



WORKING GROUP ON PROTECTION OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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Terms of Reference

Background

Violence against the humanitarian mission poses a critical challenge to the humanitarian community. Such violence includes deliberate attacks on aid workers, humanitarian convoys, or the bombing of health facilities, amongst others. These attacks endanger lives, violate international norms, and jeopardize the effective delivery of emergency assistance to populations in need. They also pose an acute operational dilemma between humanitarian organizations' ability to maintain access to populations in need, and to ensure the safety and security of their staff. Despite a reinforced security culture within humanitarian organizations, this violence continues to affect the delivery of principled humanitarian aid to civilians already made vulnerable by conflicts, disasters or extreme poverty. While humanitarian organizations find operational means of adapting, these responses often fail to address the overall deteriorating environment for humanitarian action, or the prevailing impunity for such violations, which implicate many types of actors. In view of this situation, operational NGOs, research institutions and humanitarian partners have come together in a Working Group on the Protection of Humanitarian Action (WG).

Goal of the Working Group

The Working Group for the Protection of Humanitarian Action aims to mobilize a community of practice and foster cooperation - through information sharing, fostering research and advocacy - towards a more protective environment for the provision of humanitarian aid to civilians.



Specific Objectives

1. Mobilize a community of practice towards a more protective environment for the humanitarian mission, including by mapping and engaging with other relevant actors/groups and developing new initiatives;
2. Encourage information sharing and professional exchange related to the objectives of the WG, both within the WG and with the broader community;
3. Foster and orient ongoing research of relevance to the protection of humanitarian action, in order to contribute to the state of knowledge about violence against the humanitarian mission (including about the causes; the enabling context of violence; and legal, policy and operational challenges and responses);
4. Act as a platform for advocacy and outreach efforts, by sharing information about ongoing or potential initiatives and opportunities, and engaging with other relevant organisations/groups.

Functioning and Tools of the Working Group

1. The group is composed of Members and Observers;
2. The group is co-lead by the Advanced Training Program on Humanitarian Action (ATHA) of the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, and Action Against Hunger (ACF), but members and observers are encouraged to be pro-active in the group and to use the Working Group as a platform for information sharing and cooperation;
3. The group meets every trimester, with either online conference calls or in-person meetings (in selected regions / field locations);
4. Ad hoc meetings/calls can be proposed by Members of the WG when necessary;
5. Active mailing list of members and observers of the group;
6. Online platform available (closed, hosted by ATHA) to members for sharing updates, materials and opportunities related to the mandate of the Working Group;
7. Opt-in system for initiatives proposed by Members or Observers of the Working Group (examples of activities include participation in research, articles, public discussions, conference presentations, podcasts, development of trainings, campaigns, joint events/letters, etc.).

What is expected of members and observers

1. Participate (or send senior representation) in WG in-person meetings (planned 2 per year) and calls (planned every 3 months);
2. Share information on substantive developments, findings, activities and opportunities related to the mandate and goals of the WG;
3. When relevant, propose complementary or joint initiatives to the members and observers of the group;
4. Review and consider participating in actions proposed by members and observers of the Working Group.



Protecting Humanitarian Action from Violence: Terminology and Scope of Advocacy

Purpose

Taking place in a context of “normalization” of the use of civilians in conflicts settings, violence against humanitarian action is a particularly serious manifestation of denial or hindrance of humanitarian access and assistance to populations in need and an overall erosion of respect for international humanitarian law (IHL). Such violence endangers lives, violates protections for civilians, including aid workers, under IHL, and jeopardizes aid provision where it is needed most.

The purpose of this document is to clarify the definition of terms used by the Working Group (WG), and the implications of the scope of these definitions for the WG’s focus and action. These terms include:

- I. “Violence against humanitarian action”
- II. “Protection”

Background

Humanitarian actors are often subject to violence in their areas of intervention, especially when operating in highly insecure environments such as conflict zones or areas of fragile governance. While the causes for violence against humanitarian action are often diverse and intertwined, humanitarian organizations note an increase in targeted violence against humanitarian action, either towards recipients of aid or against the organizations delivering this assistance. Their humanitarian mandates and logos are less and less considered a protection, but on the contrary are seen as making humanitarians and their operations the targets of violence in some settings.

