

1.2 Duty of care

Alert has 30 years' experience delivering conflict, stability and security-related interventions and ensuring the safety and security of staff and consultants who implement our programmes. Alert upholds duty of care (DoC) for all of its staff and consultants during the time in which they are contracted to work for Alert, primarily through our safety and security policies, processes and infrastructure, but also through our performance management process and various policies which are aimed to protect staff wellbeing (e.g. R&R, flexible working, annual and compassionate leave policies).

Security and safety procedures

- *Security policy and principles* applied organisation-wide, including security manual with generic standard operating procedures (SOPs), tools and detailed guidance on security management;
- A *security and emergency evacuation plan* is developed by each Country Office and/or regional programme with its own security and crisis management procedures based on a detailed security risk assessment;
- A *security and emergency evacuation plan* for all individual visits to countries where Alert has no office;
- A *security covenant* which clarifies roles and responsibilities within Alert for security and confirming staff/consultant commitment to take responsibility for their own security and to promote the security of colleagues;
- *Crisis management structures and procedures*, such as incident reporting, emergency numbers and contacts, a Crisis Management Group in London and an Incident Management Team in each country programme and crisis simulations to practice crisis management procedures and learn valuable lessons;
- *Personnel with dedicated security management responsibilities* and equipment at the country level (satellite phones, VHF radio, etc.).

Alert's overriding security policy asserts the primacy of the protection of life and wellbeing over assets or programme deliverables. Security policies and templates are provided in English, French and Russian. DoC is additionally ensured by Alert's systems, training and practices which have been reviewed and deemed effective by independent external experts. These include:

- *Regular risk assessments and updates*, conducted as part of new project design, and regular in-country meetings;
- Staff who will travel to any fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) and environments (including the Caucasus) are required to complete a *hostile environments & first aid (HEFAT) training* provided by Alert before any field missions;
- The existence and enforcement of *clear communication rules*, such as a nominated point of contact for London-based staff and international consultants travelling to field locations, with whom daily contact must be confirmed, and similar systems at the country level. All Alert staff and contractors have Alert's three 24-hour emergency contact numbers on hand at all times;
- *Immediate notification reports* in the case of a serious incident for purposes of notification and/or summoning assistance, and *post-incident reports* for purposes of lesson learning;
- *Comprehensive insurance*. Alert has combined international insurance that covers travel, medical and emergency expenses for all staff while outside the country of normal domicile. There is 24-hour general accident insurance for all staff, health insurance (national and international staff), and comprehensive vehicle insurance (where applicable);
- Alert ensures the physical health of expatriate staff to be based in FCAS through *medical clearance* prior to departure and a medical check on completion of the contract.

When launching new operations in an FCAS environment, an Alert staff member, usually the Chief Operating Officer, will develop a security and emergency evacuation plan for individual visits, using the template for visits to countries where Alert has no office. Security risk assessment and country security plans are reviewed at agreed intervals (according to the security context) and shared with the Crisis Management Group (CMG) in London.

General wellbeing policies

Alert has in place a number of policies in place to ensure health and safety, and both physical and emotional wellbeing of employees:

- *Rest and recuperation* policy to grant recovery time (both mental and physical) to staff members who have worked outside and/or in excess of contracted hours, often the case when travelling outside the UK for extended periods of time;
- *Flexible working and work from home policies* to allow employees with particular needs to find a suitable balance;
- Our *compassionate leave policy* allows for special leave to cope with, e.g. bereavement, relationship difficulties, childcare difficulties, or other personal problems and dilemmas can all interfere with our work;

- All staff have access to free, independent and confidential *counselling services* for work or non-work related problems, should they need it;
- The *Internal Code of Conduct* defines standards of behaviour that staff should show to each other (and any partner or interlocutor), based on the recognition of the human dignity of each and every person, the primacy of respect, and the active understanding of the needs and interests of others within the organisation.
- Periodic staff *welfare surveys* are conducted to monitor levels of welfare, stress, management adherence to policies, etc.

Duty of care towards local partners

Alert's work and approach to risk with regard to local partners is guided by the principle of 'do no harm' and by our *Codes of Conduct*, both internal (see above) and [external](#).¹ Of particular relevance are the principles of:

- *Primacy of people in transforming conflicts*. We believe that genuine conflict transformation is only possible with the participation and involvement of those most affected by the conflict.
- *Accountability*. We are morally responsible to those whom we seek to assist and accountable to those with whom we work.
- *Confidentiality*. While endeavouring to be open and transparent, we are committed to maintaining confidentiality in situations where the effectiveness of our programmes or the security of our staff and partners may be at risk.

As such, we are guided by our partners' own sense of risk, not pushing them to go beyond what they feel is safe (politically or physically) in any particular situation. This is hard wired into our ways of working, and has been built into the activities in this proposal, e.g. communication and public outreach strategies are agreed with local interlocutors (see also 1.5. Risk Management). On occasions, Alert will adopt a higher sense of risk than our partners: for example, in youth dialogue promoting civic activism in politically sensitive contexts, Alert has dissuaded over-confident youth participants from engaging in politically sensitive public awareness campaigns within our programmes.

