

# Security Guideline for People with Albinism

## CBM Health, Safety & Security Unit

Author: Tom van Herwijnen (CBM Health, Safety & Security Manager)

Co-authors: Steve Ritchie (CEO RiskVisibility), Dr Julian Eaton (CBM Global Advisor Mental Health)

Date: July 2016 (updated)

Concrete and specific security measures to prevent and handle attacks on people with albinism.



## Contents

Introduction .....	3
Security guidelines for children with albinism .....	4
Counter surveillance .....	5
Security guidelines for families .....	6
Security guidelines for meetings.....	7
Security guidelines for managers.....	7
Immediate incident management .....	8
Flow diagram – initial handling of an alert or incident .....	10
Psychosocial Support .....	11
Informing authorities .....	12
Working with the media .....	12
Using social media .....	13
Learning from the crisis .....	13



**Input provided:** Ikponwosa ERO (UN Independent Expert /Albinism) and Andrew Kain, Independent Security Consultant

**Warning.** Some of the content of this document may be **unsuitable to be read by children**. This guide could also prove to be traumatic reading for someone who is at risk. Please use and filter the content for appropriate audiences.

Some key statements are **enhanced in bold** to improve readability for people with a visual impairment.

**Copyright © May 2016 CBM.** *CBM allows the use of this publication by other organisations upon explicit, written permission, provided that it is not altered or duplicated in a way that could mislead readers and it is not used for commercial purposes. When duplicated/used/translated, the following sentence must be included: "Original publication developed by CBM. CBM is an international Christian disability and development organisation committed to improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities in the poorest parts of the world. [www.cbm.org](http://www.cbm.org)"*

For more information please contact [hssunit@cbm.org](mailto:hssunit@cbm.org)

## Introduction

Violence against people with albinism has been taking place for many years. Recently however, a trend of increasing violence has been observed. People with albinism are subjected to bullying, teasing and abuse, but most worryingly, they are targeted by criminals. This because of superstition and the deeply false belief that body parts of people with albinisms have magic powers. In some parts of the world, the false belief that sexual intercourse with a woman with albinism cures HIV Aids exists.

Violence, often leading to traumatizing, maiming and killing of people with albinism, happens at a local level by individual perpetrators (sometimes even with involvement of a relative). However, because serious money is involved in the trade of body parts, criminal gangs have become active as well. Some of these gangs operate across national borders and proactively target vulnerable people with albinism.

The **objective** of this Security Guideline for People with Albinism is **to provide concrete and specific advice to people with albinism** as well as those working with them, to remain safe within the context of where they live. It also provides easy to implement steps in handling an incident and swiftly mobilize useful resources to try and return a victim back to safety.

People with albinism stand out because of their features and are thus easy to target. Many also struggle with visual impairments making them additionally vulnerable. The visual impairment often requires children with albinism to attend blind schools which again makes them easy to locate and target.

In its global operations, CBM has worked for several years on a Disability Inclusive Security Management and Security Training approach.

**Sad reality:** On 4 May 2013, various experts at the UN stressed that “In several African countries, it is believed that body parts of persons with albinism possess magical powers capable of bringing riches if used in potions produced by local witchdoctors. Some even believe that the witchcraft is more powerful if the victim screams during the amputation, so body parts are often cut from live victims.”

Since the year 2000 there were almost 450 attacks on people with albinism in 25 African countries. More than 170 people were killed, many others mutilated or raped.

Based on this experience and the input of many people with disabilities, different skills and techniques were developed. These involve incident avoidance and prevention but also a swift incident management system to assist vulnerable people in need.

We strongly believe that an inclusive and decisive approach towards the underlying problem, will result in stronger awareness, fewer incidents and swifter incident management.



With **training and measures** put in place:

- Individuals, parent-teacher groups and guardians will be empowered to recognize contextual challenges and guide an appropriate response.
- Children with albinism will recognize danger early and act swiftly.
- Peers will take responsibility for each other and find safety in being part of a group.
- Extended families will take responsibility for safe arrival at school and at work.
- Guards at schools and institutions will be able to detect early on whether people with bad intentions are watching to detect an easy victim.
- Managers will act swiftly when an incident occurs.
- Communities can be mobilized when an incident occurs.
- Community and religious leaders will strongly condemn practices and incidents and mobilize resources to deter and solve incidents.