This document was produced by members of the Working Group on Protection of Humanitarian Action, an initiative organized by Action Against Hunger (Action contre la Faim) and the Advanced Training Program on Humanitarian Action (ATHA) at Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI). The Working Group aims to mobilize a community of practice and foster cooperation – through peer-to-peer professional exchange and information sharing, fostering research and advocacy – towards a more protective environment for the provision of humanitarian aid to civilians.

I. “Violence against Humanitarian Action”

What types of acts are we talking about?

In the context of this Working Group, “violence against humanitarian action” refer to acts of violence or incitement to violence against the humanitarian mission, or humanitarian organizations’ personnel, facilities, assets and activities which appear to be:

- deliberately or intentionally targeted against humanitarians;
- deliberately or intentionally designed to affect or prevent humanitarian activities aimed at saving lives, alleviating human suffering and maintaining human dignity;
- caused by a lack of discrimination or proportionality in targeting, recklessness or a failure to exercise precaution, or which otherwise appear to violate international humanitarian law (IHL).

Examples

- A few examples of such violence include: murder, rape and sexual assault, armed robbery, abduction, hostage-taking, kidnapping, bombing, shooting, harassment and illegal arrest and detention, as well as attacks on humanitarian convoys or acts of destruction and looting of their assets.
- A few examples of types of humanitarian actors include: national and international staff of local and international NGOs and the UN; first responders; healthcare providers.

Factors contributing to a permissive environment for such violence

- Failure to challenge the culture of impunity for violence against humanitarian action
- Failure to adequately and credibly investigate acts of violence and prosecute perpetrators
- Failure to condemn such violence on the part of duty bearers
- Unclear or expanded interpretation of the acceptable scope of “collateral damage”
- Failure to impose disciplinary measures
- Delegitimization of humanitarian actors or denial of the humanitarian nature of their work
- Arbitrary denial of permission for humanitarian actors to operate
- Failure to prevent violence (e.g. through training of arms bearers or precautionary measures)

II. “PROTECTION”

What kind of protection are we talking about?

In the context of this Working Group, “protection” refers to:

- **Within legal frameworks:** Measures in accordance with the obligations of parties under IHL, IHRL and other applicable legal frameworks, including to respect and protect civilians and humanitarian relief operations; to observe distinction and proportionality in targeting; and to take sufficient precautionary measures to avoid excessive harm.
- **Within other policies:** the policies and practices which contribute to addressing the phenomenon of violence against humanitarian action, including by fighting impunity at the global and local level;
- **Within advocacy-related efforts:** Efforts pursued to ensure that the rights of humanitarian actors and the obligations of duty bearers under international law are understood, respected, protected and fulfilled.

In this context, the protection of humanitarian action is seen as a part of the broader aim of the protection of civilians. It seeks to better enable humanitarian action and an environment that is respectful of legal and other humanitarian norms such that civilians may realize their full rights, including by receiving life-saving aid.

III. What types of measures do we expect to see in practice?

States and all parties to conflict should:

- Respect their obligations under international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL);
- Take measures to prevent violence against humanitarian action;
- Ensure perpetrators of violent acts are held accountable;
- Ensure respect for IHL and IHRL by other States and parties.

In particular, States and parties to conflict responsible for acts of violence against humanitarian action should:

- In case of assaults, acknowledge such acts, recognize their responsibility for gross negligence/advertent negligence, issue a formal apology and guarantees of non-recurrence;
- Hold those responsible accountable, whether military members or public officials, e.g. through criminal or disciplinary measures;
- Institute new practices or safeguards to prevent recurrence;
- Provide compensation to the victims.

Humanitarian organizations should engage in the following measures in response to attacks:

- Documenting and sharing information about violence against humanitarian action;
- Speaking out against such violence and its perpetrators;



- Challenging impunity by triggering investigations, prosecution and changes in policy and practice.

Conclusion

Violence against humanitarian action, and the widespread failure to protect civilians by preventing such acts, is one among many manifestations of an overall erosion of respect for IHL and degradation of the environment for humanitarian action in a variety of contexts around the globe. Ultimately, the aim of protecting humanitarian action is to enable the protection of civilians, who are not only subject to increasingly protracted conflicts, but are also deliberately barred or effectively hindered from receiving life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection.



