



ICVA at 60 Interview Transcript

Ed Shenkenberg

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Hi

Welcome to our ICVA at 60 series.

A collection of interviews with leaders of ICVA in the build-up to ICVA's 60 anniversary in 2022.

Join us as we listen to ICVA Board members and staff, former and present, talk about some of the challenges during their time at ICVA.

In this episode we listen to Robert White, a consultant for the ICVA at 60 project, talk to Ed Shenkenberg, director of ICVA 1997-2012. Ed is currently executive director of Here Geneva, the Humanitarian Exchange and Research Centre.

Their conversation begins with a discussion around the ICVA at 60 history paper, the final version can be found on the ICVA website.

Ed talks about ICVA's financial crisis in the late 90's, ICVA's humanitarian focus, interviewing the candidates for the UNHCR High Commissioner for Refugees, and the importance of collaboration.

Enjoy!

Robert White / RW
Ed Schenkenberg /ES

RW: Hello it has been a long time since I have seen you

ES: I've only got some more grey hair but other than that

RW: You look pretty much the same

ES: Thank you. How are you?

RW: Much the same. Like everyone else coping with the pandemic and hoping the situation will improve one of these days

ES: Right Yeah, here and there it does and then two steps back with new variants, we'll see.

RW: Where are you living and working these days?

ES: Geneva. Living across the border south west of town. After ICVA I went to Madrid. I took over an organization called Dara which was known for producing the humanitarian response index which is based on the good humanitarian donorship principles. And the organization that I set up or was part of setting up in 2014 is basically a shoot off from Dara in the sense that Dara had a Geneva office which not many people knew and it became its own organisation in 2014. That brought me back to Geneva- HERE is into research on policy and practice. We initiate research ourselves and we do commission work for government, UN, NGOs, Red cross etc.

RW: Have you personally had any contact with ICVA since you left?

ES: Not so much which is interesting. I really wanted to take a bit of a distance Bob, because I thought that was fair, in the sense, that you know, I don't want to come across as someone thinking that in my time everything was better or whatever, absolutely not. I thought if they need me, if they want advice based on my experience they will call me, if not that's fine to. So here and there some contacts, but not very systematic..

RW: Very good, I think that is a good attitude to have frankly.

ES : Well you know I m still in touch with my former colleagues. In fact one of my former colleagues is a team member of my organization, HERE, the Humanitarian Exchange and Research Centre, that's how we have called ourselves. She was the policy officer in New York. When she left New York I said come and join me, which is what she did. And then of course I particularly worked in my days with Manisha Thomas, and I still work with her. Still a lot of contact with former colleagues.

RW: It tends to be a small world, the humanitarian world. You tend to run into the same people over the years.

Let me tell you briefly if you don't mind what I am doing and where we hope to go in the next few months. Ignacio asked me to help out in doing some thinking and planning for ICVA at 60, the 60th anniversary of ICVA. There will be some kind of commemoration event next year (2022), not sure when or what kind of celebration. But the first step was this paper I wrote which I sent to you and that will be my first question to you. How you saw the paper, what are the gaps, what is amiss? Following the paper itself I am interviewing 15 or 16 people. You probably know all of them, they are former board members or former staff to get their view on the same questions I will be asking you. So that's why I wanted to talk to you , not take too much of your time, but I am happy to have this chat.

ES: I had a quick look at the document will come back in a moment to it. I mean you know because you also in your questions I think asked me for anecdotes. Of course I have quite the number but particularly one when you say you know probably there will be some event reminds me of, 2002 when Rudd Lubbers had just taken over, as the Dutch former Prime Minister, as you know, as the High Commissioner for refugees. That was the moment ICVA turned 40. We organized an event at ICRC because in fact I was told that's the first ICVA office was in the garage of the ICRC. Which I thought was good to know as I gave ICVA a strong humanitarian focus and I thought you know good if we were born in ICRC then you know I'm happy with that because at least it explains you know that humanitarian focus and the fact that we're trying to follow a principled approach, so to speak. So you know in that sense particularly thinking I would you know we would benefit from ICRC in that sense. So ICRC hosted it but Lubbers was the keynote speaker as you probably know and in ways it's kind of described the document it was UNHCR that threw ICVA the lifeline. I mean had there not been UNHCR ICVA would have got discontinued. But then Maureen Connolly threw the lifeline because following PARinAC, there was the whole process of partnership in action and the follow up work to be done by the NGO focal points. You know they had set up this whole system of regional NGO focal points and so on. Maureen Connolly threw the lifeline to ICVA, and this was exactly the time when I came in. On that basis we that it would be appropriate to invite Lubbers to say a few words.

