

WORKBOOK ON SECURITY: PRACTICAL STEPS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“I used to think security planning was only for those human rights defenders who weren’t brave enough to face the risks. Now I realise that doing this planning makes you stronger and more effective.”
HRD, Africa

This Chapter introduces Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and some of the risks faced by defenders. It gives a brief overview of steps for producing a security plan, and gives the definitions of security, protection and safety we will use in this Workbook. At the end there is a short exercise for you to do in relation to your own security.

Welcome

Welcome to the Workbook on Security: Practical Steps for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) at Risk.

HRDs are those who work non-violently on behalf of others for any or all of the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This includes those who work for civil and political rights, social, economic, environmental and cultural rights, and the right to equality, such as those working for women’s rights and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) rights.

Some examples of HRDs are: a group running a legal aid clinic; an organisation which documents torture (including rape) and assists the survivors; those working for the rights of disadvantaged communities such as women or bonded labour; anti-corruption activists; workers at women’s shelters; indigenous leaders advocating for the rights of their communities; protesters against environmental damage; those working for the right to express sexual identity and orientation. Sometimes these HRDs have been victims themselves and then begin working for others, for example a wife whose husband has disappeared who organises other family members to work to bring the perpetrators of disappearances to justice. Sometimes HRDs work in human rights organisations, sometimes they work alone.

HRDs all over the world may face risks because of the work that they do. These risks may include assault, torture – including sexual torture, imprisonment, and even assassination. The perpetrators may be military or police officers or their intelligence operatives, multi-national corporations, armed opposition groups, local militia, local criminals hired by others, conservative religious groups, community members, or even members of the families of HRDs.

Whatever the risks, whoever the perpetrators, wherever the danger arises, there are ways to reduce the threats and mitigate the impact of any attack.

“We mapped all the resources available to us in the NGO arena – the legal aid clinics, independent media, psychological support... Now we know who we can call on when we need help.”
HRD, Eastern Europe

Steps to producing a security plan

This Workbook has been inspired by the hundreds of HRDs from over 50 countries who have attended Front Line’s workshops on security and protection. These HRDs have been able to continue their work because they have taken steps to manage their security. They have assessed their situation in a systematic way and developed strategies and tactics which best suit their unique environment. The Workbook is based on the *Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders*¹, discussions with security specialists, and the contributions from workshop participants and other HRDs on-the-ground in difficult environments who have discussed risks with us and shared their survival strategies.

1. “Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders”, Enrique Eguren/PBI BEO, published by Front Line 2005 and available on the Front Line website www.frontlinedefenders.org

The Workbook takes you through the steps to producing a security plan – for yourself and for your organisation (for those HRDs who are working in organisations). It follows a systematic approach for assessing your security situation and developing risk and vulnerability reduction strategies and tactics.

The steps include:

- Context analysis
- Assessing risk
- Analysing threats
- Producing security plans
- Implementing and reviewing plans

We know from working with HRDs in countries around the world that there is usually a very high workload and limited resources. Steps to manage security can sometimes be put to one side because there never seems to be enough time, or because HRDs think they must consider the people they work for rather than themselves. However, HRDs who have invested time and energy in developing the capacity to manage their security tell us that it is worth it, both because it can reduce the threat of human rights work being disrupted by a security incident and because it reduces stress and assists people to be more effective in their work.

We have included a chapter on stress and wellbeing in the Workbook. This is because HRDs tell us that they experience huge amounts of stress due to many factors, including workload, expectations, threats, and traumatic experiences. Being stressed can considerably reduce your ability to be secure and lead to burnout. We hope this chapter will help you to manage your stress better.

“If a HRD is targeted, we mobilise all the other human rights activists in the country to develop a web of support. Anyone who meets an international visitor or other influential person talks about this person at risk. This raises their profile enormously, and reduces their vulnerability.”

HRD, Eastern Europe

Going through this Workbook will take some time, but it is not meant to be a theoretical piece of work. It is designed to raise your awareness about security issues and to help you consider how to mitigate threats.

