

# **Staff Safety and Security Principles**

**for the**

**ACT Alliance**

**05 February 2011**

The “Staff Safety and Security Principles for the ACT Alliance” was approved by the ACT Governing Board as policy guidance for ACT members on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2011. It replaces the “Principles of ACT Safety and Security (PASS)” which were originally adopted by the ACT International Emergency Committee in December 2007.

## Summary

**Principle 1:** Provide leadership, guidance and capacity to ensure that staff safety and security concerns are adequately addressed.

**Principle 2:** Adopt a systematic approach towards identifying safety and security risks, and identify suitable preventive and control measures.

**Principle 3:** Build staff capacity so that they are empowered to take personal responsibility for their own security.

**Principle 4:** Ensure staff are aware of, and understand the ACT member's or ACT Alliance safety and security policies and relevant guidelines

**Principle 5:** Facilitate the provision of psychosocial support to ACT staff who have experienced acute or prolonged stress during the course of their work, as well as to staff that have requested additional psychosocial support

## 1. Introduction

The ACT Alliance views staff safety and security as a serious concern in its development, humanitarian and advocacy work. The sharp increase in attacks on aid workers in the past decade, particularly among humanitarian aid workers, makes it imperative that ACT members have measures in place to ensure the safety and security of their programme personnel (employed or volunteers) and resources. ACT places a high priority on working in a spirit of mutual respect, collaboration and partnership with local authorities, local organisations and communities, building the trust and acceptance from which ACT members draw the essence of their security in its programme operations.

Using the acceptance strategy as its modality of security implies that ACT Alliance members prioritise security information and assessments which come continuously through local partners, local communities and information sources on the ground. Through ACT National and Regional Forums, ACT members seek to promote a culture of mutual support among and between ACT members in relation to safety and security.

Being accountable to the people with whom ACT works and complying with key ACT codes of conduct and policies serves as a foundation to building more responsible ways of working. This requires ACT's development and humanitarian workers to adhere to the following (where relevant):

- ACT Code of Conduct for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud and corruption and abuse of power;
- ACT Code of Good Practice;
- Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief;
- Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards;
- The Principles of Partnership<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All ACT policies can be found on <http://www.actalliance.org/resources/policies-and-guidelines>

ACT further encourages ACT members to incorporate accountability principles and benchmarks into their organisational standards, such as the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) benchmarks<sup>2</sup> which cut across humanitarian and development work and to which certification entity ACT is a member.

ACT, as a member of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) recommends that ACT members who work in countries in conflict or post conflict read and adopt the principles in the “*SCHR Position Paper on Humanitarian-Military Relations January 2010*”<sup>3</sup> that outline the role and relationship of aid organizations with the military, including the use of military escorts, etc.

ACT is equally concerned about the safety and security of the people with whom it works. Together with the policies mentioned above, their concerns are explicitly addressed in the ACT “*Humanitarian Protection Policy*” 2010.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Purpose and Scope

The “*Staff Safety and Security Principles for the ACT Alliance*” outlines the key principles of the ACT Alliance approach to staff safety and security. The principles encourage the management of each member of the alliance and the ACT Secretariat to take responsibility and hold themselves accountable for ensuring the safety and security of its staff. They equally encourage each staff person to take personal responsibility for her/his own safety and security.

The principles apply to all ACT “staff” both national and international, including consultants and volunteers who have been contracted to work in ACT member development and humanitarian field programmes. The term “staff” will be used in this document hereinafter for all of the above mentioned persons.

ACT members are encouraged to pay greater attention to staff safety and security in their partner organisations and are welcome to use the ACT policy and guidance in their work towards achieving this goal.

The “*Staff Safety and Security Principles for the ACT Alliance*” (hereinafter referred to as the SSS-principles) seek to lay the foundation for ACT Forums and organisations to establish and build upon their own institutional approaches to security and safety of their staff, national and international. They reflect not only the conscientious way ACT members manage programmes, but also serve as a statement of commitment to the well-being of aid workers that often risk their personal security to administer to the needs of others. They are complemented by the *ACT Staff Safety and Security Guidelines* which provide more detailed guidance to ACT members on all aspects of safety and security. However, it is important that all policy guidance and guidelines are contextualised to the local context.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hapinternational.org/projects/standard/benchmarks.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.actalliance.org/resources/policies-and-guidelines/ghp-principles-of-partnership/153-SCHRPositionPaperonHumanitarianMilitaryRelationsJanuary2010.pdf/view>

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.actalliance.org/resources/policies-and-guidelines/protection>

### 3. Definitions

ACT differentiates between the terms “safety” and “security” as follows:

- *Safety* refers to one’s ability to take preventive measures against accidental events.
- *Security* refers to putting measures in place to protect staff against acts of violence.