First meeting Working Group on Protection of Humanitarian Action: Geneva, 29 September 2016 – Summary Note

Acts of violence affecting the delivery of aid are frequent in humanitarian settings, such as recently in South Sudan, Syria, Yemen or Afghanistan. They include physical attacks on aid workers, bombing of health facilities, attacks of humanitarian convoys, but also numerous lower profile incidents, less spoken of, affecting local or international staff, including threats, kidnappings, and robberies. Humanitarian organizations and practitioners in the field face mounting tensions between their ability to maintain access to populations in need, and to ensure the safety and security of their staff in a context of complex and protracted conflicts.

While humanitarian organizations find practical, field-based ways to “cope” with such contexts, these adaptations fail to address the overall deteriorating environment for humanitarian action in conflict settings. Speaking out against attackers is often very sensitive for all concerned actors, especially when individual victims and operations are at risk on the ground. In the absence of effective means or mechanisms of law enforcement, impunity characterizes the follow up of such incidents at the national and international levels. Hence the feeling often expressed by practitioners of “a new normal”.

In view of this situation, ATHA, as part of its work done to build operational capacity, facilitate learning across organizations in the humanitarian sector, and to mobilize change through communities of practice, and Action Contre la Faim (ACF), as part of its broader campaign for the protection of aid workers, have partnered to bring together practitioners to address the issue of the lack of protection of aid workers.

This note serves to summarize the key points from the first meeting of this Working Group on the Protection of Humanitarian Action, which was held in Geneva, Switzerland on 29 September 2016 at the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. The meeting aimed to foster a community of concern engaged in discussing and developing new and collaborative approaches to address these issues, where traditional approaches to humanitarian operations, international humanitarian law, access, and proximity to vulnerable populations are being challenged. Intended as the pilot for the development of a longer term Working Group, this meeting was convened to discuss this supposedly “new normal” and encourage peer dialogue and reflections on current professional challenges around the protection of humanitarian action, with the aim of facilitating a more protected and respected environment for the delivery of principled humanitarian aid to populations in need, including through the exploration of concrete measures to encourage greater compliance with the law and respect for humanitarian action among States and in international fora. The 17 participants of the meeting were senior professionals working for operational and research NGOs, coordination agencies and research institutions.

I- ATHA Policy Note

ATHA developed a policy note based on background research and interviews with experts and practitioners, including many members of the Working Group. The Note, which outlines key dilemmas and challenges around the protection of aid delivery, was presented and discussed during the meeting (available [here](#)). Here are a few highlights:

- a) Difficulties in defining the terms and scope of the problem:

- Diversity of actors involved in and around humanitarian assistance – who should be protected when assistance is not only delivered by neutral actors, but also by Governments, warring parties, political and religious groups or development actors?
 - Growing number of conflicts and people in need of humanitarian assistance, coupled with an increase of security incidents and access problems, which tends to “re-victimize” already affected civilians by denying them access to aid – how to quantify whether the number of incidents is growing disproportionately and is such a comparison relevant?
 - Debates between the protection of humanitarian aid workers and the protection of civilian populations – **should humanitarian aid workers be considered as part of the civilian populations they serve, or are they in need of special protection by virtue of their unique role? Should advocacy efforts focus on the protection of humanitarians, or civilians more broadly?**
- b) Tensions between individual and collective action: interplay between the collective nature of insecurity and of the deteriorating environment for the entire humanitarian community, versus the tendency toward insularity in security management, response to incidents and related advocacy.
- c) The need to further explore motives and incentives underlying attacks against humanitarian actors: violence affecting aid delivery occurs in some circumstances, and not in others. While one can at times blame attacks on a misunderstanding of humanitarian actors’ mission and identity, many attacks are also carried out by actors who understand very well what humanitarians do and who they are. Motives can be about taking a political stance against certain values or actors. However, motives are not always strategic, and may be criminal or economical – **why is aid under attack, and how can we understand perpetrators’ motives and chance incentives instead of only adapting/submitting to this “new normal”?**
- d) Demystifying the role of the principles in ‘protecting’ humanitarian actors: the need to disentangle external explanations of insecurity (changing conflict environments, erosion of respect for IHL, militarization, perceptions by non-state armed groups) from internal explanations (nature of humanitarian operations, behaviors and perceptions in the field).
- e) Legal protection and impunity: widespread impunity for violence against aid delivery, despite clear prohibitions under international law, especially for Red Cross/Red Crescent affiliates, health workers and UN staff – **how do we enforce existing legal protections and apply them to all humanitarian workers?**
- f) Reluctance to speak out and advocacy challenges: repeated condemnation of attacks remain ineffective, while some incidents are dealt with in silence; need to weigh the risks and rewards of advocacy, and the cost of silence. The humanitarian community expresses frustration over the lack of more impactful joint messaging to bring about higher level policy and practice change, especially when incidents happen.

