The respondent’s point in telling this anecdote is that we have to be careful “when we criticize governments not to fall in this trap of a sort of moral new colonialism” (ICRC:I:3:10). Neutrality, according to this respondent, means to refrain from questioning why the parties involved choose to engage in conflict.

This story depicts another dilemma that is emerging in this research. Both organizations explained that they strive to empower recipients of aid to be independent by providing them with assistance that enables them to self-sustain. However, one of the most important means of sustaining one’s community is to solve problems that arise during conflict. If aid agencies engaged local people in their planning meetings, they could train local leaders to analyze the needs and devise a plan to meet these needs. Moreover, if local people are not involved in such planning, then perhaps the aid agencies will not implement the most needed program or do so in the most effective manner. Although the organizations assess the needs before bringing aid, involving local populations in assessing the needs themselves would be beneficial to both groups. Local leaders would learn the skills of assessing needs and strategizing a plan to fulfill them. Aid agencies would benefit because they would know how to implement a program in the most beneficial way to the community and they would be able to move to a different location sooner because local leaders could take over.

MSF also stresses the importance of communication with local authorities “especially in a situation of occupation because the general political order [and] security rests with the occupying force” (MSF:I:3:4). Thus it is necessary to communicate with the authorities in order to assist the population (MSF:I:3:4). In these situations, an MSF respondent explained, the organization’s neutrality “could be understood as talking to all sides” in an effort to gain access to the victims (MSF:I:3:4).

Civil militaries. Perhaps the most difficult dilemma regarding coordination and collaboration is the relationship between humanitarian aid and civil militaries. As the role of the international community adapts to the post-Cold War era, civil militaries are becoming increasingly acceptable. Militaries embark on peace-support operations and the Security Council is more apt to sanction military intervention on humanitarian grounds. Since the aid organizations are neutral and independent, the infiltration of an overtly political entity in its formerly purely humanitarian domain presents serious dilemmas to its practice in conflict situations.

Because both organizations are neutral, neither ever recommends that a state military intervene for humanitarian reasons. This, the ICRC asserts, is a political issue and its involvement in matters of a political nature would harm its ability to do humanitarian work (ICRC 2005). An MSF respondent admitted that at times it is “tempting to call for armed intervention in a conflict;” but there are many problems that would arise. First, the respondent continued “if you want to be neutral in a conflict you cannot call a military to fight a war against one party.” Second, MSF “can never measure the consequence of an armed intervention.” MSF recognizes that armed intervention may

not be the solution to the conflict and it cannot be accountable for any negative effects that calling for military intervention may elicit (MSF:I:1:3).

Another dilemma emerges in that both organizations work to save individual lives. Thus, if a government is supporting a militia that is killing the very individuals the agencies are working to save, it would be in line with the humanitarian imperative to save lives if the agencies worked to end the killing. The research findings suggest that there is a fine line between preventing an individual from being harmed and assisting an individual after they have been harmed. The former requires political action while the latter can be accomplished while maintaining neutrality. Neither organization advocates involving militaries in a humanitarian effort.

The ICRC has responded to the dilemmas of coordination with civil militaries by maintaining dialogues with the civil militaries and peacekeeping forces in the field but refraining from coordinating operations. Additionally, the ICRC communicates with political and military policy makers “to promote the ICRC’s view of humanitarian action and, where necessary, to foster and maintain contacts useful for operational cooperation and for enhancing respect for international humanitarian law” (Studer 2001: 388). When assessing the stance of the ICRC on the issue of coordination it is important to remember its goal of maintaining access to victims and promoting international humanitarian law. Thus, its refusal to coordinate with militaries or to call for military intervention is a logical means to ensure its ability to meet these goals.

Only when coordinating with civil militaries does not threaten its neutrality and when it facilitates its goal of maintaining access and protecting international

humanitarian law, will the ICRC do so. For example, the ICRC will use armed guards to protect its equipment and facilities when it is necessary. “However, the impact of such arrangements on the perception of the ICRC’s neutrality and impartiality is regularly assessed” (Studer 2001: 389). The ICRC only uses military or civil defense resources when “they are offered on conditions that provide a clear advantage or because comparable civilian assets are not available” and doing so does not threaten its perception of being neutral and impartial.

The ICRC takes part in some military training programs with the intention of making sure its mandate is understood. Additionally, it “establishes and maintains organization-to-organization relations with military academies and other facilities that train military and civilian personnel” in order to be “directly involved in the training” on the subjects of international humanitarian law and the “basic principles governing humanitarian action. The ICRC also takes an active part “in multilateral and other conferences dealing with the relationship between military and humanitarian action to promote its view of crisis management and to share its operational experience” (Studer 2001: 390).

