Workshop on Documentation Protocols and Best Practices
Gaziantep, Turkey 24 - 26 August 2016
Concept paper

The conflict in Syria has claimed a staggering numbers of lives; human rights abuses are widespread, in particular Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) against women and men, girls and boys, as well as a range of violations against or affecting children, for which there is no accountability. Important documentation work is being done by Syrian organisations, but they have identified a need for improved knowledge, capacity and improved coordination. On 26-28 March 2016, NPWJ organised a roundtable on “Accountability, Sexual and Gender Based Violence, Women’s Rights and Children’s Rights in Syria”, at which many organisations working on documentation indicated a need to improve their knowledge on a range of issues including best practices for the collection of information; for conducting their work so it causes no further harm to anyone involved in the process; and for collecting and storing information in such a way that it has the potential to be used as evidence in future prosecutions and other accountability processes.

There are several tools available to assist those working on documentation, which offer various approaches and guidance on basic principles. There are three recent tools offering specialised assistance on SGBV, including SGBV against men and boys, and on violations against children. These three tools are; the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict, established by the UK in June 2014; the Anti-Impunity Tool: Guidance for Investigating and Prosecuting Serious Violations against Children in Armed Conflict, established by Conflict Dynamics International in December 2015; and the Guidelines on investigation of conflict-related SGBV against Men and Boys, established by Institute for International Criminal Investigations in February 2016. However, most Syrian organisations are neither aware of nor use these tools, which deprives them of support in conducting credible, quality work that is sensitive and considerate to victims and to their staff, and these tools remain largely untested by practitioners in the field.

To answer these needs, NPWJ is organising a workshop on “Documentation Protocols and Best Practices” in Gaziantep from 24-26 August 2016. By examining the three tools described above, the workshop is designed to build awareness of them and develop the documentation skills of Syrian activists, while at the same time exploring the strengths and weaknesses of each tool and testing their utility for Syrian activists, thereby benefiting from their insight and experience on the ground. Internationally recognised experts on criminal investigations and prosecutions at the highest level and those involved in drafting the tools under discussion will lead the workshop, focusing on fundamental principles for documentation, including specific factors to consider when interviewing child victims and victims of SGBV; realistic and effective protocols for handling evidence including chain of custody of physical and documentary evidence; relationships with witnesses and intermediaries that include risk management protocols; and other similar issues. The workshop participants will consist of a number Syrian CSOs and NGOs who work on documentation, SGBV and other crimes against men, women and boy and girls, with a focus on smaller organisations who could particularly benefit from this workshop. By developing the documentation skills of these organisations, the workshop is also designed to strengthen assistance to victims of violations on the ground while also helping to challenge abuses and address the denial of justice to survivors.