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COMMISSION WORKING DOCUMENT

on

Security of relief workers
and humanitarian space

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

A series of recent incidents have highlighted the dangers to relief workers of working in conflict zones and other insecure environments. Kidnappings, abductions and targeted attacks have become disturbingly regular in places such as Bosnia, Rwanda, Congo, Somalia, Chechnya and the Northern Caucasus, and Tajikistan.

This phenomenon has complex roots and wide implications.

In view of this, the Commission has thought it fit to present the following working paper outlining its analysis of the problem and policy recommendations. Needless to say, this will not be the last word on the subject, but it is hoped that the paper is a timely one and can lead to action in various quarters.

The paper is based on work done by ECHO over the past nine months, which finds fuller expression in a more detailed **working paper** which is available on request and provides a fuller background to its recommendations. That paper stands as a useful reference document for all those seeking to think through the problem in order to draw conclusions and to gain inspiration on issues which are not directly tackled here. It has been the object of a nine-month consultation process with a wide range of interested parties and organisations, and its reception has so far been very positive.

Insecurity gives rise to moral dilemmas for agencies[1], and when atrocities do occur there is a widespread sense of public outrage. In addition to this, even when it is not hitting the headlines, insecurity carries significant **costs** for agencies and, by extension, for donors and for the quality of the international relief effort. Incidents may give rise to important financial and non-financial costs at the agency level, especially in terms of staff morale and agency reputation. Fatalities may also lead to such public outcry that they call into question the whole future of an agency's programme in a given country, or even the whole future of aid to that country at all. Those in need are then the first to suffer.

Self-interest, professional ethics and wider moral considerations therefore make it incumbent on all concerned to assume responsibility for the problem and to take it seriously.

Sensitivity to casualties amongst relief workers, as well as to the wider implications of such incidents, is not new, but it has been evident in much recent discussion amongst both agencies and donors. For example, the final communiqué of the G-8 at the June 1997 summit in Denver expressed in §65 "grave concern at the recent attacks against refugees as well as against personnel of refugee and humanitarian organisations". EU Member States were also instrumental recently in gaining acceptance for UN General Assembly Resolution 52/167 on safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

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[1] The term 'agencies' is used throughout this paper in a generic sense to refer to UN agencies, the Red Cross movement, and NGOs, insofar as any of these is involved in humanitarian work.

It is quite clearly not enough just to ask how relief workers and supplies can be protected *where* they are deployed: it is increasingly also a question of determining *if and how security conditions can be created which allow relief to be deployed at all*. To put it another way, the problem is not just "humanitarian" but also political.

Nonetheless, the issue of insecurity has not yet been the object of systematic enquiry. A conceptual understanding of the problem is vital to clarify the options available and choices to be made.

2. DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE

A few definitions must be spelt out in order to clarify the scope of the paper.

It focuses on a *limited definition* of **security**: arrangements aimed at *avoiding or countering threats* of the *use of violence* against the *physical and emotional integrity* of relief workers.

This is not intended to be an operational definition for agencies. The purpose is simply to focus in on those aspects of security which are most closely linked to the problem of access and humanitarian space, and to explore these wider implications.

It is far from easy to define a **"relief worker"**[2]. At field level, most organisations have multiple mandates and varying self-definitions. There is also often a temptation to stretch the term "humanitarian", particularly because it offers a fast track to induce donors to mobilise aid more quickly. Within the EU, definitions also vary considerably. One may reasonably take as a starting-point, however, that while *operations* may be humanitarian in their objectives or in their means of implementation; *agencies as such* are not (the only exception being ICRC, which is "humanitarian" by definition). To a greater or lesser degree all are involved at some time or other in activities which go beyond a strict definition of humanitarian action. The definition of who is a relief worker is, however, not central to the arguments to be developed here[3].

The scope is not limited to **expatriate agency staff.** Whilst they may be more in the public limelight, they are still only one link in the chain of all those involved in the relief effort, and it would be difficult both ethically and in practice to single them out for special treatment. Most if not all agencies would be just as concerned for their contracted **local staff** as for expatriate staff. There are also staff involved in supporting operations but not under contract, local agencies which may sometimes be subcontracted by international agencies, the staff of local facilities such as hospitals which are vital to the relief effort, and other local people just trying to help – right down to those in need themselves, not simply object but subject of the whole process. All of these groups may

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[2] The terms "relief" and "humanitarian" are used interchangeably in this paper.

[3] A number of the arguments developed in the paper may, of course, also be applicable also to other expatriate and local staff than relief workers, who may also face high levels of risk in the course of their duties

at one time or another find themselves in danger because of or despite their humanitarian activities.

The difficulty of delimiting the group with which we are concerned is, in fact, at the heart of the question. It is both impossible and counterproductive to focus exclusively on the security of expatriate and local relief workers without reference to the other links in the chain. The security dilemma of relief workers melts, in fact, into the whole notion of humanitarian space. Apart from anything else, incidents involving relief workers reflect increasing difficulties in providing aid to those in need at all. As such, they are part of a worrying trend which calls for a global solution.