The notion of a collaborative relationship with civil militaries is one area in which there seems to be considerable disagreement within MSF. Some of the literature refers to MSF as the leader in the *new humanitarian* agenda, which is more willing to cooperate with military forces and suspend its neutrality when human rights violations are rampant (Benthal 1993: 125). However, Nicolas de Torrente (2004:12), Executive Director of MSF-USA, wrote an article that strongly criticizes such an approach as “politicized” and

detrimental to the humanitarian imperative to save individual lives. In this article, he explains that an approach that integrates humanitarian aid and civil military intervention is inherently flawed. Such integrative responses lead to conditional rather than impartial distribution of aid. Additionally, he writes:

the fundamental principles of independence, impartiality, and neutrality not only characterize humanitarian action's single minded purpose of alleviating suffering, unconditionally and without any ulterior motive- they also serve as operational tools that help in obtaining the consent of belligerents and trust of communities for the presence and activities of humanitarian organizations, particularly in highly volatile contexts (Torrente, 2004: 6).

Torrente's concern is that aid would be used as a reward for, or a bribe to align with, a certain political ideology if militaries are responsible for its distribution. When aid organizations are seen as associates of governments that "make all assistance including humanitarian aid, an integral part of their overall politico-military enterprise," it can lead authorities to deny humanitarian organizations access to suffering populations (Torrente, 2004:6). Furthermore, it makes aid workers "prominent targets for violent opposition" by those for whom killing aid workers furthers their "goal of destabilizing and undermining the international community's political project" (Torrente 6). From Torrente's perspective, coordinated efforts will clearly lead to biased rather than impartial and neutral assistance.

One ICRC respondent explained the problem that inevitably confronts aid workers when political entities take on humanitarian responsibilities. He explained that when UN human rights investigators started to monitor Darfur by plane, the authorities in the region started denying humanitarian access to those in need (ICRC:I:3:4). Both organizations stressed the importance of responding in conjunction with other agencies,

while also maintaining independence. Organizations must coordinate through open communication, but humanitarian aid should be left to humanitarian organizations, peace-making to civil governments, and peace-keeping to militaries.

The United Nations gains support for an integrative approach to conflict situations from the JEEAR report, as reported in the ALNAP review of Humanitarian Action, which stated that the ineffective response in Rwanda was due primarily to the lack of coordination between aid agencies and militaries. Humanitarian aid, in this situation, “was used as a substitute for, rather than alongside, political and military action” (Houghton, 2004: 22). In an effort to prevent the disconnect between humanitarian and military aid from negatively impacting the victims to a conflict, the United Nations is advocating the politicization of aid. Specifically, state governments are increasingly making humanitarian aid a part of their overall politico-military agenda.

The impact of such an integrative approach, according to aid agencies, is that governments sacrifice the humanitarian objective of saving lives in order to further political goals. Thus, neutral aid agencies, whose objective is to save lives, assert that humanitarian aid and politics must remain separate. On the other hand, governments, whose objectives are political in nature, assert that in an effort to be more effective politically, they must also have humanitarian objectives.

In theory the integration of humanitarian aid and military intervention may seem like a plausible solution, but there is an obvious lack of political will for intervention among Western states in the case of Darfur. If aid agencies do not call for military intervention in an effort to protect neutrality, and militaries are motivated by political

interests, and do not intervene unless doing so is in their own self interest, then we are left with a conflict situation in which humanitarians are working to save lives while oppressive local governments are simultaneously working to end lives.

Genocide and Human Rights

Perhaps one of the most intriguing discussions regarding the principle of neutrality is the practice of denunciation or calling for military intervention in conflict situations in the instance of genocide. The MSF Charter states that the organization “observes strict neutrality and impartiality in the name of universal medical ethics and the right to humanitarian assistance. . .” (MSF 2005). In its practice, states the former director of research for MSF-Paris, “MSF has not only engaged in controversies of a political nature, but has, on occasion, overtly taken sides” (Terry, 2000:2).

Fiona Terry poses the question: “Is it morally acceptable to remain neutral when faced with genocide or grave violations of human rights?” Abstaining from making a judgment implies “a legal and moral equality between oppressors and their victims.” MSF sided with the Afghans during their conflict with the Soviets in the 1980s and with the non-Khmer Rouge factions during the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. One way that MSF attempted to confront the dilemmas regarding public denunciation and neutrality in conflict situations was to include the *freedom of denunciation* as one of its guiding principles. Terry argues that it is “ironic that the most frequent argument invoked against speaking publicly by MSF is that it will violate [its] neutrality, when

such neutrality might be morally reprehensible.” The other common argument is “a fear of expulsion” from the conflict area (Terry, 2000:3). However, when public denunciation gains international attention which leads to aid being superseded, it seems like a plausible option.

