



Civil Society: Partners for Justice

Supporting Efforts to Document Human Rights Abuses and Advocate for Justice

The Issue

Civil society organizations can play a significant role in the promotion of justice for core international crimes and serious violations of human rights, especially through efforts of documentation and advocacy.

In the absence of credible accountability mechanisms or rule of law, communities that have been deeply affected by abusive regimes or conflict violence work to gather and preserve detailed information about atrocities that have occurred with the hope that it can be used as evidence by justice mechanisms. These organizations conduct interviews with survivors, draft reports on alleged violations that have occurred, advocate for the establishment of justice mechanisms, and file cases in courts on behalf of victims. All of this information can be critical to inform current or future justice processes aiming to confront killings, disappearances, torture, sexual violence, crimes against children, or other violations that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, or even genocide.

Conducting documentation however can prove to be incredibly difficult, in the absence of a single, commonly accepted set of rules of procedure and evidence for documentation by civil society organizations. Given these challenges, these organizations are increasingly looking for appropriate tools in order to effectively contribute to justice efforts in a way that is as safe and victim-centered as possible.

Our Solution

Justice Rapid Response provides expertise to civil society organizations wishing to build their own capacity to effectively document serious international crimes and violations of human rights. We work with select civil society organizations to strengthen their ability to identify, collect and preserve information about atrocities that have occurred and engage in justice processes. These include national and international courts, United Nations-mandated investigations and human rights monitoring mechanisms, truth commissions and memorialization initiatives.

After receiving a request for support, Justice Rapid Response conducts a thorough vetting process and assessment for each civil society organization based on a standard set of criteria. A small team of experts then carries out a consultation mission in order to determine the individual needs of the organization. We then create a programme designed to fill critical gaps in the skills or procedures of the organization.

Through sustained engagement, our experts work closely with these organizations on strategies for documentation and methods to collect and preserve information. Justice Rapid Response experts also research and map justice processes that are available to survivors and advise civil society organizations on how they can engage. As with all of our work, we advocate for justice processes that prioritize the safety and well-being of survivors.



Our Approach

Justice Rapid Response offers seasoned technical experts from the criminal justice and human rights sectors who can best support the documentation strategies of a civil society organization. Expertise requested can vary over time, and may include: **Transitional Justice; Human Rights; Sexual and Gender-based Violence; Witness/Victim Support; Legal Analysis; Child Protection and Security.**

Our Impact

As a result of our work, civil society organizations documenting human rights violations have increased capacity to effectively identify, collect and preserve information in a victim-centered way for the purpose of investigations, prosecutions or other justice processes. With improved strategies and knowledge, these organizations are better equipped to engage with justice processes, whether now or in the future, and promote the dignity of survivors.



IRAQ

The conflict in Iraq has had devastating consequences on civilians, including on minority groups in Iraq who have been persecuted on the grounds of their religion and ethnicity. Justice Rapid Response is providing expertise to Yazda, a civil society organization providing humanitarian assistance to Yazidi survivors and supporting legal efforts for accountability for crimes such as mass killings, abductions, rape, and sexual slavery. Yazda now has the essential tools they need in order to safely gather testimony from Yazidi survivors, and a strategy for identifying and reporting on mass graves, kill sites, and destroyed buildings.



YEMEN

Despite the scale of the conflict in Yemen, international access and reporting continues to be extremely limited. The international community relies heavily on local organizations like Mwatana for Human Rights to document and report on serious violations including air strikes, sexual and gender-based violence, and torture in detention centers. Experts from Justice Rapid Response have worked with Mwatana in order to develop a strategic plan that includes effective strategies for documentation and advocacy for justice.

How to Request Expertise from Justice Rapid Response

Civil society organizations interested in receiving expertise can contact the Justice Rapid Response Secretariat in Geneva:

Email: secretariat@justicerapidresponse.org | Telephone +41 (0)22 544 29 00

Photo Credits - Front: JRR Expert and civil society member (2017, JRR); Back, top and center: Documentation of sites presumed to be mass graves of Yazidis killed by the Islamic State (2018, Yazda); Bottom: Damage from an airstrike on Aden, Yemen (2016, Mwatana).