



Norwegian People's Aid

Political positions

Selected political positions
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Norwegian People's Aid's political positions

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Introduction

The position document entitled “Selected political positions of Norwegian People’s Aid” should identify, highlight and underpin Norwegian People’s Aid’s positions with regard to political lobbying work in Norway.

Norwegian People’s Aid is a politically independent organisation but it is not politically neutral. It is an important principle for Norwegian People’s Aid that our opinions and positions should be based on direct experience in fields decided by the member organisation. We are the trade union movement’s humanitarian solidarity organisation and we represent the trade union movement’s core values: unity, solidarity and human dignity.

Our political positions are linked to Norwegian People’s Aid’s various areas of activity. “Selected political positions for Norwegian People’s Aid, national activities” is split into two parts: “Sociopolitical positions” and “Rescue Service and First Aid”. “Selected political positions for Norwegian People’s Aid, international activities” is split into Development and humanitarian collaboration’s (DHC) “Selected political positions, DHC” and Mine Action and Disarmament (DMAD) “Selected political positions, DMAD”.

Selected political positions for Norwegian People’s Aid, national activities

Frameworks for our political work

Our political positions for national activities should strengthen our political work locally and nationally. The position document should identify, highlight and underpin Norwegian People’s Aid’s positions in the work we do in Norway when it comes to sociopolitical activity and rescue services. We have around 100 local teams working in these areas. Our members are committed and our local teams work actively to lobby and promote our political cases locally.

The Principles Programme (2019-2023) states, among other things:

Norwegian People’s Aid works actively and purposefully to ensure the inclusion of asylum seekers and people with an immigrant background, and to ensure that these people are given the opportunity to use their resources and contribute to society. Norwegian People’s Aid should combat discrimination and contribute to the creation of an inclusive labour market and society for all. The prevention of exclusion will be important when it comes to creating tomorrow’s society.

Volunteer organisations play an important role in the creation of an inclusive society. Norwegian People’s Aid is an important contributor when it comes to promoting participation in local communities and organisations and works to ensure that more people can establish strong networks and become active citizens of society.

A country-wide Rescue Service and First Aid is a prerequisite if we are to be able to live and be active across the entire country. In Norway, resources must be available locally in order to be able to provide support in the event of accidents, crises or terror attacks. We must therefore build competent rescue resources across the entire country to make sure that Norway is a safe place to live.



Sociopolitical positions

1. Work to combat racism and discrimination

Norwegian People's Aid is an anti-racist organisation. We cannot accept an unequal distribution of the goods of society, or let discrimination, racism and hate crime go unpunished.

Far too many refugees and other vulnerable groups are currently outside of the labour market. These people represent a significant societal resource and would greatly benefit from being part of a working community. Financial difficulties and increased tension between different groups of the population can undermine the majority population's wish, and willingness, to increase inclusion. Increased xenophobia and generalisation contribute to increased discrimination in the labour market and socially.

Legal aid and the work of volunteer organisations

Perceived discrimination is when a person believes that they have been discriminated against on the basis of who they are, regardless of whether or not the incident can be said to have constituted discrimination based on legal and professional definitions. In Norway, we currently see many forms of hatred and discrimination that contribute to people becoming excluded from society, with huge consequences for the individual. Both compounded and structural discrimination are societal challenges that concern us all and must be resolved by society.

Despite the fact that the Norwegian legal system handles cases relating to hate speech/hate crimes and that there is a Discrimination Tribunal that handles discrimination cases, the Norwegian Parliament's report 210 S (2017–2018) finds that various reports, surveys and statistics indicate that racism and discrimination is a growing problem in Norway. Many who experience racism and discrimination find that their cases need to meet strict requirements in order to legally qualify as such, and many may not dare to move forward with their case, which in turn causes unwanted hidden figures when it comes to this issue. In 2019, the Oslo police recorded just 278 hate crime cases, writing in their report that they expect the hidden figures to be high. In the same year, the Norwegian Anti-Discrimination Tribunal upheld just six out of 91 complaints of discrimination based on ethnicity and/or religion. It cannot be seen as a good sign that this figure was so low, and there is no reason to believe that it is a true reflection of the situation with regard to religious and ethnic discrimination. There is much to indicate that victims do not report incidents, and that discriminatory and racist incidents are therefore not identified.

Based on the knowledge that we have today, we know that everything from severe racial incidents to day-to-day racism can be extremely damaging to the victim and that trust in the majority society is weakened when a person is repeatedly discriminated against on the basis of who they are. A report by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health published in 2019 on the health of immigrants in Oslo found that immigrants were in better health at the point when they arrived in the country, and that their health deteriorated after having spent some time living in Norway. Social circumstances such as employment situation and discrimination affected the immigrants' mental health. As many as one in four had experienced discrimination in the last year, and the incidence of psychological problems was twice as high among those who had experienced discrimination as among those who had not. Moreover, a study by NOVA into ethnic discrimination against children and young people in Norway found that racism and discrimination can have considerable negative effects, including symptoms of anxiety and depression.

For many new arrivals, finding employment is an important step when it comes to becoming integrated into Norwegian society. It also represents one of the keys to financial security. To learn about your rights and obligations in connection to working life can be difficult — especially as a new arrival. In order to have any real chance of becoming fully integrated into working life, everyone must



receive adapted information about the discrimination regulations, and it must be practically possible for anyone to report instances of discrimination.

We cannot expect those who assume this social responsibility on behalf of us all, by reporting unacceptable behaviour, to pay for it out of their own pocket. In order to provide real access to the enforcement system, free legal aid must be offered in connection with discrimination cases.

It has also become more difficult to report discrimination since power of enforcement moved to the Discrimination Tribunal and since it requires matters to be presented in writing. In addition, the lack of access to free legal aid in connection with discrimination cases also limits victims' access to the enforcement system, and the threshold that must be reached in order to apply for ordinary legal assistance/aid is high. Low-threshold legal aid initiatives must therefore be prioritised in the grant schemes. These initiatives must cover outreach work, legal information and legal guidance in addition to case management.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government/local authorities must:

- Introduce free legal aid in connection with racism and discrimination cases.
- Authorise increased support for low-threshold legal aid initiatives for discrimination and racism cases. Measures that must be prioritised are those that have a broad guidance responsibility and help to analyse and identify the root of the problems; help formulate complaints and write reports; collaborate with minorities; provide legal aid, legal information and conflict mediation, and those that perform outreach work.
- Adopt financial support for organisations that work with attitude and competence-building initiatives locally.
- Support organisations that implement measures to prevent employment-related discrimination.
- Authorise funding for measures that help support those who feel powerless as victims of discrimination and hatred.