ICRC has been debating the question of whether neutrality necessitates silence ever since it reviewed its actions during the Second World War. The ICRC remained silent despite its knowledge of the existence of concentration camps during the Holocaust “in order to avoid compromising its neutrality and its assistance to prisoners-of-war.” ICRC recognizes that its silence was a mistake and now claims that it will speak publicly if four criteria are met. First, there must be “grave and repeated violations of international humanitarian law.” Second, ICRC must have witnessed the violations first-hand. Third, the ICRC must have attempted bilateral talks with the perpetrators and failed. And fourth, speaking publicly “must be in the interests of the victims” (Terry, 2000:3).

Genocide. Thus, although both organizations use discretion when speaking publicly, respondents made it clear that they would do so in extreme situations. I asked interviewees about the debate over genocide in Darfur. Both ICRC and MSF respondents explained that they do not characterize conflicts as genocide because it alienates organizations from the authorities and has very serious legal implications. An ICRC respondent elaborated saying that the organization “*needs* to be able to work with the authorities in order to have access to the people” (ICRC:I:1:7). He continued, saying that this relationship with the authorities has enabled ICRC to travel throughout Darfur to

deliver assistance. This rationale seems to contradict the lesson learned after the Holocaust. Specifically, the organizations do not condemn violators because they do not want to alienate them. Alienating authorities would cause the authorities to restrict aid agencies' access to victims. If authorities are harming victims, it is difficult to believe that they would be cooperating with the aid agencies in good faith. Thus it seems naïve of the aid agencies to prioritize their relationship with the authorities so that they can maintain access and help the victims. ICRC has direct relations with the authorities so it tends to follow neutrality more strictly to ensure that it has the ability to influence authorities directly. MSF, on the other hand, does not have the ability to influence authorities directly so it will risk its relationship with them in the case that it decides to publicly denounce their behavior.

The ICRC and MSF do not qualify a conflict as genocide because if the term “genocide” is used, then it would be as though the organizations were calling for an armed intervention, as the Genocide Convention mandates. ICRC does not call for military intervention because it is neutral and asserts that humanitarian efforts should be completely independent of any military intervention (ICRC:I:1:7). ICRC and MSF respondents warned that one must use caution when using the word “genocide.” If the term is invoked too often in too many situations, it would lose its grave implications. However, one must realize that if it is not used when it is warranted, then the act of committing genocide would go unpunished and the Convention would not be upheld.

The ICRC and MSF explained that they do not characterize a conflict as genocide because it is not their responsibility, and to do so is clearly beyond either organization's

stated mission. According to an ICRC interviewee, “spontaneous and uncoordinated declarations” would contribute to the creation of a “polemic” which would likely lead authorities to deny aid organizations access and ultimately harm the victims (ICRC:I:2:9). Likewise, if genocide goes undeclared, victims will suffer as well. International law declares genocide “contrary to the spirit and aims of the United Nations and condemned by the civilized world” (United Nations, 1946). Article I on the UN Charter states that the “Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish” (United Nations, 1946). According to the respondents, whether a conflict is genocide or not can only be determined in a court of law (ICRC:I:1:6), (ICRC:I:2:8), (MSF:I:1:4-5), (MSF:I:2:3). However, in order for such a case to ever reach the International Criminal Court, a conflict must gain attention as a potential genocide. The signatories to the Convention are all states. Thus, independent organizations, such as ICRC and MSF are not mandated to prevent and punish genocide. Although both organizations clearly state that declaring genocide is beyond their scope, MSF did pronounce Rwanda a genocide. But in the case of Darfur, neither organization thinks the term applies. It is unclear whether this is an accurate assessment or if the organizations are refraining from making this judgment to preserve their neutrality. It is impossible to trust assessments from the aid agencies that assert that they would not use the term “genocide”.

MSF was one of the first organizations to speak publicly about the political nature of the Darfur conflict. Specifically, it reported to the international community that this

was not merely an ethnic conflict, but a civilian uprising against government repression (MSF:I :3:5-6). Consistent with its mandate to protect international humanitarian law, the ICRC told the Sudanese authorities and the international community that very grave violations had occurred (ICRC:I:1:6). The exact stance of the organizations is difficult to determine from these findings. Both organizations claim that it is not their responsibility to declare genocide nor are they capable of making such declarations. However, if the situation were grave enough, the findings suggest that the organizations would address the issue. ICRC would follow the above-mentioned criteria and MSF would likely use the media to publicly denounce a situation of genocide.

Human Rights. Both organizations make an important distinction between violations of international humanitarian law and violations of human rights. International humanitarian law applies only during times of conflict, whereas human rights abuses can occur during times of peace. Each organization explained that it would speak out about violations of international humanitarian law, but does not concern itself with peace-time human rights violations. However, the Genocide Convention states that genocide can occur both during times of war and during times of peace. Thus, the distinctions made by the organization are not as clear in United Nations documents on the topic.

