Training Course on Security Awareness for Human Rights Defenders
Gaziantep, Turkey – 18-19 January 2017

Supported by:
Background

Over the course of the last six years, a large amount of information about violations of international human rights and humanitarian law has been gathered by Syrian and other groups. However, these efforts did not result in a deterrent effect by putting people on notice that violations are being investigated and, therefore, abate the level of violence within the country; quite the opposite.

Organisations and individuals working on documentation and human rights protection have been targeted by those committing crimes, irrespective of the position or allegiance of those involved, due to the threat that information gathered constitutes for them in the long term. Since March 2011, the security apparatus of Damascus, terrorist groups and local militias have all targeted civil society representatives and human rights defenders, particularly those working on, or suspected of working on, documenting human rights violations and crimes under international law. Without sufficient security and safety awareness and protocols to guide their everyday work, the efforts of Syrian civil society organisations and human rights defenders risk becoming a liability for them and a direct threat to their personal and organisational security and safety, and that of those with whom they interact.

To answer these needs, NPWJ organised a training course on “Security Awareness for Human Rights Defenders”, which took place in Gaziantep on 18-19 January 2017. Participants consisted of representatives of Syrian CSOs and NGOs who work on documentation. The two-day training, which was led by internationally-recognised experts, focused on the main components of physical and personal security awareness, particularly in the context of investigating and documenting human rights violations and crimes under international law. Topics also included psycho-social issues, particularly about primary and secondary post-traumatic stress in victims and in those working with victims, and the development of strategies and protocols to guide the everyday work of those working on documentation efforts.

Structure of the training course

The training took place over two days, during which the experts gave interactive presentations on security awareness. Each session was very participative, with the participants engaging with the experts and sharing their own experience on the field and asking questions on how to improve their own security and also the security of the people they gather information from. The first day was dedicated to “Physical and personal security”, “Security for documentation” and “Psychosocial issues and post-traumatic stress”, while the second day focused on “Static security” and “Stress management and post-traumatic stress”. The course included stress-relieving exercises and practical exercises on physical and personal security and on security for documentation. At the beginning of the second day, a review of the activities of the first day was conducted, including expectations of the participants for the rest of the training. At the end of the training course, the participants were invited to fill out evaluation forms.

Experts

The training course was led by Willie Nugent and Ahmad Sheikhani, respectively experts in physical and personal security awareness, and psycho-social issues such as post-traumatic stress.

Willie Nugent is the founder and managing Director of Eurocheck Security Consultants, a leading provider of worldwide security training to groups and individuals. He served in the Irish Defence

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1 See Annex 2 for the program of the workshop.
Forces (IDF) for over twenty years, before retiring with the rank of Captain in 2001. While in the IDF, he served three years in South Lebanon as part of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Mr Nugent is strongly committed to human rights and democracy and served as Special Security Officer with the European Union Border Assist Mission (EUBAM) in Gaza and Israel in 2009. Over the last three years, he has conducted hostile environment, security awareness and war crimes investigation trainings throughout Europe, Africa, the Middle East and South America.

Ahmad Sheikhani has 14 years of experience in the psychotherapy, psychosocial support and capacity-building fields. In addition, he has worked for eight years with international and local NGOs such as UNHCR, UNICEF, Terre des homes Syria, Relief International, Syrian Arab Red Crescent and Bright Future. During his post-graduate training, he practiced for five years with a high profile psychologist and psychotherapists in Al Bashir hospital. As a psychotherapist, he has worked closely with conflict survivors, especially children, for which he developed a “play therapy” approach that yielded great recovery results. He is the author of two academic books on the topic of the affect of war on children. The experts were joined by the NPWJ Syria team; Rami Nakhla, Alaa Abed, Jessica Galissaire and Mustafa Ghashim in facilitating the training.

Participants
The training course participants consisted of representatives from Syrian CSOs and NGOs who work in the field of human rights violations documentation and provide humanitarian services to vulnerable populations, with a focus on smaller organisations that could particularly benefit from this training course. The organisations represented included: Hurras, a children rights protection organisation; Rm Team, a Syrian-run monitoring and evaluation organisation with a vast network of researchers throughout Syria; the Syrian Institute for Justice and Accountability, an organisation dedicated to documentation and accountability; Shafak, an impartial, independent, non-profit whose purpose is to provide humanitarian services to vulnerable persons regardless of political or religious affiliations and, in the long run, to contribute to the recovery and rebuilding of society on the basis of freedom, justice and equality; Civilians for Peace and Justice, an organisation dedicated to constitution reform, transitional justice and the rule of law; MAF, a Kurdish organisation that advocates for the defence of human rights and public freedoms in Syria; Hope of Space, an organisation working on child protection, education and relief; Start Point, a structure assisting Syrian women who have suffered rape, detention or kidnapping to reintegrate into their communities; Tayyar Mwatana, a Syrian political organisation that originated in Damascus at the beginning of the Syrian revolution; Mwatana for civilian work, which focuses on capacity building and constitution reform; Human Rights Guardians, an organisation working with detainees and victims of forced disappearance; the Free Syrian Lawyers Association, which works towards the strengthening of the rule of law and justice in a way that protects freedoms, public and private rights, achieves equality and preserves human dignity; Women Now, an organisation dedicated to women’s rights and empowerment; SHAML, which is supporting capacity building for Syrian organisations; Ghiras Aleppo, an organisation involved in children’s rights, education and documentation; and Baytuna Syria, a leading institution fostering the Syrian civil society movement by promoting an inclusive and democratic future for all Syrians, thus laying the foundation for long-term stability across the country.

Day 1 – Wednesday 18 January
NPWJ Syria Project Coordinator, Rami Nakhla, opened the training course by welcoming all participants and briefly introducing himself and the work of NPWJ in supporting Syrian Civil
Society organisation. He explained how NPWJ works to achieve peace and shares the belief that it cannot be achieved without justice. There must be justice to have sustainable peace and accountability of perpetrators and redress for victims are key in obtaining sustainable justice. Mr Nakhla underlined the big gap existing in the field of security for people working in information gathering and accountability, stressing that the aim of this training course is for participants to convey what they will learn to their colleagues in Syria, and possibly deliver the training themselves in the field. In addition, Mr Nakhla stressed that NPWJ would be following up with participant organisations to assist them to put in place their own threat assessment and risk management policies and would serve as link between them and the experts to provide additional support for any security risk they might face and need to mitigate in the future.

