Violence against aid workers and the operational response

Humanitarian Outcomes
Presentation for ICVA: 1 February 2010
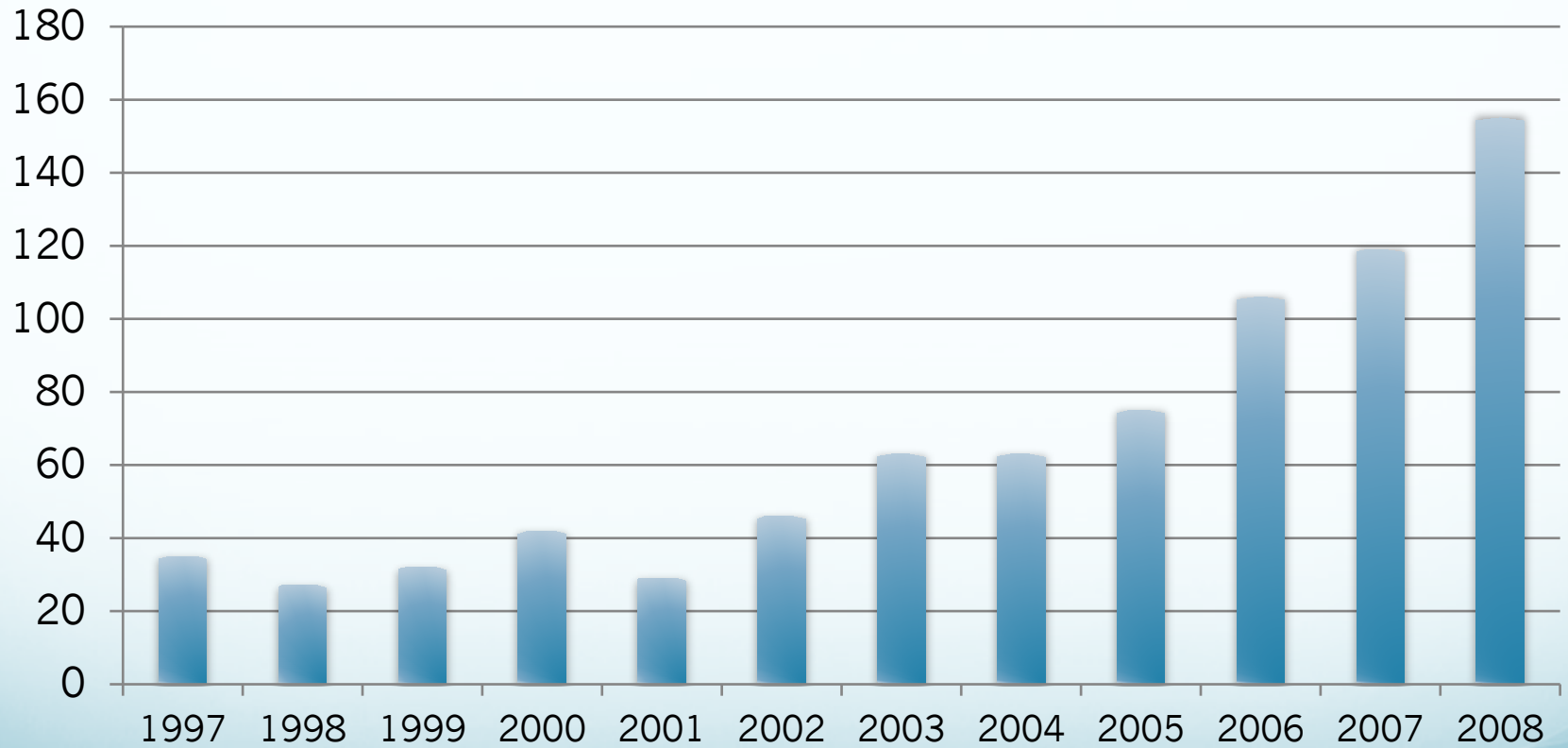
Aid Worker Security Database

- Tracks major incidents of violence against aid workers
  - *Major incidents* = killings, kidnappings, attacks resulting in serious injury
  - *Aid workers* = employees/contractors of NGOs, Red Cross and UN agencies providing aid in humanitarian contexts

- Records date, location, organization, type of staff, tactics used, and motive (where possible)