Early and broad efforts to combat racism

Being discriminated against when out socialising can result in strong feelings of exclusion. The Government is planning to launch a campaign aimed at raising awareness and increasing knowledge about discrimination and its consequences. Such a campaign is necessary yet insufficient. The current points system through which venues can be deprived of their alcohol licence is not fit for purpose. While we wait for the system to be evaluated in 2021, a functioning and effective system for depriving venues of their alcohol licence in situations where discrimination is found to have taken place must be put in place.

Working to combat hatred and discrimination is a challenge. The initiative relating to preventative work must be prioritised. Early intervention focusing on knowledge, facts, awareness-raising and structural challenges is essential here. There must be investment into school/local community projects managed by civil society organisations that have local expertise and experience of inclusion and anti-racism work. Nursery-age children and pupils need to learn about the topic, for one. It is also equally important that staff receive the training necessary to understand the topic. Many voluntary organisations and civil society stakeholders possess expertise in the field and can thus contribute to this work.

It can often be difficult to grasp when something constitutes discrimination and when it is something else, and not just for the victim. Many victims of hate crime are reluctant to contact the police, or



unaware that what they have experienced constitutes a criminal offence. We cannot accept that indefensible conduct such as hatred and discrimination fails to result in any type of inconvenience or discomfort for those responsible. A zero-tolerance policy on hatred and discrimination comes with obligations, not least when it comes to holding those who behave irresponsibly accountable. It is therefore crucial that the national expertise environment be given further support in order to ensure that geographical location does not determine whether or not a hate crime is followed up. Knowledge of hate speech and hate crime must be cemented in all police districts and in society at large. Any funding for research into this field must therefore be maintained.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Put in place a functioning and effective national system for depriving venues of their alcohol licence in situations where discrimination is found to have taken place.
- Invest in early intervention measures aimed at nurseries and schools.
- Give the national competence environment on hate crime financial room to manoeuvre and maintain grants for research into this field.

Action plans to combat racism in all municipalities

Racism is a social problem that must be fought. In order to tackle racism and discrimination, these topics must be treated like independent problems. Poor attitudes and undesired actions can be found in all parts of society, on the labour market, in the rental market, in the nightlife environment and in everyday life. All of society and everyone in it have a responsibility when it comes to combating racism. Structural and compounded discrimination is difficult to identify for those who have not experienced it themselves. We must therefore listen to, and learn from, those who have experience in this field so that together we can prevent structural circumstances from resulting in minorities systematically being disadvantaged compared to other parts of the population. The public sector has a particular responsibility when it comes to combating structural discrimination.

Far too few municipalities state that they have plans for, or are working on, action plans for combating racism and discrimination. We want to see a collaboration with Norwegian municipalities aimed at creating good local communities that are free from racism. The aim is to prevent discriminatory attitudes and racist actions, rather than take anti-racist action in the aftermath of racist actions. Awareness and measures aimed at preventing discrimination in the nightlife environment and a focus on employment diversity and inclusion are points that must be included in municipal action plans aimed at combating racism and discrimination.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that all municipalities must

- Develop action plans for combating racism and discrimination together with relevant organisations.

2. Refugees and immigration

There are around 70 million refugees in the world today. Norway must shoulder its share of the responsibility in this area, both via the UN's systems and by applying a humane asylum and immigration policy and collaborating with other European countries.

A larger number of resettlement refugees

In 2019, the number of asylum seeker who arrived in Norway hit a record low. The number of family reunifications involving people with a refugee background is also low. In 2017, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recommended that Norway continue to receive the same number of resettlement refugees in the following year's national budget, and that the number



should gradually be increased to 5,000. Norway should comply with this recommendation. Since 1994, Norwegian People's Aid has helped some 38,000 resettlement refugees arriving in Norway. We are ready to help more people. The year 2019 marks a crossroads when, for the first time, more resettlement refugees settled in Norway than refugees who had sought asylum in the county. The municipalities have the capacity to accommodate the resettlement refugees and state that they need a steady influx of new participants to the introduction scheme in order for it to be financially sustainable. The fact that the majority of the refugees that become settled in Norway come directly from refugee camps or settlements abroad, and not through an asylum centre, represents new challenges for the integration system. Norwegian People's Aid has been delivering inclusion initiatives and activities across the country for many years, and our members stand ready to contribute to inclusion work in their local communities.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Gradually increase the quota to 5,000 resettlement refugees.

A fair division of responsibility

There are currently some 70 million refugees in the world who need help. The Råde reception centre is virtually empty yet has the capacity to accommodate 1,000 residents. Other reception centres in Eastern Norway too have plenty of spare capacity.

Neighbouring countries and the countries on the edge of Europe cannot bear the responsibility for the refugees alone yet Norway seems reluctant to commit to a division of responsibility. Greece currently accommodates around 115,000 refugees and migrants. In 2019, Greece received around 75,000 refugees and migrants. In the first quarter of 2020, it received around 6,000. This number is far higher than what the country is able to manage. In May 2020, there were at least 5,000 unaccompanied children living as refugees in Greece. In Moria alone there are 1,600 unaccompanied minors aged between 4 and 17 years old living under conditions that are both harmful to their health and extremely unsafe.

Norway assists Greece through EEA funds. This is necessary but not enough in itself. We must relieve the pressure on Greece by accepting a larger number of refugees. We have previously relocated Syrian and Eritrean asylum seekers in order to relieve the pressure on Greece and Italy. At present we do neither, despite record low asylum figures in Norway (2,375 in 2019). As of May 2020, 14 European countries had accepted and begun the work. Norway cannot simply wait for 8-10 countries to start the process before taking action ourselves. We have a humanitarian duty to do more and to do it better, in order to offer a larger number of people protection in Norway. We must shoulder our part of the responsibility and we must do so now.