Mr Nakhla introduced the two experts, who added more details about their own respective experiences. The participants introduced their organisations and the work they do on documentation and the provision of humanitarian services to vulnerable populations.

**Presentation of workshop objectives, pre-evaluation of knowledge and identification of expectations**

Security expert Willie Nugent identified the overall aim of his intervention in this training course: help the participants protect themselves, their teams, witnesses, victims, information and evidence. If organisations working on gathering evidence want to do their job properly, their teams must be kept safe first and foremost. In the process of collecting information, these organisations cannot endanger themselves or other people.

The participants then discussed their expectations for the workshop, which helped the experts to assess their previous knowledge of the subject matter and adjust their sessions to meet the needs of participants. They raised many issues and expectations such as learning how to manage their activists inside Syria, more specifically how to protect them while they do their job. Participants were especially interested in learning concrete procedures to increase the safety of staff working in the field and how to mitigate security threats professionally and allow them carry out their work safely.

Another area that participants hoped that the experts could advise them on was how to collect data and document human rights violations without violating the security of the victims with whom they collaborate. They also expected to learn how to explain to survivors the importance of collecting evidence, especially when the crimes being documented include the shelling of schools and hospitals. Given that there is currently a significant load of work inside Syria, participants expressed a strong interest in learning “Training of trainers” methods they could use to teach Syrian civilians how to protect themselves.

The increasing level of insecurity in Gaziantep – the general security situation, abductions, kidnappings, robberies – was also mentioned as a concern and participants were keen on learning any procedure that could help them conduct their work safely in the city. They observed that there are still a lot of gaps in this area, that it takes time for Syrian people to settle in Turkey and that their families need to be protected. They specifically asked experts what is the best way to mitigate the exposure of activists both inside Syria and in Turkey.

**Presentation and components of physical and personal security**

Willie Nugent started his intervention by underlining the necessity for all participants to implement security policies and security procedures in their organisations if they have not done so yet. He
stressed that it would be difficult to do this in two days but that No Peace Without Justice and the experts will do everything they can to help them. NPWJ has implemented such procedures and could share them with participants, while he could share other – less comprehensive – procedures with them. Observing that he has good general knowledge of the situation in Syria, Mr Nugent stressed that the people who are on the ground are the world’s best experts on their specific nature of threats: they know their area of intervention better than anybody else. Hence, each organisation needs to take ownership of the security of its people and of the information they gather. What we can offer them is the tools and methods they can use to utilize their knowledge to come out a professional assessment. The aim of this training course, said the expert, is to help all the participants do this.

More specifically, the aim of the first security module was to help participants be able to keep themselves and those around them safer. As observed by the expert, the participants taking part in the training course may be the only person in their organisation who will have been trained on security. They will thus have to go back to their organisation and push for the definition and implementation of security programs. A difficulty mentioned at this point is that, sometimes, organisations ask too much of their personnel, without realising how dangerous it is on the ground. It is thus very important to plan and prepare properly for the field, before contemplating any action.

**Threats and risks assessment**

Mr Nugent stressed that the first and most important advice he can give to the participating activists was the utmost importance of identifying threats. If we do not identify threats, we cannot do anything about them. The first thing to do before sending people to the field, is therefore to identify the threats to ourselves, our organisation, our people and the people we are interacting with. Before asking somebody to do a job, we must know the exact situation, including what could happen in the next few months. Security always starts with a threats and risks assessment. A threat can be defined as “something that can hurt you”. It is of critical importance to list these threats in writing and never ignore them; everybody, including people on the ground, must be involved in this risk assessment process. People on the ground might feel like there are 10 threats to them, while teams staying in headquarters may identify only three. A very important thing to remember is that just because some threats are less likely to happen than others does not mean that we should not plan and prepare for them as well. We must address all of the threats and be prepared for all of them. The first time doing a risk assessment can take a lot of time. After this, it is just readjusting and updating. The first assessment could be a long document. Ideally, the organisation should do a detailed assessment and the individual people working in the organisation should be able to make small assessments, even mental ones.

After having identified and written down the threats, it is then necessary to assess the risks, which can be defined as “the chance of the threat happening”. Concretely, when we list our threats, we might come up with 20. But the risk will not be the same for every threat. In Gaziantep, kidnapping can be very likely, while bombings are less likely to occur. However, the situation can also change every day and very quickly. This is why threats and risks assessments must be updated all the time, i.e. at least once a day. To put it simply, assessing the risks consists of identify the threats and then identifying what is the chance of this threat happening. It is writing down the things that could go wrong and how likely it is that they will go wrong.

Going more into detail, Mr Nugent explained that nothing and no one must be ignored in the risk assessment process, especially collaborating victims. People must be warned of what could happen if they tell their story. It is the responsibility of the activists to inform them. The threats to the property of the organisations must also be assessed: vehicles, laptops, USB sticks, offices,
information, evidence and so on must be included in the definition of “property”. It is of crucial importance to do this assessment in the most professional and effective way possible, not only for security reasons. Indeed, donors and supporters may be slow to get involved with you if you ruin the reputation of your organisation by failing to protect people. This is also concerns people in camps, who have survived by taking security seriously: they need to be able to trust you.

In order for participants to better understand how a threats and risks assessment is done, Mr Nugent shared an example of a risk assessment table, as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat Assessment</th>
<th>Vulnerability Assessment</th>
<th>Risk Analysis</th>
<th>Mitigating Measures</th>
<th>Decision.</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>Weakness</td>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Likelihood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidnap</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Car jacking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
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<td>Mines</td>
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<td>Office Attack</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

He explained that organisations can have one document for their office, one for their team on the ground, one specifically for evidence, etc. The most probable threats should be listed first and the details of each risk must be written down. For instance: “kidnappings happen in this specific part of the town at this specific time of the day”. In this case, the solution is not to go in this part of the town at this time of the day. If we do not write the details, we will not find solutions and people will be in danger.

