



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT HIGH RISK

Security considerations for
their families and personal lives

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UDEFEGUA has been monitoring, investigating, documenting and reporting attacks on human rights defenders for over ten years. It works in partnership with numerous Guatemalan organisations. UDEFEGUA (Human Rights Defenders Protection Unit Guatemala) and Protection International collaborated in 2008 to set up a Protection Desk called Aj Noj. In 2014 Aj Noj began to operate independent of UDEFEGUA.

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook contains suggestions on personal security measures for human rights defenders (HRDs) at high risk as tools for their protection against events, threats or aggression in their private lives.

For the purpose of this handbook, security measures are defined as preventive actions or rules to help avoid or minimise the effects of acts that negatively impact or injure people and their property.

Taking such measures aims at preventing or minimising the negative consequences of potential aggressions on HRDs' homes, families, neighbourhoods or communities. The measures outlined in the handbook aim at guiding HRDs in aspects to consider when seeking to improve the security of their private lives including that of their families. It is recommended that a HRD to undertake a risk assessment with their family or a specialised organisation to identify security measures that effectively minimise the risks identified.



As a general rule, it is important to remain calm in the face of events or acts that can cause harm as uncontrolled reaction on one's part can make the situation worse.

INVOLVING YOUR FAMILY TO LIVE MORE SECURELY

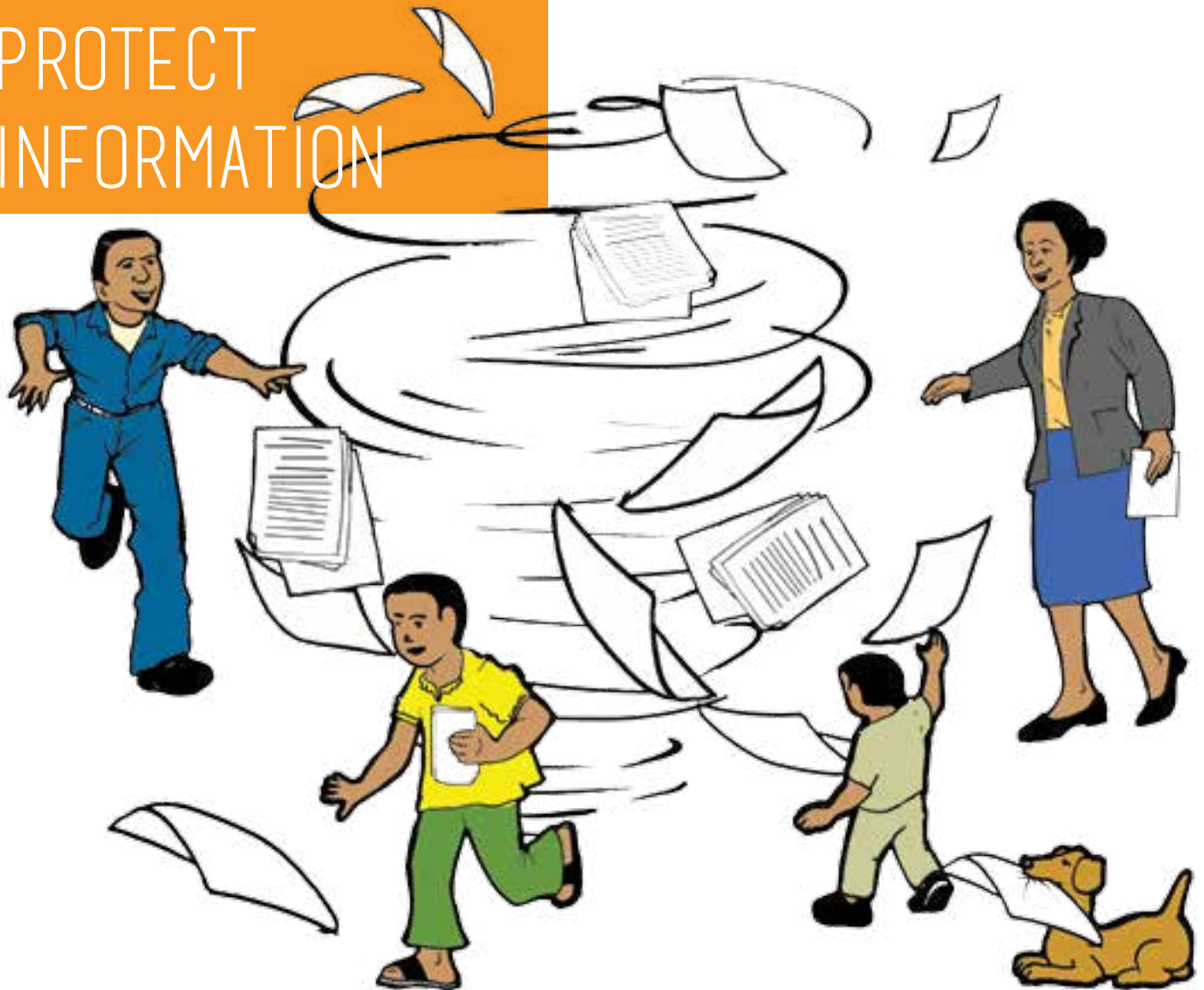
In instances where human rights defenders have been outspoken on highly sensitive issues, their family may share the risk emanating from the HRD's work. In selected cases, aggressors may choose to harm family members in an attempt to get a human rights defender to stop his/her work. In such cases, the level of risk a family member faces may be passed on to the rest of the family or those living under the same roof. It is advisable for the entire family to create a security culture with measures considered necessary in their specific situation. This will be most useful if the process is participatory, not imposed, and based on a joint analysis of the situation. All members of the nuclear family, both children and adults, should participate in this process, particularly women, because they face different and sometimes greater risks solely because they are women. Such wide participation ensures greater acceptance, responsibility and follow up of the adopted security measures by the family.