- Data from media sources & public reports, internal reports from organizations/security consortia, and verified by organizations

Sharp increase in attacks against aid workers in the past four years

- Average annual number of major attacks in 2006-08 increased by 177%

- 2008 was worst year recorded for aid worker attacks
  - 122 killed
  - 76 seriously wounded
  - 62 kidnapped (survivors)
  - At least 12 large NGO programmes suspended in six different countries after serious attacks.
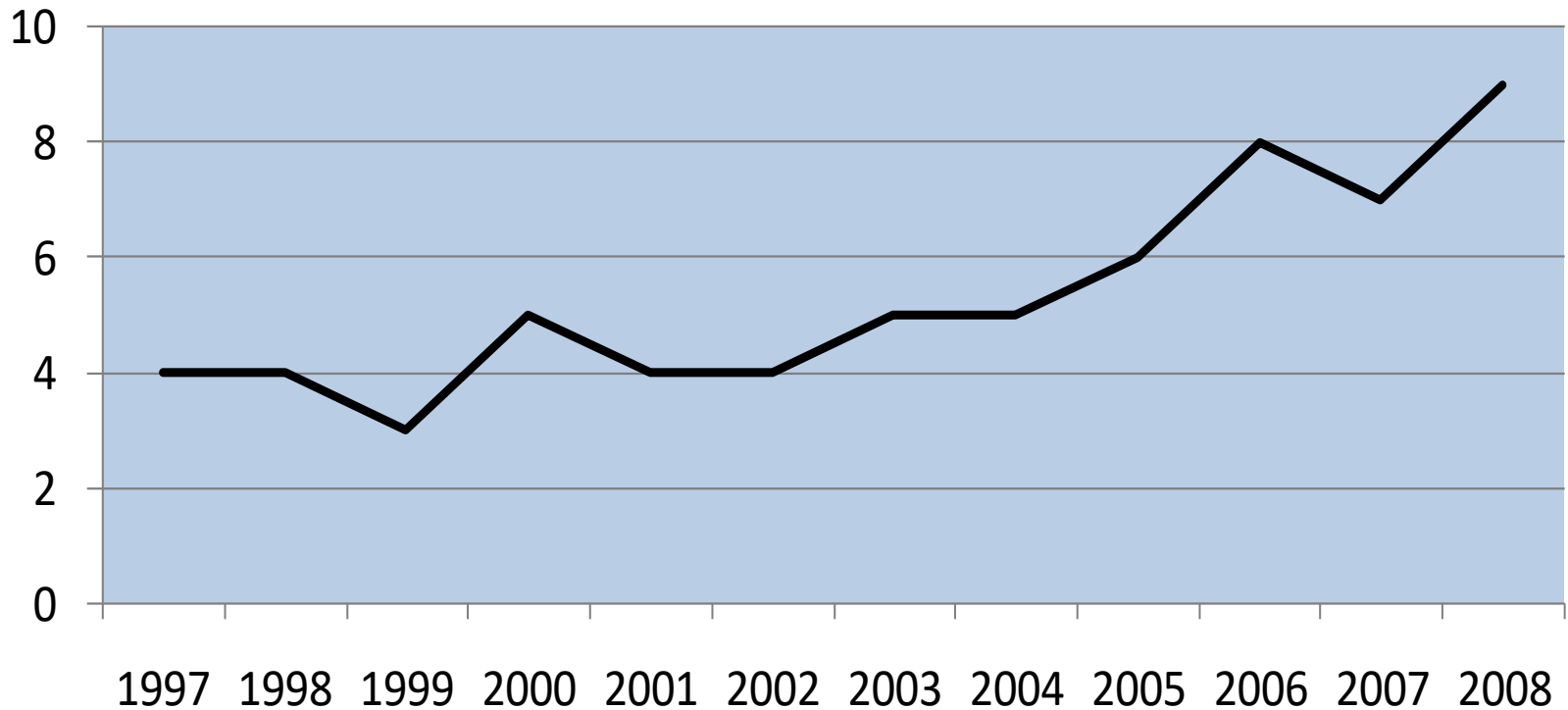
- 2009 appears similarly violent