An ICRC respondent states that “the basic rights of dignity and access to security or protection from the authorities” is where human rights and international humanitarian law are linked (ICRC:I:4:7). The significance of this statement seems to dilute the distinction between international humanitarian law and human rights. The respondent explained that since international humanitarian law protects the basic human rights for

individuals during times of war, the ICRC is promoting human rights in and through their promotion of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions (ICRC:I:4:7).

One ICRC respondent explained that it “requires a great deal of restraint” to maintain neutrality in a highly politicized environment when “the weak are persecuted by the strong and millions of defenseless civilians pay the price of ruthless tactics” (ICRC:I:3:2). Some misunderstand this restraint as “cowardly,” but neutrality is invaluable because “keeping a low media profile” and gaining “the confidence of all parties” allows the ICRC to maintain “unimpeded access to those in need all over Darfur” (ICRC:Liebeskind:2).

As mentioned above, each organization has its own policy for dealing with violations of international humanitarian law. The ICRC follows a systematic protocol. It chooses to approach authorities or armed combatants confidentially. The organization submits written “interventions,” which are documents that describe the violations it has witnessed, directly to the suspected perpetrator. Although the ICRC does not have authority to enforce international humanitarian law, one respondent asserts that it has an “international credibility” and therefore is normally listened to (ICRC:I :4:5, I:1:4).

Within ICRC there is an ongoing discussion about whether the organization should condemn violators of international humanitarian law publicly, but the conclusions have always been “that confidentiality [and a] low profile [are its] best options in order to keep doors open to have access to the victims” (ICRC:I:2:13). In Sudan, the ICRC has made interventions and discussions have occurred between the ICRC and the national authorities regarding the situation of the internally displaced persons, and an attack which

was executed with unnecessary force and without an effort to distinguish combatants from non-combatants. The strategy now is to make interventions at the state level, in Darfur. The respondent explains that “those doors are half open” so the organization is still positive that it will be able to have productive discussions (ICRC:I:3:8-9).

MSF responds differently than ICRC to violations of international humanitarian law. It does not see silence as a necessary condition of neutrality because by talking about violations of international humanitarian law, the organization is not taking sides in the conflict (MSF:I:1:3). However, this does not mean that MSF speaks openly about every situation of human rights abuses. Human rights abuses occur during times of peace and are not the responsibility of MSF or ICRC. Violations of international humanitarian law occur during times of war, and both organizations seek to promote adherence to these laws. Like ICRC, MSF uses discretion when deciding what situations to expose and keeps its declarations of abuse to circumstances that violate “respect for civilian life in the midst of conflict” (MSF:I:1:5). MSF states that when there is an international presence in a conflict zone, such as an aid organization, the government knows that it is “in the eyes of the international community” and it is aware that its actions will be reported if it violates international humanitarian law.

MSF acted on its freedom to denunciate in Darfur once in 2004 and once in 2005. Both denunciations were in regards to the rape of the women in Darfur. These denunciations were made because, as one respondent explained, “it is in the mandate of the Sudanese government to protect the civilian population during a conflict. And MSF has a mandate to challenge the government to do their job by speaking out” (MSF:I:2:3).

Another MSF respondent explained that MSF “considers that war is a given” (MSF:I:3:5). It is not MSF’s mission to decide whether a war is just or not, but it does feel it needs to take a stand regarding the way in which the war is conducted. This includes monitoring whether or not international humanitarian law is respected. Specifically, it looks for whether or not the weapons used are proportional to the situation. When MSF spoke out about the instances of rape in Darfur, this was a concern for international humanitarian law, rather than human rights, because rape was used as a war tactic during a time of conflict.

Political Influences

An ICRC respondent stressed that it is becoming more and more difficult for humanitarians to be detached from politics, which necessarily affects their neutrality. An organization’s source of funding impacts its ability to be neutral in a politicized environment. Many NGOs receive funds from donor states for specific operations. Thus, even if the organization prefers to be neutral it must deliver aid in accordance with the donor states’ policies. If an organization’s funding source does not support the organization’s principles, then it can not put the principles into practice (ICRC:I:4:3-4).

MSF and ICRC have funding sources that enable them to act according to their principle of neutrality. MSF has funds from states that it uses for projects that the states request. Additionally it has private funds which make up about 70% of its budget and it can use them for projects that assert its neutrality such as delivering aid to a group that the state funds can not support for political reasons. The ICRC receives funds from the

international community. Because of its status as the promoter of international humanitarian law, it does not have difficulty attaining the funds it needs to accomplish its goals. Moreover, because it is protected as a neutral organization, states can not manipulate the ICRC to act according to the states' political interests.