To facilitate the discussion of these measures, they have been grouped around nine main rules. When making use of these measures, ensure that these are based on your own risk and threat assessment to ensure that the measures chosen actually mitigate the risks you have identified.

The measures set out below are considered to be a guide for human rights defenders - it is not possible to follow all the measures set out below but rather adopt what has a direct impact on one's specific risks.



RULE Nº1. PROTECT INFORMATION



All members of a nuclear family should be cautious to avoid disclosing information on aspects relating to their daily lives such as occupational, political or social activities. Discretion should be exercised when using the telephone, internet or social networks, and safer alternatives used whenever possible to avoid any unnecessary disclosure of information.

1. Information that should be guarded includes household finances, family travel for holidays or other reason, sharing mobile telephone numbers of family members with unknown people, leisure routines or where family members meet or work among others.

2. Agree on how to handle a phone call:

- Always wait for the others to identify themselves first.
- Ask basic questions such as “What is your name?”, “Where are you calling from? Once they have responded and you do not know who they are, resort to evasive replies for them to call later and do not give any information.

- If they want to contact another member of the family ask the person on which number they can be contacted later
- Do not give personal information or numbers. Do not confirm anything if questioned. Simply point out that they are mistaken, even if what they are asking is true.
- Record information on telephone conversations, if they contained threats.





3. Avoid bringing sensitive information home from work.
4. Protect computers at home with antivirus, firewall and anti-spyware. Ensure that you regularly update and run these programmes for your computer to be protected.
5. Protect work-related information on your home computer with a strong password. Create a separate user account for your work-related use of the computer to avoid family members having access to this information. You thereby minimise the risks of this information accidentally ending up in the wrong hands.
6. Do not share your passwords for work-related emails or documents with your family members. Additionally, do not have the same passwords for your work and personal email accounts.
7. Familiarise yourself with basic technological skills. For example get to know how to troubleshoot a failure in your computer, hide files on your PC or laptop or how to share encrypted information. Some of the latest encryption software is easily available on the internet and they can be downloaded at little or no cost.



8. Regularly back up your computer data to minimise data loss in case of theft or technical failure.
9. Understand the security risks involved in using social networking sites. Check the information and photos your family members upload on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and others. All members of the family must understand the basic rules of discretion on the Internet that are necessary for their own security and that of the rest of the family.
10. When holding discussions about sensitive issues related to your human rights work, switch on the radio or television at a certain volume to drown your conversations so that they cannot be listened to from outside the house.

11. For people employed in the house e.g. house help, watchmen, gardeners, it is important to check their background and reliability; find out if they have a boyfriend or girlfriend and who they are.
12. Avoid letting service providers in the house e.g. to deliver items. Where this cannot be avoided e.g. when repairs in the house are required, ensure that one of your family members is present at all times to observe their movements and avoid access to sensitive information.