### 4. ACT Safety and Security Principles

ACT has adopted the following five principles that guide the ACT Alliance approach to staff safety and security.

**Principle 1:** Provide leadership, guidance and capacity to ensure that staff safety and security concerns are adequately addressed.

The senior management of each ACT organisation (member or Secretariat) is responsible for ensuring a safe environment for staff and promoting a culture of safety and security awareness and understanding within its organisation.

Therefore, ACT members and the ACT Secretariat should aim to

- Have a policy and procedures addressing key security and safety issues. This will demonstrate that ACT organisations are addressing their duty of care. Policies and procedures should acknowledge the special security needs and threats that may be linked with gender, age and diversity, and will ensure that such specific needs and vulnerabilities are taken into account when deciding on safety and security measures and procedures.
- Develop a clear Crisis Management Plan (CMP), with strict protocols for handling crisis situations, including clearly documented lines of authority and division of labour in a crisis situation. Regular Crisis Management Training within the organisation is essential to support implementation of the plan.
- The CMP should clearly indicate who is responsible for incident handling. Specialised training should be given to incident handling focal points on how to handle diverse crisis scenarios. Alternatively, procedures should be in place to use external experts for handling major security events.
- Irrespective of whether internal or external expertise is used, establish clear lines of authority and decision-making mechanisms on safety and security-related issues to ensure an effective and efficient response in an emergency. Ensure...
  - The provision of a list of actions that must be taken in an emergency with clear indications as to their priority.
  - The assignment of the persons who shall be responsible for taking the aforementioned actions, and the assurance that these persons are competent to undertake their role
  - The provision of communication channels essential to the co-ordination of tasks needed to deal with an emergency.

- The specification of required personnel, equipment and materials to carry out the measures to be undertaken in an emergency.
- The Crisis Management Plans have clear actions for home-based and field staff
- Formally and regularly discuss and explain security plans and procedures to home-based staff as well as to national and expatriate programme field staff.
- Have security plans at country level – national and sub-national - which are regularly updated based on risk assessment. All country plans should include procedures to ensure the safety of national staff in the case of evacuation of expatriate personnel.
- Ensure that the organisation has human and financial capacity to adequately implement policies and procedures, or co-opt external support if necessary.
- Ensure that staff are trained to cope with the safety and security issues at their posts of assignment, support them during their service, and address post assignment security sequel related issues.
- Ensure that all staff being deployed are given a security briefing relevant to their location and are debriefed on return for the purpose of improving security procedures.
- Lead by example by putting the safety and security principles into practice in their own lives and particularly in the work environment.

**Principle 2:** Adopt a systematic approach towards identifying safety and security risks, and identify suitable preventive and control measures.

A comprehensive risk, threat and vulnerabilities assessment should be at the heart of all ACT security management. This applies to development, humanitarian and advocacy work at country programme level as well as headquarters level of all ACT members. ACT supports a joint ACT Forum approach to undertaking risk, threat and vulnerabilities assessments. Assessing and addressing risk demonstrates an organisation's commitment to safeguarding staff by reducing the chances of those risks actually arising. When working with partner organisations, ACT members should involve and seek their advice regarding local safety and security.

ACT recognises that *risk* cannot be eliminated altogether. But it can be reduced, in two main ways, by: a) reducing the *threat*; and, b) reducing a person's *vulnerability* to the threat.

Therefore, at a minimum, ACT organisations should aim at...

- Ensure that programme decisions are informed by appropriate safety and security considerations at all levels from programme identification, design, planning, implementation and, and monitoring and evaluation phases.
- Recognising that staff have a high risk of being involved in car accidents and that 60% of security incidents happen while NGO staff are traveling, ensure that there are...
  - Strict travel and vehicle procedures in place; all ACT vehicles equipped with functioning seat belts which all staff wear; ACT vehicles that are well-maintained with regular maintenance checks; and drivers that are well trained and drive with care.
  - Special travel safety procedures in place for the use of boats and especially the use of lifejackets at all times.

