



INTERNATIONAL NGO SAFETY ORGANISATION
Analysis & Advice for Humanitarians

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International NGO Safety Organisation

An introduction to the new charity dedicated towards providing safety and security services to humanitarian aid agencies.

INSO, 2-6 Cannon St, London, EC4M 6YH, United Kingdom. A registered company in England & Wales, 749673 / a registered charity, 1140276

1. INTRODUCTION

Independent research has confirmed that aid work is becoming more dangerous, particularly in highly politicized conflicts, such as Sudan, Afghanistan and Somalia¹.

In the most recent report, former UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland concluded that²:

“The last ten years represent one of the worst decades ever in terms of attacks on humanitarian workers and lack of humanitarian access”

In response, aid agencies have taken many *individual* steps, such as appointing security staff, developing & implementing policy and investing in security training and resources, but security cooperation *between* agencies, to some a more critical activity³, has so far failed to improve in as coherent a manner.⁴

At the global level, forums like the US-based Interaction Security Advisory Group (SAG) and the European Interagency Security Forum (EISF) have provided excellent venues for policy debate, HQ -level coordination and the development of standards but they are not structured to routinely

provide these services overseas, which is often where they are needed the most.

Inversely, a number of durable inter-agency cooperation platforms have emerged in the field, such as ANSO in Afghanistan, GANSO in Gaza and the NSP project in Kenya,⁵ that are very rich in innovative operational tools and practices.

Experts agree on the need for coordinated, and widespread, replication of these,⁶ but because each is hosted by a separate NGO, acting in isolation from the others, there is currently no institutional mechanism by which that could occur⁷.

What is missing from the effort to improve inter-agency cooperation is the capacity to capture diffuse field practice, coalesce it in to standardized tools and policies and then replicate it back in the field through permanent operational coordination structures.

The **INTERNATIONAL NGO SAFETY ORGANISATION** (INSO) has been formed specifically to play this role as the first independent humanitarian agency *custom built* to establish and operate NGO safety platforms connected via a global hub.

INSO Board of Trustees, May, 2011

¹ Stoddard, Harmer & DiDomenico: HPG Policy Brief 34 “Providing Aid in Insecure Environments: 2009 Update”, April 2009, p.2

² Egeland, Harmer, Stoddard: “To Stay & Deliver, Good Practice for Humanitarians in Complex Security Environments”, Feb 2011 (p.vii)

³ Ibid: Stoddard, Harmer & DiDomenico, April 2009, p.34 “*Security more than perhaps any other sector, cannot be achieved by one agency acting in isolation, but requires a coordinated approach, especially in sharing of information*”

⁴ Ibid: Stoddard, Harmer, DiDomenico April 2009

⁵ See full list in HPN/ODI: “Good Practice Review 8 Operational Security Management in Violent Environments”, Dec 2010, p.20

⁶ Ibid: Egeland, Harmer, Stoddard, Feb 2011, p.50 / Stoddard, Harmer, DiDomenico, 2009, p.50

⁷ Unless an extant NGO volunteered to be a global host, which seems highly unlikely and even then would result in legitimate questions over suitability and capacity

2. WHAT IS INSO?

It is a UK⁸ based non-profit, non-governmental organisation committed to humanitarian principles and the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief*

INSO is a self-mandating operational NGO delivering safety and security services to other NGOs in the field.

INSO is *not* a policy forum, membership association or peer-network and so does not overlap or conflict with any other institution.

3. WHO CREATED INSO?

The staff of the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO) created INSO with support from Welthungerhilfe, European Commission Directorate for Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection (ECHO), Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Between them, these agencies and individuals are some of the world's leading experts in this field.

4. WHY WAS INSO CREATED?

INSO was created to improve the ability of NGOs to cooperate with one another on security issues in the field by providing them with sustainable

access to high quality, standardized and effective NGO safety platforms.

Simply, INSO was formed to improve NGO safety in the field.

“We recognize that the formation of INSO will facilitate important improvements in NGO safety coordination both in Afghanistan and globally and we believe it is in our interests to see it succeed”

Steffen Stenberg, Director of Humanitarian & Civil Protection Operations - ECHO

5. WHAT WILL INSO DO?

The primary purpose of INSO is to establish & operate an **NGO Safety Office** (hereinafter NSO) in any insecure country where aid agencies work together.

An NSO gathers and collates relevant security information from all sources and makes it available to NGOs across any available medium such as email, SMS text or VHF broadcast.

While services will vary context to context they will generally include:

- Threat warnings and security reports
- Analysis and trend monitoring
- Regular security meetings
- Crisis support (*in extremis*)
- Capacity development (training)

⁸ Registered Company in England & Wales, number 7496737 and UK Registered Charity, number 1140276

- Civil/Military coordination
- NGO/UN liaison

Additionally, INSO will develop a range of global services and products that can support policy formation and advocacy at that level.