The term **"humanitarian space"** has come into widespread recent use without agreement as to its precise definition. The origins of the term lie in the idea of a consensual space for humanitarian actors to do their work. Until recently, the fact that *physical security is an intrinsic and necessary part of humanitarian space* has tended to be downplayed. It is becoming increasingly clear that this needs to change.

Both general measures (at the level of the security environment) and specific ones (in support of actual relief operations) can be used to underpin physical security. These measures are usually (and preferably) **not military**, although the military can be called upon if necessary. Nor are they the sole responsibility of actors **external** to humanitarian agencies.

The concept of humanitarian space covers both the security of workers and of those in need. Since the role of workers is, of course, to sustain those in need, the limited focus of this paper on their security is to be seen as one part of the wider debate on how to establish safe humanitarian space, and it is certainly not the whole picture.

3. AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

3.1 The extent of insecurity: a few statistics

Prior to 1992, it has been claimed that security was "not a major issue" for the UN, that "UN policy was that staff and dependents should not be exposed to dangerous situations", and that "it was almost unheard of for a staff member to be killed". This contrasts with statements by UNHCR in 1997 to the effect that the humanitarian imperative is overriding and that only severe casualties would force withdrawal.

There are no exact **statistics** on casualties amongst aid workers, but, in any case, fatalities from violent attack are only the tip of the iceberg. The problems associated with insecurity go much wider.

Agencies are increasingly concerned with insecurity-related **stress**. The survey *Room for Improvement* noted that personal security was a major source of stress for expatriate field

staff working in dangerous situations. Only 6% of those interviewed – which included development workers – recorded no security problems at their work location[4].

In June 1997, the UN considered 53 **countries** to be insecure to some degree; 28 were considered wholly or partially to be at "phase three" or above, requiring relocation of all non-essential staff and all dependents. UNHCR calculates that, around the same date, it had over 3.000 staff working in areas designated insecure; around 10.000 if associated NGOs are added into the equation. By all acounts, the working environment of UNHCR staff has "altered dramatically" over the last five years.

The number of people in need who may have died because it was impossible to provide aid on account of the security situation is inestimable.

The available evidence offers little doubt that insecurity is a serious and growing problem of humanitarian action, that at its current level it is of recent origin, and that there is at present no sign of this trend being fundamentally reversed. In order to establish the reasons for this and to predict future trends, we need to take a look at causes.

3.2 Causes

Much evidence relates increased risk to a number of factors which characterise present-day conflicts: the economic value of relief, its impact upon the dynamics of conflict, the political capital which aggressions against relief workers may occasionally attract, the scope to obtain significant ransom money, and the intrinsically anti-humanitarian character of the war goals of parties to internal conflict. In short, on this view it is *the nature of contemporary conflict itself* which lies at the root of the problem.

But we can also come at the problem from another angle. For the sake of argument, let us assume, simplistically but not unreasonably, that any single agency, left to its own devices, would have a view (even if not explicitly) as to what is an "acceptable" level of risk to staff. It would then act to maintain exposure to risk constant by expanding or reducing activities in function of the situation on the ground. If this is true, but proportionately more casualties are nonetheless occurring, then it may well be that incentives to take risk are provided by the "market". On the agency side, competition for funding contributes to willingness to take risk, while, on the donor side, the need to do "something" in hostile crisis environments means that funds may be on offer for operations which are next to impossible to carry out. In other words, *both donor and agency funding behaviour can give rise to risk.*

This model may be simplistic, but it does capture something of what is going on; it also accounts for the clear tendency on the part of many agencies, and indeed quite a number of donors, to try to "regulate" the humanitarian sector through initiatives such as the IFRC/NGO code of conduct and the People in Aid Code, even if security as such has not so far been a central feature of these efforts.

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[4] R. Macnair (1995), ODI RRN Network Paper n° 10, Overseas Development Institute, London

It needs to be carefully noted, however, that the above causes give rise only to *risk*, not to incidents as such. The probability that risks will lead to security incidents and casualties depends also on how workers and agencies deal with it. Many practical measures could and should be implemented to improve staff safety and thereby expand humanitarian space. In practice, incident upon incident has shown the extent to which, at the agency level, these are too often neglected, sometimes with dramatic consequences. Inter-agency cooperation too leaves much to be desired.

The analysis of cause and effect from the angle of risk avoidance needs to bear in mind that agency practice impacts upon security in two ways. Technical security guidelines and procedures may diminish the likelihood that a given risk will translate into an incident, or the gravity of any incidents which do occur: *ex-post* risk avoidance. They may also diminish the likelihood of a risk arising in the first place: *ex-ante* risk avoidance. General agency practice – the standards that agencies work to, the relationships they have with parties on the ground and so forth – also contributes to ex-ante risk avoidance.

3.3 Types of risk

It is also important to make a distinction between **different kinds of risk** in order to differentiate appropriate responses.

