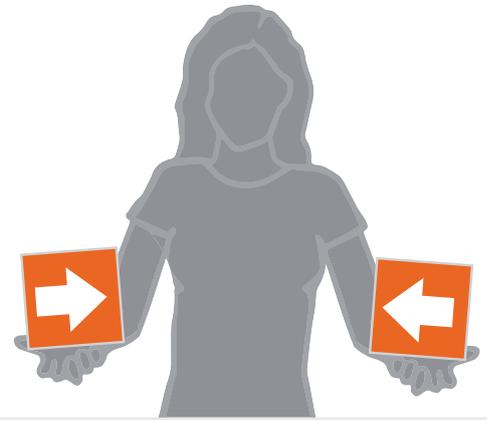


# 5. PREVENTING AND REACTING TO AGGRESSIONS



> CHAPTER 1.5 OF THE NEW PROTECTION MANUAL  
PREVENTING AND REACTING TO AGGRESSIONS



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- > Assess the likelihood of different kinds of aggression taking place.
- > Critically reflect on how to prevent and react to aggressions.



## KEY MESSAGES

- > An aggression is the culmination of a process that probably included security incidents, possibly even threats. Thus, in general, it is not an unexpected event. An aggression is the product of three interacting factors:
  - The party who takes violent action and uses violent means to attain her/his goals;
  - Background and triggers that lead the aggressor to see violence as an option; and
  - A suitable setting.
- > Aggressions require adequate resources and capacities and an enabling environment if they are to be carried out. Therefore, the prevention of attacks must address political cost and focus on reducing the physical exposure of the HRDs.
- > Aggressions take time and resources to prepare. It is therefore vital for defenders to detect and analyse any signs that might indicate a possible aggression. These include:
  - Assessing risks ([NPM, Chapter 1.2](#)).
  - Assessing the likelihood of a threat ([NPM, Chapter 1.3](#)).
  - Analysing and reacting to security incidents ([NPM, Chapter 1.4](#)).

## THE SESSION



### CHALLENGES THAT MAY ARISE DURING THE SESSION :

- The session can be emotionally charged if based on real-life cases.
- Participants might find it hard to clearly separate the three interacting factors leading to aggressions.
- Taking into account the specific protection needs that women HRDs may have (in terms of threats, vulnerabilities and capacities, incidents, etc.). Taking into account the particularities of any other relevant social category when assessing risk (for example, indigenous populations, LGBTBI defenders, disabled defenders, etc.).

 THE SESSION STEP BY STEP :

Time	Acc. time	Activity	Tool / method / materials
10'		<b>Introduction:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objectives and structure of the session</li> </ul>	Have the points ready on a flipchart (or PowerPoint slide).
20'	30'	<b>Explanation of aggressions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aggressions as the product of three interacting factors.</li> <li>Who is behind aggressions?</li> </ul>	The three factors written down on a flipchart (or PowerPoint slide).
45'	75'	<b>Establishing the feasibility of aggressions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning activity: Assess the probability of aggressions</li> </ul>	Tables to establish the feasibility of aggressions (NPM Chapter 1.5). Video about the killing of Marisela Escobedo ( <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNygrEKedsw">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNygrEKedsw</a> ).
30'	105'	<b>Preventing a direct/indirect aggression.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case analysis: you can either use a real-life case chosen by participants, or use the case proposed below</li> <li>Exercise: planning as the aggressor</li> </ul>	Cases printed out on paper Contextual information about the case analysis;
10'	115'	<b>Conclusion</b>	

**TIME KEEPING: CALCULATE 135' (2 HOURS, 15 MINUTES), INCLUDING A 20' BREAK**

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### EXPLANATION OF AGGRESSIONS

Refer to [Chapter 1.5. of the NPM](#) to explain why and how aggressions occur. See also the Tips for Facilitators below. Two main points will guide your explanation:

- Aggressions as the product of three interacting factors (p.53).
- Who is behind aggressions? (pp.53-55)



- Violent aggressions against HRDs have the purpose of causing them to abandon their work by inflicting harm – either directly or indirectly, e.g. by targeting family members. This has not only a physical but also an emotional dimension that needs to be acknowledged.
- When introducing the concept of aggression, underline that violence is not only an act but also a process. A violent aggression against a defender does not come out of the blue. Careful analysis of aggressions often shows that they are the climax of conflicts, disputes, threats and security incidents, which can be traced over time. So the good news is that by being observant, analysing and reacting to security incidents, and putting security measures in place, defenders can significantly reduce the risk of a violent aggression, i.e. they should not feel helpless.

- Outline the three interacting factors that make up an aggression and give examples to help participants absorb them. If possible, choose an example drawn from the participants' experience. Otherwise, you may use the following example:
- **Example:** The work of a WHRD has touched on the interests of a wealthy businessman who engages in large-scale farming and has illegally evicted farmers from their lands. The WHRD has evidence of this. To silence her, the potential aggressor needs to gather information on her behaviour, routines and vulnerabilities. This requires an investment of time and resources. The potential aggressor must take a conscious decision that an aggression against the defender, intended to stop her work, outweighs the possible repercussions this action might have, e.g. prosecution and conviction in the courts. Contexts with high levels of impunity make it less costly for a potential aggressor to carry out a threat, as there may be little or no risk of repercussions for her/his actions. In addition, s/he needs to find a suitable setting to carry out the aggression with limited risks for her/him to be discovered or stopped. S/he will therefore spend time planning the aggression in order to limit eventual negative consequences.