Norway must make use of the current exception and refrain from returning the largest possible number of individuals to Greece. In 2018 and 2019, Norway made no less than 7,991 return request to Greece under the Dublin procedure. This number exceeds the number that we relocated to relieve the pressure on Greece a few years ago. Greece has accepted only 18 of these requests. This policy does not contribute to a better international division of responsibility. Norway must take its responsibility for ensuring the conclusion of the Dublin III regulation negotiations with a permanent relocation solution. A very large number of high and medium-income countries contribute minimally — financially or by receiving quota refugees — to a reasonable international division of responsibility. Refugees and migrants need help now. Norway can no longer sit on the fence and wait for other countries to contribute.

On 23 September 2020, the European Commission presented a proposal for a new pact on migration and asylum that, among other things, includes a solidarity mechanism for helping



countries that are experiencing high migratory pressures. It is highly uncertain when this migration pact will come into force, or indeed whether it will be adopted at all. The effort to assist Greece must therefore continue in 2021, regardless of the status of the EU's migration pact progress. Norway should therefore make use of the sovereignty clause in article 17 of the Dublin III regulation and choose to try cases by their merits here in Norway.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Relocate refugees to relieve the pressure on Greece and Italy.
- Contribute, through the European division of responsibility, by accepting a larger number of asylum seekers and trying cases on their merits in Norway.
- Intensify support for host countries in neighbouring areas and identify more opportunities for funding sustained refugee work through long-term aid.

Access to the realm and participation in society

The UNHCR believes that Norway may be in violation of the Refugee Convention by ending refugee status for hundreds of Somalis. Norway should recognise that the security situation in Somalia remains uncertain and, against the background of the UNHCR's objections, halt the process of termination of refugee status for Somali refugees.

Norway is the only European country to have removed the reasonableness criterion in connection with repatriation to internal displacement in Afghanistan which states that no one should be repatriated to displacement in their home country if repatriation will make it difficult for them to cope. The UNHCR believes that this breaches the Refugee Convention. Norway should therefore comply with the UNHCR's recommendation and reinstate the reasonableness criterion. The UNHCR sees the termination of refugee status for Somalis and the removal of the reasonableness criterion in connection with the internal displacement of Afghans as violations of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. Norway should therefore listen and change its policy rather than undermine the UNHCR's mandate.

The right to a family life is essential to a person's psychosocial ability to succeed. The UNHCR has previously stated that there are "insurmountable obstacles and barriers that a refugee encounters in an application process for family reunification in Norway". Procedural obstacles in the application process and labour market discrimination which results in the person in question not earning enough to meet the requirements for family reunification are a reality for many. At present, these obstacles and barriers serve as a filter for external factors and not for determining whether the applicants and their referees actually meet the material criteria for family reunification. This is tantamount to using procedural barriers to hinder the testing of material rights.

There are 301 children in Norway living with limited residence permits because they have not been able to present approved identity documentation. These children have been granted residence permits on humanitarian grounds, however these permits do not form the basis for a permanent residence permit or family reunification. The limited permits are granted for a period of one year at a time, with the option to apply for renewal. Limited permits present an obstacle to social participation and result in uncertainty, fear and compromised mental health. The number of limited permits of residence being granted to children is increasing, contrary to the intention of legislators. In the preparatory works for the present Norwegian Immigration Act, the department emphasises that it "will not be advisable to establish an extensive practice of granting such limited permits," and that "this type of permit generates uncertainty with regard to the migrant's future in the realm, which may hinder integration".

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Halt the process of terminating refugee status for Somalis.



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- Reintroduce the “reasonableness criterion” in connection with repatriation to internal displacement.
- Simplify the regulatory framework for family reunification.
- Improve opportunities for social participation and legal protection for children with limited residence permits.

Undocumented and non-repatriable refugees.

Undocumented individuals are people who live among us year after year without enjoying the fundamental rights that the rest of us take for granted. The legislation discriminates and excludes undocumented individuals from accessing basic health care, which represents a human rights violation. Undocumented individuals are also unable to take up employment. Some spend years in asylum centres, rendered highly passive and with little ability to contribute to society. A funding scheme for hospitals, GPs and municipal healthcare facilities must be established to ensure that these can be reimbursed for the cost of providing healthcare services to patients outside of the Norwegian national insurance system.

Non-repatriable individuals cannot return to their home country, yet they live in a society where they are not able to either contribute or participate on an equal footing. Both society and the migrants themselves benefit from predictability and stability with regard to residency status. The Government has proposed a temporary, one-off solution whereby individuals who have spent 16 years in the realm can be granted residency. 16 years is far too long not to be given the opportunity to take up regular employment and live a decent life. The sooner we are able to grant the target group residency, the sooner they can begin to participate in wider society and join structured and informal integration programmes, which will have a significant positive impact on their mental health.

Norwegian People’s Aid believes that the Government must give

- People without legal residency access to the healthcare services they need and not just to emergency healthcare.
- Legal residency without limitation to all non-repatriable asylum seekers who have been in the country for a certain period of time.
- The right to work to asylum seekers with a permanent permit of residence and a known identity.
- Work permits to non-repatriable asylum seekers until such time as they can be repatriated.

3. Inclusion and women with an immigrant background

Regardless of whether a person comes to Norway as a refugee, for family reunification or for other reasons, user-adapted and needs-oriented measures are essential to ensure the best possible safeguarding and inclusion in wider society and on the labour market. Since the introduction programme was launched in 2004, women have systematically achieved poorer results than men when it comes to transitioning into work or education. There is a great need for new initiatives that can help bring immigrant women with a refugee background into employment and society to a greater extent.

Realistic ambitions that are achievable for the target group must be set. Just like the general population, immigrants are a diverse group. This diversity must be reflected in varying ambition levels and individually adapted measures. The ambitions and the measures must be based on the individual’s actual circumstances. Investment into upskilling is therefore necessary in order to increase participation in both working life and in society at large.