II- “Breaking the silos”

- a) Growing tension between enabling programming and keeping staff safe and secure: Although the majority of incidents occur in just a few countries, **is the global attitude of humanitarians toward acceptable risks changing, and are we becoming risk-averse?**
- b) Silos needs to be broken between security personnel and policy, advocacy and protection experts: While security personnel from various organizations, often with a military



background, share information, the rest of the humanitarian community lack sufficient access to the information or do not seek that information because “security is somebody else’s problem”. On the other end, those knowledgeable about IHL are typically policy and protection people, who are not included in the protection of humanitarian personnel or the follow up of incidents. Focusing on the protection of civilians, they should also have the protection of humanitarian action in their portfolio, which would help prevention, and the creation of a more enabling environment for aid delivery. It could also help trigger legal proceedings following incidents – **how can we protect people affected by conflict, if we do not prioritize the protection of our own staff at all organizational levels?**

- c) Implementing IHL for all: International humanitarian law (IHL) clearly prohibits attacks against humanitarian aid workers, yet perpetrators of such attacks have enjoyed widespread impunity in practice. Additionally, while some categories of aid workers are granted special protection – namely Red Cross/Red Crescent affiliates, health workers and facilities, and (by Convention) UN staff – most receive general civilian protection under the law. In the aftermath of incidents, attention is generally focused on the immediate crisis management, not on justice and fighting impunity, which results in a situation where perpetrators are not held accountable for violations of IHL. There is therefore a need to explore options for using domestic and international legal systems to pursue accountability for perpetrators of attacks against aid workers. The complexities inherent in seeking accountability for IHL violations (especially in contexts with weak legal mechanisms) make it difficult to pursue justice, given also that the legal and political implications of doing so make it difficult to persevere. This is especially the case for organizations that are neither States, nor the ICRC (though even they face great difficulties). Rather than falling into a “someone else’s problem” mindset, participants expressed that international humanitarian law is everybody’s problem, especially for those first affected by attacks in their everyday work.

III- “Demystifying humanitarian principles”

- a) Understanding the principles in a new environment: As the security environment became more critical after 2001, there was a tendency in some organizations to radicalize the use of principles, as a protection mechanism. However, being principled is not a security measure. **Humanity** and **impartiality** are substantive principles and values, not tools for access or security concepts. **Neutrality** and **independence** can be more readily used as operational tools, but neutrality can also be problematic. Sometimes, attacks occur because humanitarians are neutral (i.e. providing aid to the other side). Other times, humanitarians are attacked because of something happening on the other end of the globe. Perceptions of humanitarians’ role and identity sometimes have little to do with their behavior in the field where attacks occur, but can largely be influenced by the world’s politics. When incidents occur, or when access is denied, it may be hard to distinguish between external and internal causes, or local and global decisions as contributing to violent incidents. Incentives for not attacking humanitarian actors should be highlighted and leveraged.
- b) The challenges to apply humanitarian principles in protracted crises: While humanitarian action was traditionally conceived as immediate and life-saving, noting the complexity and protracted nature of many conflicts today, it is now more politically transformative, which multiplies the risks. Additionally, various organizational mandates, and multi-mandate organizations, sometimes make it difficult to determine the line between humanitarian and development work, which has implications for the application of the humanitarian principles. Many religious or diaspora NGOs have no interest in being impartial as they were set up to support specific communities. In other cases, attacks occur because humanitarian action is



seen as countering the interests of belligerents, who consider humanitarian actors as parties to the conflict.

