

WORKBOOK ON SECURITY: PRACTICAL STEPS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT RISK



APPENDIX 10

Check list: Risk of Assault, including sexual assault

This check list is not intended to be a blueprint for security. Your own context is the key determining factor. Consider the risks and threats you face, and any vulnerabilities you have in order to supplement and personalise this list.

General:

- Do your risk analysis – consider when you may be at most risk of assault, where attacks are most likely to occur, who the perpetrators might be and what their methods would be. Your protection plan will differ according to variables such as these
- Being alone increases the risk – do not go out alone when you are most at risk and avoid the places where you are most at risk
- Use the safest transport options
- Do not carry weapons – these could be used against you by an attacker and used as an excuse by the authorities to arrest you
- Carry a whistle to blow to alert attention
- Practice screaming for help – many people ‘freeze’ when attacked (and their throats feel constricted)
- If attacked, use what is at hand, eg throw sand in your attacker’s face
- Keep fit and always wear comfortable shoes – running is often the best form of defence
- If you are going to an event such as a demonstration where you might be beaten, wear protective clothing such as a leather jacket, and pack cardboard under your clothes
- Consider who the perpetrators might be – can you devise a believable protection strategy, such as ‘I am a friend of ...(an influential person)’?
- Prepare yourself to give up valuables without a struggle
- Avoid being an attractive target by walking confidently and not displaying expensive jewellery or equipment (phones, laptops etc)
- Know where you are at all times and where you could run for help
- Have medical insurance

Sexual assault (in addition to the above):

- There are 3 basic ways to deal with this situation and you may not know what you would do until it happens. If you cannot run immediately, the options are to fight back and run, to reason with the attacker, or to submit
- If you are able to fight back, aim to do the attacker maximum damage (eg kick in the groin, poke in the eye) so that he cannot run after you easily. If you have fought back but do not escape, the perpetrator may be more violent towards you as a result
- Prepare yourself psychologically – if the worst happens, know that the perpetrator cannot deprive you of your essential self - during the attack concentrate on mentally separating your mind from your body
- Consider who the perpetrator may be – can you devise an effective protection strategy such as ‘I have my period’? (If this could work, be prepared to wear a soiled sanitary towel as ‘evidence’) (One HRD told the attacker ‘Yes, I’d like to have sex with you but it’s my period now – I can come back tomorrow’... and she was allowed to leave)
- If you are at risk of rape, consider carrying condoms (which you could try to persuade the attacker to use) or wear a feminine condom
- If you are attacked try, if at all possible, to behave with as much dignity as you can – rapists are generally motivated by a need to have power over a victim and crying and pleading may only feed this urge
- If it is possible, try to engage with the attacker on a personal basis – for example, you could tell him that he may have a sister/mother/daughter or brother/father/son your age and how would he feel if this happened to her or him?

If a colleague is assaulted, including sexual assault:

- Get the person to a place of safety where they can receive medical treatment. In the case of rape, anti-retrovirals (to avoid HIV infection) need to be taken as soon as possible and certainly within the first 72 hours. Anti-biotics and the morning after pill (which provokes menstruation whether or not the survivor has become pregnant) may also be taken
- Photograph their injuries for evidence if appropriate (and keep the crime scene undisturbed)
- If the person wants to report the crime, check if there are specially trained officers who deal with sexual violence cases
- Support the person in reporting the attack to the authorities, but respect their views if they choose not to do so
- Arrange counselling for the person and any others involved in the situation