During travel to events on Alert programmes, we aim to look after participants' wellbeing and all participants are covered by Alert travel insurance and subject to Alert security policies (outlined above). On recent occasions we have responded to security threats during meetings held in both Istanbul and Brussels. For example, on one occasion, holding a training/dialogue meeting in Istanbul (in 2014), located in Taksim area, the hotel and participants were affected by tear gas used to disperse demonstrations held nearby. The incident took place in the evening when participants had free time and were out of the hotel. Alert was able to locate everyone within one hour using phone tree/text communication, to warn them or to ensure they were accounted for. On the next day, we relocated to a hotel in another part of town, with assistance from a dedicated tour agent, as weather conditions meant that tear gas was still in the air and affected people. Alert's CMG was informed, but not activated, as the level of risk was relatively low. Currently, since the security situation in Istanbul has deteriorated, we do not plan to hold meetings there.

On a more recent occasion (November 2015), we held a meeting in Brussels shortly after the Paris attacks during the emergency 'lockdown', when the metro was closed. We introduced strict rules for participants, provided a comprehensive security briefing, what to do in the case of a terrorist attack, and ensured contingency and communication plans in case of emergency, all of which were pre-approved by Alert's CMG (but which did not, fortunately, need to be used).

Examples

With the news of the earthquake in Nepal in 2015, all Alert/London Crisis Management Group (CMG) members were immediately notified and a plan of action agreed to contact all Alert/Nepal team members (using the phone numbers in the Nepal security tree) to ascertain whether they were safe. Using a range of communications (email, phone, skype, whatsapp, viber, twitter, etc.) we were able to contact all staff within a short time period. Staff were instructed to stay where they were (all were in safe locations), remain in regular contact with the Country Manager (or the CMG if that was not possible) and not to go to the office until further notice. Although the Alert office remained standing, we were concerned about possible structural damage and no staff returned to work until we had secured a structural assessment. Operations resumed within three days. Had damage to Kathmandu been more substantial, Alert would have been prepared – one building in our office compound runs on solar power and has its own water supply which may have helped cope with large-scale municipal water and electricity shortages. Alert regularly participates in UN and INGO networks and working groups and continued to monitor safety and security conditions for staff throughout the recovery process through these mechanisms.

In 2012, the Tajikistan authorities closed down a number of international NGOs operating in Tajikistan based on allegations of political interference. Alert was informed that the KGB had concerns about our work with young people through an EU-funded project, and were particularly concerned about the content of a summer camp we had organised

¹ www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/international-alert-code-conduct-conflict-transformation-work

on tolerance, for the prevention of radicalisation. This resulted in a political and security crisis incident during the summer camp in which a number of participants and staff were interrogated by KGB officials, and negative media coverage was published in local press alleging that Alert was undermining the interests of Tajikistan through its education programme for young people. This incident was followed by an investigation into Alert's presence in Tajikistan. During the incident, we cut short the youth camp as sensitively as possible, ensuring the security and wellbeing of participants and staff. We were quickly in touch with the British embassy, who were supportive. Our staff in the local office kept a low profile but kept in touch with other NGOs in order to stay informed on the broader situation, and Alert's head office in London increased contact with the Tajikistan office and monitored the situation closely. At this time we also appealed for support to Catharine Ashton, then High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security, who publicly stated her support for Alert in Tajikistan. Following the conclusion of the investigation, Alert's local office was permitted to continue operations, and we redesigned a follow-up youth project to hold a summer camp under a more politically sensitive title and programme, and developed a new detailed risk and contingency plan based on the experience.

Alert has been working in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2000. In 2012 and 2013, attacks and advances by the M23 rebellion militia provoked numerous security crises affecting our offices in North and South Kivu. At certain points the city of Goma, where one of our offices is located, was militarily controlled by the rebel movement, and there were open military clashes and violence in our areas of operation. Incidents were managed by both our local DRC and London offices – with daily (from time to time hourly) updates and analysis – including keeping in contact with all local staff via a pre-established telephone tree. On a practical level, staff were paid early so that they had access to monies in the event of banks (and the office) being closed, and were provided with phone credit to be able to maintain contact. Through these and numerous other security crises during our 15 years of operations in DRC, we have successfully maintained the safety of our staff and consultants by investing in security management including: sourcing and providing a bespoke personal security training for all members of the DRC staff; actively participating in the local security networks (INSO, UNDSS, etc.); procuring and training key staff in the use of satellite phones, Codan radios and other security equipment; pro-actively researching the security context of new operational areas, e.g. conducting a two-week security assessment in Ituri Province prior to undertaking conflict and human rights risk research related to oil exploration; opening a bank account in Gisenyi (just across the border in Rwanda) to ensure there are emergency funds available locally.

Added value offered by Alert's DoC

- Alert works with small on-the-ground teams in most cases – again because we work with local partners – and therefore impact of incidents can be minimised.
- We have developed in-house security management capacity which means that we can avoid reliance on expensive security consultancy companies to deliver our security framework and training to staff in FCAS environments at better value for money.
- As demonstrated by examples above, we are experienced and adept at responding to various crises, whether they be natural disaster, political and/or security.