## ESTABLISHING THE FEASIBILITY OF AGGRESSIONS

### ASSESS THE PROBABILITY OF AGGRESSIONS

Divide participants into three groups, one per theme. Ask them to apply the three tables given in [NPM \(pp.56-58\)](#), "Establishing the probability of an aggression", either to their own environments or to another setting they are familiar with.

Share and discuss the results in plenary (be aware of any sensitivities if there may be trust issues among participants).

-  → To prevent aggressions, it is necessary to be able to analyse the likelihood of their happening. To help participants acquire this capacity, use the tables provided in [NPM \(pp.56-58\)](#). These will help participants to identify the different factors that interact in the development of aggressions and to ponder their relative importance in evaluating the likelihood of different types of aggression occurring (common crime, incidental aggressions and direct aggressions).

## EXPLANATION OF AGGRESSIONS

Remind participants that to prevent an aggression it is crucial to:

- Persuade a potential aggressor or a person making threats that an aggression will involve them in unacceptable costs and consequences;
- Reduce the likelihood of aggressions occurring.

Choose one of the exercises below (useful for assessing the probability of aggressions).

For both exercises, divide the participants into small groups (four to five people) for about half an hour, after which each group will present the results of its discussions; then engage participants in a general discussion, in plenary, for about 15 minutes.

### EXERCISE 1 - CASE ANALYSIS: THE KILLING OF MARISELA ESCOBEDO (MEXICAN WHRD)

(This video can only be screened if the facilitator has access to the Internet, or if the clip has been downloaded beforehand).

Following the disappearance of her daughter Rubi Frayre in August 2008 (she was found dead in June 2009), Marisela Escobedo had dedicated her life to seeking justice for her daughter. In December 2010, an armed man approached Marisela and shot her while she was participating in a pacifist demonstration opposite the Government Palace, in the city of Chihuahua. A security camera placed on top of the State Government building recorded the killing – which has since become a painful and yet unique testimony. Although the video is in Spanish and there are no subtitles, it is a useful and easy-to-understand visual resource. Some basic facts: Marisela was camping in the park as part of the protest, and at the time of the attack was sitting with a friend at a table on the pavement (on the right-hand side of the screen), opposite the main gate of the State Government building. A white car approaches; a gunman steps out of the car and attacks both Marisela and the person who is with her. Marisela tries to escape and runs across the road towards the State Government building (from right to left), but the gunman shoots her as she reaches the pavement (on the left of the frame). After that, he runs back to the car and leaves the scene.

**Ask participants to read the contextual information about this case (which you have printed out on paper), and then show them the video. To analyse this case, ask participants to follow the three conditions necessary to carry out an attack and how each of them could have been influenced to prevent an attack:**

- A. The thinking and behaviour patterns used by the individual or individuals who carried out the action.
- B. Why did the attacker imagine that he could “achieve an objective” or “solve a problem” by carrying out the attack? (What is the likely motive for the attack, the nature of the problem, how it was carried out, etc.).
- C. What context or circumstances made the attack possible (describing the place where it happened, how it was carried out, etc.).



- The example is based on a real-life case, but the facilitator might use another case (in written form) if it is relevant and adequate.
- Restate that, to prevent an aggression, it is crucial to: Persuade a potential aggressor or a person making threats that if they commit an aggression the costs and consequences will be unacceptable to them; Reduce the likelihood that an aggression will occur.



## EXERCISE 2 – PLANNING AS THE AGGRESSORS

Ask participants to develop an attack plan against an HRD. Knowing how aggressors think is one of the best ways to prevent the possibility of an attack (facilitators can also read section “Surveillance and Counter-surveillance” ([NPM, pp.60-62](#)) to guide them in this exercise):

- A. Imagine a scene in which an HRD travels from home to the office every day. The HRD had previously received a death threat; his attackers plan to simulate a mugging, beat him up and, by these means, try to force him to stop working as an HRD. The attackers, who are two individuals paid by a local police officer, do not want to be identified in case they get arrested (draw a plan for the route if possible, etc.).
- B. Imagine the rest of the background information, such as the house the defender lives in, the distance from home to the office, whether s/he uses any transport, whether the attack will take place during her/his free time, etc.
- C. Imagine what you would have to do, in order to prevent such an attack from happening, without having any prior information about it. In other words, what security measures should be adopted to enable an HRD to lower/eliminate the risk of such an attack?

- The second case can prove to be very stimulating, as it requires participants to adopt the point of view of perpetrators. But the exercise should be implemented with great care, as requesting participants to assume this role might cause tensions, or lead participants to overplay their roles. Avoid the exercise if you do not feel comfortable with the group.
- In order to prevent direct aggressions and better understand their logic, it can be useful to put oneself in the shoes of aggressors. This should help participants to get a better understanding of the thinking, behaviours and strategies that aggressors adopt. Aggressions against defenders are often the product of processes of thought and behaviour that we can understand and learn from, even if they are illegitimate. Most people who attack defenders see violence as a “useful” means to reach a goal or “to solve a problem”.

## CONCLUSION

Conclude the session by having participants recall the key learning points.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- > Van Brabant. Op. Cit. Chapter 3.2. (pp. 22-38).