During the following Q&A session, participants raised concerns about how to deal with unexpected threats and the impossibility to plan and prepare for them. For instance, if for a while there is random shelling every day, and the shelling threat is assessed, but then there is no shelling for a few weeks. What do we do? What if there is new unexpected shelling all of a sudden?

Mr Nugent picked up on this point, noting that unexpected things happen and there is no place in the world that is 100% secure. However, there are things that we can do to protect ourselves if shelling starts. In relation to shelling, there can be two different situations: artillery shelling or aerial bombings. After spending a while in the field, it is possible to recognise the sound of artillery. It is even possible to hear the difference between the different weapons used. Hence, there is a little room for anticipation. For example, it is possible to anticipate the areas that will be targeted. If an area has been targeted – such as markets, hospitals or schools – it is very likely that it will be targeted again, so it is possible to prepare for this. For example, when a bomb comes down, things are shattered 200 meters around the place of impact. The safer place in this case is therefore to stay in a hole. If one hears artillery, find a ditch, stay inside and cover. In the case of aerial bombings, there are a lot of different options. The safest place however would be to find shelter in a bunker.
or a basement. In Syria, most bombs are artillery and target specific areas: if you are in an area
where there is a military headquarter or a communications centre, it is more likely to being targeted.

**Weaknesses and strengths**

Following the first section of the training, participants did a group exercise in which they identified
what weaknesses and strengths their respective organisations may currently have regarding
kidnappings in Gaziantep.

Here are the main weaknesses listed by participants:

- They are exposed to danger in the streets;
- Their headquarters don’t have security;
- Persons working for NGOs are often criminally threatened and targeted by criminal
  elements (because they have money and because of the work they do);
- They don’t know the city well, so don’t know which streets are safe and which aren’t;
- They don’t know many people in Gaziantep, so if they are kidnapped, no one will go
  looking for them;
- The lack of knowledge of the language further complicates things;
- They don’t always check if their phone is charged before going out;
- They don’t have GPS systems.

And here are the main strengths some of them identified:

- They work exclusively in streets which have lighting;
- They taught people to protect themselves;
- They are always expecting potential dangers;
- They always tell others when they move from one place to another during long travels;
- When travelling, they set up a route and don’t move away from it;
- They go to places at different times;
- They separate work from personal life;
- They don’t deal with unknown people;
- If hosted somewhere, they don’t leave information related to work on the tables;
- They don’t go to places they don’t know.

In the process of identifying these strengths and weaknesses, a participant asked whether it would
be safe to give their procedures document to donors and whether it could cause a threat to them.

Mr Nugent explained the difference between a policy paper and the procedures paper, noting that
the former is a rather short document, while the latter is a more detailed document. He said that
he would share with the donors the policy paper but not necessarily the procedures. Donors are
very important, so we can give them some general information regarding our procedures (ex: we
have a security guard, we have a fire exit; we always use the same driver, the doors are secured,
etc.) but not the details of what we do precisely in Gaziantep or Aleppo. Most importantly, what
this training course aims at, is reassuring you that if your organisation has a weakness, it can be
solved.

Overall, most of the organisations expressed weaknesses, while a few others went a little further
already because they had identified the threats beforehand. Some of the participants said that they
have a good level of security and that because they are an NGO, they are not likely to be targeted.
Mr Nugent warned them about such misconceptions and observed that precisely because they are
NGOs, they could be targeted. As some of them have offices in the same buildings, somebody might also take them for somebody else and they could be accidentally targeted. A participant agreed, and observed that it makes no sense to say that some NGOs are under threat and others are not. All of the NGOs and civil society, especially Syrian, are under threat.

The issue of media and social media was then raised as being a potential danger. Mr Nugent advised participants not to indicate their movements on social media, because the number of people who need to know where they are is limited. He also advised them to avoid press releases of conferences, to make sure that nothing goes up on Facebook, in newspapers etc, and to give as little public information about the work you are doing. For instance, the person waiting for you at the airport shouldn’t have your name or the name of the organisation or of the workshop on a sheet of paper. This might attract attention. Use the name of a hotel or silly names instead. The problem is, if people are very interested in what you are doing, they will find a way to find out about it. It is of crucial importance to make no copies, to keep no information on cell phones and to encode information by not using people’s names or places’ names. This way, if someone finds your document, it means nothing, it has no names and no places.

Another issue which was addressed is that of drivers. As a participant said, they might be an observer and might be the first person to hand them over to criminal networks. Participants were thus interested in learning about how to behave with drivers. Mr Nugent observed that drivers are very important, especially in Syria. They can take you to safe places and they know how to go through check points. But they also represent a potential threat and participants should share as little information as possible with them about the work they are conducting. They don’t need to walk around with them if they go to camps for instance. Their job is to drive. That’s it. We should limit the amount of information they have, and avoid putting them in a situation that might endanger us. It is however important to bear in mind that no situation is 100% safe. It is up to every organisation to decide what is the best way to keep its staff safe: for some of them it will be to have one driver, for others it will be to have three different drivers, and for others it will be to have their own car.

Risk level

After looking at weaknesses and strengths, the next step in the risk assessment is to look at the risk level. No computer program can assess the risk level for us, we need to assess it based on our experience and knowledge of the situation and the area. A matrix such as the one below can be used in order to do so.
If we take the example of a car bomb exploding in Gaziantep, the impact would probably be 4 or 5, since it would most probably cause serious injuries or even death. As for the likelihood of it happening, it would be around 3 and 4 in the city. Based on the matrix, if we criss-cross these two elements, we come to the conclusion that the risk level is either high or critical.

Mr Nugent then explained that the risk level that organisations are willing to work under is a choice and varies from one entity to the other. Most of the organisations he works with would be happy to work within low risk situations, while others may be willing to operate in situations of medium risk. It is a choice. The important thing is that people working for an organisation should be aware of the risk level they are under.