Along the way we have included examples of simple tactics that HRDs have used to make themselves more secure. We hope these examples – whilst not necessarily being directly relevant to your own unique situation – will inspire you to think creatively about how to reduce the risks you face so that you can continue the essential work you do in the safest possible way.

“Is security an absence of risk? Or being able to manage risk? Obviously by choosing to be a HRD working for the rights of other people, individuals and organisations have taken on certain risks. These will vary from country to country and context to context and will vary over time. Defenders have an obligation to themselves and the communities on whose behalf they work to pay attention to security. It is not a question of being self-interested but of ensuring the continuation of the work on behalf of others. It is about caring for the victims even more. “It is not a luxury, it is a necessity.” HRD, Europe

Important notes

No book can **tell** you how to make yourself secure. Advice is rarely applicable to all the HRDs under threat all over the world. Different circumstances require different responses, and the same circumstances involving different people also may require varied strategies. While there are examples and check lists in this Workbook, they are included for illustration and to stimulate your own ideas about what is required to improve your security, and are not intended in any way as blueprints.

Security management is partly about setting up procedures. But procedures will only be effective if they are an appropriate response to the risks you face. The challenge, therefore, is to identify correctly the threats and vulnerabilities in your environment at any given time and supplement this assessment by constant situational awareness.

As different people face different risks, it is important for you to consider which of your personal attributes may make you more vulnerable to risks. In most societies women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI) HRDs face additional risks because of who they are and how they express themselves. In this Workbook issues of identity and orientation are integrated, rather than dealt with in separate sections.

Although technology brings many benefits to HRDs (easy communication by mobile phone, fast dissemination of information through email, networking through social networks etc) it also brings the risk of surveillance and interference by those opposed to your work. This Workbook is not intended to be a technical guide to digital security – for this we refer you to *Security in-a-box*, *Tactical Technology Collective & Front Line* - <https://security.ngoinabox.org/> and Mobile in-a-box <http://mobiles.tacticaltech.org/>



Security-in-a-box

However, you will find some basic advice in two of the appendices – Appendix 14 on Computer and Phone security and Appendix 15 on Surveillance technology and methodology.

The examples used in this Workbook are anonymous for reasons of privacy and security – the names have been changed and in some circumstances the experiences of more than one HRD have been amalgamated.

Definitions

This Workbook is focussed on HRDs and the measures that can be taken to enhance their personal and organisational security. HRDs also need to be concerned about the safety and security of the people they work for and with (clients, witnesses etc), and many of the security measures identified here will benefit them too.

The Workbook deals with:

Security: freedom from risk or harm resulting from violence or other intentional acts

and

Protection: measures taken by HRDs or other actors to enhance security

It does not aim to deal comprehensively with:

Safety: freedom from risk or harm as a result of unintentional acts (accidents, natural phenomena, illness).

However, it is worthwhile to spend some time considering which threats to your safety are high risk because of your environment, work practices or lifestyle, and require risk mitigation action on your part. (Note that people are more likely to underestimate the dangers of common risks, eg vehicle accidents, and overestimate the less common risks, such as flying.)



Activity: Considering your own security situation

We hope this Introduction has stimulated your thinking about your security situation. On the following pages you may wish to list your initial thoughts about the factors which make you feel more secure and the factors which make you feel less secure. (Some people may prefer to draw or map these factors.)

“After assessing our overall security and safety, we realised a big threat was the location of our office, which is in the path of an avalanche. We decided to move.”

HRD, Asia

“Vehicle accidents are very common in our country. We made a rule that staff should not drive in the dark except in extreme circumstances.”

HRD, Africa

This information can be used when you are drawing up a personal security plan.

Note: All the exercises you fill in with personal details in this Workbook are on sheets which can be torn out of this publication, which you may want to keep in a separate, safe place.



"WHAT FACTORS MAKE ME FEEL SECURE?"

ACTIVITY





"WHAT FACTORS MAKE ME FEEL INSECURE?"

ACTIVITY



