

The Human Angle – A Guide for Gathering Testimonies from the Field

Objective: Giving a human face to a situation is one of the best ways to communicate about an issue. Interviews gathered from the field can be used on websites, magazines and possibly external media.

Things to Remember:

- ❖ Do the research – know about the issue and the potential interviewees
- ❖ Take the right equipment – notebook, pen and audio-recorder if possible
- ❖ Choose the right place to do an interview – shaded, seated, quiet
- ❖ Identify yourself clearly to the interviewee. Who are you? Who do you work for? What are you going to use the information for?
- ❖ Get Consent

Consent is not determined by a signed piece of paper. It means genuinely explaining the process and outcomes of an interview to the interviewee, ensuring they understand it and are happy to proceed. There is no obligation. If a person does not want to be interviewed or want to remain anonymous, that is ok.

- ❖ Be careful of the choice of translator (gender, ethnicity, proximity to the story)
- ❖ If they are nervous, chit chat a bit first about things like the weather. Be patient and understanding
- ❖ Let them know that they can ask you if they don't understand a question
- ❖ Don't forget to ask the basic questions:
 1. Full name? (Get correct spelling!)
 2. Age?
 3. Married? Number of children?
 4. Where do you come from?
 5. What do you do?
- ❖ Ask the person to tell the story, step-by-step, moving through in chronological fashion but ask open question like *"Please tell me what happened? Please tell me why you had to leave your home?"*

- ❖ Don't interrupt and make eye contact.
- ❖ Facilitate the storytelling by summarising where you are and asking what happened next (e.g., "Okay, after you saw the soldier come in, then what happened?")

- ❖ Make note of points for further clarification (if you don't want to interrupt right then), get dates, times and place names correctly. If the interviewee doesn't know the exact date or time, try to approximate by using things that help people mark time. Do they remember the month? Before or after a particular holiday? Before or after payday?

- ❖ *Clarify* unclear descriptions and *verify* the source or basis of the information, e.g., if the witness says: "then soldiers came into our home and took my son out", you should ask "how many soldiers?" and "how do you know they were soldiers?"

- ❖ Avoid leading questions, which will encourage the interviewees to give the answer they think you want to hear, rather than the truth (e.g., ask "What did the soldier do?" rather than "Did the soldier hit you hard?")

- ❖ Ask them to tell you how they feel

- ❖ Ask the person if other persons have also experienced the same event/ witnessed it

- ❖ Ask if they have anything they want to add or ask

- ❖ Get Photos – of the interviewee and the surroundings for context, taking issues of anonymity and protection into account.

According to the Pew Research Centre, an Internet user is 7.4 times more likely to click on content if an image is attached to it. So photos matter when you are trying to get a message across, however it can feel invasive. So make sure you get consent. If they do not want a full frontal, you can take pictures that are still great. See tips for photos.

Aftercare of Witnesses/ interviewees

- ❖ It should not be forgotten that those interviewed are often people who have personally witnessed or experienced extremely traumatic events or have relatives or close friends who have been victims. Even if you can't provide care directly, you should at a minimum be able to direct persons to those who could help, such as a local support group, when applicable.