The Government’s integration strategy highlights knowledge as the key to success. User-oriented measures can yield the desired results, as can further tailoring and adaptation of methods for



Norwegian language learning and qualification initiatives aimed specifically at immigrant women. One way to remedy a lack of qualifications is to ensure that women acquire enough skills to make them attractive on the labour market. This may involve early investment in a short educational programme for those who feel that a certificate of apprenticeship is unobtainable. For example, short, adapted educational programmes must be developed, such as a certificate of practice or the first part of a certificate of practice. For others, less extensive practical vocational training such as a certificate of apprenticeship may be the solution. Social participation skills are just as important. We must invest in increasing the target group's skills with regard to becoming active participants in society by focusing on user-participation, the ability to perform specific actions, increased self-esteem and mastery.

Norwegian People's Aid demands that the Government must

- Ensure quality and continuity with regard to the Norwegian language training offered to persons with an immigrant and/or refugee background.
- Raise the five-year limit for free Norwegian classes.
- Invest in skills initiatives for persons with an immigrant and/or refugee background.
- Focus on developing shorter vocational training programmes adapted to the target group.
- Focus on acquiring more knowledge about what factors influence psychosocial aspects.

4. Voluntary sector policy with regard to inclusion work

The voluntary sector plays a decisive role in the inclusion work. The aim of creating lasting connection and good conditions for participation in various social arenas requires knowledge.

Voluntary organisations represent platforms for knowledge, community and anchoring within many key areas. In order to achieve the aim of inclusion and increased participation of refugees and immigrants in social life, flexible and predictable framework conditions must be put in place so that voluntary organisations can utilise their full potential as integration stakeholders.

In order to include the contribution of voluntary organisations in the integration process, it is important to strengthen the capacity of the voluntary sector through increased cooperation and coordination between the sector and the municipality/county administration. To achieve this, the state, municipalities and counties must take responsibility for establishing a comprehensive voluntary sector policy, in close cooperation with the voluntary sector.

We need grant schemes that are adapted to the relevant social challenges at all times. Inclusion and integration work requires high-quality initiatives with sound methodologies. Short term support schemes are therefore not fit for purpose. The immigrant population is not uniform in size. Different circumstances require different solutions. It is therefore important that experiences are collected from a representative sample of the immigrant population. If we are to be able to offer targeted measures, we must take the user perspective seriously by listening to feedback, both from new arrivals and from people who have been in Norway for a few years.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that

- The Government must ensure better framework conditions for the voluntary sector with predictable general terms, for example through access to multi-year schemes.
- All municipalities and county administrations must draw up an action plan for collaboration with volunteer organisations.
- We must have predictable and flexible grant schemes in place that can be adapted to developments in the integration field at all times.



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- The user perspective must be incorporated into the design of initiatives and into the orientation of grant schemes.



Rescue Service and First Aid

One of the overarching goals of our political work is to ensure better conditions for the voluntary rescue services. For our local search and rescue teams, the political lobbying work is helping to ensure framework conditions for equipment and crews at the right time, and with the expertise needed to save lives.

The number of missions we carry out has increased considerably in the last few years and this trend is expected to continue in the years ahead. We are ready to take on the challenge, but we are calling for more public support.

1. Ensuring a dialogue between the authorities and the voluntary sector — increased state subsidies

The costs of running a preparedness organisation are much higher than the subsidy amount that we receive from the state each year. The voluntary sector is also participating in more and more rescue missions in Norway. At present, volunteers are involved in one in four rescue missions nationally. We are ready to take on this challenge, but we are entirely reliant on public support in order to be able to increase preparedness and meet the growing need.

Norwegian People's Aid demands that the Government

- Increases the current rescue services grant to NOK 75 million.
- Commits to further increases.
- Includes the voluntary sector in the allocation of these funds.
- Authorises funds, through the Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services' budget, for central preparedness stakeholders in the voluntary sector.

These requirements are in line with the measures recommended in the 2018 report titled "The role of voluntary rescue and preparedness organisations in today's society". Norwegian People's Aid receives approximately NOK 5 million out of the state budget from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security each year. This money is to be used to facilitate, stimulate development and assist more than 70 local rescue groups staffed by some 2,000 volunteers. The organisation's administration costs alone far exceed these 5 million.

Norwegian People's Aid participates in more than 400 missions annually. This represents a significant increase compared to just five years ago, when the average was around 300. There is nothing to indicate that this development will stop.

Increased state subsidies would give us greater predictability and the ability to provide the voluntary rescue services with a necessary and long-awaited boost to their ability to handle the increasing number of missions.

Norwegian People's Aid provides important support to the healthcare services in connection with major incidents and disasters. The voluntary sector supports both the municipal and the specialist healthcare services. At the same time, there is no central funding for maintaining and developing this task. Norwegian People's Aid therefore believes that funds must be allocated through the state budget to ensure this.



2. More emergency network subscriptions

It is broadly agreed that voluntary resources need to have access to the emergency services radio network in order to be able to communicate directly with the police and the ambulance service. This has been something of a revolution for the rescue services and has resulted in more efficient search operations.

Norwegian People's Aid demands that the Government

- Makes it possible to purchase new radios and cover the cost of network subscription fees for these.

There are no state-funded schemes for covering the cost of purchasing new radios and network subscription fees. This means that newly established groups end up outside of the emergency network and unable to communicate effectively with partners.

We are prepared to cover the cost of the emergency radios ourselves, but we cannot cover the running network subscription fees for these. If a new rescue group purchases ten radios it will cost NOK 36,000 a year to use them. These funds must, in the current situation, be raised through the work of the local team. We are doing our best to reallocate terminals within the organisation when new needs arise but this compromises the readiness of those who must surrender their radios.

3. Exemption from the one-off registration tax for vehicles

In many rescue operations, time is the decisive factor when it comes to saving those in need. We are working to cut out time-consuming elements and improve our equipment in all areas. Exemption from the one-off registration tax for vehicles would contribute considerably to strengthening preparedness in local communities across the country. Moreover, it would also improve the safety of volunteer crews.

Norwegian People's Aid demands that the Government

- Guarantees exemption from the one-off registration tax for rescue vehicles.

The rescue services need to use the most heavily taxed type of vehicle. When society asks for help saving lives, the crews sometimes get to the site of an incident before the snowplough. If a rescue vehicle is unable to reach a site due to snow or poor road conditions, the mission may be delayed as a result. All rescue vehicles should have four-wheel drive, space for crews and the engine power needed to pull trailers with equipment, snowmobiles or boats. These requirements both render the base price more expensive and adds maximum taxes.