Then what happened was that there's a number of things coming together here.

I think it's also mentioned in the document and it's certainly I think quite indicative of the direction we took ICVA in in those years. We had started to publish this newsletter called Talkback. I can't remember that I can look it up for you what exactly the month was of 2002 um that's right that I

can't recall right now the precise month but in the issue that had just come out because of our 40th anniversary we had taken UNHCR to task for this report of its repatriation involvement in Tachenya and Sierra Leone or Liberia, West Africa. We were not convinced that the time was conducive for voluntary repatriation. It probably was Liberia actually. And certainly Tachenya. That was a piece I had written.

Lubbers didn't like those pieces because we were really critical of UNHR. Now then what happens - it was in the week before or just a few days before that cocktail at the ICRC museum. Lubbers spoke, and just before, was the news had broken on this this report and on the massive sexual abuse and exploitation in West Africa. This was a Save the children and UNHCR report. Everybody thinks that you know it was the Haiti Oxfam scandal and so on no 2002 was actually already really the pivotal moment.

So there was this as annex to that report there was this long list of organizations whose staff were implicated or alleged to be implicated in the sexual abuse and exploitation

So Lubbers starts his speech and then it sort of he wanted to get even with us for TalkBack and in fact then he says you know as a joke but you know it wasn't quite understood that way yeah I was very surprised not to see the name of ICVA there. There was a deafening silence I mean absolutely you know complete its everybody most were diplomatic I mean at the ambassador level we had quite worked to get the Geneva diplomatic core out to this event definitely silent OK yeah yeah yeah so that was that was the 40th anniversary.

So you know if Ignacio wants to set something up so yeah it's a different it's an interesting experience.

RW: We may try for a more positive approach for 60

ES: But what I'm saying what I'm saying Bob it addresses a couple of things. I think so what happened was and actually it's quite important I think here that you know the it's funny because my office where I'm sitting right now is just around the corner of where I found ICVA. So my first task was literally to move the office from Rue Gautier to Versoix. I found an office was literally an office with mail piled up against the wall meters high. I mean literally 12 people had dropped their pens and left from one day to another in in '96 and I came in in late '98. There was one considering her name Pauline Silvestri who had kept on almost volunteer basis had kept the office open that was it.

I was starting on my own there was nobody else all the staff had left there was no paid staff.

RW: It was just after the financial difficulties.

ES: From this death that had occurred from World Aid there was still one Swedish organization the tiny Swedish organization that you know because most of the agencies particularly World vision, Lutherans etc decided to write off the debt.

But this small Swedish organization I've no idea if they still exist anymore, they couldn't write it off. Because in fact that the guy who had been the director as you know and this was exactly the issue that had been going on. The real crisis was that in fact you know there was not just the lack of oversight from the executive committee at the time, in terms of who was the executive director. In fact there was a small group involving the executive director, and involving a few other people who not only set up World Aid, but had also the executive director, I don't want to say conspired, but had set up a system, an arrangement with a couple of members including Swedish member where they

would you know chip in money to pay for the floor space in Palexpo thinking that they would get money back right from the sale of the shop floor space which of course didn't sell.

So that how ICVA incurred the debt and how these agencies encouraged got blamed for it. Nobody knew, few people knew of it and certainly the executive committee at the time hadn't delivered any oversight on this so it was very dodgy very dodgy arrangement. And so the decision was really that the Lutherans World Vision and NRC they will take over the debt and yeah you know except for the small Swedish organization because in fact you know his board didn't know either that you know he have given under 75,000 to ICVA. So quite a dodgy situation. When UNHCR through the lifeline it was explicitly stated that that money could not be used for that debt. So no ICVA staff left, only one unpaid staff, on a volunteer basis. So that was the situation. And then there is the discussion and that was the other point I wanted to mention where you know I thought the analysis or the history writing was a little thin.

