



VOICE/GRIP EVENT MAY 2007

**Field Security and Perception:
Experiences from Crisis Situation**

Monday, 21st May 2007, from 18.00 to 20.00
Fondation Universitaire, rue d'Egmont 11, 1000 Brussels

Speakers:

Antonio DONINI, Senior Researcher, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University

Xavier ZEEBROEK, Senior Researcher, Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la Sécurité

Thomas GONNET, Operations Director, Action Contre la Faim (ACF)

Oliver MONEY-KYRLE, Project Director, International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

Moderator: Kathrin SCHICK, VOICE Director

Short Notes of Session

The Round Table focused on the very actual topic of security on the ground in humanitarian crisis. The debate – organised in collaboration with GRIP (Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité)¹, and the financial support of DG ECHO, aimed at contributing to the debate on security not being solely a technical matter, but that there are other aspects to consider, due to different actors having different perceptions of what is security.

The interventions to prepare the debate were given by two researchers contributing to the Feinstein International Center's preliminary report "*Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Principles, Power, and Perceptions*" and related country studies². The NGO perspective was provided by Action Contre la Faim. The fourth speaker added the security realities of the journalists to the discussion in order to broaden the discussion outside the humanitarian community.

1. Antonio Donini: Humanitarian Action 2015: Principles, Power and Perceptions

The origins of the preliminary report "Humanitarian Action 2015: Principles, Power and Perceptions" are in a Feinstein International Center's consultation in 2003, after the beginning of military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and at the time when it seemed that humanitarian action was being strongly politicised and instrumentalised. The research wanted to find out what the perception of the humanitarian action was on the ground within the people living in crisis situations. The preliminary report is linked with 6 country case studies (Afghanistan, Burundi, Colombia, Liberia, Northern Uganda, Sudan) The final report foreseen by the end of 2007 bases on 6 additional case studies (Palestine, DRC, Iraq, Nepal, Sri Lanka).

The report is structured on four themes: universality, terrorism and counter-terrorism, coherence, and the security of humanitarian personnel and the beneficiaries of humanitarian action. The approach is evidence-based and it focuses on local perceptions. On security, the data points to a disconnect between the perceptions of affected communities and those of aid agencies. Therefore, understanding

¹ <http://www.grip.org/>

² <http://fic.tufts.edu/?pid=32>

local perceptions of security is the key both for the effectiveness of humanitarian action and the security of aid workers.

2. Xavier Zeebroek: Field Security and Perception: Experience from DRC

In the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) the universality of humanitarianism, terrorism and permanent armed conflict are not the main issues in the discussion of security/insecurity. After the heavy violence in Bukavu in 2004, MONUC changed its approach: increase in number of peacekeepers, stronger mandate and more robust operations.

The consequences for the humanitarians are that the peacekeeping interventions interrupt the humanitarian action locally and it creates IDPS, though short-term. So, the preventive action, e.g. saving lives, stops in order to enable peacekeeping. On the other hand, this approach has created a more positive perception of the MONUC, due to the possibility for a proper response to the sporadic violence.

3. Thomas Gonnet: ACF on field security: experience from Sri Lanka

Action Contre la Faim (ACF) is increasingly involved in humanitarian disasters related to fragmented internal crises, ethnic and religious conflicts, widespread anarchy in failed states. This has led to a specific approach on security, in which governance, assessment and management are the important elements.

Despite the measures to prevent security incidences some still occur, and more worryingly the intentional ones. In August 2006, 17 ACF employees were murdered in Muttur, Sri Lanka. The following analyses resulted in recommendations both at operational and headquarter level. On the ground the improvements were to be made on risk analysis, collection and sharing of information, decision processes, reflection on ethnicity of the teams, crisis communication means, capitalisation of incidents and situation reports, security trainings, and application of security rules. At the institutional level recommendations included reflection on ACF security concept, the need to share out responsibilities, improvements in training, follow-up through statistics, and organisational changes in order to better address security.

4. Oliver Money-Kyrle: Journalists in crisis zones

The threats to journalists are similar to those faced by humanitarian workers: crossfire, mistaken identity, traveling across unsecured land, lack of contact with colleagues or agents that can provide rescue, lack of briefings, lack of medical equipment and training in the event of incident, trauma etc.

In the past journalists died as a result of a lack of preparation, in otherwise avoidable situations. Now International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has included all of these issues into standard training modules that are provided by a range of trainers for hostile environments. The IFJ was the first to take programmes readily developed for international media companies and their foreign correspondents and to adapt them for the use by local journalists.

To reduce security risks for journalists The International News Safety Institute, INSI, has developed a dialogue between media and military on how they treat journalists. There is a lack of understanding of operational requirements of both parties in coverage of conflicts. INSI alongside with IFJ also advocates for the employers' responsibility on journalists' security. Given that adequate safety precautions can be costly, media is now often relying on freelancers to get their stories.

Impunity is a serious problem in relation to journalists' deaths. While only one quarter of the journalists killed were located in war zones, the circumstances of the deaths of journalists elsewhere effect their security in war zones. Only in less than third of the cases the murderer is identified; and in even fewer cases there is a prosecution.

Journalists have traditionally held the status as the neutral observer. They were of course also targeted as witnesses to war crimes. Today, journalists are in real danger of losing their position of neutrality. In many of today's conflicts it has already gone. Media and journalists are increasingly targeted for being seen as a part of one side or another.

Journalists need to demonstrate time and again their objectivity and the independence. If they are targeted for being part of the propaganda machine of one side or another – then that is what they will become.

5. Questions and remarks from the audience

It was noticed that humanitarian organisations and journalists are both very professional, but not necessarily perceived as such. The problem of impunity was raised also in relation to humanitarian action, as seems to be the case of ACF incident in Sri Lanka. Also, the non-action of international actors in various conflict situations was mentioned.

The audience reflected on the humanitarian restructuring in the ideal world, and the definition of the humanitarian aid policy as a western concept. If there actually was “negotiation” of humanitarian values in the field, the NGOs should be interlocutors in order to avoid having political agendas influencing.

In relation to the reduced humanitarian space, it was asked whether and how it was possible to re-concur it, given that in some cases there were new actors involved, such as the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan.

At the close of the seminar, Val Flynn the ECHO Headquarters and Field Security Co-ordinator thanked VOICE for its continued support in advocating for greater awareness of INGOs security-related issues. He gave a brief overview of the various capacity building security/safety measures which ECHO has been providing for its FPA partners and the INGO humanitarian community in general. He stressed that this support to the humanitarian community is a key work area for ECHO. He pointed out that the ECHO website has already received in the region of 30.000 hits on its section dealing with security reviews and handbooks. Having just returned from a security fact-finding mission to Darfur with a UN security management team he stressed the need for increased security training for both international and national staff working in hostile security environments such as Darfur. He highlighted the need for the humanitarian community to improve its security incident management arrangements especially at headquarters level. He concluded by calling for greater support by the community for training organisations like RedR.

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