The rescue services provide an excellent community service. Voluntary organisations perform a large part of this service with the help of volunteers who dedicate their free time to attending courses and training, and to the missions themselves. They also dedicate a lot of time and resources to raising funds for the equipment needed to do the work. It is paradoxical that voluntary rescue groups have to pay the state for vehicles that they use to perform voluntary work for the same state.



4. Guarantee full VAT reimbursement for the voluntary sector

Full VAT reimbursement is important to the volunteer sector. At present, the Norwegian parliament decides what proportion of VAT expenses are to be reimbursed when they adopt the national budget. A pot of money is set aside and distributed among those who have applied for reimbursement. As the total sum applied for exceeds the amount set aside by the parliament, the sum reimbursed to each applicant is slightly smaller than that applied for (reduction). This means that the state effectively levies a tax on the activities of voluntary organisations, and that we do not know how much we will receive back from one year to the next.

Norwegian People's Aid demands that the Government

- Guarantees full VAT reimbursement for the voluntary sector and that this entitlement be laid down in law.



Selected political positions of Norwegian People's Aid, international activities

Norwegian People's Aid has two departments with international activity, Development and humanitarian cooperation (DHC) and Mine Action and Disarmament (DMAD). Both departments have developed selected political positions for their respective fields.

Selected political positions, DHC

Frameworks for our political work

Norwegian People's Aid takes a political approach to development. Development is not just about economic growth, knowledge or the right technical solutions. The central issue is the way in which resources are controlled and distributed. In order to achieve just development, it is essential that oppressed groups are able to strengthen their power, participate and influence those in power and decision-makers. That is why we apply a partnership approach based on solidarity and long-term relationships to our development and humanitarian work, which emphasises support that allows people to organise themselves and respect for the partner's own agenda and strategy for achieving social justice.

We emphasise contextual understanding and local anchoring in all our international work. Change demands solid insight both from relevant stakeholders and where the problem really lies. Norwegian People's Aid stands with those affected by crises and injustices and contributes technical and political expertise and global experience-based spokesperson work for lasting change and local resilience.

The Principles Programme (2019-2023) states the following, among other things, about our development and humanitarian work:

Norwegian People's Aid wants

- To work with popular organisations and civil society to promote democratisation and contribute to a more just distribution of power and resources.
- To promote democracy, human rights, equality and a just distribution of power and resources between men and women.
- To promote the role of local organisations when it comes to responding to humanitarian crises and strengthen their ability to assume this role.
- To contribute to increased involvement and understanding of development issues within our local teams, among members and among the population at large.
- To strengthen the collaboration with the trade union movement on the development of democracy and international solidarity.

1. Inequality

The differences between the poor and the rich have increased dramatically in recent decades and



they continue to increase. Inequality has increased both between and within countries and a small number of people control much of the world's wealth. Some argue that it is not that bad if someone becomes very rich, as long as we manage to reduce poverty. This is not true. When a few control large parts of the resources, they also gain disproportionate political influence and hinder a just distribution. It is the interests of the community that suffer as a result.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that low levels of inequality between people has inherent value in itself. At the same time, it is also important in order to build trust, community and good societies. The inequalities between the rich and the poor must be reduced, as must those between men and women and between different groups in society. We can see that countries with a high degree of financial, social and political inequality are also characterised by significant social division and injustice.

There are several reasons why inequality is on the rise. The neoliberal economic policy that has dominated in the last decades has contributed to a concentration of income and wealth. The highest salaries have grown significantly in many countries while downward pressure on normal salaries, unstable working conditions and social dumping is widespread. The pressure against unionisation has been so great that the organisations are unable to defend the rights of workers. In many countries, most people work in the informal sector, for example as street vendors, and a large proportion of these informal workers are women. An uneven distribution of land represents a historical challenge. Today, private businesses investing in natural resources such as land, mines and hydropower results in many small-scale farmers being driven off the land. Environmental destruction and climate change also hits those who have the least the hardest. In recent years, the pandemic has hit poor and marginalised communities especially hard and there is a strong consensus that it will contribute to further inequality.

Most people in the world lack social security and in the last decades we have seen an extensive privatisation of the welfare and social security systems that did exist. This affects the large number of people who depend on collective solutions. Many countries tax people on ordinary salaries the hardest while the richest avoid paying huge tax bills. Many multinational companies engage in aggressive tax planning and hide assets in tax havens. The policy of limiting the role of the state and having low tax revenues combined with widespread corruption often results in the state being unable to provide welfare services.

We need an all-out effort on a wide front to reduce inequality. Political willingness is needed in order to achieve the UN's sustainable development goal of reducing inequality. Popular organisations and mobilisation are crucial in order to bring about a change.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Support free, public and universal services, not privatisation.
- Contribute to the creation of universal systems for social security for the entire population.
- Promote workers' and collective rights and support those who fight for a decent working life.
- Support the development of progressive systems of taxation.
- Fight tax havens, promote openness and demand that taxes are paid where values are created.
- Create a Norwegian development policy strategy that ensures that the policy contributes to reducing inequality in all areas.



2. Democratisation and the right to organisation

Recent decades have seen a decline in democracy. Democracy is about more than voting in elections every four or six years. It is about people having the opportunity and the right to set the political agenda, influence political decisions, put forward demands and solutions and express and organise themselves without fear of repercussions. In the past year in particular, respect for political and civil rights has weakened, according to The Economist's Democracy Index. Simultaneously, governments are less and less democratic. Important decisions are not discussed in democratic spaces but defined by expert and elite groups, supranational bodies or privatised. Norwegian People's Aid finds that power is concentrated to economically powerful groups, to those highly educated, to urban areas and, still, to men.

Legislation is limiting the activities of organisations in many of the countries where Norwegian People's Aid works. Anti-terror laws are used to stifle peaceful opposition and harassment of organisations and social leaders, killings and impunity are not uncommon. The authorities always bear the main responsibility, but also non-state stakeholders, armed groups or private corporations that are behind this. Recognition of rights is not enough. The rights must be respected in practice.

Even though civil society's room to manoeuvre has been restricted, there has been an increase in political involvement. The year 2019 saw massive protests in several countries with people calling for openness and influence, denouncing inequality, political elites, corruption, economic policy and violence against women. The increase in turnout at such protests may point towards increased democratisation.