According to an ICRC respondent, the ICRC and MSF are essentially the two organizations that actually follow the principle of neutrality on the ground (ICRC:I:4:7). The United Nations has a purely humanitarian branch, of which the World Food Program (WFP) is a part. However, it is strongly influenced by the political wing of the UN which prevents its ability to remain autonomous from the UN's interests on the ground (ICRC:I:4:7). Clearly a number of dilemmas occur when aid agencies come in contact with organizations that have a political agenda decide on the appropriate level of coordination depending on how the relationship would impact the perception of the agencies' neutrality and whether it would serve the interests of the victims according to the goals that the organization strives to achieve.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In this research I have explored how the principle of neutrality impacts humanitarian aid agencies' practice in conflict situations. I have found that aid agencies define neutrality as simply not taking sides in a conflict (ICRC: I:1:2) (ICRC:I:2:4) (ICRC:I:4:2) (MSF:I:1:1) (MSF: I:2:1) (MSF: I:3:1). However, the practice of implementing neutrality is significantly complex. The nature in which neutrality impacts practice depends in part on the organization's goals. Thus, neutrality is more often a

pragmatic means to an end, rather than a theoretical ideal. Additionally, the neutrality of an organization depends not only on its intention but also on how it is perceived by the parties to the conflict.

ICRC has the goal of saving the lives of non-combatants living amidst conflict and promoting international humanitarian law. It accomplishes these goals because it strictly adheres to the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality. These principles enable the ICRC to maintain access to suffering populations. This access allows the ICRC to aid victims and to know if international humanitarian law is being respected. Thus, the fulfillment of the ICRC's mission depends heavily on the pragmatic means of neutrality.

MSF's primary goal is to save the lives of victims living amidst conflict and its secondary goal is to raise awareness about the plight of suffering populations. The contradictions that arise when trying to accomplish both of these goals generate conflicting perspectives on the principle of neutrality within MSF. First, there are those who emphasize the practicality of neutrality which enables the organization to have access to accomplish the short term goal of saving lives through delivering medical assistance to the victims. Second, those who emphasize the long-term, life-saving tactics of preventing oppressive regimes from continuing to harm people, see neutrality as a theoretical ideal that does not contradict the practice of denunciation. Third, those who advocate a new humanitarian perspective assert that denunciation does violate neutrality and MSF should therefore sideline neutrality for a more public advocacy role. Thus, for

MSF to achieve its primary goal, neutrality seems essential. However, to achieve its secondary goal, neutrality may be unnecessary or even contradictory.

To ensure the perception of neutrality, while working within a violent and highly politicized context, MSF and ICRC follow field guidelines to lessen the likelihood that aid has unintended, negative consequences. These operational guidelines include delivering aid directly to the beneficiaries, monitoring for aid's impact, delivering only that which is necessary when it is necessary and providing assistance that helps the recipients to become more autonomous. Following these guidelines is a way to heighten the possibility that, like the organization's intentions, the impact of its aid is also neutral.

A second way in which aid agencies maintain the perception of neutrality is through remaining independent in the field. Both organizations stress the importance of being independent, not only politically, but also from other organizations in the field. Despite their insistence on independence, if cooperation with other aid agencies, states or militaries furthers the goal of saving lives without compromising the organizations' mission, they will work with these other entities. Working with states or militaries with obvious political interests, implicates the organizations in having a political objective. Likewise, if organizations work with NGOs that are very outspoken, they could be seen as officially connected to the NGO's agenda. Thus, both ICRC and MSF declare that independence is an invaluable principle in protecting their neutrality and facilitating their efforts to save lives. Therefore, any cooperative efforts are done on an unofficial basis to protect the perception of neutrality.

The United Nations Security Council is growing increasingly supportive of an integrative approach to conflict situations because of the findings cited in the ALNAP review of humanitarian action (see page 54). Specifically, it advocates the integration of humanitarian efforts with military and political efforts. For example, the UN is in favor of military operations that integrate humanitarian missions into their overall political goal. According to the ICRC and MSF, this progressively blurs the distinction between humanitarian space and the politicized war zone. When militaries take on humanitarian objectives, it confuses recipients. They do not know what the military's true intentions are and they can no longer distinguish between armed military personnel delivering aid and an unarmed humanitarian delivering aid. Consequently, victims of conflict attack aid workers thinking they are the same individuals running military operations in their region. Whether the use of military force is motivated by a desire to care for victims, to reward political supporters, or distract attention from other operations, neither MSF nor ICRC wants any part in it.

The juxtaposition of the principle of neutrality to the aid agencies' goals and the emerging popularity of civil militaries creates tension out of which the following policy dilemmas arise:

- Humanitarian aid agencies are neutral. They do not have political objectives and therefore refrain from engaging in practices of a political nature.
- State governments are increasingly incorporating humanitarian assistance into their politico-military missions.
- Politically motivated militaries and humanitarian-motivated aid agencies conduct similar operations thus blurring the once clear distinction between political and humanitarian space.