- Helmets are worn when using motorcycles.
- Undertake a comprehensive risk, threat and vulnerabilities security assessment prior to...
  - Initiating any development or humanitarian programme in any country or region
  - Visiting a potentially insecure operational area or any area that is recognised as volatile
  - Expanding activities to a new location within a country
  - Making public advocacy statements.
- Recognize that sometimes staff in the field develop a degree of complacency towards danger due to continuous exposure. Ensure health and safety risk assessments are updated regularly in each field office. At a minimum,
  - Ensure that staff are aware that in many cases health threats (e.g. malaria, HIV) pose the most serious risk to life, and staff should take precautions accordingly.
  - Efforts must be made to reduce the risk of sexual and gender based violence as the most immediate and dangerous security concern for female staff is sexual violence
  - Make sure that fire prevention and response measures are in place as fire poses a significant risk to health and safety, especially in countries where there is no fire brigade, buildings are not built to minimize fire hazards, and few people have fire-safety training.
  - In earthquake prone countries, have regular earthquake drills for staff in preparation for rapid and safe evacuation of the workplace and accommodation buildings.
- Develop a comprehensive, realistic plan for risk reduction and control measures.
- Have a joint crisis management team when a serious threat occurs, having both home office staff as well as field staff as perspectives on level of risk will differ.

**Principle 3:** Build staff capacity so that they are empowered to take personal responsibility for their own security

ACT recognises that safety and security is everyone's responsibility. It also recognizes that it is management's responsibility to ensure that both national and international staff are equipped and receive adequate training on safety and security issues to better prepare them for insecure situations.

Therefore, ACT management and staff should...

- Have the possibility to attend formal training on personal security and First Aid.
- Not be deployed to an insecure area without having received formal security training and security briefings particularly geared to the priority risks in the receiving area.
- Ensure staff are equipped with or have access to functioning communications equipment during deployment.
- Identify a 'security' focal point within each ACT organisation and ensure that security focal points have additional and specialized training on a range of safety and security issues.
- Ensure that formal 'security' and 'health' staff link regulatory on safety and security issues.
- Have a clear understanding of the responsibilities and duties of all staff and address what are acceptable and unacceptable levels of risk.

**Principle 4:** Ensure staff are aware of and understand the ACT member's or ACT Alliance safety and security policies and relevant guidelines

The *ACT Staff Safety and Security Guidelines* (formerly known as the ACT Security Handbook) was developed by the ACT Security Working Group to provide security and safety guidelines to members of the ACT Alliance. Additionally, many ACT members have crisis management procedures for their own organisation staff.

Therefore, all ACT staff should:

- Know “what to do” and, where appropriate, “what not to do” about the most common security threats in the given environment
- Know how to report an incident or potential incidents.

**Principle 5:** Facilitate the provision of psychosocial support to ACT staff who have experienced acute or prolonged stress during the course of their work, as well as to staff that have requested additional psychosocial support.

Stress is a risk to health, and to security. Managers and staff should aim to prevent stress, and should be alert for signs of it among their team. It affects different people, and people from different cultures, in different ways. Staff can become stressed for many reasons, such as: personal loss, overwork, or high-pressure work environment, conflicting job demands, multiple supervisors to name but a few. Traumatic stress can be brought on by exposure to emotionally powerful events or "critical incidents". It can produce a very intense response, including fear and/or helplessness, which may overwhelm the individual's coping mechanisms. Such a response is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. It does not necessarily indicate that the person has developed a psychiatric disorder. Nonetheless, in a small number of cases, such exposure can lead to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Therefore, to prevent, diagnose, treat and manage stress, ACT management and staff should...

- Seek to provide adequate physical, emotional and spiritual care for all staff at all times.
- Be aware of the dangers of excessive or prolonged stress, and understand signs of it in colleagues for whom they are responsible.
- Managers should try to ensure that staff have adequate working conditions, take annual leave due to them in a timely way, have realistic work plans and working hours, and know that they have the full support and encouragement of their manager in their work environment. Building a positive team spirit is central to the stress reduction process.
- Debriefing during and at the end of deployments should be done by a trained person if possible and improvements made where necessary based on feedback received.
- Ensure that staff who have been in, or witnessed, traumatic incidents receive specialist and professional support.

- Within certain limits, ACT management is encouraged to cover the cost of counselling for staff who have suffered stress as a result of their work, where this is appropriate and possible.
- If an accident, injury, illness, death or other serious event happens to a staff member, and if that person is unable to contact their next of kin, in most cases the employing organisation has at least an ethical duty to inform them, preferably in person. This is obviously a very sensitive process, and it is important that organisations have a clear procedure for it.