A strong civil society is essential for promoting democracy and a just distribution of resources. Civil society also play an important role when it comes to holding the authorities accountable, and not least with regard to influencing policy and agenda-setting. That is why civil society's access to media and channels of expression is so important.

Norwegian People's Aid has extensive experience of working with organisations in many countries in the global south and emphasises the development of partnerships based on solidarity and equality. There is a need for organisations that are capable of promoting social change over time, and of defending the interests of marginalised groups under changing political, social and economic circumstances. These organisations can, when well-functioning, act as democracy schools and contribute to the promotion of equality and diversity.

Civil society consists of many different stakeholders and organisations. Norwegian People's Aid believes that it is especially important to cooperate with marginalised and oppressed groups that organise themselves. This type of broad, popular organisation can have a significant impact on social development. Civil society organisations' representativeness and legitimacy are essential to be able to build people's power and influence and promote more political equality and stronger democracies.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Double its budget for supporting civil society organisations.
- Limit the purpose of the civil society funding to the strengthening of civil society, the



- organisations and their influence in society and over powerholders.
- Ensure that the funding reaches representative and legitimate organisations of marginalised groups.
- Ensure that Norway assumes global leadership for increasing civil society's space, respect for the right to organise, protection against violations and harassment and justice when such violations occur.
- Reinforce international efforts aimed at putting the UN resolutions concerning the protection of human rights defenders into practice.
- Ensure that Norway consults with and promotes civil society participation in its work in the UN Security Council.
- Ensure that Norway makes binding demands with regard to respect for human rights and due diligence for Norwegian companies.

3. Gender and equality

In recent years, the struggle for equality and women's rights has increasingly taken centre stage in large protest movements in many parts of the world. In Latin America, the fight against violence and for abortion rights has been some of the most important causes underlying popular mobilisation, while in countries such as Lebanon and Sudan, women have been at the forefront in the fight against repressive and corrupt regimes. At the same time, the resistance to equal rights for women and people outside of the norms for gender and sexuality has become clearer. Reactionary and conservative forces, where religious and economic interests intersect, are increasingly well organised and funded. Both national and international laws and conventions are under threat and we are at risk of losing much of what we have fought for in recent decades.

Norwegian People's Aid works with partners that work towards a just distribution of power and resources. Nowhere in the world are these independent of gender, and men and women are still treated differently, given different tasks, opportunities, responsibilities and privileges, to varying degrees. Many of our partners are women's and feminist organisations and equality is at the heart of the work that we do.

The unpaid work that women perform in the home and poorer conditions generally in formal and informal employment results in inequality and in the inability of women to decide over their own lives. Financial interests also benefit from maintaining such unjust systems while society suffers when everyone does not have access to organised and paid work. Violence against women and persons outside of gender and sexuality norms has immense consequences for the individuals in question and their families, societies and nations. Inability to decide over one's own body represents a serious human rights violation and limits the affected person's ability to participate fully in society or take up leadership positions.

Different forms of oppression are connected. In order to achieve true equality and justice for women, persons outside of gender and sexuality norms, people with disabilities, racialised individuals (ethnic minorities) and other marginalised individuals, we need to fight for economic rights and opportunities, freedom from violence, the ability to decide over our own bodies and full access to participation and leadership within organisations, local communities, politics and forms of governance.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must



- Support programmes to combat violence against women run by women, and the meaningful inclusion of men in this work.
- Ensure that women truly participate in and lead Norwegian-funded development programmes and processes, and work actively to promote the inclusion of marginalised groups.
- Assess and take into consideration how all programmes funded by Norway affect equality and women's rights, including Norfund.
- Work to improve public welfare systems and safety nets in all countries.
- Stand firm on and fight for the right to free abortion and access to birth control.
- Be a clear voice for the rest of the world in the struggle to defend previous gender equality gains.

4. Strengthening local humanitarian work stakeholders

Never before have so many people been in need of humanitarian assistance. In order to ensure more effective humanitarian work and more robust local communities, local stakeholders must be strengthened and recognised in the humanitarian work. Local forces are often the first to respond when a crisis strikes. They are already present, capable of mobilising and organising people locally and can potentially ensure that those affected become active participants with influence over the assistance they receive.

With its travel restrictions, the coronavirus crisis has further highlighted the need for local response capacity. Local organisations only have access to a very small share of global humanitarian funding and are rarely able to utilise their full potential. Norwegian People's Aid should work to break down the barriers that limit local stakeholder influence over humanitarian responses and access to global humanitarian funding.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Take the lead internationally to ensure that local and national stakeholders get access to a larger share of both Norwegian and international humanitarian funding.
- Work to revise requirements and structures for the funding of local and national stakeholders and ensure real participation of these in global and national/local coordination forums.
- Ensure a long term and broadened perspective on partnership and capacity building for local and national humanitarian stakeholders by coordinating long term and humanitarian funding.
- Strengthen crisis coordination, reinforce local crisis coordination where available and connect local stakeholders with international crisis coordination systems. Ensure training and upskilling for local stakeholders.
- Work to share the risk involved in all work so that it is not all borne by local partners.
- Ensure that local stakeholders and their work are presented and highlighted in all official communications.

5. Responsible business

There is a great need for job creation and business development in the world. This is one of the focus areas of today's development policy, together with stronger involvement of Norwegian business. However, there are too many examples of foreign investment in business activities where



a few earn while others lose or earn very little. Similarly, there are many examples of business activities resulting in human rights violations or gross exploitation of labour. On the other hand, the larger number of jobs are created locally, in informal structures, under precarious conditions, and women perform a large number of these jobs.

At the same time as the current policy emphases frameworks for business in development, we need to require business development to contribute to poverty reduction and a just distribution of resources. This is largely taken for granted in politics today. In order to qualify for business support, companies should be required to prove a positive social impact through contribution to a more just distribution, decent work and more robust support for small local enterprises. The Norwegian authorities must demand more clearly that the business community prevent human rights violations through due diligence assessments, broad consultation and free prior informed consent in indigenous territories.