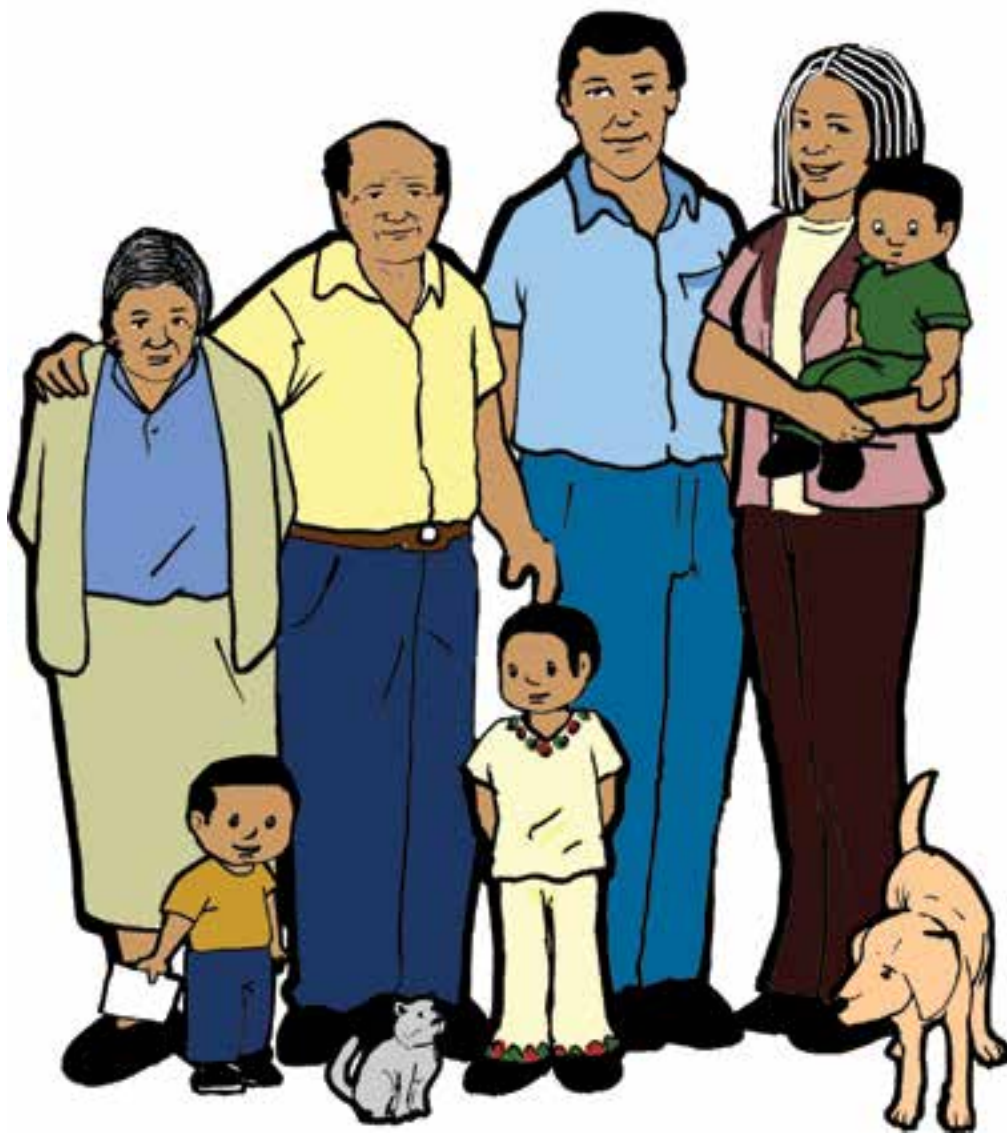


RULE Nº2. RECORD AND ANALYSE SECURITY INCIDENTS



All members of the family must be able to identify suspicious people and circumstances, record information and share it with the rest of the family. If the family gets ample information gathered by all its members, it will be able to conduct a better threat analysis.

1. There is a common sequence of events that takes place during surveillance. Attackers normally select a potential victim and begin collecting information and the surveillance continues as the attack is planned and practiced. They then deploy according to the information received. Hence there is need to be vigilant and try to reduce opportunities for an attack to be carried out.
2. The entire family must learn to observe and gather information on suspicious incidents, e.g. if





they have seen suspicious cars or people in the vicinity of their home, work place or school. If so, note down data such as number plates, colour of the vehicle, and a description of the people inside.