These will initially include:

- A standardized template for NGO Safety Offices including structure, governance, outputs, operating policies and staff profiles & tasks
- A centralized statistical database on violence against aid workers
- A centralized statistical database on the world's conflicts
- Evaluations of third-party service providers, particularly PSCs and trainers
- A vetted human resource database to assist agencies in identifying & hiring appropriate security staff

We anticipate that new global services can be introduced as they become relevant, such as a centralized pre-deployment training tailored uniquely to the NGO sector.

6. WHO WILL BE ABLE TO BENEFIT FROM AN NSO?

INSO builds on the strong humanitarian tradition of ANSO and will *exclusively* support independent, non-profit humanitarian aid agencies.

It will not offer support, information or participation to contractors, private

development companies, militaries, PSCs or governments.

INSO's mandate is to support those who *genuinely* operate with independence, impartiality and neutrality. At its core it is a service for humanitarians, by humanitarians.

7. HOW WILL INSO IMPROVE ON WHAT WE ALREADY HAVE?

To date, the development of NGO Safety Offices has been ad-hoc and there is no structure by which they can become replicated or learn from one another.

INSO will address systemic weakness in the following areas:

- I. *Start-Up*: Currently no NGO is obligated to step forward to host an NSO, which makes them very difficult to start.⁹ INSO will always be available to host.
- II. *Sustainability*: Even where a host is found, they may rightfully withdraw at their own discretion. INSO is mandated to never quit the management of an NSO.
- III. *Fitness for Purpose*: Even the most committed hosts can find themselves strained by NSO management as they juggle competing program priorities, incompatible mandates and policy hurdles. INSO's mandate and policies have been developed

⁹ Ibid: Stoddard, Harmer, DiDomenico, April 2009, p.30 - on frustrated efforts to get a desperately needed NSO in Dafur

specifically to support NSO deployments and, with no other projects to worry about, INSO will remain focused.

- IV. *Program Quality:* Individual hosts operate in a vacuum, unable to draw on concepts or practices that worked, or avoid those that failed, in other settings. INSO will capture and apply good practice, raising the quality of NSOs collectively.
- V. *Standardization:* NSOs need high levels of trust and participation, which in turn requires familiarity and continuity. This is difficult to inspire between platforms when each one operates differently. By standardizing how NSOs interface with their beneficiaries, INSO will improve the global acceptance of the NSO concept.

“Research by the Aid Worker Security Database (AWSDB) project over the past several years has strongly identified the need for expanded field-based security coordination platforms for humanitarians. The proposed INSO model, with a demonstrated track record of success behind it, has the potential to fill a critical gap”

Abby Stoddard, Humanitarian Outcomes

8. WILL NGOS HAVE ANY SAY IN WHAT AN NSO DOES?

Yes, NGOs will have a very central role in NSO tasking and oversight.

INSO will apply a standardized operational structure¹⁰, but the outputs of that system will remain tailored to the local context.

Each NSO will establish an **NGO Advisory Board** that will be empowered to select, from a master menu, the services they want to receive and then to adjust the timing, content and format of those to fit the local circumstances.

For instance, the Board may task the NSO to focus on tactical level threat warnings and avoid strategic analytical reports due to political sensitivity of the latter, or more simply, they may request that reports are sent by SMS rather than by email.

In the unlikely case that a service is needed that the system cannot deliver, INSO will explore its development locally with the Board and the donors.

The Board will meet routinely with the NSO director in an ongoing process of feedback and adjustment as circumstances change.

The Board mechanism guarantees beneficiary participation and the local relevance of the NSO.

9. HOW WILL INSO DECIDE WHERE TO START AN NSO?

In order to ensure that INSO is responding to genuine needs, and has a guaranteed minimum level of

¹⁰ Staff, duties, information management, internal policies, governance etc.

participation prior to arrival, our mandate requires that we be *requested* to establish an NSO¹¹.

INSO recognizes any legitimate NGO forum - such as Interaction or ICVA - as being authorized to make such a request on behalf of its members¹².

INSO also recognizes any request coming from a minimum of ten NGOs operating the country in which the NSO is required¹³.

Once we receive a request, INSO will commence immediate pursuit of funding for the NSO, establish it, staff it and operate it for as long as it remains funded.

The initial ten NGOs requesting will be invited to become the first members of the Advisory Board.

This simple mechanism ensures that INSO remains *genuinely* service oriented and is only operational where it is both wanted and needed.

