How can people find out the truth during a violent conflict? How can they gain access to information that may be decisive to their lives and futures? Never is there so much propaganda as during wars and conflicts, never so many rumours. Violent conflicts create poverty on several levels and destroy a world that can take many, many years to rebuild. Respect for human rights – the right to life, freedom of expression and the various forms of development – is abandoned which causes hopelessness and hate.

For Swedish culture and media development cooperation, support to freedom of expression and diversity represents one approach to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. People who live in conflict areas are entitled to relevant information, freedom of expression, to exert influence and to be able to participate in society.

Freedom of expression is the cornerstone of cultural freedom, in other words the right to choose political, ethnic, religious or sexual identities without being exposed to oppression and discrimination. Policies such as ethnic cleansing and religious persecution are used to suppress cultural identities. Another method is excluding people from important parts of daily life such as education, public debate, health care, working life or political and cultural participation.

Culture and media support
Support to culture and media can contribute to diversity, democratisation and development on many levels:
- Culture and media strengthen people by providing them with access to knowledge, creativity, self-esteem and recognition.
- Culture and media provide vital arenas for the public discussions essential to democracy.
- People’s opportunities to influence and participate in society are promoted by culture and media.
- Culture and media, which in different ways examine and comment on decision makers and power structures, contribute to the democratic process. People become aware of their rights and can demand accountability from those in power.
- A strong culture and media sector also promotes economic development.

Conflict management
There are various dimensions to conflict management within Sida’s development cooperation: working in a preventative manner in situations of rising tension, and promoting peaceful development, dialogue and security during and after open armed conflict.

A great deal of Sida’s culture and media cooperation possesses a conflict prevention dimension. Inputs support freedom of expression in various ways as this freedom is a precondition for a
The idea that Sida should act in an impartial manner as concerns the parties to a conflict, but should not remain neutral on issues such as democracy, human rights and gender equality.

In Sweden's Policy for Global Development from December 2003, the importance of identifying methods of conflict management is emphasised. Below are some examples of the design of support to media, literature, dramatic arts and cultural heritage with the aim of conflict management. This is not, however, an exhaustive list.

**Creating dialogue and security**

Culture sector actors are important forces for dialogue creation in a society in crisis. The examples below show that these actors can discuss political issues and form opinion, as in Zimbabwe, or create respect and understanding between ethnic groups as in South Africa. Culture is also a source of inspiration, joy and courage for people living in difficult circumstances such as those currently prevailing in Palestine.

Journalists play a key role in democratisation processes. Media can assist in creating conflicts as well as resolving them. Conflict sensitive journalists and publicists do not spread rumours that could incite violence and do not set up one ethnic group against another. Support to professional journalism and publishing activities could be one path to conflict resolution and increased security. Support to legislation and structures that promote transparency, diversity and freedom of expression can increase stability in a society.

Sida's conflict policy is based on the principle that Sida should support professional journalism and publishing activities. This is primarily aimed at children, women, minority ethnic groups and other marginalized groups whose rights are often violated. Together these form the majority of the populations in Sida's cooperating countries. One key group for Swedish culture and media cooperation is culture workers and journalists. Their arenas of action are determined by legislation and culture and media infrastructures. Consequently, support to social structures is also vital.

**Support to legislation and structures**

Support to legislation and structures can contribute to conflict management. Support to legislation can contribute to conflict management. Support to legislation and structures that promote transparency, diversity and freedom of expression can increase stability in a society.
people do not gain access to true and relevant information. Media may contain a number of unsubstantiated rumours or even false information. At the same time, journalists are threatened, harassed or sometimes killed.

The International Foundation International Media Support has developed various rapid mobilization methods to support media in crisis areas. The aim is to support press freedom and enable local media to operate professional, objective journalism – even under war conditions. IMS is also working to establish guidelines for conflict journalism.

IMS initiates its activities by assessing the situation in the country/area and establishing what the local media needs to be able to function. Then the organisation designs its activities, often in cooperation with international, regional or local partners.

Inputs can be of a very practical nature: for example support for the purchase of equipment or alternative channels for production, printing, broadcasting or distribution. IMS also distributes professional advice on editorial decisions and brokers short-term cooperation with media in other countries.

However, IMS also examines whether the media themselves are part of the problem. In these cases, efforts are aimed more at supporting objective reporting by advising local media or enabling exchange of experience with journalists from other conflict areas.

Sida takes decisions on support to IMS activities in different countries as and when conflicts occur.

**Empowerment through literature**

Children’s literature in Palestine

Since 1995, Sida has provided support to a children’s literature programme in the West Bank/Gaza through Diakonia, a Christian NGO. The overall objective is to increase reading among Palestinian children. Their hope is that Palestinian children, who in their everyday lives are surrounded by destructive forces, can acquire positive inputs through literature. Children’s books can help them process the trauma they experience, so that they can grow up knowing that other ways of life exist.

During its almost ten year duration, this project has provided hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children with access to books of high quality. It has also trained authors and illustrators in the production of children’s books, implemented extensive activities to promote reading and trained Palestinian teachers in how they can work with children’s literature in school.

Diakonia has worked in close cooperation with authorities and organisations in the West Bank and in Gaza. Cooperating partners include the Palestinian Ministries of Culture and Education, the Tamer Institute for Community Education and UNRWA. In spite of the extensive material destruction in the country and an increasingly difficult security situation, the children’s literature programme has, generally speaking, proceeded according to plan primarily thanks to the commitment of the Palestinians.