3. Keep the house tidy, thereby making it far easier to detect an intrusion.
4. Take a good look around when leaving the house, the office or workplace. Make a mental image of people (caretakers, watchmen, neighbours) or vehicles usually encountered in the vicinity of the house, office or workplace, and be attentive to any situation out of the ordinary.
5. Be familiar with surveillance and

counter-surveillance forms and be able to apply them when leaving the house and when going about your daily activities including a visual inspection of the environment and checking whether one is being followed. Multiple sightings of the same person, vehicle, or activity may confirm you are being watched.

6. Any such incidents recorded, should be shared with family members and jointly analysed. Decide together whether and how to react to them. This goes hand in hand with the security incident analysis at the HRDs' work place and measures decided upon need to go hand in hand.



RULE Nº3. THE FAMILY MUST KNOW HOW TO REACT TO ANY INCIDENT





All members of the nuclear family must know how to react to any danger or emergency. It is important to know who we have to call in case of emergency, which public services are there to help us, which trusted relatives or neighbours we can turn to for help. It is

also important that children are able to contact parents at work, and to know whether there are emergency protocols at their workplace.

1. For cases of emergency, always have the contacts of the fire brigade, hospital and police. Always have a list of direct telephone numbers to contact the defender's office or workplace.
2. Inform the family if there are emergency protocols at the defender's workplace.
3. Know which trusted friends or neighbours one can rely on in case of emergency. Everyone in the family must know the contact's name, address, and phone number.
4. Discuss with the entire

family how to react in certain scenarios that relate to the risks you had identified e.g. there is a risk of arrest, discuss how each family member has to react if the arrest takes place, whom to call from the defender's office or which lawyer to contact.

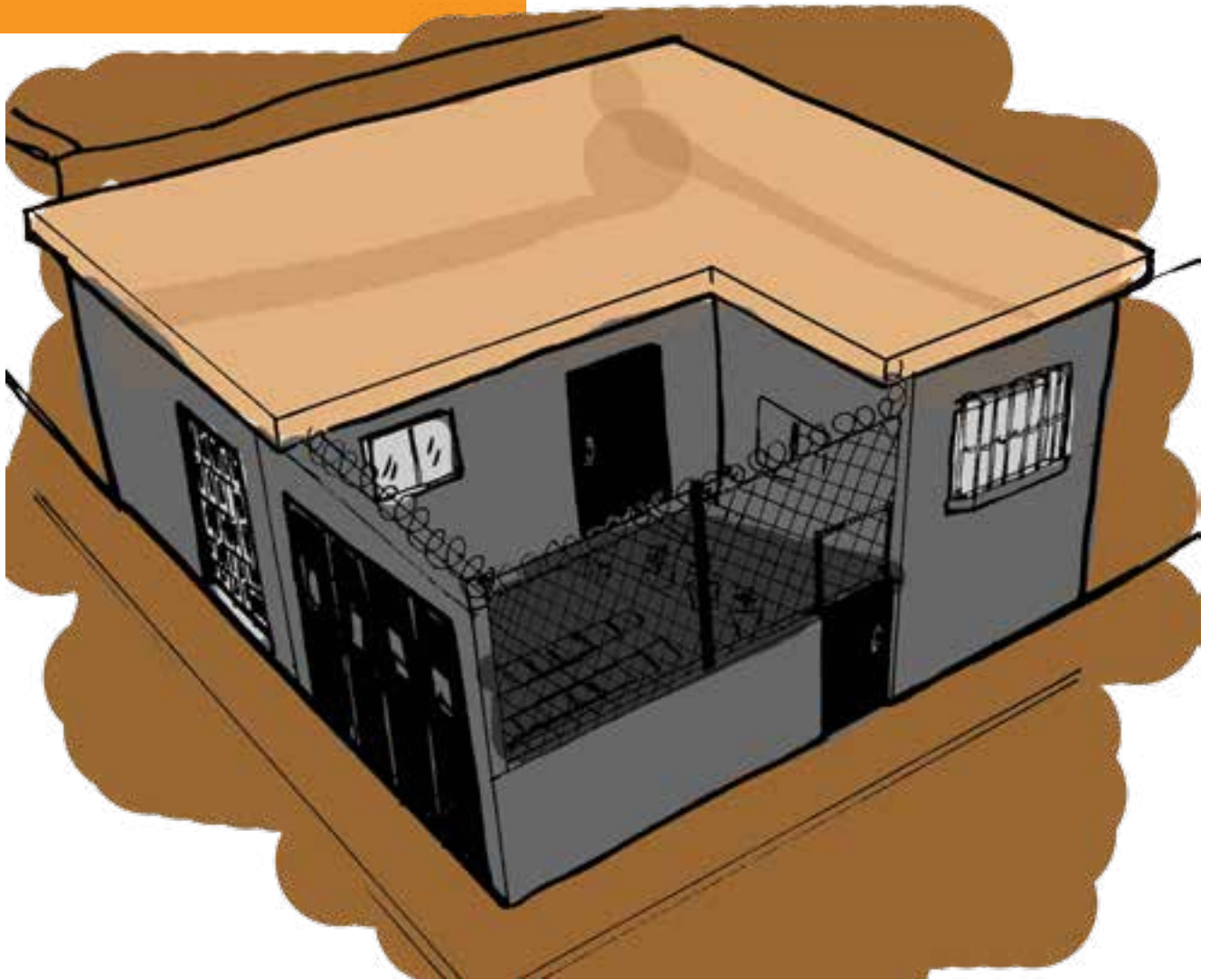
5. Know the schedules and places where family members go, and agree on reporting periodically that everything is fine.
6. Keep personal and financial documents and information in order for the sake of family security. Make sure that all important papers are up to date, including wills, certificates of birth and marriage; legal titles to property and other goods; insurance contracts; evidence