10. WILL THE PRESENCE OF AN NSO CREATE DEPENDENCY OR UNDERMINE AN INDIVIDUAL AID AGENCIES OWN CAPACITY?

Absolutely not. An NSO is an advisory body, not a regulatory one, and NGOs will remain at liberty to accept or decline its advice and services at their own discretion, without penalty.

¹¹ INSO remains at liberty to solicit and encourage requests, but never to initiate them itself

¹² A full list of recognized forums will be published after July

¹³ As well as any donor, or group of donors, willing to fund the NSO

Experience at ANSO demonstrates that **an NSO is a net gain in situational awareness**, allowing agencies to harness the '*network effect*' and access real-time collective information that complements and reinforces their own efforts, rather than competing with, or undermining, them.

In addition, NSOs facilitate the development of common resources that simply would not be available to individual agencies acting alone such as centralized statistics, emergency coordination centers and liaison staff.

11. WILL INSO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UN DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY & SECURITY?

Yes, INSO has already established strong links with UNDSS in order to bring to life precisely the sort of NGO/UN cooperation envisioned under the "Saving Lives Together" (SLT) framework.

NGO Safety Offices form a key element of the SLT vocabulary, particularly in challenging environments, where INSO will work closely with UNDSS to ensure the consistent, reliable and secure sharing of security information with NGOs.

Experience at ANSO has demonstrated that collaboration with the United Nations dramatically improves both the quantity and quality of information that can be shared.

Moreover, the presence of dedicated INSO staff will facilitate implementation of other aspects of SLT, such as, engagement with UN security managers, meeting common security-related needs and collaborating and consulting on the development and delivery of training.

INSO views UNDSS as a critical partner and will work to establish standing agreements for global cooperation in pursuit of the objectives of SLT.

“DSS has found ANSO to be a valuable partner in the implementation of SLT; ensuring that our NGO partners benefit from sound advice, information and analysis. We are encouraged by the establishment of INSO and its potential to bring similar benefits to our partners across the globe.”

Gregory B. Starr, United Nations Under-Secretary General for Safety & Security

12. WHAT IS THE TIMELINE FOR ALL THIS TO HAPPEN?

INSO came in to legal existence on 8th February 2011 and it will start its first program activity on the 1st of July this year when it takes over the management of ANSO from Welthungerhilfe.

Subject to the parallel development of capacity, INSO will be available from that date forward to start new NSOs elsewhere in the world, or to take over the management of an existing one at the request of the current host.

However, despite the broad support and momentum INSO enjoys, we are the first to caution that the global standardization of NGO safety platforms is not a single *event* that can be expected to happen overnight.

Rather, we see the formation of INSO as simply the start of a much longer *process* of targeted development that engages with NGOs, donors, individual NSO hosts and other stakeholders to build towards INSO’s objectives one-step, and one NSO, at a time.

It will be a long and occasionally difficult path, but the end results will be worth it.

13. HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

INSO is an exciting new initiative offering many opportunities:

- (i) If you feel that the country you work in could use an NGO safety office, why not organize a few like-minded NGOs and make a request to us to start looking for funding for it? You can volunteer as the Advisory Board members and start practically shaping a program that suits you.
- (ii) If you are currently hosting an NGO safety platform and feel like handing it off for any reason, why not contact us to discuss a transfer? We will be happy to work within any timelines or conditions that suit you.
- (iii) Do you feel like you have something to contribute to the strategic direction of INSO, and/or have you been working on or studying

NGO safety cooperation mechanisms?
Then why not apply to join the INSO Board of Trustees, bring your experience to the table and do your part to improve the system?

(iv) Are you looking to enter, or build upon, a career in NGO safety and want to try the challenging new sector of field based inter-agency coordination? Then why not volunteer to join our personnel roster and be ready to deploy to an NSO?

“The Swiss Agency for Cooperation & Development’s (SDC) experience with ANSO, in support of our partner NGOs in Afghanistan, has been excellent. In conflict ridden and violent environments, SDC is reassured that NGOs have a relevant provider for security information and training at hand. This holds true for other countries in conflict and it is for this reason that I welcome the creation of INSO and its ambition to bring the same support to other countries”

Fulvio Massard, Head of Security, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland

14. FURTHER DETAILS:

This document is provided as a basic introduction to the nature & purpose of INSO and assumes a general familiarity with ANSO, NGO safety platforms, the UN/NGO safety coordination system and some of the key research related to the sector.

If you should require any additional details on INSO, or would like to follow up on any of the suggestions made in

section 13, then please do not hesitate to contact us on: info@ngosafety.org

We look forward to hearing from you.

Please note that www.ngosafety.org will be the INSO web domain but this site is currently undergoing construction and content integration with the existing ANSO site, which will be discontinued. The new domain will be activated on July 1st 2011.

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