Building on this observation, a participant asked if the nature of organisations might be a reason for their acceptance of this higher risk. Mr Nugent explained that, of course, the nature of some organisations work, e.g. humanitarian purposes, explained this acceptance of a higher risk, but stressed that this acceptance is not accidental; it is calculated. Sometimes those organisations will pull out of a situation but they will stay longer than other organisations because they accept a higher level of risk than most organisations. Each organisation needs to decide under what level of risk they accept to work, but every organisation needs to be aware of the risks and have procedures to mitigate them.

**Mitigating the risks**

The most important part in a risk assessment is what comes after the risk analysis: mitigation. In other words: what can be done to bring the risk level down? For example, if an NGO wants to send an activist to an area which they know would lead to certain death, what can be done to protect this person?

Anticipating attacks by recognising patterns is one way to mitigate risks. If we look at bomb attacks in Turkey, patterns are recognisable. There have been attacks on a wedding, on a hotel and on a stadium. This indicates that terrorists will go for large targets, i.e. crowded areas. In order to mitigate the risk of being hit by a bomb attack, we can for example go to the market, to the restaurant or to the mall at a time when it is less likely to be targeted, for example when it is less crowded or when diplomats or politicians are not around. This is an example of how we can
decrease the likelihood of a threat happening. If we look at the impact, we can decrease that too. For example, if one wants to organise a meeting with NGOs, it may be wiser to organise the meeting over the course of 3 days, with a few NGOs a day, rather than meeting them all at once. If a bomb is dropped, less NGOs will be affected. Similarly, if several activists of the same organisation were to meet an official in a government building, there would be a higher risk. Here, the impact can be reduced by going to a different place or by sending two people instead of four.

To conclude this first part on the presentation and components of physical and personal security, Mr Nugent insisted that conducting a risk assessment is of fundamental importance. Often times, it is a matter of life or death. The biggest problem, he said, is that people often jump from the problem to the solution. Instead, we must assess everything: the threat, the weaknesses, the strengths, the impact, the likelihood and the risk level; and then mitigate. If not, we will miss threats and solutions.

**Practical exercises on physical and personal security**

In order to put into practice the lessons learned during the first session, Mr Nugent proposed practical exercises on physical and personal security. The first one consisted in practicing filling out a threat assessment form. The participants had to imagine they had just been deployed to Kampala, Uganda, where there have been several bag snatching and mugging incidents. Most of the incidents happened in markets or crowded areas such as bus stations and busy streets. Participants had to assume they worked with a local partner and had to go to the market to buy groceries. They had to define the weaknesses and strengths they had in this situation.

Here are the strengths which were listed by the participants:
- The local partner can be a guide and tell them which areas to avoid and advise them on how to behave;
- They know the potential danger beforehand.

Here are the weaknesses they identified:
- They do not know the city at all and do not know which areas are most likely to be targeted;
- As foreigners, it will be hard to blend in with people and avoid attracting attention;
- They would not know how to deal with the police.

In addition to these strengths and weaknesses, participants also listed as strengths some mitigation measures such as:
- Avoiding crowded areas;
- Avoid using cash and, as much as possible, divide money in several pockets instead of keeping everything in one;
- Hide money in books or envelopes in order to not attract the eye;
- Avoid being distracted.

Mr Nugent observed that these were interesting points, but they are not strengths. They are mitigation measures. He reminded the participants that before trying to mitigate the risks, it is very important to clearly identify all threats, instead of jumping directly to the solution. To conclude the exercise, he indicated that in this case, the activists’ biggest weaknesses would be that: (1) they do not know the area; and (2) they stand out. If people stand out, they are going to attract attention. In such situations, people have to try their best to blend in and not take everything with them.

In the next exercise, the participants had to determine the impact and the likelihood of their wallet or handbag being stolen.
A participant observed that the likelihood would be of level 5, the highest level, because we know that a lot of robberies have occurred in the area. As for the impact, it would be of 1 or 2. Another participant shared his opinion that the likelihood would be more of 4, and the impact higher than 1 or 2.

Mr Nugent intervened and explained that the impact would be actually more serious than that. It would be at least 3, maybe even 4. If an activist got their wallet stolen, it would create stress and cause severe disruption to programs. They would have no ID card, no credit card and no way to contact base. The likelihood would be pretty high, probably 4. In order to mitigate such risk, Mr Nugent said, activists should spread their cash around their pockets, have several copies of their passport, avoid bringing the actual one with them and have a cheap phone. If they resist, the impact could get higher. This is the reason why it is important to have a cheap phone: it is not worth dying for. It can just be handed to the robber. In the end, you lose only 30 or 40 dollars and you still have your passport. Another important thing is to let people know where you are and for how long. This way, if something happens, they will come looking for you.

The last exercise on physical and personal security read as follows: “Your organisation has its headquarters in Gaziantep. You are informed that a 17-year old girl in a camp in Syria wants to talk to you. She has been separated from her family for 3 years and lives with her uncle in an IDP camp. Who or what is under threat?”

Participants’ answers included: the girl herself, the activists, the uncle and family of the girl, information and the reputation of the organisation.

Willie Nugent thus observed that in this case, three or four different assessments should actually be conducted. Indeed, what may keep the girl safe, might not keep the others safe. He then asked participants what is the threat to the girl. Their answers included the government and criminal organisations and groups such as militias. Mr Nugent reminded them not to forget her own family, as well as the community. Indeed, her uncle could become a threat if she speaks about what happened to her in front of him.

At this point, Mr Nugent came back to the question of the strengths and weaknesses participants would have in the situation.

The main strength they listed is:
- The young girl reached out for them.

The weaknesses they identified were:
- Her age;
- The location of their headquarters;
- The fact that she will be the weakest link in the chain;
- The fact that she lives in a camp;
- The lack of knowledge of the background of the family and how they would react to the process of interviewing her.