of membership in groups and pension plans; precise data on debts payable or receivable. Make copies of these documents and keep them in another safe location if possible.

7. Devise a plan together with the family in case of emergency. For example, all members of the family must keep their most important personal documents and medical records in good order, so that the safest arrangements can be made in the case of an emergency.

RULE NO4. A SAFE HOME





The house must be suitable to provide protection for possible minor risks of any form of aggression or intrusion. The house must be a place of respite and tranquillity, where the family does not feel threatened because of the work carried out by human rights defenders in its midst.

1. Check all physical aspects of the house that may make you vulnerable to aggression, such as windows, doors, walls or fences.
2. Establish escape routes in case of aggression and discuss these with your family members.
3. If the house does not have an escape route (e.g. in apartments), prepare a safe room with a reinforced door in which to take refuge and resist in case of aggression.

The room must have a telephone so as to be able to call for help.

4. When answering the door, be very strict in checking the identity of whoever is calling before opening.
5. Do not give interviews at home or in private to unknown people. You may meet in a very public place and do not give the exact venue until very close to the meeting time.
6. Women who are alone should consider ways of self-defence in case of an aggression. Having operational phones (charged, with credit, extra charged batteries or portable charger) within reach is essential to call for help.



RULE Nº5.
KNOW THE
ENVIRONMENT IN
WHICH WE LIVE





All members of the nuclear family must be thoroughly familiar with the environment in which they live, their street, neighbours, risks and safe places.

1. Study the streets of your neighbourhood or district - who lives and works there, where groups of criminals, thieves or others move about. Know where the nearest police stations, health centres, fire stations and the like are located
2. Maintain cordial relations with neighbours, shopkeepers, watchmen and caretakers, especially those living on the same street with you. Analyse if any could prove suspicious.
3. Make sure to encourage the same to be done by your family while its members decide to be as discrete as possible and

at the same time inspire confidence.

4. Observe the surroundings and people when leaving the house. Take note in particular of people (caretakers, watchmen, neighbours) encountered around the house or office, or in places along the way, to determine that they are going about their actual work. Take care of any person who does not seem genuine or is normally not present.
5. Make sure that children are always under supervision, as they give information to strangers more easily, not realising whom they are dealing with. This could lead into them being kidnapped and the family being extorted.



RULE Nº6. KNOW
THE PUBLIC
AND PRIVATE
MEANS OF
TRANSPORT





All members of the nuclear family must know and check the means of transport (public or private) they use to attend to their daily activities.

