



What the Declaration on the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel Means for NGO safety and security

A briefing note by the GISF Policy Working Group

Summary

The [Declaration on the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel](#), launched at the UN General Assembly in September 2025, represents a significant political commitment by states to strengthen the safety and security of aid workers. While non-binding, the Declaration carries weight in shaping donor policies, UN frameworks, and state practice.

For NGO safety and security, the most relevant commitments fall under:

- **Access:** Streamlining visas/customs, creating CT/sanctions exemptions, preventing criminalisation, countering disinformation, and supporting civil–military coordination.
- **Protection of Personnel:** Addressing disproportionate risks to local staff, strengthening training and risk assessment capacity, improving access to security information and wellbeing support, promoting collaborative SRM planning, and enabling flexible funding.

These commitments are advocacy levers to press donors and states for **dedicated and flexible SRM funding, removal of operational barriers, equitable support for local partners, and investment in collaborative security systems**. SRM professionals can use the Declaration to brief advocacy, fundraising, and leadership colleagues, ensuring its language informs donor negotiations and organisational priorities.

Background

In September 2025, a cross-regional group of states led by Australia launched the Declaration on the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel at the UN General Assembly. Over 100 states have signed the Declaration in support, signalling continued strong political momentum around aid worker protection. Although the Declaration is voluntary and non-binding, such commitments can influence donor policy, UN operational frameworks, and state practice. For NGOs, the Declaration provides an important reference point to advance dialogue with governments and donors on the resourcing and practical support required for effective Security Risk Management (SRM).

Key elements on safety and security

The Declaration broadly covers four areas:

- Respect for and **adherence** to international humanitarian law
- Allowing and facilitating full, safe, rapid and unhindered humanitarian **access** for the delivery of humanitarian assistance in accordance with relevant international law obligations
- **Alignment** of actions to strengthen protection for international, national and local humanitarian personnel
- Commitment to pursuing greater **accountability** and justice in response to incidents

Strengthening safety and security are strongly referenced under **access** and **alignment**. The security relevant provisions are summarised below.

Para	Commitment / language
Allowing and facilitating full, safe, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access	
21.2(c)	Facilitate access for personnel, security and comms equipment by streamlining visas, customs, and clearances.
21.2(c)	Implement humanitarian exemptions to sanctions and counter-terrorism measures.
21.2(d)	Prevent criminalisation , harassment, arbitrary arrest/detention, reprisals against humanitarian personnel.
21.2(f)	Support civil–military training and coordination to minimise incidental harm.
Alignment of actions to strengthen protection	
21.3(b)	Strengthen UN SMS and NGO capacity for security risk assessments and training , especially for local NGOs.
21.3(c)	Provide access to timely security information, training, and systems ; support physical/mental well-being.
21.3(d)	Encourage humanitarian organisations to collaborate on SRM planning and use of emerging technology.
21.3(e)	Provide flexible funding mechanisms to adapt security management strategies as contexts shift.
Commitment to pursuing greater accountability and justice in response to incidents	
21.4(d)	Support monitoring and reporting of incident data to promote accountability and remedial action.

Practical Guidance for SRM professionals

The Declaration provides political cover for NGOs to push harder on removing access barriers, including visas, customs, CT exemptions, counter disinformation, securing flexible funding for SRM, resourcing equitable protections for local staff and partners, and embedding collaboration, planning, and training into donor practice.

Here are a few ways SRM professionals can leverage the Declaration internally and externally to support effective advocacy and support for security.

1. With advocacy and policy colleagues:

- Share analysis of the Declaration and highlight concrete language on SRM and equity for local staff.
- Encourage policy and advocacy teams to reference the Declaration when engaging governments and donors, framing SRM as part of states' political commitments.
- Provide real-world examples from your operations (e.g., equipment held at customs, partner staff arrested, staff targeted online) to illustrate gaps between commitment and reality for effective advocacy.

2. With fundraising and grants teams:

- Use the Declaration (para 21.3(e)) on flexible funding as additional justification for security budget lines in proposals.
- Point to para 21.3(a) to argue for including local partner SRM costs as standard practice.
- Flag potential changes in donor practice (e.g. revised templates, guidance) so grants teams can adapt early. Messaging: "states have endorsed a declaration that commits them to predictable and flexible funding for staff security; donor practice and our proposals should reflect this expectation."

3. With senior leadership:

- Work with policy colleague to ensure executives are aware of the Declaration as part of the shifting political environment around aid worker protection.
- Help brief them on the security-related commitments that could influence state and donor expectations, particularly around flexible funding to security and equitable support for local partners.
- Recommend leadership use the Declaration in high-level dialogues (with donors, governments) to press for resourcing and practical implementation.
- Position leadership to back sector-wide efforts so NGOs can speak with a stronger collective voice when calling for implementation.

4. With GISF and peer networks

- Support calls for coordinated advocacy by aligning on the most operationally relevant commitments.
- Share examples of how commitments can be implemented in practice.