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Making sure your organisation is prepared for kidnap situations

Aid worker kidnappings have quadrupled over the past decade. Since 2009, more aid workers have been victims of kidnapping than of any other form of attack¹. Whilst the likelihood of a kidnap situation is not necessarily high compared to other threats that we face, the impact to the organisation and the individual can be catastrophic.

Following the recent Steve Dennis vs. Norwegian Refugee Council case, organisations have been starkly reminded to reconsider the impact of a kidnap case. Duty of Care has never been so relevant, so discussed and perhaps, so confusing.

So, are we now more prepared? The following is a list of kidnap-specific considerations that all humanitarian and development organisations can use to rapidly assess where they stand in the Duty of Care conundrum.

- Are your global and country programme Crisis Management Teams adequately informed and prepared? Are they regularly professionally trained in kidnap management simulations?
- Has every employee travelling to a location with an elevated kidnap threat been fully informed of and accepted the risk of their travel? Have they been given the opportunity to submit a Proof of Life form? Have they been trained on Kidnap Avoidance and Hostage Survival?
- Does your organisation have Crisis Containment / Special Contingency Insurance? Critically, does the policy include 'unlimited cover for Response Consultants'?
- Does your organisation have clear, board-level agreed, guiding principles for kidnap situations? This goes beyond the ransom / no ransom question. For example, what is the primary principle: the safety, health and security of the abductees, or their release?
- Does your organisation have competent, professionally trained Family Liaison Officers? Do they understand how to deliver 'bad news', effectively support families and represent the organisation?
- Do your kidnap policies clearly outline your approach to external and internal communications? What is the general principle? Does the policy include template reactive statements?
- Have you fully considered business continuity plans? What impact will the suspension or continuation of activities have on the abductees, your staff, the populations you support, your donors and your strategic goals?

¹ Harmer, A. et al. (2013) *Aid Worker Security Report 2013*. Humanitarian Outcomes