For present purposes, a four-fold distinction is proposed: accident, criminality, banditry and targeting[5].

Accident refers to being caught in crossfire, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, falling victim to landmines, or aviation and road accidents and the like.

Criminality is largely self-explanatory. **Banditry** refers to armed factions seeking to plunder aid agency assets with an economic value in order to feed their war machine or for personal gain. It is also a risk in post-conflict settings where small arms remain freely available and alternative means of earning income are in short supply. Hostage-taking for ransom (a particular problem in the Northern Caucasus for example) also comes under this heading.

Lastly, **targeting** refers to deliberate attacks or threats aimed at an agency in order to disrupt its activities or to influence the behaviour of third party, mainly international, actors, either to withdraw or, on the contrary, intervene more forcefully. Such motivations for attacks on relief workers have characterised operations in, for example, Bosnia, Somalia, and the Great Lakes.

In order to determine priorities for remedial strategies, one might want to know the proportion of incidents falling into each category. Unfortunately, no statistical evidence is presently available. Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that the criminality and banditry categories predominate. It would also appear that relatively simple precautions

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[5] This partly follows ICRC's practice.

would have been sufficient to prevent a number of the casualties which have occurred in these categories.

4. A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR TACKLING INSECURITY

4.1 Addressing the causes of insecurity

It follows from the discussion on "causes" above that in addressing insecurity there are three possible avenues, namely:

- deterring or minimising abusive practice in war;

- donor funding behaviour;

- and agency practice.

Deterring or minimising abusive practice in war may be approached in either of two ways: one may seek to *modify the behaviour of belligerents*, or, less ambitiously, to *reduce the material scope for abuse*.

In order to **modify the behaviour of belligerents**, "soft" measures are unlikely to suffice. Belligerents' motivations for acting as they do are too strong, and form an integral part of their reasons for being in conflict at all. Measures such as dissemination of international humanitarian law (IHL) in peacetime, and especially making it subject to the jurisdiction of an international criminal court as will be discussed shortly at the diplomatic conference in Rome, certainly deserve support. However, this should not blind us to the fact that, in most cases, human rights abuses in internal conflict can only effectively be deterred through a form of coercion which either strikes directly at the war aims of the abusing parties or renders abuse materially much more difficult. An example of the former might be withholding the prospect of recognition or cutting off trade; the latter may involve the use of armed protection (which is, however, often flawed) or more massive military deployment.

The fact that the trend towards internal conflict is likely to be an enduring feature of future humanitarian work only makes it all the more imperative to look for new approaches to the problems and dilemmas posed by insecurity.

An alternative strategy is **reducing the material scope for abuse**. Through appropriate means, belligerents can be given less incentive to engage in abuses not through the threat of sanction, but simply because the economic, political or military value of relief goods and personnel is kept to a minimum. The extensive use of local capacities is a cornerstone in this approach.

This distinction gives rise to four subheadings under which recommendations can be broken down. Clearly, action under each of these headings is complementary and the most effective choice of strategy depends on the situation being confronted.

4.2 The relationship between causes and typology

The following table shows the relationship between the causes of risk and the proposed typology, and may help to guide the choice of measures in individual situations or at the global level.

This table shows that **agency practice is relevant to reducing all kinds of risk,**

	Accident	Criminality	Banditry	Targetting
Change belligerent behaviour			(X)	X
Reduce material scope for abuse		X	**X**	X
Adapt donor funding practice	(X)	(X)	X	X
Influence agency practice	X	X	(X)	X

although it is **least effective against banditry**. In situations of banditry, the primary focus must be on **reducing the material scope for abuse**. This is also an effective strategy against all categories of risk except accident.

Donor funding practice might, conceivably, also discourage agencies from investing in measures to counter accidents and criminality, but the major concern is that it may encourage them to **expose themselves to banditry and targetting** beyond the risk threshold which the situation and their readiness to confront it should imply.

Insofar as **targetting** is more premeditated and a more specific threat, it may be more amenable to efforts aimed at **influencing belligerent behaviour** through incitation or coercion. This strategy runs up against greater problems in situations of **banditry**, for two reasons. In a number of cases, interlocutors are difficult to identify, hierarchical discipline is low, or groups are less amenable to pressure on account of their small size. Where banditry serves war aims or is tied up with the way the war economy works, it may be possible to identify interlocutors but not to give them sufficient incentive to change their behaviour.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This last section puts forward a number of recommendations together with some comments justifying them. The basis for these recommendations is treated in much more depth in the working paper.

5.1 General recommendations

- **Move security issues up the agenda of agencies and donors**

Although it is receiving increasing attention, security is a long way from dominating the agendas of either agencies or donors. It needs to receive high-level backing and become an integrated part of planning.

Donors must therefore deliberately place much more **emphasis** on security issues. In doing so, they should project an **holistic concept** of security, not limited to technical/procedural aspects but encompassing how agencies operate on the ground, the wider question of humanitarian space, and donors' own policy mechanisms and stances. It is not sufficient to cite adherence to principles or relationships with the local community as an adequate guarantee of agency security: these are important elements, but they are not the whole picture and they may disguise a reluctance to think the issues through.