Norwegian People's Aid works with organisations and communities that experience the negative consequences of investment into natural resources and companies' lack of respect for the rights of indigenous peoples and workers. We support their organisation and believe that we have a responsibility to support them in raising this issue nationally and internationally.

In our advocacy work on Norwegian economic interests abroad, Norwegian People's Aid focuses especially on initiatives by popular organisations in partner countries. In our work to promote this issue to Norwegian stakeholders, Norwegian People's Aid often work in partnership with the Norwegian trade union movement.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Ensure that all job creation support is in line with the ILO agenda on decent work.
- Prioritise aid budget funds for the development of local employment instead of promoting the establishment of Norwegian companies abroad.
- Put in place binding guidelines, such as a human rights act for business, that require companies to conduct due diligence assessments of what human rights violations their activities may entail and make these assessments available to the public.
- Ensure that populations affected by corporate investment, trade agreements and development projects have a right to be heard.
- Consider Norfund's further growth and the suitability of the mandate in terms of who benefits from the development effect of the investments and how a broader consultation can be ensured ahead of investments.
- Call for an assessment of the effect of business investments on inequality.
- Support strengthening of corporate taxation, the principle that taxes should be paid where the business activities take place, and the creation of progressive tax systems.

6. Climate and the environment — international solidarity in climate policy

Climate and environmental crises represent the biggest threats of our time. Climate change and the degradation of nature and natural resources affect those who have the least and are therefore strongly linked to inequality between those who have resources and those who do not. Inequality and poor governance are therefore underlying explanations for who is affected and how. Climate and environmental crises amplify the already existing inequality; vulnerable and marginalised groups are often most exposed to and least able to deal with the crisis, and in many cases is exacerbating their situation. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, local pollution and the degradation of nature and natural resources is therefore a prerequisite for maintaining the livelihoods of those potentially most at risk.



Moreover, effective prevention of environmental degradation and climate adaptation must be based on solid local knowledge. It is particularly important to ensure that any measures introduced do not exacerbate inequalities and conflicts or lead to a further deterioration of people's living situations. It is therefore crucial that the green shift is just and rights-based. A humanitarian response, investment into the physical prevention of environmental destruction and climate change adaptation is not enough. Both prevention and response must be more closely linked to long-term development work that strengthens people's ability to challenge structural inequality locally and nationally, so that they too can lead the fight against the degradation of their own lands and climate change.

Norwegian People's Aid works with organisations trying to protect their lands, local communities, rivers and woods against environmental destruction. They are working to combat deforestation, pollution and the destruction of biodiversity and for increased awareness of environmental destruction, climate change and climate-friendly development. They influence both society and those in power. Many of these environmental activists live under threat and face harassment and some even risk their lives for this work.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Ensure a sharp increase in Norwegian climate funding so that developing countries can cut their own emissions and adapt to the harmful consequences of climate change. This increase must be in addition to traditional aid.
- Work to ensure that international climate funding does not contribute to the generation of unmanageable debt in developing countries.
- Take a rights-based approach to climate adaptation and the prevention of environmental degradation and make sure that all Norwegian climate and environmental initiatives ensure local involvement and competence building.
- Ensure that all climate and environmental initiatives are based on an analysis to determine how the climate and environmental challenges affect and are affected by inequality and underlying forces that create vulnerability and conflict.
- Support environmental activists who put themselves at risk to protect the environment and manage their natural resources in a sustainable way.



Selected political positions, DMAD

Frameworks for our political work

Humanitarian mine clearance and disarmament has a proud history in the world and within Norwegian People's Aid. We have spent decades working to protect people by establishing and strengthening conventions, performing mine clearance on the ground and continuously developing the sector to make it more effective and systematic. The Mine Ban Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions have saved countless lives and limbs, tens of millions of landmines and cluster munitions have been cleared or destroyed in storage and the conventions have established a strong international norm against the use of these weapons. Norwegian People's Aid has been involved from the start and is today one of the world's three largest and leading humanitarian stakeholders in the field.

The Principles Programme (2019-2023) states the following about mine and explosives clearance, among other things:

Norwegian People's Aid wants

- To work operationally and politically for increased civilian protection before, during and after conflicts, and to strengthen international rules and norms with regard to humanitarian disarmament.
- To work to ensure that more states join the ban on nuclear weapons and increase knowledge of the humanitarian consequences of these.
- To work to stop the use of explosive weapons in inhabited areas and contribute to civilian readiness and protection from explosive weapons.
- To contribute to increased involvement and activity in the local teams, and increased understanding among the population when it comes to humanitarian disarmament.

1. Mine and explosives clearance

60 million people live in areas where there are land mines and cluster bombs. In some of the worst affected places, children have to cross mine fields to get to school. A single misstep can be fatal. A large number of victims of explosive weapons are civilians and around half of them are children.

Norwegian People's Aid has been protecting civilians from explosive weapons since 1992. We have cleared more than one billion square metres of land and removed more than two million landmines and explosives in more than 40 countries. Still, millions of mines and cluster bombs remain in the ground. Landmines, cluster bombs and explosive remnants of war represent a serious and constant threat to civilians.

Landmines can either be anti-personnel mines, anti-tank mines or so-called improvised explosive devices. These are placed on or in the ground and made from plastic, metal or other materials and contain explosives and shrapnel. They are activated when someone steps on or drives across them, for example. The Mine Ban Convention which came into force in 1999 prohibits the use and production of mines built to explode as a result of human presence, proximity or physical contact. Many countries have already managed to clear all their mined areas. However, there is still a considerable amount of work left to be done before the target of a mine-free world is achieved.



Norwegian People's Aid works to map and clear mines, cluster bombs and other explosive remnants of war. Norwegian People's Aid also works to ensure that the mine work is inclusive, that no one is discriminated against on the basis of who they are or where they come from. We also believe that it is important to strengthen national expertise. The threat and the problem are local and national, which is why the expertise must be generated nationally and locally in line with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). We believe that this is a sustainable approach that helps ensure local ownership and capacity.

In 2019, the fourth Mine Ban Treaty (MBT) review conference was held in Oslo with Norway hosting. In 2020, the second review conference on the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) was held virtually due to the coronavirus pandemic, with parts of the conference postponed until 2021. The Oslo conference resulted in an action plan for the fulfilment of the Mine Ban Treaty known as the Oslo Action Plan. The states parties are expected to agree on a corresponding plan for the Convention on Cluster Munitions, known as the Lausanne Action Plan. These plans are important markers of ambition and contain indicators for measuring progress.