From what was left in the executive committee and then some members coming on the board again or taking over so particularly the Danish Refugee Council at the time. So you imagine that particularly the Refugee Council because of UNHCR's interest. It was also the Refugee Council they said yeah yeah we need a mechanism such as ICVA. They wanted actually to start something new but then thought OK we then make a restart at ICVA. That lead to a discussion in the newcomers to the executive committee and the old timers so to speak or those who have stayed on whether the new person at the helm should be someone with a relatively junior and practical or pragmatic profile or again and I think the word again is quite important here someone with a quite hefty salary former UN or former government a very senior level. So in UN terms at D1 or D2. That was that was very much that was real discussion or fight that I heard later on in the executive committee which obviously because I was recruited the ones that were new on the board or on the executive committee, I should say won for the simple reason I would say there wasn't any money.

It also meant that you know the expectation that ICVA and there was also there decision to call the executive director no longer executive director but coordinator. Well, I was fine with whatever title coordinator suited me well I couldn't care less.

The problem I had of course in those days was wherever I introduced myself you could immediately tell from the look on people of someone's face what perception they had of ICVA. So I always said you know I'm the coordinator of the new ICVA. ICVA was known for people doing relatively little and getting big salaries and certainly then of course in Geneva being the village it is the whole world aid crisis went out very quickly of course.

Th previous director before, so the director before me, had a car- there was an ICVA car. I mean there were all these issues I certainly had to deal with when I came in. Well there was a business car I know I did you know and the problem was that it had been taken to Bosnia for ICVA coordination office there and that should have done well because in fact it had Geneva plates on it and the only organization ^with Swiss plates on it of course was ICRC you know they go easily across cross lines and so on but of course it's not allowed but this is ICVA is still happening Swiss car

Oh yeah yeah yeah all these sort of issues I had to deal with yeah j

RW: just in that connection though one of the very good documents that I read was this you know this long paper called at ICVA at Forty Something 2009 and i forget the woman's name, the author talks a lot about all the difficulties and the search for a new coordinator and so you think I should emphasize that maybe more in the document?

ES: I would say so. I think it was quite a pivotal as such. It is also relevant to emphasize in the sense that well for two reasons I believe.

The first reason I think is that there is so much the impression, or the image created that this kind of story which was my or is my background the humanitarian focus in particular that that let's do tensions or may have alleviated NGOs from the developing world. It's not my view for the simple reason and in fact you know what happened at the time was the number of effects of those NGOs join simply because of party knock so you know we had a number of African NGOs joining and in fact Asian as well CFSI and a couple of others who have been elected as far in our focal points as well. These local NGOs or national NGOs just as for that matter a number of international NGO's you know they don't label themselves as either humanitarian or development but they ICVA's focus was displacement and humanitarian and that that was because they joined. So it was not if it creates the image that it was meant to exclude NGOs, that would be really inaccurate because in fact these NGOs including from the global South, joined ICVA because of that focus.

That I think is one point to keep in mind. The other bit of history was shortly after I joined I got a phone call from somebody called Ian Gas who was a former journalist with the Herald Tribune and so on who had just covered the setting up of the Rome International Criminal Court, the Rome conference. And he suggested to me shall we cover; would you be interested in covering in a daily newsletter the UNHR annual executive committee.

I thought yeah sounds like a great idea so that newsletter initially was called *On the Record* became Talkback and yeah certainly a number of people in UNHCR office, but also a number of people at least in the membership really liked it because certainly it's not only did it show that necessarily ICVA was back of course it showed that but ICVA was becoming a little bit more if you like activist a little bit more sort of you know on the pushing the agenda really and you know quite strong advocacy terms but from a yeah you know a little bit challenge or a little bit I mean quite challenging UNHCR if not the broader UN system but of course particularly UNHCR. And raising a number of critical questions. Certainly, a group of NGOs and certainly the ones that you know had taken ICVA or had given new life to ICVA were quite happy with that because it meant that they did I mean obviously executive council and all of those they received money from UNHCR. So when ICVA does it, it sort of keeps them a little bit out of the winds right. So they were quite happy with that sort of activist advocacy role and yeah I think particularly the newsletter that we developed. I mean it was not for nothing that I mentioned the experience with Lubbers, you know it definitely challenged him and that was exactly the intention.