- **Keep the security situation under review**

Donors should not rely solely on agency or UN assessments of the security situation in the field, since either of these sources of information may suffer from serious drawbacks. Those donors which have the capacity should also monitor the security situation themselves, in order to arrive at informed funding decisions, where necessary, to adopt a common stance, and to plan for possible contigencies. Donor security officers could be deployed to the field, with responsibility also to advise and report on agency and inter-agency security arrangements.

- **Sponsor further research**

The anecdotal character of much of the evidence is in itself proof of failure to take security seriously. Primary research into the problem of insecurity is lacking, and should be stimulated. Analysis of the typology, causes and dimensions of the problem should be allied with applied research into the effectiveness of different strategies to deal with it.

5.2 Influencing agency practice

- **Encourage good practice and be prepared to fund security**

Good security costs money, and, although in the long run it more than pays for itself, it is easily crowded out in an excessively competitive environment. Donors therefore need to be prepared to **fund** security measures.

There is already some willingness to fund operational security, but there are weaknesses at the conceptual level and there is a lack of expertise available to the humanitarian community. Donor funding should therefore as a priority be directed towards supporting an agency's **general security planning, training** agency staff in security (preferably on an interagency basis), and developing agency/interagency **capacity** on both technical and more general security issues.

- **Require a high standard of security from agencies**

By and large, agency practice in respect of security leaves a lot to be desired. As well as being *prepared* to fund security measures, donors need, progressively at least, to *require* them from agencies so as to eliminate any incentive to cut costs by limiting security expenditure.

All donors should request that agencies in their proposals and reports demonstrate an **assessment and monitoring** of the security situation, and require them to make systematic **enquiries** into security incidents: the way they responded to them and the lessons to be learnt. Donors should request that the results of such enquiries be shared with them, and, in particular insofar as it is a question of accumulating insight into specific situations in a given theatre, also with other agencies.

Agencies should be required to have adequate operational **security guidelines,** and to have a clear commitment to **training** and briefing staff. **Common sense principles** such as insisting that inexperienced staff are not 'thrown in at the deep end' must be demanded by donors. Minimum field equipment standards (such as two-way radios) are also essential.

It is wrong to assume that donor guidelines in this area would be unwelcome. Many agencies do indeed say that they would support donor efforts to ensure minimum agency standards. Preference to agencies committed to implementing the **People in Aid code** is a possible immediate step which is also justified on other grounds[6]. In the longer term, the code might be built upon to reinforce its security dimension, preferably by NGOs themselves. It is strongly recommended that security measures also apply to **local agency staff.**

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[6] The People in Aid Code of Best Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel was published as *ODI RRN Network Paper* n° 20, Feb. 1997. It is a joint effort to develop practical guidelines amongst agencies committed to high standards in human resource management, and includes reference to the issue of security.

When carrying out **evaluations**, whether ex-ante or ex-post, donors should also ensure that security arrangements in the broad sense form part of their terms of reference. Specific evaluations focussing on security could also be carried out.

- **Require a high standard of professional ethics and standards**

Professional ethics and a clear understanding and implementation of the humanitarian mandate contribute significantly to agency security, but this factor may also easily be undermined if there are a number of agencies on the ground who do not conform to such standards. The importance of humanitarian principles underlines the need, however, to formulate and interpret them in such a way as to provide guidelines which fit the reality of contemporary internal conflict.

Donors need to adopt rigorous requirements for the agencies which they fund, including requiring them to have a demonstrable commitment to standards. They should also be prepared to sanction agencies whose performance is not up to scratch by withdrawing funding. Concerted donor effort of this kind could also contribute to reversing the much-criticised proliferation of agencies in recent crises.

- **Strengthen inter-agency capacity**

Action confined to the level of individual agencies is unlikely to be sufficient to deal with systemic and situational aspects of security. Umbrella organisations must therefore take on a responsibility for developing or disseminating standards, tools, guidelines and so forth. (As argued below, a "focal agency" model may be more appropriate in the field). The efforts already undertaken by the US-based NGO consortium InterAction in the area of training are an encouraging sign. Donors have an important role to play in stimulating this process.

- **Review UN arrangements**

There is a particular need to review security arrangements within the UN, especially with reference to the role of the UN Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD). The system is being overwhelmed by the scope of current challenges: it suffers from limited resources, bureaucratic constraints, and a lack of specificity and operational insight.

Such a review has now been called for in the framework of UNGA Resolution 52/45 as well as by the UNHCR Staff-Management Committee. Donor governments should make an active input into this process. The review should examine all options which might improve security both for UN and non-UN humanitarian workers. Some services might be provided by or through OCHA (the successor to DHA) or a lead UN field agency, and integrated with other field support/logistic functions such as staff and resource management, information exchange and the deployment of specialist assessment and support teams in overall coordination schemes.