We invite you to **read this guideline and decisively implement quick, easy and inexpensive measures to help safeguard children and people with albinism**. In doing so, you could be instrumental in protecting precious lives and making a genuine difference in the lives of people with albinism.

Please share this publication within the UN, NGO and People with Albinism and Disabled People's Organisation networks as well as within Human Rights circles.

Should you have further questions about Safeguarding People with Albinism, Disability Inclusive Safety & Security Training, NGO Security Management systems or Crisis Management training, please contact [hssunit@cbm.org](mailto:hssunit@cbm.org)

## Security guidelines for children with albinism

Children with albinism are perceived to be at higher risk. They are young, not so physically strong and due to the often occurring eye sight challenges, they may not observe that they are being watched or followed. As many of them will go to school based on a regular pattern (time, uniform and route), they are easy to spot, follow and target, particularly in isolated locations.

Below are several concise action steps that should be discussed with children with albinism, their families, caretakers and those with whom they study.

**Basic surveillance detection:** Learn to be aware of your surroundings. Notice things and events that seem out of the ordinary, for example: "I have seen this man several times before. Why is this person / car following me from a distance? Why is this person asking me where I live? Why are these three people sitting in an idling car near my house when I get off the school bus?"

- **Avoid walking to school alone.** Always make sure that you go to school and back home with several friends whose task it is to ensure that you arrive safely.
- **Set up a school companion system** where peers are teamed up with pupils with albinism to assist, keep them safe and 'be their eyes where needed' to spot possible surveillance.

- Where feasible, vary the times you go to school/home/do your chores, use different routes and avoid predictable routines.
- **Avoid quiet, deserted roads** or routes. Be outside only in the daylight.
- Learn to practice situational awareness and basic surveillance detection.
- Carry a whistle on a cord around your neck and blow it loudly when you need help or feel uncomfortable.
- **Learn to trust your instinct** – if something does not feel good, there often is a reason for it. Act on it firmly and without hesitation.
- **Do not accept a lift**, not even from somebody that you know somewhat. Use good judgment, be wary of people's motives even when somebody says, for example, "your mother has sent me to pick you up."
- Practice basic 'travel tracking': **Tell a trusted friend where you are going**, how and when you plan to arrive. If you have a mobile phone, send a short message when you depart/arrive. Ask your friend to monitor, and where needed raise an alert, when you do not arrive at the agreed time and place.
- On routes that you travel regularly, know where there is a safe place you can go should you feel threatened or uncomfortable with a situation.
- Ensure that school bus drivers and watchmen are well trained and specifically tasked to watch over the security of children with albinism
- Ensure all children **know how to raise an alert** and know who to contact when an incident occurs.

**Resisting kidnap:** Normally security professionals advise victims **not** to resist during a kidnap attempt to increase your chance of survival. However, the motives for kidnapping a person with albinism is motivated by the value of their body parts and thus often ends in death. In this case, it is recommended that, when somebody tries to take you against your will, you **fight and scream** for help in the hope that your noise and struggle will alert others to come to your aid. A fighting and struggling victim may coerce kidnappers to abandon their attempt. You may get hurt, but you increase your chance of survival.

Consider doing a basic **assertiveness course** with all children and teenagers where they learn to be firm, know the boundaries of decency and signs of danger and are equipped to raise the alarm. This could include some very basic self-defense techniques as a last resort.

The information above is geared towards children with albinism. However, much of the advice provided is also valid for women or people who are otherwise vulnerable due to a disability.

## Counter surveillance

In the text box above, some basic principles are outlined to help children spot things that are out of the ordinary. It has been proven that most criminal acts are preceded by a period of observation. Criminals generally do not strike opportunistically. They lower their risk of detection and arrest by seeking a vulnerable, easy target. They seek to increase their chance of success by getting to know an area, seek out a soft target, get to know his/her routine and strike at a place and time where the person is vulnerable, unaware and unprotected.

A criminal gang may cruise around an area that is considered target rich, such as a school where many pupils with albinism attend or a project or office where men and women are employed or where they regularly meet. They may sit in an idling vehicle near a school exit to see who leaves and when. They may follow somebody from a distance to get to know his or her routine.

With basic training, school guards, drivers and other trusted people nearby can learn to spot surveillance. Gate staff must be instructed to be alert and aware, patrol their area of responsibility and act decisively when they observe possible surveillance. They must know at all times how and with whom to raise an alert, share a suspicion and take protective measures for the people under their care.