- c) Beyond humanitarian principles – mainstreaming a security culture: In today’s context, security is not just a technical issue delegated to technical experts, but needs to be integrated into contextual analysis and program planning. Humanitarians need to mainstream a security culture in their organizations, from the leadership level on down, with a focus on accountability. In the field it translates into being able to respect rules, but also understanding the challenges for potential perpetrators. Acknowledging humanitarian actors are part of a given conflict eco-system is important, especially as conflicts today are about values, which humanitarians can become associated with. New analyses, and sometimes new programmatic solutions (including through new technologies) are necessary to access people in need.

IV- A call for collective advocacy

- a) Costs and effects of advocacy: Action Contre la Faim (ACF) presented their experience pursuing advocacy and accountability for the massacre of their staff in Muttur, Sri Lanka, 10 years ago. They described shifts in organizational decision making within the organization around how to pursue accountability, how or whether to engage in domestic and international advocacy, and when to leave the country. They noted that the criteria for considering engagement in advocacy are **relevance, opportunity, added value, and capacity**, and explained how their experience with the Muttur case led them to pursue the Protect Aid Workers (PAW) campaign globally. Exploring the risks for organizations of speaking out after attacks shows immediate risks for individual victims, beneficiaries, local staff, partners, possibility of lawsuits, harassment or kidnappings. Yet the risks of “silence”, impunity and accepting “the new normal” are of a longer term nature and include a loss of faith from humanitarian staff, partners and beneficiaries, who no longer feel protected by their organization and the humanitarian system. This also has consequences for potential perpetrators of violent acts and has a terrible impact on the rise of impunity and the erosion of IHL – if international norms are not persuasive, **how do we change the incentives to deter potential perpetrators from attacking humanitarian action?**
- b) Need for collective and innovative engagement: There was a large call for concrete action to change the global environment, within the working group and during the various preparatory meetings and interviews. The idea of creating a community of practice and further engagement in advocacy to influence positive changes was considered highly pertinent, with several proposed ways for the group to have a valuable contribution in complementarity with existing mechanisms. Gathering various types of personnel in their respective organisations (security, policy, programming, coordination, legal, and advocacy), the group can be helpful in overcoming the ‘siloeing’ of security actors from others. There was a proposal to design a methodology for decision makers to address the tension between advocacy and security following attacks, and to complement the technical aspects of security. It was also proposed to examine alternative methods and means of access through the lens of protecting aid delivery on the global level. A recurring theme was that operating environments are changing, and that humanitarians must adapt as well, not only through security “fixes” but also with stronger analysis and innovative methods to understand contexts and to then influence positive changes in the eco-system.



- c) Proposed activities: Participants proposed a number of potential measures which could be of value to address the problem, including:
- **Training** – the development of trainings for humanitarian practitioners on IHL, humanitarian principles, negotiation
 - **The creation of new platforms for information sharing** – (e.g. mailing list, microsite, blogs), where practitioners and experts could share ideas, research questions, publications, events and information on current initiatives. However, this should not duplicate existing platforms.
 - **Research topics** – data collection and analysis (collective analysis of trends); defining the terminology (defining ‘humanitarian action’, ‘protection’); incentives for violence against or the protection of humanitarian actors (e.g. for states, armed groups); future trends and contexts (adaptation/transformation); the role of leadership in operations and protection, the implications of changing operating environments for security; the implications of militarization of the humanitarian action; the humanitarian impact of different types of weapons used; the effectiveness of alternative or unconventional security and advocacy strategies.
 - **Outreach** – to avoid isolation and build the community of practice, it is seen as important to reach out to other actors (including other humanitarian actors in the field, as well as Member States, donors, militaries, private security companies, intelligence services, and armed groups)
 - **Advocacy and Policy** – participants expressed the desire for more effective collective advocacy, but also to keep internal the decisions about how to manage individual incidents, whether to speak out, etc. Proposals to strengthen individual and collective communication and advocacy around this issue, and to build common messages between organizations, included:
 - Creating a system for follow up on violations, investigation and reporting, e.g. through an annual report of violations, cases and trend analysis;
 - Naming a “rapporteur” on protection of humanitarian action to represent the group/civil society during high level meeting and decision making spaces;
 - Creating a global compact on humanitarian values (humanitarian principles), with reference to the legal framework (IHL, IHRL and others), with an action plan.

V- Next steps

In light of the discussions summarized above, this first meeting of the Working Group thereby served to convene practitioners and experts to bring high-level dialogue on operational, policy, legal and advocacy challenges of the protection of humanitarian action. This professional exchange served to highlight key tensions and challenges facing humanitarian actors in insecure environments. It also served to identify needs for further exchange of information and perspectives of joint advocacy, further training and professional development opportunities, and research.