Mr Nugent identified the lack of information as crucial here. There are, indeed many unanswered questions. What camp is she in? Are there 20 different ethnic and religious groups living together or only one? In order to reduce the risk level, these questions must be answered. Before conducting any interview, we would need to find out more about the village, the family, the camp, etc. Maybe somebody could agree to come with her. If the government or the militia finds out that she is passing out information, the impact of going ahead with the interview could be death. The risk level, based on what we know, is quite high, although if we get more information, the risk level may decrease. In such situations, it is ok to say no. Activists all want to do the best things, but
sometimes we are not able to reduce the risk level. It is ok to say it is too dangerous. The most important thing to remember is that it is better not to collect information rather than putting anyone at risk. In such a case, the organisation decides to go ahead and conduct the interview, it should take all necessary precautions. Organisations have great responsibilities concerning risk assessments. A participant agreed and shared the experience of his own organisation, which refuses to document anything in areas controlled by ISIS or the PKK in order to protect the safety of its personnel and that of survivors of crimes.

Mr Nugent proceeded to present the process of updating a primary risk assessment. Once the first risk assessment has been completed, it is very important to update it on a daily basis. In this process, every organisation must look at what the expert called “indicators of change”. In order to make their work safer, organisations working on the ground must (1) anticipate changes before they happen; and (2) monitor changes as they happen. They have to be “situationally aware” of their surroundings. Special events and political developments often reoccur. There are protests, holidays, anniversaries, elections, political and religious gatherings. In the modern age, something that occurs in one part of the world, might have repercussions anywhere. This is for example the reason why we all get worried on 11 September every year. Governments and militia groups may react in a particular way to special events and political developments.

If we anticipate the change, we can reduce the risks. We can decide not to go to work on a specific day for instance. Another useful indicator is that one terrorist attack usually leads to a cluster of attacks in the following days. We must keep this in mind. Terrorists go for priority targets: mosques, hotels, restaurants, protests and high profile places gathering a lot of people. In case of an increasing in the military activity or in case of protests, it could be wise to decide to suspend operations for a while, or to stop working in some areas where the situation has worsened. If check points are being installed everywhere, a hibernation strategy – i.e. staying at home or at the office – may be needed. Another solution could be relocation: displacing your activities somewhere safer. In this case, NGOs should let their people know what equipment they are going to need, such as food supplies, a phone charger or medical supplies. Every organisation must have a plan to evacuate or to relocate and everyone in the organisation should know what the plan is. Often, people hibernate because they waited too long before relocating or evacuating. No one should let this happen. People in the field have better knowledge of when to evacuate and they should be trusted.

**Psychosocial issues and post-traumatic stress**

The second part of the day was dedicated to a session presented by expert Ahmad Shiekhani on psychosocial issues and post-traumatic stress. More specifically, it focused on the psychological impact that working in the field or with victims may have on the participants. First, Dr Shiekhani asked the participants if they knew what concretely is a trauma. The proposed definition was that trauma happens when a person suffers from physical or psychological discomfort.

Then, the participants were asked what they expected to learn during this training course. Various participants expressed their desire to learn how to deal with trauma on a personal level and to be instructed in practical solutions in order to deal with it. A participant shared his experience of trauma, indicating that he has been having nightmares every night, suffers insomnia and feels depressed. Others wished to learn how to deal with persons who have undergone a trauma, especially victims of human rights violations and children.

In an attempt to start answering the participants’ questions, Dr Shiekhani observed that it might not be possible to help people who have PTSD, but what can be done is try and do no harm. Dr Shiekhani then asked participants when they thought their trauma started. A participant replied
that his personal trauma started when he had to flee Syria, stating that there is a difference between being forced out and deciding to leave voluntarily.

Building on this answer, Dr Sheikhani proceeded to demonstrate that the trauma these people are undergoing dates back to a lot earlier than 2011. As a people in the Middle East, they are one of the peoples experiencing the most trauma. There has been Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. In the region, trauma has been transferred from generation to generation. This is not related to seeing first hand somebody being killed; it is secondary trauma. When somebody has the idea of a threat being directed against themselves, this person is subject to trauma. This perception that we are under threat has been stored in our minds for many years, Mr Shiekmani said. This persistence of a perceived threat can become overwhelming and create a psychological confusion in our psychological map. The problem is there is no scheme in the Syrian community to overcome this. There are no clear projects or programs for people in Syria. The trauma they have is not a result of the last 4 or 5 years.

Among the people who have undergone trauma, only 10% are diagnosed with trauma as a disorder. But if the other 90% are not treated, they risk joining the diagnosed 10% in the long run. If they have not yet been diagnosed with PTSD, it is because they have developed what we call “resilience”, self-healing. It is not only being accustomed to trauma. There are two kinds of traumas: man-made traumas (bombings, wars) and natural disaster traumas. In normal life, we may see shocking things, but it does not mean that we are necessarily traumatised. Things that are outside of the scope of ordinary life can be traumatising. In such cases, every person will react differently. Based on their resilience, a person might develop a trauma, or overcome the traumatising event. What makes no doubt is that all wars, in all forms, are traumatising experiences, just like physical assaults, beating, rape or natural disasters.

There is also secondary PTSD: when people develop PTSD symptoms without having experienced the traumatising experience themselves. Whether they will develop trauma or not depends on the person, their personality, their background and their past experiences. Some will be traumatised, others will not.

Traumas caused by humans have greater impacts than natural disasters ones. They are harder to heal. One of the reasons why is because we do not know when it will end; it is repetitive. It is what is called a “complex trauma”: it has a start but no end.

One of the side effects of PTSD is silence, which makes the suffering internal. People are afraid to talk about their trauma for various reasons, for instance because a man should be strong, manly, and not cry. Others are under the impression that people will not understand them. However, as Dr Shiekhani indicated, the only way to heal is to get help. To fight the trauma, one must talk about it and digest the painful experiences. When someone is physically hurt, it is necessary to clean the wound; then it will leave a scar, but the pain will not be so bad as if nothing had been done to heal the wound. It is exactly the same with PTSD.