### Security guidelines for families

When you have a family member with albinism, it is important to be alerted to the reality and to be aware of dangerous trends and patterns. Never assume that danger and sorrow will not come to your family.

Unfortunately, some people with financial or superstitious motives and a complete lack of conscience will see your family member as a possible source of quick wealth and fortune. From incident analysis, there is also evidence suggesting that some disappearances of people with albinism were orchestrated by or at least had a level of involvement from a family member or neighbor who knew the family routines and points where they were vulnerable.

**Safe residence:** There have been reports of small groups armed with machetes appearing at night at a house seeking to kidnap a person with albinism. What they are looking for is a swift and silent getaway. Consider this and see how you can make your house a difficult place to get into. Find a way to deter these people (good locks, a big dog, strong door or a safe room) and raise the alert through a simple alarm system. Agree with neighbors that you will look after each other.

We therefore urge parents to **have an open dialogue around albinism**. Treat your children with albinism well, learn about their needs and know how to explain what this congenital disorder is (and is not) to those around you. Discuss openly where you may be vulnerable and take decisive action. Mobilize the (religious) community as well as your trusted, extended family and collectively work out how your precious family members with albinism can be safeguarded while still staying active in community life. Your **children with albinism are precious and can make wonderful contributions** to the community. So, please protect them so they can reach their full potential.

#### **Situational awareness:**

You can be 'the eyes' of a person with albinism by having the ability to identify when potential targeting activity is taking place. Watch for absence of the *normal* and presence of the *abnormal*.

Take note of the measures suggested in the previous chapter. **Pro-actively assess how your family can go about daily routines, chores and safe commuting.** Ensure safe transport is available or escort people, for example to school and back home. Also think of safeguarding during festivals, celebrations and other events where many people are gathered, and moving to / away from an area.

Avoid leaving children with albinism under the care of somebody who you do not fully trust. Do not entrust them to somebody who has debts or criminal contacts.

Where needed, **mobilize community support** and companion systems and actively liaise with school authorities to demand protective action. Having many people that are aware, involved and alerted will go a long way towards keeping your family members safe.

### Security guidelines for meetings

When you are organizing a meeting where one or several people with albinism will be attending, be aware of the risks for them to travel back and forth to the meeting. Research whether the area has seen any previous incidents of violence (against people with albinism) or whether criminal gangs are operating in the area. Consider safe means of transport and set up a simple multi-person companion system. Remember that even two or more people may not be able to defend themselves against several armed men.

**Select and screen reliable accommodations** where people can meet, eat and stay overnight without being targeted. Also consider commutes, for example between the hotel and the meeting venue. Preemptively identify where a group of criminals may strike and provide adequate protection. Consider wise start and end times for the meetings so that people can be home or in a safe location before it gets dark. For each larger meeting (e.g. a conference or multi-day workshop) appoint an experienced person as Security Focal Person (SFP) and task this person with concrete objectives to keep participants safe. Ensure the SFP is well equipped (working, charged phone with enough credit) and has an existing network in the area to swiftly raise an alert and mobilize supporting resources. Provide the name and contact number of the SFP to all participants and give a condensed security briefing for the specific location and event.

### Security guidelines for managers

When you are the manager of a project, leader of a school or institution where people with albinism work, study or meet, you carry additional responsibilities to keep the people under your care safe. Below are several simple recommendations and easy / low cost actions to implement:

- Nominate a Security Focal Person within your team that has designated tasks to assess risks and vulnerabilities of people with albinism.
- **Make Safety & Security a recurring theme** at your management meetings where incidents, trends and patterns are discussed.
- Implement recommendations as soon as possible.
- Implement training for students, staff and specifically for guards and drivers as per this guideline.
- **Equip students and other vulnerable staff with whistles** on a cord.
- Demand that guards and drivers take their duties seriously and pro-actively patrol and monitor the streets, gate and compound.
- **Set up an alert system** through which you can swiftly channel information about possible risks. Urge people to report all incidents, 'near misses' and suspicions so that possible patterns can be monitored.
- Set up and communicate a **designated reporting channel** for incidents.

- Screen the vulnerabilities of transport and commuting and determine safe routes and routines for students and staff.
- **Implement companion systems** and where needed arrange formal, safe transport.
- Keep rigid attendance systems so you know at all times who has and has not arrived. Take swift, pre-agreed action when somebody is late or unaccounted for.
- When you have a boarding facility where students or staff stay overnight, carefully assess the risks to people with albinism and take action accordingly.
- **Prepare for a possible crisis situation** by having names, photographs, next of kin and addresses of all staff and students. Store data confidentially to avoid misuse!
- Consider doing a Crisis Management simulation exercise with your team or seek support to implement a security and crisis management training.
- Ensure you have an up-to-date list of Emergency Contacts so you can swiftly reach out to police, authorities, community and religious leaders as well as (local) media such as local radio stations.
- Use the crisis management flow diagram in this document (below).