As an immediate next step, ATHA and ACF hereby share the summary of the workshop, and propose the organization of a follow-up **virtual meeting** (via skype/web-conferencing) in **November 2016**. The purpose of this meeting will be to:

- Define the roles and mandate of the Working Group;
- Identify key themes of focus and proposed activities for 2017, including advocacy opportunities and targets as well as possible areas of cooperation or complementarity between our agencies, guided by practitioners in the Working Group and supported by ATHA research and training;
- Discuss other opportunities for engagement, including future in-person gatherings.



Second Meeting Working Group on Protection of Humanitarian Action: December 13, 2016 (conference call) – Summary Note

BACKGROUND

This note summarizes the 2nd meeting of the Working Group on Protection of Humanitarian Action (WG), which was held via conference call on 13 December 2016. The agenda of this meeting was to:

1. Finalize the role and mandate of the Working Group, based in the ToR (see Annex I);
2. Share updates from Members of the group on current initiatives, findings, campaigns and other information relevant to the group (see Annex III);
3. Identify and discuss key themes of focus and proposed activities for 2017, including complementary or common objectives and avenues for supporting research and advocacy;
4. Identify advocacy opportunities and targets;
5. Discuss other proposed activities and opportunities for engagement, including future in-person gatherings and internal information sharing.

The 2nd meeting aimed to move beyond a discussion on the many challenges & tensions relating to the protection of humanitarian action, as discussed at the 1st meeting of the WG, held in Geneva on 29 September 2016, to determine how the group can best work together to support individual and joint initiatives.

1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Based on comments and suggestions made before and during the call, the Terms of Reference were updated.

2. **UPDATES** from members are available in Annex of this summary.

3. PROPOSED ACTIVITIES FOR 2017

The WG discussed proposed activities for 2017, including complementary or common objectives and avenues for supporting research and advocacy. These include activities proposed for the group, or where group members can participate, as further elaborated below.

KEY POINTS

Defining the terms – A number of members raised questions about the definition of terms being used by the WG, and the implications of the scope of these definitions for the WG’s focus and action. These terms included:

- “Violence” (against humanitarian action) – whether to focus primarily on direct or deliberate violent attacks against humanitarians, or to more broadly include actions which result in access restrictions or denial (e.g. denials of visas). The response was to focus primarily on acts of violence targeting humanitarian action (e.g. bombings, shootings, kidnappings).
- “Protection” (of humanitarian action) – whether this refers to legal, programmatic, or physical protection. The response was to focus on policies that enable humanitarian action, as well as an environment that is respectful of legal and other humanitarian norms.
- “Humanitarian action” – the primary debate here is over the inclusion of local NGOs or healthcare workers, which may not fit the traditional definition of principled humanitarian action. The response was to recognize different types of actors, but to have an inclusive definition which encompasses what we commonly understand to be humanitarian action, while avoiding the use of specific legal categories (e.g. impartial humanitarian actor).
- “Protection of humanitarian action” and “protection of civilians”: working on the protection of humanitarian action is seen as a part of working on the protection of civilians, rather than in contrast to it, as one of many angles that need addressing.

→ Action Point: WG to develop definitions.

Understanding motives/incentives for perpetrators of attacks, as well as **disincentives** that we could push forward (“increase cost of attacks for perpetrators”)

→ Action Point: WG to foster research, dialogue and analysis to better understand motives/incentives.

Overcome the silos between organizations and within organizations (e.g. across departments of security, legal, policy, operational, etc.)

→ Action Point: WG to foster information sharing and professional exchange across organizations, departments and functional areas.

Support advocacy efforts and decision-making over speaking out following attacks: tensions over how to speak out and how to engage in advocacy that is most effective, e.g. risks and rewards of advocacy; how to protect field staff and individuals affected by violence; how to condemn attacks and still protect staff. Similarly, members expressed that the activities of the WG should help to take some of the pressure off staff at the field level by better addressing protection concerns across organizations.

→ Action Point: WG to develop resources on possible strategies and messages following an attack.