- Neutral aid agencies are misidentified by recipients as being connected to the political agenda of the military. Parties to the conflict may target aid agencies thinking they are members of a government or military force.
- The aid agency is no longer perceived by local authorities or recipients as neutral and its ability to access suffering populations and distribute aid is diminished.

This dilemma is intensified by fact that the two primary actors, the aid agency and the military, do not work together. Additionally, the presence of the military negatively impacts the ability of the aid agency to accomplish its goals because it leads to the erroneous assumption that the aid agency is somehow associated with the military efforts. Conversely, from the military perspective, not having a humanitarian aid component would negatively impact its ability to accomplish its goals because when militaries are seen as doing something positive for the victims of conflict, the other potentially negative political aspects of the agenda are often overlooked.

Thus to resolve the policy dilemma, I assert that the neutral aid agencies and the governments in the United Nations will have to work together to the extent that they respect the mission and responsibility of the other. The aid agency is there to provide aid resources to victims in need, and the military is there to establish and maintain security. Thus, each entity will understand the role of the other in a conflict zone; however, they must not collaborate in their efforts in the field because it would negatively affect the aid agencies' ability to prove their neutrality. State governments must leave humanitarian aid to neutral aid agencies.

As discussed earlier, MSF, ICRC and other aid agencies are funded in part by state actors. Thus, states will have an input in how their resources are used. However,

states should not use their militaries to distribute aid because local individuals are not able to distinguish a civil military from an aid agency and may target aid workers because of the military operation taking place. When confronted with the findings reported in the JEEAR report, we must not assume that “alongside” military aid means that militaries should be responsible for distributing humanitarian aid. Additionally, we cannot assume that the presence of humanitarian aid signifies a corresponding political presence.

The second set of dilemmas that arises concerns the issue of speaking publicly about violations of international humanitarian law. Aid agencies strive to save the lives of victims of conflict. They do so in situations where other groups are trying to kill the same individuals they are working to save. Thus, how can an organization remain neutral while assisting the individuals that one side of the conflict is trying to harm? Moreover, how can an organization remain silent about abuses that harm the individuals they are trying to protect? When aid agencies are working to save victims while others are working to kill them, they recognize that the impact of their aid is no longer neutral. The political implications of working in a conflict situation, despite neutral intentions, are evident in these circumstances. Aid organizations realize that their efforts will likely have some impact on the political situation, but should they strive to alleviate the political situation that is harming civilians? Organizations have to weigh the threat to neutrality, which denunciation can imply, against the threat to victims’ lives, which silence can ensure. The dilemma can be summarized in the following points

- Neutral aid agencies are often permitted access to suffering populations. With this access, neutral organizations gain information about the causes of suffering.

- If the organization speaks out, its perception of neutrality is tainted and their access will be denied in the future. Consequently, it will not be privy to further information of abuses nor will they be able to assist the victims in need. Additionally, the ICRC would lose its ability to directly impact the practices of the abusive regime through confidential meetings.
- If the organization does not speak out, states may never put political pressure on the abusive regimes to change their practices. Thus, abuse may continue and victims will continue to suffer. However, even if an aid agency does speak out, it does not guarantee that political pressure will result. Thus, public denunciation could lead to the denial of aid to victims with no long-term political change to end suffering.

The question of when it is appropriate to publicly denounce a regime is constantly debated among humanitarian aid organizations. As discussed earlier there are two main schools of thought within MSF which are represented in the dilemma above. One side argues that to denounce a regime leads to the denial of aid for victims without guaranteeing real change in policy. The other side argues that to continue to aid victims who are being attacked by their own government is not accomplishing the humanitarian imperative to save lives in the long run. This is possibly the most pressing dilemma for humanitarian aid agencies working in today's conflicts.

When I began this research I agreed with those who advocate speaking out and working to change the root causes of suffering. As I interviewed staff from the ICRC, however, I began to recognize the invaluable benefit of having an organization that is almost always granted access to those who suffer because of its strict adherence to neutrality. The ICRC is a unique organization, whose role of promoting international humanitarian law and maintaining access to victims cannot be achieved without being neutral and confidential. In the case of this organization, I think that the benefits of being neutral outweigh the potential negative effects of being silent. The ICRC, unlike any

other aid agency, has the clout to sit down with those who abuse international humanitarian law and actually influence them to change their practices. It could not do this if it were to publicly denounce the violators.

Each side of the debate within MSF is compelling for the reasons stated above. I tend to agree with those who promote advocating for the victims through speaking publicly about their situation. And although the interviewees down played MSF's advocacy role, written reports provide evidence that public denunciation is the organization's most common response to violations of international humanitarian law.