## Immediate incident management

Naturally it is best to focus the majority of time, energy and resources on training and prevention of incidents. **Much can indeed be done to avoid incidents.** However incidents will happen and, if they do, your preparedness and quick reaction could literally save lives. Experience has taught that well thought out and rehearsed incident management, increases the chances for a victim to come out of a dangerous situation unharmed.

**With regard to incident management, the early stage is the most crucial phase.** When we look at the most common and severe scenario – the abduction of a person with albinism – we have to be realistic and face the facts however gruesome the topic.

Criminals who abduct a person with albinism generally have two motives; sexual and/or financial. A kidnapped girl or woman (sometimes also boys and men) may be forced into sexual intercourse and contract HIV Aids or become pregnant.

**Immediate action:**  
You must therefore act **immediately** to solicit a response from the community leading to a massive outcry.

A kidnapped person will be taken to a quiet location shortly after the abduction where he or she is killed and maimed with the aim to sell the body parts. The longer perpetrators wait, the higher their chance of being discovered. Because the motive for kidnapping people with albinism is different, there is no time to waste. There will be no contact attempt or a period where negotiations take place regarding a ransom.

Occasionally a criminal community member (or somebody with debts) may take somebody with the aim to sell the person to a gang or dealer offering cash money for a living victim.



You must **act immediately to solicit a response from the community**. We need the community leaders to strongly condemn, while mobilizing community members to help search. The below flowchart will help you assess a situation, take decisions and mobilize resources to find a missing person.

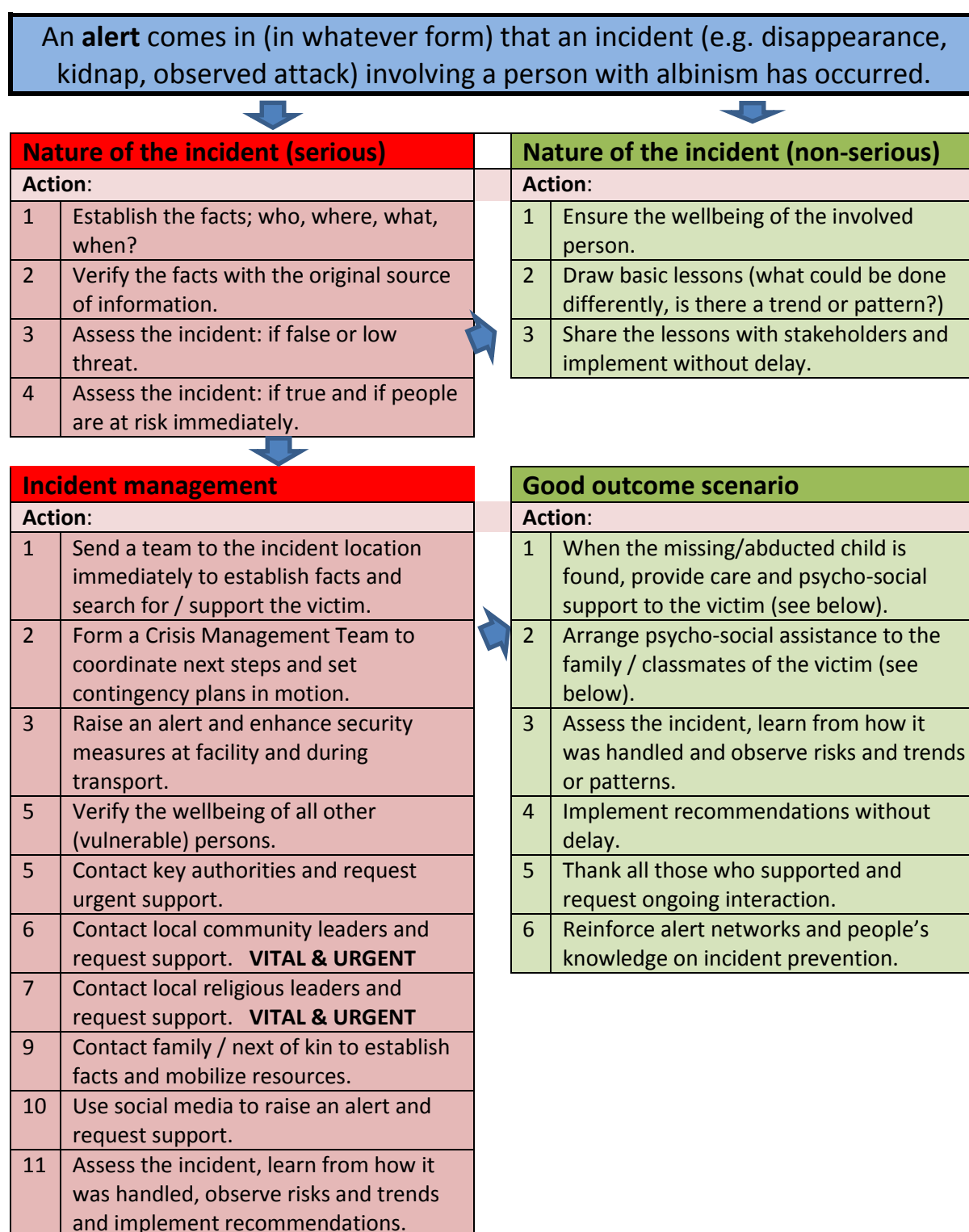
The (few) successful cases where abducted people have been found alive and freed, generally had one thing in common: an entire community was alerted and rallied into immediate action to search for a victim. With hundreds of people looking and searching, community elders condemning the incident and religious leaders urging their followers to assist, a relatively big area can be covered, a victim found and perpetrators apprehended.