Connecting with field / local actors – Considering that most current WG members work at the headquarters level in Europe and North America, members highlighted the need to connect with field and local actors. This is critical considering the objective of the WG to strengthen protection and reduce tensions in the field, which needs to account for the specific challenges, perspectives and communications of field actors, which may differ from HQ.

→ Action Point: WG to solicit input and participation from key actors in the field, and consider key field locations for activities.



Information sharing and exchange

A number of members reiterated the need for greater information sharing and professional exchange on this topic, which should be a key contribution of this WG. They expressed the desire to share questions, challenges and ideas with other experienced members of the community of concern, in order to have an informal sounding board beyond their own organizations. This could be useful e.g. to reassure members that some of the difficult discussions happening within their organizations are also happening elsewhere, thereby providing them with potential allies or support. Greater information sharing can be accomplished through the WG via:

- Regular meetings of the WG (virtual and on-site)
- Ad hoc discussions – convened to address specific issues, questions, events or developments (e.g. in the case of an attack)
- More formalized mechanisms for sharing updates, ideas, outputs and opportunities

Research

The WG can serve an important function in helping to foster and advance research relating to the protection of humanitarian action. Members saw a role for the group in:

- Landscaping / mapping of existing work and knowledge to avoid duplication (including scoping particular contexts)
- Fostering and advising on the development of research to build the evidence base relevant to the protection of humanitarian action;
- Participate in ongoing research activities and the dissemination of research findings (e.g. literature reviews, reading lists, briefing packs, policy analysis)
- Elaborating a theory of change (e.g. What might make attacks stop/reduce? If we do 'X', will it reduce the chances of 'Y'?)

Research is seen as especially needed given the number of knowledge gaps identified in the first meeting, e.g. on:

- Motives and incentives / disincentives to attacking humanitarians
- Assessing alternative / unconventional security strategies
- Assessing means of raising the costs of violations (political, legal, diplomatic, financial)
- Assessing preventative methods, e.g. on sexual violence

Advocacy and Mobilization

Members also expressed that the WG can contribute to raising awareness of the issue and bringing about change through outreach, mobilization and advocacy initiatives, e.g. through:

- Awareness raising and advocacy initiatives, by some or all members and observers of the WG (with opt-in on a case by case basis)
- Substantive discussions in the WG on identified themes among subgroups
- Organizing public events, lectures, panel discussions, conference presentations, including with other types of actors such as states, militaries, NSAGs, etc.
- Participation in the drafting of articles, op-eds, blogs, etc.



- Participation in an ATHA Podcast series (e.g. on speaking out; on motives and incentives)
- The development of professional tools
 - Resources on methodology / strategic options for decision makers to address the tension between advocacy and security/protection following attacks, including common messages that could be used by organizations in the aftermath of attacks
- Reaching and involving the field / local level
 - Connect to local initiatives / NGO fora / consortia (e.g. S Sudan NGO forum, Saving Lives Together initiative (bridge gap between HQ and field))
- Connect with other types of actors, such a human rights actors (e.g. link with Human Rights Up Front)

4. IDENTIFY ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES AND TARGETS

- Few opportunities materialize at the high level for these discussions; as a result, there is a need to look for smaller discussions, panels, etc., in order to build momentum.
- How to leverage public opinion surveys showing that understanding of IHL is much greater in conflict-affected countries (see [ICRC study](#))?
- InterAction is submitting questions to incoming US administration officials during nomination procedures, and welcomes input.

5. DISCUSS OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

In response to the identified need for eased information sharing and exchange, the creation of a **mailing list** and an **online platform** (managed by ATHA) were agreed upon. Participants saw value in such a platform, and expressed the desire for a closed platform (password protected) for exchange among the WG, including around questions, internal debates, updates, materials, reflections on new developments, planning joint activities, and opportunities for engagement related to the objectives of the WG:

- In order to reach across silos: avoid parallel / closed sharing, and make use of and connect to existing platforms / websites
- Place for sharing updates, reflections, conversations (e.g. after S. Sudan attacks), e.g. on how to balance perceived risk v. actual risk, which could help organizations to make more robust decisions (including by seeing others addressing these challenges as well).

NEXT STEPS

- Creation of mailing list
- Creation of online platform
- Small group of interested Members to develop definitions
- Small group of interested Members to develop a guide on possible strategies and messages following an attack
- The next meeting will take place in about three months by conference call.



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