**Abduction and Kidnap Guidance**

The following generic advice should be adapted and incorporated into local security plans as appropriate, dependent on the context analysis and risk assessment.

# Introduction

The number of aid workers being abducted or kidnapped has increased substantially in the past few years. Although every situation is different there are some common features, enabling us to anticipate potential incidents, to minimise the risks, and to provide basic guidance on survival techniques.

The best defence against abductions and kidnapping is having and practising good security procedures, which are based on a thorough understanding of the general context and risks, and of the particular threat of kidnapping specific to your location.

**Definitions**

* **Kidnap:** a person is forcibly takenwith the intention of detaining them at an unknown location until demands for cash or concessions (ransom) are met.
* **Abduction:** a person is forcibly taken; demands are not made initially, although it is intended to cause harm or to force the person to act for the abductors benefit. Abduction may become a kidnapping once demands are made.
* **Hostage:** theperson who is held against their will to ensure specified terms are met by others (the organisation, family, authorities, etc).

**Identify the Risks**

Where abduction/kidnap is identified as a potential risk, analysis is required to understand the type of threat, the motives, the conditions and treatment of abductees and the overall chances of survival, in order that appropriate preventative and contingency measures may be adopted.

* **Motivation:** in many situations kidnap is motivated by profit not principle, although there may be overlap between groups carrying out political abductions and kidnap for ransom. Understanding of motivation will assist in dealing with the challenges. For example, although an acceptance strategy may guard against abduction of staff for political reasons, staff may still represent an attractive target for ransom kidnappings.
* **Potential targets** may be pre-identified due to the perceived wealth or influence of the organisation or individual staff. In some areas, specific nationalities may be at higher risk.
* **Opportunity:** most abductions occur while the victim is travelling in vehicles. Many occur in the early morning, within 400 meters of home or office, due to a predictable pattern of behaviour. Roadblocks or car accidents may be staged to create a scene where abductors then have a pretext to operate quickly, disguised as officials. Similar tactics may be used to gain entrance in homes or offices.

**Reduce the Risks**

Having identified and understood the risks, appropriate operating procedures and preparatory measures should be adopted to reduce risk. Consider the following:

* Reduce the factors promoting abduction - displays of assets, deployment of specific nationalities, etc.
* Restrict movements to minimum necessary. Avoid routines and regular routes.
* Ensure good site security for homes and offices.
* Ensure staff access to, and understanding of, all communications equipment.
* Check for surveillance - possible targets are often surveyed before abduction.
* Brief staff on the risks, appropriate behaviour to prevent abduction and behaviour for survival during abduction.
* Inform staff of support they and their families will receive and assure staff that all efforts will be made to secure their release.
* Build relationships with key actorswho may be of use in the prevention, mediation or negotiation of abduction or kidnapping. Discuss their possible role in advance.

**Surviving an Incident**

There are four key phases of a kidnap/hostage situation:

**Capture**

The initial capture is the most dangerous moment in the event; the abductors will be under stress, they are probably armed and most likely to use weapons if resistance is shown. Your objective is to survive, hence:

* Be calm and cooperative, speak only when spoken to, listen carefully and attentively, avoid sudden moves. Do not behave aggressively or try to be a hero: accept the situation.
* If in a group, try not to be separated. Appoint one person to speak for the group.
* Do not attempt to escape and or to physically resist.
* Do not make eye contact it may be mistaken for aggression.
* Recognise that fear and shock are normal reactions.

**Transportation**

* You may be drugged, blindfolded, restrained and beaten. Do not resist, the main purpose is to make you more submissive.
* If being transported, use the time to compose yourself. Keep your mind active.

**Confinement**

* Anticipate periods of isolation and other methods of intimidation and prepare for a long wait. Do not believe everything you are told. Persuade your abductors to contact your organisation or the authorities, find reasons why this would benefit them.
* Try to build a relationship of respect whilst keeping your dignity, do not beg or plead; be cooperative and obey demands without being servile or aggressive; do not discuss politics, keep to mutual subjects such as family and children; encourage your abductors to view you as a person.
* Try to retain personal belongings such as clothes, identification, watch and books unless forced to hand them over; ask for practical things such as toiletries, medicines, or time to exercise; avoid an exchange of clothes with abductors - it may hinder your identification in a rescue attempt.
* Be aware of body language and non-verbal communication styles; do not threaten to testify against abductors; if concealing their identity, do not indicate that you recognise them.
* Eat and drink water even if you have no appetite or it is unpalatable; maintain a routine of rest and activity; try to exercise daily and to keep track of time; maintain personal hygiene and maintain your values.
* Try to remember positive and pleasant memories, meditation techniques or other ways to connect to your personality; mentally reconstruct books or movies; think positively; do not despair; do not allow yourself to be convinced that you have been abandoned – your organisation will be working on your release.
* Keep a low profile, avoid appearing to study your abductors, although, to the extent possible, make mental notes about mannerisms, behaviour, speech, clothes, ranks, etc, in order to understand their profile, attitude and intentions; it may help in establishing possibilities for communication, the potential risks and may help the authorities after your release.
* Agree to talk on the radio, phone or video: say only what you are asked to, do not try to send signals or messages; if asked to sign notes, or write a confession, do so if not doing so will endanger your, or others, well being. You may be asked for specific details of your personal life and/or family, be aware this may be part of ongoing negotiations regarding your release (known as proof of life).

**Release or Rescue**

Most situations end through either release or rescue.

* If released; obey all instructions from your abductors
* If rescue is attempted by force lie on the floor, put hands over your head, do not try to identify yourself until appropriate to do so.
* Escape should only be considered if you are sure it will succeed, or if it is imperative to save your life, otherwise it may create more danger. If in a group, it may endanger the lives of others and may frustrate rescue activities.

**Aftermath**

* Regardless of the method of freedom, expect to be immediately and thoroughly debriefed. Cooperate with the authorities, giving as much detail as possible.
* Recognise that you may have developed sympathy for your abductors and their objectives (known as Stockholm syndrome).
* Accept offers of counselling, support, rest and recuperation.