My recommendation to both organizations emerges from the discussion about the involvement of local individuals in the planning and implementation of aid. The practice of including the local population in this process would potentially impact the community in the following ways:

- The local leaders would learn how to assess the needs of their community and strategize the response to these needs.
- Aid agencies would use resources more efficiently because local people know their needs and the local resources that are available better than an outside group.
- Local people will understand the causes of their suffering and will be empowered through the act of working to meet their own needs.
- The skills and sense of empowerment gained in this process will continue after the aid agency departs. Thus the agency will improve the ability of the local community to sustain itself in the future.
- If suffering populations are empowered, they will be more likely to vocalize the causes of their suffering and advocate for themselves, thus negating the need of the organization to violate the principle of neutrality.

This research has shown that humanitarian action is imbued with paradoxes despite the attempts of aid organizations to consistently adhere to humanitarian principles. Aid can never be separated from the context in which it is distributed, thus the

impact of aid will differ even as the intentions remain the same. Aid agencies take on a crucial responsibility and I challenge those in the field to use the principle of neutrality as a moral guideline, not an unbendable rule. Organizations must use “practical wisdom”: “inventing the conduct that most satisfies the exception requested by the victims and least betrays the rules” (Ricoeur 1989: 1).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations

The sample size of the research was limited to two organizations. An article by Farouk Mawlawi (1993), former chief of the Non-Governmental Organizations and Institutional Relations Section of the U.N. Department of Public Information, suggests that religious or spiritually oriented NGOs, such as the American Friends Service Committee, often undertake the task of conflict mediation. Thus, it would have been beneficial to this study to incorporate a faith-based organization that takes an active role in conflict resolution.

Pamela Aall (2001) discusses the role of aid agencies in conflict resolution. She asserts that aid organizations can have an integral role in preparing a conflict situation that is ripe for negotiations. However, both ICRC and MSF declared their lack of interest or responsibility in the process of resolving conflict. First, both organizations accept that conflict is inevitable. The organization’s function, therefore, is to minimize loss of life from a conflict by promoting international humanitarian law and providing assistance to victims in need. Furthermore, the concept of conflict resolution is political in nature and

would implicate the organizations in a political agenda. An ICRC respondent admitted that it is “very tempting” to take part in negotiations because it is a good idea to have adversaries sit down and talk, but felt that the risks to neutrality and thus ICRC’s goals outweigh the benefits (ICRC:I:4:6).

The research is limited because I did not evaluate the practices in the field in Darfur myself. I relied on the responses of organizations’ staff members and written reports which always run the risk of being biased. The perception of the organizations as neutral is important to their function in the world. Thus, when participating in an interview, it is likely that the individuals responded in a manner that would further the perception of the organizations neutrality.

Future Research

This research has sparked my interest in other areas of humanitarian aid, specifically the United States’ military perspective on the integration approach in Iraq. I have looked exclusively at the perspective of humanitarian aid agencies and political scientists on the notion of integrating military and humanitarian efforts. But, I would like to study the military perspective on the coherence approach to humanitarian aid operations including the impact of participating in a humanitarian mission on individual soldiers, the perception of military-run humanitarian aid operations by recipients, and how such operations fit in the larger scheme of the military’s goal in a conflict situation, specifically Iraq or other instance of invasion.

APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

Background

- 1) Please tell me about your experience with (MSF/ICRC/Aid Organizations)?
- 2) How long have you worked with (MSF/ICRC/Aid Organizations)?
- 3) What position have you held in the organization?
- 4) In which countries have you worked previously?
- 5) Have you worked with other organizations?
- 5) Can you tell me about the organizational structure? How are decisions made in the organization? Do field workers follow guidelines? Do they have autonomy on the ground or do all decisions come from the headquarters?
- 6) Can you define the term neutrality for (MSF/ICRC)
 - a) How does this definition or understanding of neutrality influence the organization's policies?
 - b) How do you see this definition or understanding influencing practice (ie how is neutrality played out in the field)?
- 7) Can you define the term political for your organization?
 - a) How does this definition or understanding of political influence the organization's policies?
 - b) How do you see this definition or understanding influencing practice (ie how are the organization's political goals played out in the field)?

Coordination and Collaboration

- 8) In what ways does the organization interact with other NGOs and/or state governments when planning and implementing aid responses in Darfur?
- 9) Are you ever confronted with ideological and operational differences between NGOs? How do you resolve them?
- 10) Does the organization coordinate with states to provide security with military presence?

- 11) What are the political implications of these sorts of collaborative efforts?
- 12) Does collaborating with NGOs and states make it more or less effective in fulfilling your organization's goals?

Political Context in Darfur

- 13) How does the organization perceive its aid as interacting with the political situation in Sudan?
 - a) Does aid support one group over the other?
 - b) Does the organization have political goals? If so, what are they and how do they plan their aid according?