Dr Shiekhani explained that PTSD symptoms include:

- The loss of the pleasures of life (visiting relatives, playing sports, etc.);
- Sleeping problems (nightmares, insomnia);
- Flashbacks, re-living shocking scenes, seeing intruding pictures, migraines;
- Social exclusion or self-exclusion (because people feel misunderstood or accused of being weak).

The lengthier the traumatising experience, the more a person is likely to develop PTSD. Sometimes, these symptoms are not revealed right away, but rather appear after some time, such as when the person moves to a different place. This is what is called “delayed symptoms”. Similarly, symptoms
of PTSD can disappear if the person moves from the place where the trauma occurred. This all
depends on the person. Gender, personality and resilience are all factors that have an impact on
trauma. After a traumatising experience, some people might consider suicide, while others will not
be affected. It is a multiplicity of factors that lead to a disorder like PTSD.

Going back to the topic of how to help people who suffer PTSD, Dr Shiekhani explained that
listening, without giving guidance, can be helpful. He then gave them criteria to listen effectively.
Active listening was one of them. It is important not to push somebody to talk about a traumatising
event and to build some limits, like preventing yourself from giving advice. If they need
professional help, refer them to somebody else instead, such as service providers. The golden rule
is to be a good listener and to accept the independence of people. They have the right not to talk
about things.

To sum up, the main principles of active listening are as follow:

- Be a good listener
- Do no harm
- Refer to services
- Listening is not a treatment

A participant asked how not to be affected by PTSD. Dr Shiekhani gave the participants different
options. One of them is to have a mentor, or peer support from people who have undergone the
same experience. Another solution is to separate work and personal life clearly.

**Practical exercise on active listening**

To put into practice the lessons learnt in this first session, Dr Shiekhani proposed a practical
exercise on active listening. A participant had to tell a traumatising experience, while another one
was listening. The results of this exercise were very instructive. One thing it taught them, is the
importance of body language. Here is the advice given by Dr Shiekhani to be a good listener:

- uncross your legs;
- do not sit in an upright/straight position, sit down in a relaxed way;
- do not close your hands;
- avoid touching people, you never know how they might react;
- nod with your head, it shows solidarity.

A participant asked if it would be ok for the listener to cry. Dr Shiekhani replied that if the listener
is not a specialist and cries, it is fine. One important thing is to be prepared to hear shocking stories.
If it is a physician who cries in front of the person, they should take a break and not cry in front
of the victim. Otherwise, the person might think that their story is a very complicated one and lose
hope of ever healing. Another issue that might occur is sometimes, when a person wants to explain
their suffering to someone, the person will say that they suffer more, whatever the other one is
saying. This is not helping. The problem is that rather than listening, some people tell about their
own story. In order to be useful and to help people, it is absolutely necessary just to listen. It is
important not to compare situations and sufferings. The listener is not supposed to believe or not
believe the story. They are just supposed to listen. If people speak, it is because they have a need
for attention.

**Day 2 – Thursday 19 January**

**Review of previous day and expectations**
Under the guidance of NPWJ Syria Project Coordinator Rami Nakhla, the second day started off with a review of the previous day and expectations for the sessions to come. As participants had questions for Mr Nugent on physical and personal security, he came back to some of the topics he had gone through the previous day. One of these was mitigation.

It is crucial, he reminded the audience, to know what the threats are, to identify what the situation is for every threat and to know what weaknesses and strengths you have regarding each threat. Then, the next step is to assess the risk level, and to mitigate the risks. Mitigation is the crucial part. An organisation must think of all its employees and volunteers when assessing what level of risk is acceptable. The level of risk accepted is a calculated choice. It is also very important that an NGO knows what can be done to mitigate the risk before going in the field. A mitigation measure could be for example to give security advice to the staff, or to offer them protection. You have to think about this before you go, not once you are there. He strongly encouraged them to train their colleagues to do risk assessments and to update the assessment every day.

**General Security Awareness: “Arriving, Living and Working in a Potentially Hostile Environment”**

Mr Nugent then turned to the subject of arriving, living and working in a potentially hostile environment. One question that must be answered is: is it too dangerous to operate in this area? This must be decided based on the threat assessment. If things go bad in the area where we are operating – i.e. if there is shelling or demonstrations – it might be necessary to suspend operations and then resume the work after a week if things get better. If things start to get worse, it becomes necessary to think about how to get people out of the area. Always remember not to wait until it is too late to evacuate.

A participant observed that sometimes, the team in the field is less aware than people in HQ about the threat they are under and when they are told to move to another city, they refuse. The participants wanted to know what can be done in such a situation. No one can force people out. If the organisation has taken all reasonable precautions, if the people have been trained, it is the best you can do. Your responsibility stops here.

Still on this same topic, another participant asked whether it could help to make people in the field sign a paper stating that they commit to stop working if the situation becomes too dangerous. Mr Nugent doubted that it would work, because it is very hard to make people stop going places and doing what they want to do. The only real solution, he said, is to take all necessary precautions.

Regarding halting activities, a participant asked what to do in a case like Aleppo. Is it morally acceptable to tell people to stop going to work there when hundreds of people are dying every day? Mr Nugent explained that Aleppo is dangerous because there is shelling there and there are patterns of shelling. Sometimes you even get a warning. After having spent a while in such a hostile environment, people get accustomed to shelling and they recognise it. If they identify patterns, NGOs can decide where to work. For example, if there have been 15 rounds of shelling and you know that it usually stops after 15, you can resume the work in this area. The important thing is to do the risk assessment, see when the shelling is happening and where it is happening.

A participant regretted that she had not had the opportunity to attended this training course before the revolution. Back then, she said, she was foolish and took a lot of unnecessary risks. She shared the story of her arrest and how she had to swallow her SIM card to prevent the officers from discovering that she worked for an NGO. Had the officers discovered her contacts list, she would probably have been killed. Mr Nugent noted that concerning cell phones, the best option is to not have your phone with you or to have what it is called a “sanitised phone”, i.e. a cheap phone with
only two or three numbers in it. The idea is to carry as little information as possible. At checkpoints, instead of saying the truth, you can say you are a plumber. If the officers call the few numbers that are on your phone, your friends will answer and confirm that you are a plumber and that you work for them. They have to be informed beforehand, of course. If it is an NGO or the UN that answers, you may be dead. Mr Nugent advised the participants not to keep videos or pictures which might attract attention. He also warned them about storing encrypted data, which can be dangerous because it might make them look suspicious.