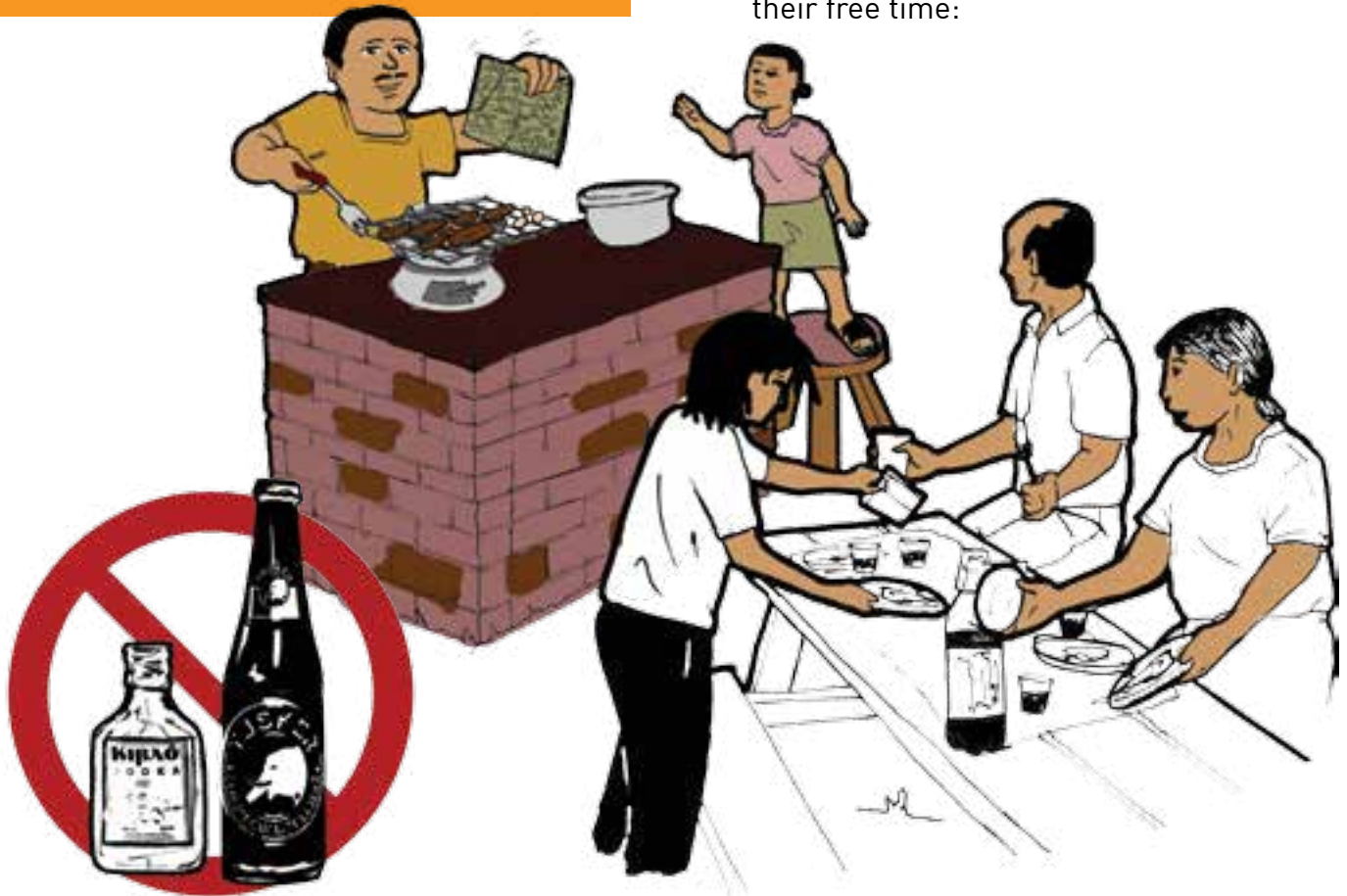
1. Be familiar with the routes of buses and other means of transport, their schedules and which ones have been subject to assault in the past.
2. Be familiar with taxi companies, and identify those that are professional and trustworthy. Use safe, known and reliable taxis.
3. Maintain cars, motorcycles, etc. in good operational conditions.
4. Be aware of places that may pose a greater risk on your daily routes and identify possible safe places in case of emergency.
5. If your risk assessment has indicated you are being surveilled and there is a risk of kidnap or assault, consider changing your routines to make it more difficult to target you.