- **Support an integrated approach to field security**

There is a clear need to group security **information** relating to a given crisis together in one place where security professionals can use it for planning purposes and where it is interpreted and made accessible to the whole humanitarian community. Authoritative information is of vital importance to agencies in deciding courses of action in the face of risk, and all the more so in those many situations where rumour or deliberate misinformation may abound. Collection of all available information is of vital importance to planners, so that statistically significant trends can be distinguished in a minimum of time from random occurrences. Such information also needs to be standardised, suggesting moves towards a common reporting system, based at field level but passed up to a central database available for trend analysis.

Security **planning** is presently, more often than not, lamentable. The chaos in Brazzaville when agencies evacuated from Kinshasa with the imminent fall of Mobutu, and the general unawareness of security plans which has been reported by the UN in the Great Lakes, are not extreme but in fact rather typical examples.

The model of a technical "field security centre" for information and planning deserves serious consideration. Such a centre should come under the guidance of a lead NGO or UN agency and its staff should include security professionals. The approach followed by such a centre should be comparable from one crisis to another and should therefore be subject to the interagency coordination referred to above.

5.3 Needed changes to donor aid and cooperation policy

- **Emphasise conflict prevention and mitigation**

It goes without saying that the best way of reducing security risks to aid workers is by preventing, mitigating and resolving conflict. This paper does not need to rehearse the ways in which this might be done, but it can hardly avoid underlining this fundamental point. It is to be hoped that the recent Carnegie Commission report will serve as a platform for this issue finally to receive comprehensive treatment at international level[7].

Before and during conflict, it is necessary to limit the flow of arms into conflict-prone areas. Donor governments need also to show an understanding of the economic dynamics of war and a concerted willingness to starve rather than feed the war machine through their aid and trade policies.

The way agencies go about programming aid may also have a considerable impact on conflict dynamics. This impact may be positive, but all too often it is not, and donors cannot avoid the need to review proposed agency operations from this perspective[8].

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[7] Ref. the Commission's Communication on Preventing Conflict in Africa SEC(96)332 and the work carried out within the Conflict Prevention Network

[8] The issue is reviewed in detail in John Prendergast's 1996 book *Frontline Diplomacy: humanitarian aid and conflict in Africa.*

• Stick to global principles for donor humanitarian funding

Donors are ultimately responsible for determining the pattern of aid in any given context, which in turn largely determines the perception that belligerents have of humanitarian aid being balanced and principled. Donors too, therefore, need to abide by certain principles. However, while those principles should certainly be inspired by agency principles and the humanitarian tradition, it does not necessarily follow that they should or can simply be agency principles writ large.

Wherever possible, donor humanitarian aid should at least aim at being globally impartial and non-discriminatory. Perceptions of imbalance or suspicion of ulterior motives often have immediate knock-on effects for agencies on the ground. Agencies may indeed be operationally independent – and this should be respected – but financially they depend upon donor choices and therefore "inherit" some of their image from donors.

There may, however, be many reasons why a policy of global impartiality and non-discrimination, even if it remains as a point of reference, cannot be followed through on the ground. If this is the case, it is strongly urged that policy nonetheless be explicit and reasoned, coordinated amongst donors, and systematically implemented. Most crucially, *the security implications of donor policy need to be seriously assessed,* so as to programme aid in such a way that it minimises the risks associated with policy which – at the global level, *de facto,* and for whatever reason – favours one side over another.

• Eliminate incentives to take unnecessary risk

A consequence of demanding a high standard of security preparation from agencies should be a determination on the part of the donor community to eliminate incentives for agencies to take unnecessary risk. Claims to be able to go where other agencies do not dare should mostly be treated with suspicion, and being the last to leave a dangerous situation should more often be penalised than rewarded. A responsible attitude to risk should be rewarded by better chances to receive funding.

Donors should also do what they can to avoid giving agencies incentives to bid for large contracts without necessarily having done the proper preparatory work, including in terms of security. A specific measure which might be useful in this regard is to allow **seed funding** to support agencies in a preliminary analysis and relationship building phase prior to designing and implementing a major project or programme.

• Choose agencies in function of the situation

The risk associated with different agencies may well be quite different, and a judicious choice of partners can minimise risk. Factors which enter into consideration are: political associations accruing to the UN or to agencies of a particular nationality; whether or not it is desirable to have the same agency operating on both sides of a conflict; other activities that the same agency may be involved in; the agency's commitment to security, as well as its general humanitarian aid experience and standards; willingness to coordinate with others; and style of work (discrete or outspoken).

It is important that donors equip themselves to analyse and understand agency track-records under these headings, and that they pool such knowledge amongst themselves.

⊙ Encourage a "focal agency" model for security in the field

The fragmentation of security information, know-how and planning is to no-one's advantage. However, security is closely linked to operations; it is not likely that umbrella organisations, due to their non-operational character, are in a position to assume this function in a given field situation. A "focal agency" model is more attractive.