RW: I want to just to get back to a point you raised comments ago about this humanitarian development well they call it the Nexus now but the perceptions people had of ICVA because in the paper I drafted and all the documents I read and you know already from the history when it started back in the 60s it was pretty much both humanitarian and development but then later on I guess before you came the decision was made to focus more on humanitarian at the expense of development. But for me personally the older I get and I'm pretty old I really see less and less of a distinction between this real division between the two and not much more of a blurring between the two concepts. Although I I guess the focus still is humanitarian, core humanitarian standards, but I wonder about that quite a bit actually. UNHCR moving into the post emergency phase to more and more of what I would call development projects. Development funding World Bank. IMF. I wondered how you see that also this whole humanitarian development difference and in my last question but I can you know, where do you see ICVA moving to in the future

ES: uhm I think there was certainly a debate going on in the early 90s around you know the balance between humanitarian and development. Again that was also part really or played out in the

restructuring or in the fact that, or the plan that was re written on the basis so to get ICVA for new money and on the basis of me getting in. Clearly, I mean at that stage in fact those that executive committee particularly the Refugee Council of course they gave it that focus. And you know it was on that basis it was exactly that UNHCR gave money so that if you like sort of de facto concluded that kind of debate if you see what I mean.

Plus of course my personal background being you know having a strong humanitarian background. And to be honest there and that's certainly something I feel quite strong about I thought it would be a mistake and I'm talking about my period to try to do everything, so I thought the humanitarian focus was very appropriate. And you know and that's also why I mentioned, Bob, you know I don't think it alienated those national or local NGOs because they were happy to join ICVA just for that reason as I said in terms of you know a focus on displacement and so on. In that sense I think there was pretty much a full consensus at that moment and I'm talking sort of the years 99-2010 maybe when I left you know ICVA had that strong humanitarian focus as such. I mean I remember there were some old members from the old days who said ICVA should still do development and so on so there was a little bit of that but not in any significant way I think. Because it was pretty much an agreement that the world had moved on if you see what I mean. In the sense that and I think that was part of ICVA's near demise other than the world aid fiasco, suggesting that ICVA could be or should be the UN for NGOs, like what the IFRC is for the Red Cross movement or WCC for the churches so to speak.

The NGO movement have become two diverse, particularly in the late 80s or early 90s there was an explosion in NGOs, in civil society because at the end of the Cold War focus on humanitarian funding and all of that and so on. So you know and I felt in that sense that you know yeah there are other networks dealing with human rights or with dealing with development ICVA should really just be humanitarian in in in that sense. Because the way as I said the world is simply too complex and so on and let's I mean trying to put too many things in is only going to muddy the waters basically. So that was certainly the direction or my stamp that I gave it if you see what I mean.

Coming back then or just responding to your other point in the sense of now the nexus and all that and so on. For the simple reason I think that the humanitarian agenda is big enough um I you know had I will still be there I still would have you know I think continued that line of humanitarian agenda and I would have had very critical view on things such as the Nexus or the triple nexus and all of that.

I mean for the simple reason that look at what's happening on the ground, Ethiopia is a perfect example in the sense of Tigray, eastern Nigeria, Mozambique is a perfect example. There's a suggestion that you can work on development and guess what the situation certainly turns back into an all out war. I mean the development for the UN system, for World Bank and so on, means working for the government. It's true that development perhaps more in NGO terms means working with communities I agree but there is a real disconnect between the two as such. I think ICVA's much more humanitarian way of working to focus on communities as such so for that reason had I been still at the ICVA helm I would have kept very much a reservation to which you know development context in the sense of I mean engagement with development mechanisms or with development discussions. I would have really kept the reservation from a distance from that.