Attacks: absolute numbers

Violent incidents against aid workers

worker population in the field
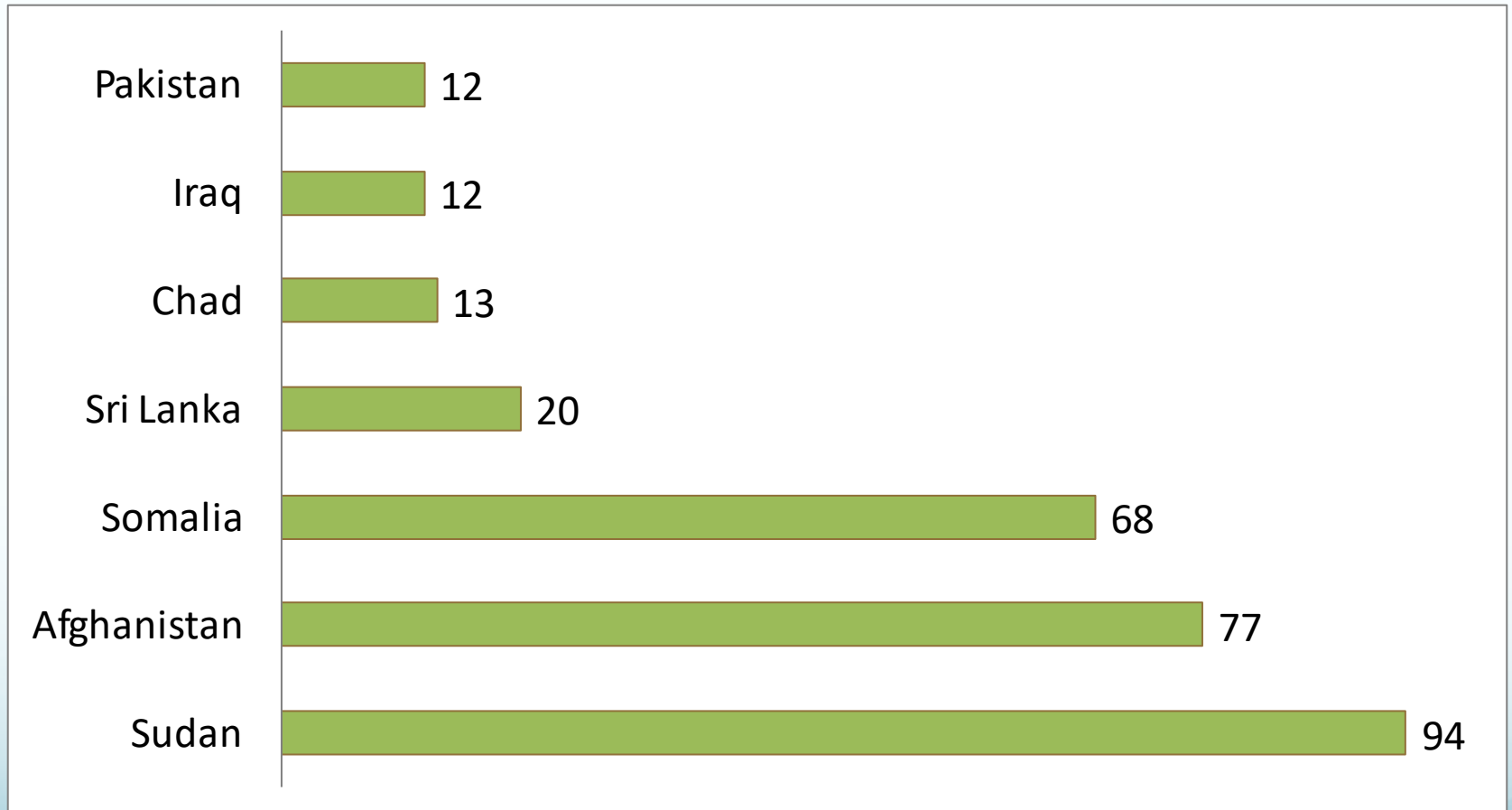
Global attack rates per 10,000

International staff of NGOs showed highest increase of attack rates

- Rates for international (expatriate) staff spiked upward in 2006-2008

- However, long-term trend still shows attack rates for national staff rising relative to internationals