**Raise your voice and take a stand: Dramatic arts**

Dramatic art in Palestine

Since 1992, the Swedish University College of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre has provided support to dramatic arts in the West Bank/Gaza, especially concentrating on children and young people. During the relatively calm and hopeful period after the signing of the Oslo Agreement, the primary aim was to help to build up a Palestinian cultural infrastructure that would be an important part of an independent Palestinian state. However, since the Al-Aqsa Intifada broke out in September 2000, dramatic arts projects have increasingly included psychosocial activities.

Many children live with deep trauma caused by the increasing violence and their severe poverty, and need help with the psychological processing of their experiences. Plays, drama training and video animation courses have proved to be one way of helping these children to talk about and work through their experiences. Girls especially have gained a unique place to express themselves through this project.

All support to the dramatic arts has been channelled through Palestinian NGOs and independent theatre groups. Several of these theatre groups take up difficult subjects with the aim of creating debate and expanding the discussion field. For example the Fekra Art Institute theatre group set up a play entitled “Something’s going on”, which criticises corruption and high-handed methods in the Palestinian leadership.

The Ashtar T Theatre Group runs a forum theatre for children where they improvise plays based on requests from the audience. They have taken up controversial subjects such as physical abuse in the family, incest and under-age marriage.

The increasingly difficult situation in Palestine has changed preconditions for cooperation. Theatre groups who could previously go on tour to various places have now been limited to their immediate neighbourhoods. It has, for example, been impossible for anyone to visit Gaza for long periods of time and lack of security is another recurring problem.

Critics seek new paths in Zimbabwe

Freedom of expression has been brutally limited by Robert M Mugabe’s government: independent newspapers have been closed while journalists and members of the opposition have been arrested and threatened. However, civil resistance is widespread: mass demonstrations against government policies, followed by mass arrests, are frequent. Since January 2001, development cooperation between the Zimbabwean Government and Sida has been terminated and support to the population is carried out via UN and NGOs.

Culture plays a central role in a state where media cannot operate freely. As it is difficult for the media to critically examine the government, critics often look for other channels to make their voices heard, for example theatre and music. Culture workers from Zimbabwe often cooperate across borders, which also makes it more difficult for the government to control them.

Sida supports theatre groups such as Rooftop (in Harare) and Amakhosi (in Bulawayo). These groups have set
M arket T heatre - a voice against Apartheid
The Market Theatre in Johannesburg was well known internationally as early as the 1970s as a strong voice against Apartheid. Culture played a vital role during the struggle against oppression. It encouraged people of all colours to resist, gave expression to prevailing injustices and challenged those in power. Until the fall of the Apartheid Regime, the Market Theatre was one of the few places in South Africa where people could socialise as equals irrespective of the colour of their skins. The ensemble and its audiences were racially mixed - revolutionary in a country whose very existence was based on the separation of races. The theatre became a place of resistance but also a forum for peaceful development as it presented opportunities for dialogue between different views. The fact that there were places like the Market Theatre was perhaps one of the preconditions that allowed the transformation of South Africa to be about reconciliation and not violence. The theatre created an important training facility: the Market Theatre Laboratory, where young people primarily from the townships receive drama training and field drama teachers are taught how to work with amateur theatre. The theatre has received Swedish support since the 1980s, latterly via a culture fund over which Sweden and South Africa have equal influence. As the Market Theatre is now becoming a government financed institutional theatre, its need for foreign support is decreasing.

Recreating what the conflict destroyed: Cultural heritage
The history of the oppressed
Cultural symbols often become targets during conflicts. In the same fashion meeting places and environments which encourage alternatives are also attacked. Consequently, it has become extremely important that reconciliation activities take up the past. District Six was once a prosperous, multicultural district of Cape Town. However, during the 1980s and 90s it was demolished and all the ethnic groups who had called it home were forced to move to “racially homogeneous” areas. However peoples’ memories of the district remained and in 1992, the District Six Museum was founded in order to document the district’s history. Today there are extensive archives including photos, stories, interviews, artefacts, musical recordings and films. The District Six Museum is intended to work for the interests of those who were forcibly relocated and to tell their stories, will ensure that the Apartheid era’s crimes will not be forgotten. However the museum also has a symbolic value and shows what a multicultural South Africa could have been like, before Apartheid tore it apart. Swedish support to the District Six Museum has primarily been channelled via Malmö Museum.

Building Balkan cultural heritage
Systematic destruction of the cultural heritage of the opposite side was part and parcel of the conflict in the Balkans. Building up what has been destroyed can strengthen and unite people as well as returning their history and common memories to them. The Cultural Heritage without Borders foundation, supported by Sida, is currently working with the restoration of Balkan buildings such as the National Museum in Sarajevo, traditional dwellings and mosques in Jajce and the monastery at Zavala in Bosnia. In addition, the foundation advises a cultural environment office in Kosovo. The aim of this office is to involve the local population in broadly based cooperation to preserve places of cultural value in the area, and while doing so create dialogue and an opportunity for reconciliation. The office operates restoration projects in Kosovo and also trains local builders, craftsmen and suppliers in traditional building methods. One important part of the restoration projects is to employ workers from the various ethnic groups in order to contribute to discussions across borders on the personal level as well.