This is all the more important since human rights activists have a bad reputation when it comes to taking security precautions. The important thing is to stay safe in order to be able to do the work properly. Upon arrival in a hostile area, activists should adapt to local conditions and understand the type of threats that they are under. There are different threats in different places. They should identify them and prepare a response.

Passing from one area to another can also be tricky. Checkpoints may be controlled by different militia groups. Before going, know what these groups are and what they are looking for. It is crucial to know if the militia is affiliated to Al Qaïda, to the government, to ISIS or to another group. What participants should remember is to: (1) plan who is going to do the talking, (2) have one coherent and well prepared story; (3) keep it simple; and (4) try not to tell lies.

In order not to attract attention, activists should not carry expensive things around. Instead, they should stay under the radar so that nobody notices them. Because they should be prepared to give up anything that they have on them, they should leave all sentimental jewellery at home. Single women may consider wearing a cheap wedding ring so that nobody bothers them.

Taxi drivers may represent yet another threat in hostile areas. In Mr Nugent’s opinion, taxis are the most dangerous sort of transportation on earth. When taking a taxi, activists should be very careful. Drivers will tell them that they do not speak English or the local language, when in reality they do. Taxi drivers listen to everything. Mr Nugent advised participants not to talk about their work in public places in general and with taxi drivers in particular. There are also people pretending to be taxi drivers, but who in reality are intelligence agents. Depending on your needs, the best way to travel – from a security point of view – may be by bus, train or tram instead. When using transportation, NGO personnel should not take their smartphones or laptops with them. They should also be careful with Wi-Fi networks: every time someone logs into a Wi-Fi network, somebody else may connect to their phone and have access to all the data stored in it.

Regarding accommodation, people on the ground should be ready to find a place to keep themselves safe. Here is some fundamental advice Mr Nugent gave participants when arriving in a hotel:

- Have a casual walk around the hotel;
- Know where the back door of the hotel is;
- Try not to go to the same hotel all the time or to the same restaurant;
- Always change routine and times;
- Try to keep the whole team on the same floor;
- Lock your door even when you’re inside;
- Do not leave stuff lying around;
- Be in charge of the elevator, take control of it, i.e. stand by the buttons, not in the back.

When things go wrong, they go wrong quickly. If something feels wrong, it probably is wrong. For example, if you are in a bus and you feel like you are being watched or followed, get off the bus. When walking in the street, walk in the centre of the pavement and in the opposite direction of traffic.
Mr Nugent then tackled the issue of checkpoints and how to behave when confronted with one. He concentrated his demonstration on what he called the “approach behaviour”. Here are the key points he highlighted for when approaching a checkpoint:

- Slow down;
- Maintain an interval between vehicles;
- Be friendly but not too chatty;
- Use words of greetings in the local language;
- Have your hands on show if possible;
- Have the doors locked.

The participants then shared their own experiences at checkpoints before wrapping up the session, with Mr Nugent thanking the participants for their attention and active participation.

**Stress management and post-traumatic stress**

After a short break, Dr Ahmad Shiekhani introduced the participants to the management of post-traumatic stress. To start the session, he asked the activists what they thought “psychological pressure” meant. A participant replied that it is a kind of physical pain that comes from the psychological side. It is a painful experience illustrated by a change in the mood. The outcome of it, said the participant, is instability. It can also lead to recklessness or aggressiveness.

Dr Shiekhani explained that when problems build up inside of us, it destroys our psychological balance. There are indicators, physical and psychological, that we are not feeling well. If you can see the signals, do not ignore them. Instead, take them into consideration and do something about them. Physical and psychological problems are interconnected; it has been scientifically proven. When psychological pressure builds up, it affects our hormones, our blood pressure, our heartbeat, even our neural system. Not taking into account post-traumatic stress may lead to the development of physical problems.

After making sure that the participants understood what he had just explained, Dr Shiekhani proceeded to demonstrate the importance of doing something about our fears. Insisting that we all have fears, he noted that the way we react towards them is different in every person. For some people, for example, the anxiety of an exam will prevent them from succeeding. For others, it will give them an incentive to study.

In order to help the participants analyse their own level of post-traumatic stress, Dr Shiekhani offered them to complete an anonymous stress test. At the end of the process, a participant asked if it was normal to feel physical pain when we are tense. Dr Shiekhani answered that yes, it is, but it is also a personal decision to continue to suffer from the pressure. Instead of suffering, it is possible to acquire tools to ease or prevent the pain coming from psychological stress. It is our decision to do something about it. Workers in the humanitarian field can encounter a lot of challenges. It is like working in a landmine field. No matter how prepared you are, if you want to continue providing services to people, you need to protect yourself. While conducting their work, activists may encounter particular psychological difficulties. The lack of team spirit can be one of the difficulties for examples.

To identify more of these difficulties, participants broke into pairs and discussed some psychological difficulties they have encountered in the past. After a few minutes, they shared the results of their reflections. Here are the psychological difficulties they identified:

- Lack of team spirit;
• Some colleagues are never on time, they don’t respect deadlines to deliver reports, they are not committed enough;
• Some people they work with are very negative;
• Working with people whose living conditions are terrible makes them depressed and feel terrible;
• They feel like people are suffering more than them;
• Guiltiness stemming from the fact that they are in a more secure place than them;
• Low self-esteem;
• Lot of pressure from work; they are working all the time, have no free time and always think about work even at home;
• They ask themselves if they are doing something wrong? Am I doing the right thing?

Dr Shiekhani listened carefully to their answers and proposed solutions to help them overcome these difficulties. One important thing, he said, is to always separate work from home, and never involve your family in what you are doing at work, especially your children. He offered to talk individually to participants after the session and thanked everyone for attending.