While donors would probably not want to try to appoint specific agencies to assume this function, this model can be fostered by (i) building up key skills in a small number of agencies rather than fragmenting knowledge across the agency spectrum; (ii) insisting as a consequence that these skills are put at the disposal of the wider humanitarian community and (iii) asking agencies to indicate in their proposals the agency appointed to act as a focal point for coordinating security arrangements.

This paper is agnostic as to whether these capacities are best built up in the UN, NGOs or elsewhere, provided that the above conditions are respected. Particularly, however, if the UN is chosen, the option of making buying in to the arrangements compulsory under certain conditions could also be entertained; a genuinely coordinated system may sometimes be at that price. It is, in this context, worth noting UNHCR's work on a generic agreement with NGOs which would include a commitment to work out and implement joint security plans, adhere to certain behavioural norms, and respond in a coordinated way to incidents.

With or without a clear lead agency, field-level coordination is absolutely vital and it needs to be stepped up. Donors should therefore consider exercising pressure on their grant recipients to participate in effective collaborative arrangements with other agencies, and withholding funding from agencies operating in too independent a way without convincing reasons.

• Be sensitive to the implications of visibility

Donors need to be sensitive to legitimate arguments from agencies if the latter feel that a given form of donor visibility may be detrimental to their perceived independence and hence security in the field. They need also to be aware that proxy symbols of humanitarianism may easily be misused and thus lose their currency in theatre — even gain negative associations.

• Allow agencies flexibility to cope with changing security conditions on the ground

Some kinds of over-stringent and inflexible funding arrangements with agencies may provide them with incentives to persist in operations of a type which the evolution of the security situation has rendered inappropriate. Flexibility in such arrangements is therefore essential, at least in regard to aspects which are closely linked to security. These include areas of work, types of relief supplied (e.g. changing from more to less lootable items), delivery arrangements, and specific security-related expenditure. A further practical issue

is the need to allow staff and support costs to continue to be paid in the event of temporary evacuations becoming necessary.

The need to build such flexibility into donor-agency relations is an additional argument for enhanced donor presence in the field.

- **Mobilise non-military support to the security environment**

New instruments for intervention, in order to eliminate specific security threats, need to be developed. Armed groups in refugee camps are a notorious example. The security threat is much more diffuse in complex emergencies than it is in classical armed warfare. For this reason, non-military resources – police and special forces, and private sector expertise – need to be mobilised more than they are at present to give advice and draw up plans. This also applies in many post-conflict settings where residual violence remains a problem. Police operations have the added advantage of far lower unit costs than the military.

The means to mobilise police contingents and the arrangements which apply to them urgently need further consideration. Police operations have been criticised for fielding staff without adequate training or understanding of the local environment, and for being poorly structured and/or managed. Work within WEU on contingency planning for police operations may have a particular value for the response capacity of the international community to the problems of present-day humanitarian action.

- **Assume a greater responsibility for aid worker safety**

Donors might contribute directly to improved aid worker safety, *inter alia* by sharing information with agencies, coordinating on security issues, offering guarantees to expatriate and local staff (including evacuation for local staff if it becomes necessary), and being prepared to deploy rapid military backup for evacuations if necessary. Under certain circumstances they might sponsor the direct deployment of a civilian security mechanism in the field.

Several agencies have expressed a good deal of interest in accessing donor information, such as political and technical reports and satellite imagery, including information which is not restricted but simply not made available systematically, predictably, sufficiently rapidly or in a usable form. Discussions to this effect could be entered into, aiming at framework agreements, notably with the UN agencies.

- **Ensure overall foreign policy is consistent with and supports humanitarian objectives.**

Overall policy need not be impartial, but it should be motivated by considerations of fairness, justice and encouraging reconciliation and sustainable peace. If it is pursuing other objectives which are in fundamental opposition to these, humanitarian organisations have a moral right to know so that their decision to accept the risk which relief work entails is at least the result of a conscious choice.

There are many ways in which foreign policy instruments such as diplomatic alliances, commercial relations, loans, international recognition, economic sanctions, visa restrictions and so forth could be brought to bear to support humanitarian space. Persisting in considering humanitarian aid as an activity apart, or one which only surfaces on foreign policy agendas when dramatic events occur, denies the opportunity to exploit these instruments. It is not a "politicisation" of humanitarian aid to conceive of it within an overall foreign policy framework, it is a logical consequence of its being worth providing at all.

- **Uphold an ethic of humanitarianism and establish a partnership with agencies which encompasses human rights**

While it is important to maintain humanitarian identity and principles, there is an urgent need to reinterpret the humanitarian mandate both theoretically and operationally if it is to retain its credibility and moral force, in particular by insisting on the protection component of humanitarian work and by integrating certain human rights notions within the conceptual framework that agencies and donors project.

Failure to do so during recent operations such as the one in Eastern Congo predictably turned out to be venturing down a blind alley. The presence of aid agencies on that occasion all too often meant co-opting their silence vis-à-vis the abuses which were going on. At a certain point, the ethics of such an operation need to be called into question.