6. Know who is taking your children to school, who the driver is and who escorts the children. Know the route that they are taking, what time they leave school and when they are expected at home. If there is delay in the children getting home, call the driver and seek to know where they are.
7. If the children are not using school transport introduce the driver who is allowed to pick up your children to the school administration.
8. Before you get in the car, have a look around and inside the car, on the floor on the passenger side and the back seat. Those are the places where assailants usually lurk.
9. Do not wear conspicuous clothing or jewellery when travelling to avoid attracting the attention of robbers.



RULE Nº7. SAFE LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Leisure activities are an important factor for defenders' well-being. However, risks faced by HRDs can spread to their private life. Defenders should therefore take precautionary measures even during their spare time and leisure activities. The following suggestions aim at reducing HRDs and their families' vulnerability to attacks in their free time:





1. Do not use drugs or alcohol.
2. Travel routes and times must vary and be disclosed only on need basis.
3. Do not go to places that do not provide a minimum of security or which have a bad name for altercations, the selling of drugs or other aspects.
4. Be discrete and not attract attention when handling money, or wearing jewellery or carrying other valuables.
5. Do not trust unknown persons under any circumstances.
6. Let a trusted person know you whereabouts and expected return home. Agree on what the person will do if s/he fails to contact you.



RULE Nº8. SECURITY AT MASS EVENTS

It should be borne in mind that criminals tend to attend gatherings of large numbers of people, such as concerts, political, social, and sporting events or demonstrations, and that the most dangerous moment is when the crowd disperses once the event is over.





1. Check to see who is standing at your side and whether they are observing and analysing you.
2. Always keep children under close watch.
3. Know where there is a police, fire brigade or healthcare stations, and be able to go near them.
4. At political events in particular, before leaving the crowd, remove insignia, stickers etc. that identify you, change or cover up with another garment if your clothing has a political identification.
5. Plan the return home by double checking the surrounding when the crowd disperses.
6. When returning, plan ways to evade

or throw off your trail those who are following you.

7. Do not park the car at the same place as the event, if violence, evictions, and the like are expected. It is best to park some way off, or in guarded premises or parking facilities.



RULE ^{NO}9.
SPECIFIC
MEASURES
FOR WOMEN
HUMAN RIGHTS
DEFENDERS





Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) can be at risk not only because of their work but also because of their gender. As a result, threats and attacks can take on a gender-specific nature. In some instances WHRDs run a greater risk in the work they perform, so their security and protection acquire a specific dimension.

1. If your risk is considered high, plan for accompaniment when in certain locations.
2. When undertaking a risk assessment

make sure you consider on how your gender can further increase your vulnerability to threats and attacks to enable you take appropriate prevention measures. For example if you are pregnant, assess the physical risks of exposure. It would be unreasonable for a woman with an advanced pregnancy to take part in demonstrations or public rallies where riots might occur.

3. When developing a security plan, make sure to consider security measures



- Submit. If the victim fears for his or her life, they may choose to submit to the crime.
- Passive resistance. Do or say anything distasteful or disgusting to ruin the attacker's desire for sexual contact. Tell him you have AIDS, diarrhoea, make yourself vomit, etc.

that offer a range of support, including things like childcare and health care as these are often ignored despite their importance.

4. There is no general formula for the right response to sexual assault. The response chosen lies entirely with the victim and depends on the individual situation. The primary objective is for the victim to survive. The options available to the victim of a sexual assault can include doing the following:



- Active resistance: Try any type of physical force you can muster to fight off the attacker, such as striking, kicking, biting, scratching, shouting and running away.
5. All human rights organisations must consider the preventive and reactive dimensions to sexual assaults of their staff. The latter include at a minimum access to legal services and effective health care including psychological support, access to the day-after pill, immediate and regular checks for sexually transmitted diseases etc.
 6. WHRDs should familiarise themselves with existing protection mechanisms set up to responding swiftly and effectively to situations of emergencies where WHRDs are at high risk or have come under attack.



Protection International is an international, non-profit organisation that brings protection strategies and security management tools to human rights defenders at risk. Since 2004, Protection International has been working with local partners in over thirty countries throughout the world.

Protection International envisions a world where human rights and fundamental freedoms are universally recognized and respected, and where everyone has the right to defend these rights and freedoms without fear of threats or attack.

Our mission is to support human rights defenders through comprehensive protection programmes. Our programmes help defenders build their capacities in order to manage their protection effectively, to allow those that protect them fulfil their obligations, and to convince other individuals and institutions with a stake in the protection of human rights defenders to maximise their positive contribution. Protection International always works in partnership with defenders.

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