Conclusion

The experts were very positively received in the course and participants were engaged in the topics of discussion. The group worked well together as there was a strong desire to learn and for self-improvement. Upon completion of the training sessions, the participants filled out an anonymous evaluation form to share their view on the quality of the workshop. Some of the participants commented that they would have liked a longer workshop, possibly over three days, because the amount of information to take in was a bit overwhelming. Others felt like they needed more information and that a third day would have been necessary to study the topics more in depth. Finally, some activists who already had some background knowledge on security, expressed their interest in an advanced level training course on the same topic. Several participants also wished they had been shown explanatory videos and had been involved in more practical exercises. Overall, they were very satisfied with the workshop and thought it was well organised. Most of them showed interest in attending an advanced level training and No Peace Without Justice staff is now considering this idea.
Annex 1 – Biographies of experts

Willie Nugent
Founder and Managing Director of Eurocheck Security Consultants Limited. Willie served in the Irish Defence Forces for over twenty years, retired with the rank of Captain in 2001 and set up Eurocheck Security Consultants Limited. While serving in the Irish Defence Forces, he served in the Military Police, Army Ranger Wing and the Cavalry Corps. He served three years in South Lebanon as part of UNIFIL (the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon). While he was heavily involved in security, operational and training aspects, he also has extensive experience in the areas of logistics and transport.

Willie is strongly committed to human rights and democracy and served as Special Security Officer with EUBAM (The European Union Border Assist Mission at Rafah) in Gaza and Israel in 2009. During the last three years he has conducted Hostile Environment, Security Awareness and War Crimes Investigation training throughout Europe, Africa, the Middle East and South America. Willie holds a Level 7 Certificate in Further Education from the National University of Ireland at Maynooth.

Willie is a member of:

- The Institute For International Criminal Investigations—IICI
- The American Society for Industrial Security—ASIS
- The Security Institute of Ireland—SII
- The American S2 Safety & Intelligence Institute—S2
- The Association of Irish Risk Management—AIRM

Ahmad Sheikhani
Ahmad has 14 years of experience in Psychotherapy, psychosocial support and capacity building fields; 8 years of work experience with International and local NGOs, such as UNHCR, UNICEF, Terre des homes Syria, Relief International, Syrian Arab Red Crescent and Bright Future.

In the post-graduate training, he worked for five years with a high profile psychologist and psychotherapists in Al Bishir hospital. During that period, he dealt with a wide range of psychological cases, especially after having established and managed a day clinic. As a psychotherapist, he has worked closely with conflicts survivors, especially children, for which he developed “play therapy” approach that came out with great results of recovery. In addition to having published two academic books regarding the effect of war on children, he published a booklet presenting advocacy for women survivors of detention, after one year of working with such cases. Dealing with complicated cases - through person-centred and comprehensive approach he has been taking- deepened my situational knowledge and understanding on social and psychological levels; this experienced is shared with non-specialized trainees of community capacity building training he conducted as certified master trainer. Raising awareness of mental health issues and building the capacity of psychology graduates.
Annex 2 - Program of the training course

### Day One – Wednesday 18 January 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.00 – 10.30</td>
<td><strong>Opening remarks</strong>&lt;br&gt;Introductory remarks on the objectives of the course will be given by the organisers and the trainer. Participants will introduce themselves and highlight their expectations from the course.</td>
<td>NPWJ</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.30 - 11:15</td>
<td><strong>Presentation and components of physical and personal security</strong>&lt;br&gt;The presenter will focus on the significance of security in investigating human rights violations, its objectives and consequences. In particular looking at the risks associated to murder threats, kidnapping, harassment and targeted surveillance. Planning and preparation. Introduction to threat and risk assessments. Discussion with and input from the group about what they see as the threats to all involved.</td>
<td>William Nugent</td>
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<td><strong>Coffee break</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>11.30 – 1.00</td>
<td><strong>Practical exercises on physical and personal security</strong>&lt;br&gt;Continuation of the above, group exercises.</td>
<td>William Nugent</td>
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<td><strong>Lunch</strong></td>
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<td>2.00 – 3.00</td>
<td><strong>Presentation and components of security for documentation</strong>&lt;br&gt;The presenter will focus on the significance of security for the documentation gathered in investigating human rights violations, its objectives and consequences. In particular looking at the risks associated to murder threats, kidnapping, harassment and targeted surveillance. In this session, we will look at likely direct threats and how best to avoid and deal with them. <strong>Practical exercises on security for documentation.</strong></td>
<td>William Nugent</td>
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<td><strong>Coffee break</strong></td>
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<td>3.15 – 5.30</td>
<td><strong>Psychosocial issues and post-traumatic stress</strong>&lt;br&gt;The presenter will focus on Trauma concept, types, and the effects on the people’s lives In particular looking at Potential effects on psychological level with who is works with survivors of crisis conditions.</td>
<td>Ahmad Shiekhani</td>
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### Day Two – Thursday 19 January 2017

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<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>10.00 – 10.15</td>
<td>Review of previous day and expectations</td>
<td>NPWJ</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.15 – 11.30</td>
<td>Presentation and components of static security</td>
<td>William Nugent</td>
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<td>The presenter will focus on the significance of security for homes and offices in investigating human rights violations, its objectives and consequences. In particular looking at the risks associated to car bombs, suicide attacks, break-ins, targeted surveillance. In this session, we will look at likely indirect threats and how best to avoid and deal with them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.45 – 1.00</td>
<td>Practical exercises on static security</td>
<td>William Nugent</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.00 – 3.45</td>
<td>Stress Management and post-traumatic stress</td>
<td>Ahmad Shiekhani</td>
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<td>The presenter will focus on Stress Management, with a Stress test to Highlighting on their stress.</td>
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<td>4.00 – 5.30</td>
<td>Risk management framework and security protocols</td>
<td>William Nugent</td>
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<td>Working Groups on the Risk management framework and analysis of which kind of security mechanisms the participants have in place.</td>
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<td><strong>Outcomes of Working Groups</strong></td>
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<td>Presentation of the outcomes of each working group and general brainstorming on challenges and obstacles</td>
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