There is no inevitable conflict between security and human rights advocacy within the context of humanitarian crises, or between security and access. Complex emergency situations require agencies and donors to make difficult ethical judgments, identifying the best interests of victims, but such judgments still have to be made. Skirting around them by appealing to over-simplified assumptions about humanitarian action is counter-productive and may put victims' lives in danger.

5.4 Changing belligerent behaviour

- **Uphold the identity of humanitarian aid and penalise abuses by belligerents**

In situations of open conflict, humanitarian operations need to be clearly delimited and identifiable if the humanitarian label is to be a source of security. Donors should therefore make sure that they adopt a rigorous definition of humanitarian aid under such circumstances and consistently differentiate it from other types of intervention. In contacts with the parties in presence, they should at all times reinforce the specific identity of humanitarian aid and project humanitarian standards.

This does not mean that humanitarian activities should be developed in isolation, or that the definition which is adopted needs to be extremely restrictive. The need for such distinctions is also largely confined to open conflict situations. In post-conflict situations or situations of subdued violence, it may also be highly artificial to draw rigid distinctions between humanitarian aid and other sorts of aid, and it is not obvious that doing so would enhance security much, if at all, in such situations.

In pursuing both formal and informal means to encourage respect and punish abuse of humanitarian principles, donors should establish and maintain a common front and make their position clear and credible to the parties in presence. Their determination to enforce a particular line should be independent of any other foreign policy considerations short of *force majeure*. As stated, other strands of foreign policy should, however, not be such as to undermine the credibility of dissuasion and deterrence mechanisms which donor governments have established.

Donors should not be under any illusions as to the likely effect of "soft" deterrents to abuses of humanitarian principles and human rights in the context of internal conflicts. The dynamics of such conflicts do not often admit of such deterrence. However, if governments are serious about deterrence they certainly – except in the most extreme cases – have many tools available which are often underemployed.

Donor statements and those by UN political organs need to be assessed for their possible security implications in the field, and agencies should receive advance notification of any important statements or changes in policy which may impact upon their security.

- **Be alert to negative impact and use other aid instruments to improve the security environment**

Donors should be aware that over-funding relief at the cost of other aid activities may create disparities, and incentives for greater rather than less violence.

This problem notably arises in the context of refugee crises, where over-favourable treatment of refugee or displaced populations compared to the standard of living of host populations must be avoided. This can only add to tensions which are already present if camps are a source of insecurity for local populations because of criminality, the proximity of arms and armed groups, or their impact on the environment and local infrastructures. Addressing this issue implies both programming humanitarian aid with more sensitivity and ensuring counterpart measures for local populations are also in place.

General lawlessness and incentives to engage in crime are also sources of insecurity for relief workers. Aid should be used to invest more actively in measures that promote livelihood security and alternative employment for civilians and combatants.

Security in a number of situations, particularly post-conflict ones, can be directly improved by investing, for example, in military reforms, police, judiciary and the media. There must also be much greater awareness of the way in which all manner of traditional aid instruments may serve to stabilise the security situation by removing sources of friction and encouraging cooperative peace-building – but they must be mobilised more rapidly than tends to be the case at present.

The use of mass communications for diffusing awareness of humanitarian principles and the specifics of ongoing operations is also a potentially important tool of "preventive advocacy".

- **Review options for the involvement of the military**

At the end of 1994, there were 17 operations where ICRC worked alongside UN peacekeeping forces, and operations such as those in Bosnia and Albania have provided further proof of the role that the military has to play in a number of humanitarian crises. In Eastern Zaire at the end of 1996, an international military intervention might have made it possible to save many more lives.

Options for the use of the military need, however, to be reviewed. In particular, the idea of direct protection to relief supplies and workers must be approached very critically.

Military operations should always have a military logic and they should be coordinated with humanitarian actors at the highest level. Donors should support efforts to develop and disseminate civil-military doctrine applicable to such operations. The 'political doctrine' of military intervention also needs to be developed, so that standard response tools are available and predictability in their deployment can be improved. Rather than allow the military to be a "solution in search of a problem", modular responses in support of humanitarian space which stop short of outright intervention need to be studied and put in place. Contingency planning, and joint exercises, for such deployments should become standard practice.

On the EU side, anticipating the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty, WEU should take the lead in developing such response tools, which fall under the Petersberg tasks, in close cooperation with the Commission, Member States, and interested agencies.

5.5 Reducing the material scope for abuse

- **Insist on projects with a strong reliance on local resources**

Using aid to strengthen local structures and increase self-sufficiency is an important aim in itself. Donors also need to be aware of the reduction in risk which can be gained from implementing projects which co-opt the interests of local populations and rely on their knowledge resources.

Local resources can be used in a creative way for a number of logistic tasks, such as delivery, more safely and with fewer losses and reduced costs. In Somalia, for instance, the technique was used of selling relief goods to local merchants with an agreement to buy them back at a premium at destination. Because those goods belonged during transit to private individuals, they had every incentive to ensure their safe passage, and their local knowledge and contacts also made it far easier for them to do so. This is an illustration, not a universal model, but it proved to cut losses from 50% down to under 10%. Given the negative impact of diverted aid, such techniques merit serious attention.