RW: That's a good point and it goes back to the comment you have just made that you can't do everything you got to make choices frankly and already the humanitarian side is enormous to work on. Just thinking of Afghanistan today also what's going to happen in the future Afghanistan

ES: Again a situation that is you know going the other way and what do you then so to speak. How do you create that space again, how do you create trust with population if you have been aligned

with the government, if you have been aligned with institutions that are seen to be toeing the line of the government as well. That exactly is where my reluctance is coming from. And exactly also relates to this more yeah I don't know how else to describe it, this more activist challenging role vis-à-vis the system. I think we were fine particularly with the one foot in one foot out if you see what I mean

RW: OK let me get to the two main questions that I have for you. I think I sent them to you already. But you were there you were there for quite some time actually, ten to twelve years, and you were engaged before that also probably and even since then. What made you proud, gave you the most satisfaction of being part of ICVA when you were there. Where did you get your pride or your satisfaction or if you could just give me one or two examples.

ES: well there is really one example that stands out linked to that the coverage of UNHRC executive committee and then you know transforming their daily newsletter into Talkback. In 2000 when Sadako Ogato left we engaged we saw that this process on the recruitment of the next UNHCR High Commission for Refugees. And this was really exactly you know this kind of playing, what's the English term I'm looking. really the challenging role being a very small player in a involved in politics if you like because obviously even the selection of the High Commissioner was part of that if you see what I mean. Member states interests on all of that. But you know at least challenging that system and trying to you know raise yeah I mean and rock the boat a little bit. So what happened then was you know we invited the candidates whose names were going on in the corridors to come forward and to explain why they wanted to be High commissioner for refugees.

So we had Sergio yeah some Jessen-Petersen wrote, and I think the Norwegian whose name escapes me there was a Norwegian candidate . And the rest didn't respond except there was of course the whole Kosovo crisis was going on. And Kouchner was special representative I think of the UN secretary general but in fact I think it was I'm sure it was Manisha because it was this conference in Kosovo and she went up to him at the end of the meeting you know to the to the podium and in her best French asked Kouchner said I'm from ICVA and have you seen this newsletter we're asking actually we have understood that you are a candidate for the High Commissioner for refugees we would like you to come forward. You know I think he only said one word not "it would be interesting Manisha", but "arrogant, extremely arrogant" like you know how dare you even ask me Kouchner.

As you know Lubbers came in all of that Lubbers has to resign so new process in 2005

what we had called for other than the candidates coming forward we had also called for a more transparent process.

You know with based on qualifications based on merit I mean so a publication of the qualifications and even also a publication of the names of people who would express their interest in the position

guess what all of that was part of the recruitment process the official one and then we thought oh *** there was nothing left to do anymore for us. How do we do this so you know that's still of course we wanted to come out with told back before the UN would publish the list of names so we have heard there were eight candidates April 2005 we had heard there were eight candidates we had seven names written to all of them and I couldn't find out the eighth one was. And then in fact again Soren Jessen- Petersen was candidate and I got a call from Soren he said I've heard this Portuguese. So I called the Portuguese mission and it was Thursday before Good Friday I called the Portuguese mission no no no we don't know we're no idea. Then on the Friday which was Good Friday here I thought actually maybe the Portuguese mission in New York knows so

I called the Portuguese mission in New York on that Friday. 10 minutes later I had Antonio Guetteres my cell phone.

He really wanted to publish his views as well which we published.

But the best part of it actually Bob is that years later I'm in an elevator in New York in UN building and guess who gets into the lift in the elevator Mark Malloch-Brown. Oh yeah Mark was at that moment Chef de cabinet of Kofi Annan, or deputy SG, no I think it Chef de cabinet still, and by the way there's I mean

but I said you probably don't know who I am so I introduced myself and said Mark listen there is always one questions I always wanted to ask you because I knew he was in charge of the recruitment. You know did you see our advocacy our messages in 2000 and did you actually therefore change the recruitment of the High Commissioner for Refugees I mean because in fact you basically did everything we asked for. And he said yes. So you know that for me it was a moment to be proud because it's the most concrete evidence I have of any advocacy that you know has a result has an impact. It really saw change, so you know they changed the rules on the basis of what we have said in 2000 I mean I thought that was a pretty you know stabbing example.

