

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



APPENDIX 11

Check list: Travelling to rural areas (for research etc)

This check list is not intended to be a blueprint for security. Your own context is the key determining factor. Consider the risks and threats you face, and any vulnerabilities you have in order to supplement and personalise this list.

When you travel away from your home area you are more vulnerable because of lack of knowledge about your environment. This vulnerability is compounded if you travel for the purpose of a research mission on a sensitive topic and are meeting witnesses etc.

- If this is a trip with risks, start planning in good time
- Find out exactly what the risks are and how to minimise them. (Consider: Do the benefits outweigh the risks? Are you willing to accept the risks? Do you need to go or can someone else do the task required more safely?)
- Consider the safest mode of travel and the safest route
- Consider the advantages of having accommodation in a place some distance away from your final destination (so you can go there and back relatively quickly and be out of that immediate area by the time your visit becomes known to any potential perpetrators)
- Have at least one trusted contact at the destination. Check before you go and when you arrive what are the current risks.
- Do not travel alone – depending on the destination consider who to travel with, eg
 - someone from / with knowledge of the area (language, customs etc)
 - male / female (a male or female companion may be safer for cultural reasons, or as a cover for your travel)
 - special knowledge
- Have a clear distribution of tasks and responsibilities
- If you have a driver, ideally this should be a trusted and knowledgeable person
- Have an Emergency Contact person who knows what to do if there is a security crisis.
- Give the Emergency Contact a clear itinerary (your route, your accommodation, who you are meeting where, when and for what purpose). Include contacts along your route who can be trusted to assist you (names, contact details, location and background details). Do not deviate from the schedule without informing your Emergency Contact.
- Agree the schedule of checking in with your Emergency Contact, eg twice a day (or whatever is realistic, given your resources and the infrastructure), plus an emergency code word in case of crisis.
- Mechanical check of the vehicle before you go
- Consider the papers / materials you are taking – including visual materials – such as reports, agendas etc. Could they endanger you?
- Have an escape strategy – what to do / where to go if things go wrong
- Have a plan of how to transport sensitive information such as interviews, photos etc (eg in a USB

in your sock? emailed to your organisation and then deleted?)

- Take with you:
 - money for emergencies (eg vehicle breakdown)
 - maps
 - food, water
 - First aid kit

- Consider taking (if useful):
 - suitable communications equipment with you - preferably at least 2 devices (mobile phones – including one unregistered phone if possible, laptops, satellite phones etc – and check them before you go)
 - video camera
 - legal documents: ID, authorisation letters as required (or documents which support your cover story)

- Consider not taking:
 - Your mobile phone, if you think you are under surveillance (leave your phone at home and get a new, unregistered one instead, if possible)
 - Papers / materials / visual materials – such as reports, agendas etc which could endanger you

- Avoid travelling after dark

- Behave responsibly – obey local laws, avoid drinking too much, etc.