Unfortunately, apart from strong preventative action, we have very few options to end a crisis positively. We must therefore **focus our full attention** on getting the community aspect right. This can only be accomplished through pre-established and well-rehearsed contingency plans. Precious time will be lost if incident managers have to struggle to find up-to-date contact data. Response will be slow when people have not bothered to keep their contacts in the community current, and do not know who among the authorities to reach out to.

Your team, project or school must invest in buy-in from the community and religious leaders and have pre-established and maintained (rapid response) networks of helpful emergency contacts. The greater the **acceptance** of your mandate, the more effective your ability to mobilize support.






## Flow diagram – initial handling of an alert or incident



## Psychosocial Support

It is important that a person who has undergone a distressing or traumatic experience is able to **receive appropriate support** from their family and community, and if necessary, from professionals focused on mental wellbeing. Some simple principles can help to ensure that people benefit from available support mechanisms and avoid being further harmed by attempts to help them.

<b>LOOK</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Check for safety.</li><li>» Check for people with obvious urgent basic needs.</li><li>» Check for people with serious distress reactions.</li></ul>	
<b>LISTEN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Approach people who may need support.</li><li>» Ask about people's needs and concerns.</li><li>» Listen to people, and help them to feel calm.</li></ul>	
<b>LINK</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>» Help people address basic needs and access services.</li><li>» Help people cope with problems.</li><li>» Give information.</li><li>» Connect people with loved ones and social support.</li></ul>	

### Basic principles of Psychological First Aid<sup>1</sup>

**Look:** Make sure that the person is out of danger and that their basic needs are addressed. Are they safe? Do they need food or clothing, Are they in an environment where they feel comfortable and secure?

People who are clearly very distressed, emotional or unable to communicate soon after an incident need to be given time to recover. If they are severely distressed after a long period, it may be necessary to refer them to specialists. *No-one should ever be forced to recall or 'debrief' if they do not want to talk about their experience.* This can be distressing and is not therapeutic unless the person wants to do so.

**Listen:** The most important thing that can be done to support a person who has been traumatized is to show that you are available for them, and concerned for their welfare. Show empathy and a willingness to give them time to listen. Ideally, friends and family can offer this support.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers* (World Health Organization, War Trauma Foundation, World Vision International, 2011). Used with permission.

If you are not known to the person, introduce yourself and ask how they are and if they want to talk (if possible in a quiet and private area). Ask if they have any particular needs or concerns. Never insist that they talk, or ask overly intrusive questions. If they are anxious or distressed, calm them down and reassure them that they are safe (if this is true). Speaking quietly and calmly, maintaining eye contact.

**Link:** Help people to address their concerns and access the basic needs they say they have. Connect them to family and friends who can help, and link them to services that can help them for the long-term, either practical or in terms of further physical or mental health care.