RW: yeah that's really a great a vignette. I really appreciate that

ES: The funny thing is I've always kept in touch since with Mark Malloch-Brown, and so you know that's been nice I mean

And there's one more that I like. which I think is also a good anecdote. Years later after my recruitment it goes back to the discussion should it be an executive director should it be a coordinator so the profile of the person and all that. I only heard that years later there was such a clash or such a discussion on the ICVA executive committee. Of course those who said you know it should be a coordinator and they had it their way so to speak

But the description that I got was you know we want somebody who's able to change the light bulbs in the office and to meet the High Commissioner on the same day.

Guess what, years later it wasn't changing the light bulbs but it was 2010 we had a farewell party in the office the night before. This was a Thursday night which of course had gone on maybe longer so you know we hadn't cleaned all the all the stuff. But the Friday morning at 9:00 or 9:30 the new head of UNICEF's emops, the head of emergencies for UNICEF, a pretty senior person, passed by to introduce himself and you know because of course you have explained I really want to meet with the NGO so then you go to a ICVA right. And of course, he wanted to come early he said we had already told him don't come too early because we have a party the night before and we probably need to do some cleaning but he needed to catch the plane the same morning for the direct flight to New York.

So I said OK well then come at 9:00 or 9:30 of course quarter to 9:00 or something before 9 at least guess who shows up. But then it happens that you know I was I was really vacuum cleaning I mean with the vacuum cleaner in my hands and so my colleague because you the ICVA office has multiple doors and of course he was exactly coming to the door where the meeting room was instead of the reception door although that's always a little confusing for people.

And so my colleague Rudiger opened the door, to see who it was. I stopped the vacuum cleaner and he said yeah yeah I'm here to see Ed Shenkenberg. So I put I put the vacuum cleaning thing down I said OK you know at muchto his surprise by my colleague I said to Ted yeah yeah I will look for Ed Shenkenberg. So what I did I went to my office, put on my jacket, so now here's Ed Shenkenberg. So

of course my colleague couldn't stop laughing, the UNICEF guy completely flabbergasted, why what had happened. The same guy who's you know vacuum cleaning, saying he is going to look for Ed Shenkenberg and comes back as Ed. So here I am all of this to say that description of having someone who can meet fairly quite senior people in the UN system or anyway you know government, and at same time you know who includes vacuum cleaning or the changing the light bulbs in his job description I'm perfectly fine with that description.

RW: OK that's a good example. My last question really is looking more to the future as you see ICVA today I'm sorry I'm sure you still have a pretty good idea of what they do and what were their activities are. But why do you think ICVA is still important today? And where are you will see them moving into the future whether it's the same direction or a different direction? How do you see ICVA for today and how do you see if ICVA in the future?

ES: yeah it's a very good question Bob and I appreciate you asking it except I would put in one caveat where you say or where you assume I still have a very good picture. To be honest I don't. In the sense that I read their newspaper or their monthly activity report I think that is what I get. I mean the person I have the most contact with is Jerome Elie, professional because I'm actually doing some UNHCR work and I'm particularly at the moment actually doing work with IOM funny enough on protection. By the way which I thought was never a good combination IOM and protection. To be honest also but again you know, no hard feelings from my side, I think we do interesting stuff. I know NGOs are asking and using our reports and looking at our website and you know reading my blogs and all of that and I'm invited to meetings.

I'm rarely or not invited to ICVA meetings fine you know again as I said no hard feelings. But it's the main reason that I don't really know at the moment what ICVA is doing. I mean I know they have a 10 year and new strategy I read that in the newsletter I haven't looked up the strategy.

I find it an extremely ambitious plan to have such a long, I mean there's nothing wrong with having a long perspective or vision, I think a strategy that for that many years when NGO network given all the changes going on, who would have thought two years ago there would be a pandemic now. I'm not saying that makes your strategy invalid because if you're into humanitarian your strategy should always allow for the Black Swan or something that you haven't seen so to speak. At the same time you know it read for what it means for me is that you know keep your strategy relatively 3-4 maybe five even then I find long but don't do anything longer or because you know obviously with something like the pandemic there are adjustments to be made.