Norwegian People's Aid works actively to influence the content of — and monitor progress in relation to — these plans. Norwegian People's Aid is also a member of [LandmineFree2025](#), a campaign in which we, together with other major humanitarian mine clearance organisations, work to promote the importance of mine clearance and for states to continue to support the important work done to ensure that we achieve a landmine-free world.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Maintain economic and diplomatic support for humanitarian disarmament.
- Work with other active states to fulfil the ambitions of the Oslo Action Plan (OAP) and the Lausanne Action Plan (LAP).
- Contribute to setting realistic goals for the fulfilment of the convention obligations, preferably as soon as possible and by no later than 2025, for both the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions.
- Help develop work plans for OAP and LAP and ensure that the protection of civilians and development is central in this context. This must happen in consultation with, and with the complete participation of, the affected communities, including women, men, girls and boys.
- Together with Norwegian People's Aid and other stakeholders, continue the important work of strengthening national expertise.
- Support work to strengthen international standards for mine clearance.
- Contribute to work for equality, diversity, and gender integration in all aspects of the fulfilment of the MBT and the CCM. It is not just about fulfilling the obligations, but also about how we fulfil them. We wish to see an equality pledge and for all stakeholders to contribute to the meaningful participation of women and diversity within the delegations, on panels and in all convention-relevant forums.

2. Civilian preparedness and protection

Armed conflict increasingly takes place in cities and areas where civilians live, and using weapons intended for open battlefields. This makes it difficult to ensure the protection of civilians in connection with armed conflicts today.

Tens of thousands of women, men and children are killed, injured and traumatised every year due to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) where they reside, work, go to school



and live their lives. When used in cities, explosive weapons account for more than 90 per cent of all civilian injuries and fatalities. A record number of people are currently on the run in search of safety. Vital infrastructure is destroyed, schools and hospitals are damaged or destroyed, access to food is hampered and communities and areas are contaminated by unexploded bombs that injure, kill and prevent return even after the fighting is over.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Ensure that Norway works actively to ensure that more countries join and comply with the political declaration against the use of EWIPA.
- Take the lead when it comes to funding and developing a humanitarian response that contributes to civilian preparedness and protection in connection with war and conflict.

3. Nuclear weapons

Norway has historically been an important advocate for disarmament, for example through its contributions to very important disarmament agreements such as the MBT and the CCM. Lately, however, both ambitions and contributions in this field have waned, as is particularly evidenced by Norway's 'no' to the nuclear weapons ban and the fact that Norway goes against the UN majority working to strengthen the norm against nuclear weapons and to make possessing and threatening to use such weapons a strain on countries. Norway belongs to the minority that questions the notion that nuclear weapons are necessary and legitimate. Norwegian peace and disarmament work need increased focus, funding and knowledge.

In 2021, the world is closer to a nuclear disaster than ever before. Nuclear weapons have already nearly been used several times due to misunderstandings, technical errors or accidents. In a multipolar world with cyber warfare, hybrid warfare, terrorism, extremism and irrational leaders, we simply cannot continue to put nuclear weapons at the centre of our safety. The disarmament work will not progress unless we recognise that the risks associated with nuclear deterrents far outweigh the benefits.

Norwegian politicians cannot continue to under-communicate the risks that nuclear weapons pose to Norwegians and the world. They must also recognise that Norway is part of the problem since our current security policy is based on allied nuclear weapons states continuing to possess, and potentially use, nuclear weapons on our behalf. While Norway remains a loyal NATO ally, we must now distance ourselves from nuclear deterrence and increase our efforts for nuclear disarmament. In addition to continued verification work, the knowledge-based humanitarian initiative on nuclear weapons must be re-established. The goal must be to offer hope and direction — for Norwegians as well as in the UN and in NATO.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Welcome the UN Treaty that bans nuclear weapons, participate as an observer at the agreement's state party meetings, expressly state the goal of Norway signing the treaty, and work actively to put in place the conditions that would allow this to happen.
- Initiate a broad and balanced reality assessment of the risks that nuclear weapons and our continued commitment to nuclear deterrence pose to Norway and the world.
- Re-establish the knowledge-based humanitarian initiative on nuclear weapons and fund research, the generation of new knowledge and civil society engagement on nuclear



weapons-related risks and the humanitarian, health, developmental and environmental impacts of nuclear weapons.

4. Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

Artificial intelligence is quickly gaining ground within the defence industry. We are now facing a dramatic shift where technological development can enable lethal autonomous weapons that have autonomy in critical functions and can select and attack targets without meaningful human control.

The development has been dubbed the third revolution in warfare, after gunpowder and the nuclear bomb, and both experts in artificial intelligence and the UN Secretary General are asking the countries of the world to ban such weapons before they come into use. The International Committee of the Red Cross states that we must urgently set limits on autonomy in weapons systems if we are to ensure compliance with international law and make sure that we do not cross an ethical line.

Norwegian People's Aid is a member of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots and works to ensure that all political parties adopt policies specific to lethal autonomous weapons systems in their party programmes. We are also working towards a new Norwegian government, following the 2021 elections, having the explicit goal of contributing to a ban on lethal autonomous weapons.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Agree that Norway should support the international work for a treaty prohibiting the development, transfer and use of lethal autonomous weapons.
- Agree that Norway should assume a leading role in the work to bring about such an instrument.

5. Climate and environment in connection with war and conflict

War and conflict can have a negative impact on the environment, while climate change and environmental challenges can increase the risk of conflict and of people becoming refugees. It is the most vulnerable people in a society who are worst affected by climate change, war and conflict. Humanitarian responses can also have a negative environmental impact by putting pressure on the environment and the natural resource basis. Humanitarian stakeholders must do their bit to avoid unintended damage as a result of humanitarian intervention.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that the Government must

- Contribute to ensuring that more countries comply with and respect international laws on the protection of the environment in connection with armed conflict.
- Be at the forefront of funding a green humanitarian response.
- Use its place on the UN Security Council to work for a United Nations security resolution on "Environment, Peace and Security".