- NGOs continued to have highest casualty rates of all types of aid provider

- Only the ICRC showed an overall *decline* in attack rates over the past three years

by three most violent contexts

- Afghanistan, Somalia, and Sudan (Darfur) accounted for over 60% of all violent incidents against aid workers

- More pronounced clustering of incidents in a smaller group of countries than seen in previous years

- When controlling for these three settings, global attack rates are seen to decline slightly – reflecting advances in operational security management
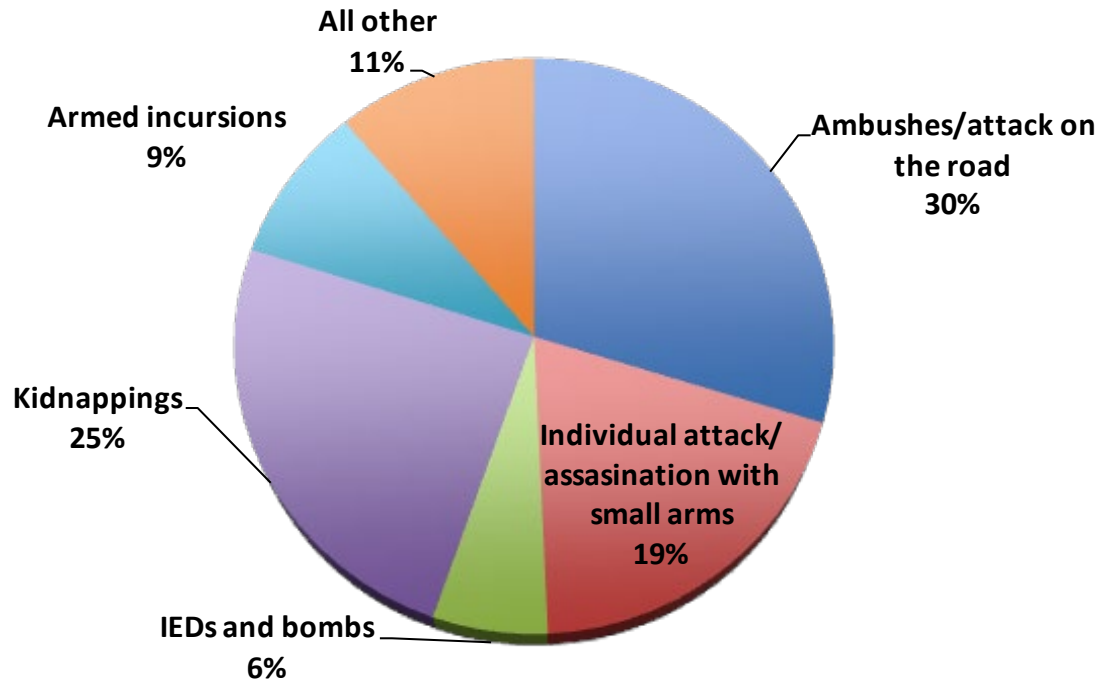
Countries with most aid worker attacks, 2006-2008

Methods of violence

- Surge in kidnapping: 350% increase in 2006-2008
  - Favors international staff as targets
  - Political (visibility) and economic benefits for perpetrators
  - Collusion between criminal and political elements

- New tactics affecting aid workers: suicide bombings, IEDs

- Most dangerous aid work setting remains the road

Most common means of attack, 2006-2008

Increasingly political motivations in attacks

- Politically motivated incidents rose relative to purely economic crime, or incidental violence (personal disputes or "wrong place, wrong time")

- Attacks with political motives: 49% of known total in 2008, up from 29% in 2003

- Afghanistan NGO Security Office reports major shift – 65% of attacks now perpetrated by AOGs as opposed to criminals

- Reflects a broad targeting of aid enterprise as a whole

In the most dangerous contexts, no good options

- Remote management/contracting – shifts risk to nationals

- Low profile – creates distrust and cuts off links

- Deterrent approaches – militarizing aid?

- Pulling out/scaling back – beneficiaries suffer

Providing aid in the most insecure environments

- Disassociation from political actors – necessary but insufficient

- Understand level of threat – 'acceptance' is not a viable security approach where aid has become a wholesale political target

- Do not let extreme environments dictate security models elsewhere. Continue efforts to improve:
  - Information sharing, and joint tracking and analysis
  - Risk assessment and mitigation for national staff, partners, and beneficiaries