So in that sense maybe also I haven't taken the don't have time to be honest because I have too much work at the moment but also maybe for that reason I thought you know I'm not sure if I should even look at that strategy I mean. . The funny thing is I'm also raising the strategy because last year particularly I worked where MSF on its strategy for the whole of MSF the whole network I did a review of their strategy I'm doing a strategy review at the moment of WFP. I'm working with IOM on their strategy which they don't have particularly not on protection. So you know I have a pretty strong engagement on protection on strategy issues I should say. I haven't really had the time and I haven't you know it's always so I mean don't get me wrong I really don't want blame any of them because it always two sides right. So in that sense I'm not answering your question really or maybe I am in some way but not directly in that sense.

Obviously there's a need for a network- Is ICVA different from the the ICVA I left, for sure. Is there a better or lesser ICVA? No not that I can you know that's certainly not my intention of saying. It's what the membership agrees on it you see what I mean. I gave certain direction in terms of a strong humanitarian focus also in terms of you know one that I thought is a little bit more on the advocacy if I compare where ICVA is now, I always find Jeff obviously you know Jeff Chris but I always find his

tweets quite challenging. There have been a number of tweets from him to ICVA "Where is ICVA?" To be honest I can say to you it puts a small a small smile on my face because at a few times he tweeted stuff that was part of the days when I was part of ICVA. For now I'm not saying Jeff has it right but somehow it makes me feel proud in the sense of at least we were looked at again, not that Jeff is the example or the way ICVA should be going. It fits with my idea that ICVA should be a little challenging. And challenging not just don't get me wrong on that challenging not just towards UNHCR, to the system, also and maybe even more so to its members.

RW: When you say challenging as you mean in their advocacy approaches or statements they make or combination?

ES: Part of that is advocacy, part of that is around NGO relevance. Are we doing the right thing? Sure climate change or for that matter a pandemic is what really and for that matter you know policy issues like human development actions and so on. But the main fundamental question is are we reaching the most vulnerable in what generally is being called the hard to reach areas, although I find that a misnomer, because when people who are really cut off from humanitarian aid are always in hard to reach areas otherwise you wouldn't have humanitarian aid, if you see what I mean, it would be something else. It's always asking that question "are we actually able to do or are we doing what we said we would do?" Instead of you know just adding a new comms. The humanitarian development Nexus there's nothing new about it. We should ask the question why is it still an issue rather than you know anything else I would say. But also let us really focus on what is it that only NGOs can and should do. And I think a lot of that in the NGO community is exactly making feel people a little uncomfortable rather than going with the mainstream.

RW: OK there's some really good ulcerations. I appreciate. well that's it from my side

ES: it's not to say that ICVA in my days was better or it's just to paint a little bit the picture in terms of the differences.

RW: I can see that yeah and you said this several times and I appreciate that. Any final comments or observations from your side before we finish?

ES: no I think it's great they're doing this. I think it's really important. I only realized I think it was much of it also after I left ICVA and you know at first in the early 60s NGO's didn't define themselves, course you've had NGOs already for a century, but the first international collaboration among NGOs was with ICVA. I think that's very very significant But then later of course with the specialization perhaps the professionalisation all of that, I think you have to have you're better off without actually because that's the mistake I'm not advocating for silos, I'm certainly advocating for you know crossover, but I think a network is better off by having a particular agenda rather than having a very broad agenda to in order to get everybody or keep everybody on board.

RW: I think I put that even in the paper about the how ICVA was created in the 60s and it was the first global humanitarian consortium. So it's a good point. So Ed thanks very much for your time. I really appreciate your time and your thoughts and good too much longer so maybe I'll maybe our paths will cross I'm not far I'm on the I'm on the French side across the border so not too far from you

ES: Have a look at our website here-geneva.org. I mean yeah it's it's

RW tell me again where it is ?

ES: Here-geneva.org

This conversation between Ed Shenkenberg and Robert White was recorded in September 2021.

Founded in 1962, ICVA (International Council of Voluntary Agencies) is a global network of over 140 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in 160 countries, operating at global, regional, national and local levels. Our mission is to make humanitarian action more principled and effective by working collectively and independently to influence policy and practice.

For more information about ICVA, and the history of ICVA visit [www. icvanetwork.org](http://www.icvanetwork.org).

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