- **Encourage the formulation of groundrules**

In recent years there have been some experiments with the use of so-called "groundrules" for humanitarian operations, of which the best-known example is Operation Lifeline Sudan. Such groundrules offer many advantages from a security perspective because they

can provide for inter-agency solidarity, context-specific dissemination and implementation of humanitarian principles, and predictability in cases of abuse. Depending on the context, donors might also be able to assist in the process of negotiating such groundrules by lending their weight to implementation arrangements.

- **Know when to suspend aid or to withdraw**

All too often, withdrawal, suspension or scaling down of aid seems to be a knee-jerk reaction to events the implications of which are not really analysed. Such use of the ultimate sanction of withdrawal makes of it a very blunt instrument and, while easy to understand, is difficult to justify.

The threat of withdrawal may be a powerful one in some circumstances, whereas in others atrocities are designed to achieve precisely that and the idea that it might be an option will only encourage them. The correct reaction at donor level should be the fruit of careful analysis.

Donors have a particular responsibility in decisions of this kind, because they often have considerable influence on agency decisions on whether to withdraw or suspend aid; indeed, this influence is almost total when it comes to renewing funding or allowing new operations to start up. A coordinated response is of paramount importance if the instrument of withdrawal is to have maximum impact – it is clearly no use at all just to replace one agency on the ground by another without reassessing the situation.

Rather than simply withdraw aid, it makes sense in the first instance to limit oneself to **suspending** it pending a reassessment of appropriate and available measures to improve the security environment according to the principles laid out in this paper. It may well be possible to redesign the approach being followed in such a way as to reduce security risks significantly and allow aid to continue.

Donors may make more mistakes over **allowing** aid in than withdrawing it. There is often a tendency in extreme situations to want to do something at all costs, but frequently this does not imply willingness to provide sufficient political or even if necessary military backup to make the operation tenable. This in effect encourages agencies to accept very limited humanitarian space at the cost of their appearing to condone or at least relativise massacres and other human rights abuses. The net effect may be precisely the opposite of the one intended. In particular, donors have a prime responsibility in dissuading UN agencies from getting into a situation where they become a silent party to abuses, which undermines the credibility of the UN and thereby that of the international community as a whole.

6. CONCLUSION

Although it contains a variety of recommendations, this paper can be summarised very simply. Insecurity is a factor which may seriously compromise humanitarian operations, and it therefore needs to be addressed as a priority and with all available means.

There is an urgent need for more professional agency and inter-agency security arrangements than exist at present. Agencies also need to become much more aware of the unintended impact which their way of working may have on the general security situation in a given theatre.

Donors too need to become much more directly involved in issues of security. Many resources are available, but there is rarely, if ever, an integrated security strategy for humanitarian operations and so the potential to improve the situation goes largely unexploited.

No amount of effort is ever likely to make humanitarian operations risk-free: sadly, there are always likely to be occasional casualties amongst relief staff. But the principal concern that this paper sets out to address is not to eliminate risk as such. It is rather to counter the fact that security conditions are making it increasingly difficult to get aid to victims at all.

The "good news", if one can call it that, is that the risks associated with relief operations *can* be reduced significantly through a judicious combination of measures which may be relatively innovatory but are certainly not beyond the international community's grasp. By doing so, humanitarian space can be widened and more lives saved.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Move security issues up the agenda of agencies and donors
- Keep the security situation under review
- Sponsor further research

INFLUENCING AGENCY PRACTICE

- Encourage good practice and be prepared to fund security
- Require a high standard of security from agencies
- Require a high standard of professional ethics and standards
- Strengthen inter-agency capacity
- Review UN arrangements
- Support an integrated approach to field security

NEEDED CHANGES TO DONOR AID AND COOPERATION POLICY

- Emphasise conflict prevention and mitigation
- Stick to global principles for donor humanitarian funding
- Eliminate incentives to take unnecessary risk
- Choose agencies in function of the situation
- Encourage a "focal agency" model for security in the field
- Be sensitive to the implications of visibility
- Allow agencies flexibility to cope with changing security conditions on the ground
- Mobilise non-military support to the security environment
- Assume a greater responsibility for aid worker safety
- Ensure overall foreign policy is consistent with and supports humanitarian objectives
- Uphold an ethic of humanitarianism and establish a partnership with agencies which encompasses human rights

CHANGING BELLIGERENT BEHAVIOUR

- Uphold the identity of humanitarian aid and penalise abuses by belligerents
- Be alert to negative impact and use other aid instruments to improve the security environment
- Review options for the involvement of the military

REDUCING THE MATERIAL SCOPE FOR ABUSE

- Insist on projects with a strong reliance on local resources
- Encourage the formulation of groundrules
- Know when to suspend aid or to withdraw