Unintended consequences of aid

- 14) Does the organization monitor the impact of aid? Explain
- 15) Have you ever seen evidence of aid being misused (or supporting unintended Recipients or efforts) in Darfur?
 - a) Are their guidelines/policies for what to do if aid is supporting the war effort?
 - b) Who makes decisions?
- 16) Is it ever ethical to remove aid if it is being misused?
 - a) Have you ever pulled aid out of a situation due to misuse of the resources?
 - b) How do the organization's responses to unintended consequences of aid reflect its understanding of (or the relevant policies of) the organization as neutral or political.

Genocide

- 17) Does the organization try to push the international community towards recognizing Darfur as genocide? Why or why not?
 - a) Does the organization have policies on how to address genocide publicly and on the ground? If so, what are they?
 - b) What are the organization's policies concerning political activism? How is this played out in terms of the current genocide debate?

c) How has the genocide debate impacted policies on, and practice in, Darfur?

Human Rights

18) Whose responsibility is it to protect individual human rights? (ie: the state or the international community)?

a) What are the organizational policies that reflect this view? How are these policies played out in Darfur?

b) How do the organization's practices demonstrate its concern for human rights?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

To: _____

Date _____

From: Nancy Matteuzzi Bruni (Home Phone: (724) 335-3617 Email: nkmb@juno.com)

Re: 1. Description of thesis project: *Political Neutrality and Humanitarian Aid: Practical Implications of Organizational Ideology*
2. Consent form to conduct an interview

I recently spoke with you on the phone about the possibility of conducting an interview with you to gather data for my thesis project. Please review the following description of my thesis project and the attached consent form. Please feel free to contact me at the above phone number or email address if you would like me to clarify anything or to further inform you about any aspect of this process.

Description:

The study will investigate how the different ideological interpretations of the principle of neutrality affect the practice of traditional versus new humanitarian aid organizations. Specifically, I will study the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Medicines Sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders/MSF) in the Darfur region of Sudan. These two organizations have represented opposing sides at the forefront of the debate over neutrality.

The genesis of the modern human rights-based solidarity movement can be traced back to Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGO) responses to the Biafran famine in 1968. The famine occurred in Southeastern Nigeria as a result of the war for independence waged by the Biafran people against the government. It was the first real test for humanitarian NGOs, the first case in which NGOs were responsible for the majority of the humanitarian aid effort, and the first case that provoked a split between the ICRC and other major NGOs over the nature of humanitarian action.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the opposing ideologies impact the manner in which aid is delivered in conflict situations. Understanding these differences or similarities is an important step in the process of determining the most effective and humanitarian means of delivering aid to suffering populations.

I will conduct interviews with members of each organization as well as with academics in the field. I will tape record the interviews and transcribe them. The transcriptions will serve as the data for this study. I will then do a qualitative analysis and search for emerging themes in the data. I anticipate that I will be able to draw conclusions about the impact of organizational ideology on practice in conflict situations.

Please review the attached consent form.

Dear Respondents Name,

Thank you for taking the time to review this form and offer your consent if you agree to participate in a research study concerning the relationship between ideology and practice in (name of humanitarian organization). I am a graduate student at Duquesne University in the Center for Social and Public Policy and am conducting this research for the thesis requirement. The formal title for my thesis project is: *Political Neutrality and Humanitarian Aid: Practical Implications of Organizational Ideology*.

Requests

I am requesting an interview with you to gather data for the above mentioned project. Additionally, I would like your permission to audiotape our conversation and to transcribe the tape upon completion. I assure you that when I transcribe the tapes, I will omit any identifiers to protect your identity and the identity of anyone you mention during the course of the interview. The transcriptions will then serve as the data for my research and will be made public in my thesis and in discussion with my thesis directors.

Risks and Compensation

You will not face any risks from participating in this research, beyond those of every day life. Unfortunately, I am not able to pay you for your time; but I will happily provide you with a copy of the results and final thesis if it is of interest to you. You will not have to finance any aspect of this project.

Confidentiality

Your name will never appear on any survey or research instrument. Your identity will not be evident in the data analysis unless you request that I use your name. The tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. The transcripts, without any identifiers, will be used as the data for the research. The tapes will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

Right to Withdraw

I would appreciate your participation in this research; however, you are not obligated to participate. Moreover, you are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time and to withdraw information that you have contributed up to that point.

Voluntary Consent

If you agree to the following statement please sign below:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project. I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Nancy Bruni (724-335-3617), her advisor, Daniel Lieberfeld (412-396-1851), or Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (412-396-6326).

Participant's Signature

Date

Sincerely, Nancy Matteuzzi Bruni
PH: (724)335-3617
422 4th Ave. New Kensington, PA 15068

Date

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