In general, it is important that while following these safety recommendations, people with albinism are able to be included in the usual activities of communities. These recommendations should help people to feel safe rather than live in fear. They are not to blame for the situation, and emphasis should be put on changing the abusive behavior of others in the community.

When communicating risks to children in particular, it can be helpful to;

- give them more time to speak and absorb information.
- share basic information in a way they can understand and give them a chance to ask questions. This includes discussing when an incident has occurred or when there are rumors in the community/school.
- make sure they know that they are not to blame for the situation.
- be patient if they display behaviors like wetting the bed, which will resolve when over the crisis.
- not separate them from loved ones, and encourage normal routines in a familiar environment.

## Informing authorities

When you experience an incident regarding a person with albinism we also strongly recommend that you **send an alert** to the UN's **Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism** via: [albinism@ohchr.org](mailto:albinism@ohchr.org) or use Twitter/Instagram: @unalbinism or use Facebook: "UN Albinism..."

Similarly there may be national contacts either in state or civil society who can be informed, with the person's permission, to help to track incidents. The more incidents that are reported centrally, the better trends and patterns can be assessed, authorities informed, action taken and perpetrators brought to justice.

## Working with the media

During a crisis event, the role of the media is crucial. Wise and coordinated involvement of the (local) media can bring an incident to a positive outcome. Unwise involvement could also be detrimental to the fate of the victim and promote more attacks.

Through media messages that strongly condemn an attack and disempower the local superstitious beliefs about the magical power of albino body parts,



incrementally we may see community awareness grow. During a current incident we may see positive anger and desire among communities to help rid the world of this evil. We should work with the local media to avoid speculations, correct wrongs and point fingers at groups such as cross border gangs without ample evidence. Far more the media (e.g. local radio) could assist to mobilize local groups and communities to help find a victim while s/he may still be alive and in the area. Urge media to **never mention the value of body parts** of persons with albinism as it may give other people ideas and increase attacks.

**Avoid open involvement of powerful organisations** (perceived as rich, powerful or influential) in the direct handling of a local crisis situation. When this becomes openly known in the media, perpetrators may get scared to be caught and quickly depose of their victim. It is best to let a local organization handle the crisis and media management. Foreign organisations openly supporting a local partner in the release of a victim, may see the perceived monetary value of their victim increase and it may be harder to free the person.

It is possible that in your role as Security Focal Person or Manager of a project, the media contacts you for a response or to get additional information. We advise you to be very careful with what you release. Best is to work with formal media statements only, scrutinized carefully by a team working on the incident.

**Always avoid any speculation or release personal details about a victim or his/her family.** You can always safely confirm that an incident has taken place and that you urge all community members to look out for a victim with a generic description. Always use the opportunity, when contacted by the media, to correct wrong beliefs and superstition around people with albinism.

## Using social media

In this day and age of social media, Facebook postings and Twitter messages will often be the first place where an incident gets reported. Traditional media often pick up their first reports from such channels and start inquiring and reporting.

When your organization has an active social media presence, you could use these platforms to swiftly send out an alert for a missing person to many followers. Ask them to help search, keep an eye out and report to a given address with relevant information.

## Learning from the crisis

Irrespective of the crisis outcome, it is advisable to **evaluate the handling of each crisis** after an incident. This will improve your organizations' contingency planning and professionalize how future incidents are handled. It may even help you avoid another incident and share useful lessons learnt with other organizations.

**Take time to honestly evaluate** what went well and what did not go so well. Were protocols set in place to help protect people with albinism followed or not?

How was the flow of communication? What was most successful? Were you able to mobilize your resources quick enough?

From there, come up with tangible recommendations and do not delay implementation. Also ensure that you further train and instruct your staff when protocols and routines were not (sufficiently) followed.

-----

We are deeply concerned about the plight of people with albinism and the terrible violence with which they are confronted. We sincerely hope that this publication will help deter further attacks and safeguard precious individuals.

Safety and security for people with albinism is very culturally contextual. It is worth **distinguishing between cultures** where people with albinism are discriminated against or abused generally, and those where there is a specific risk of abduction. We don't want to imply that these risks are universal and **contextualized measured** will be required.

Especially in **conflict and disaster zones** where people are fleeing for their lives with the little they can carry, people with albinism are extra vulnerable. The exposure of people with disabilities and especially people with albinism should be carefully considered, planned and mitigated in **Disaster Risk Reduction** and Relief Programmes.

