Standing Operating Procedures for
Crisis Management and Emergency Operations
February 2000

[This paper outlines UNICEF’s standing operating procedures (SOP) for crisis management and emergency planning from country level through regional office, to UNICEF NYHQ. These procedures are intended to assist all concerned to plan and, when necessary, deal with any crisis or emergency].

Crisis and emergencies come in many forms -- civil disturbances, medical emergencies, general crime, acts of terrorism, air and natural disasters, to name a few. No two country offices will experience the same emergencies in exactly the same way. Therefore, the purpose of this planning process is to provide the Head of Office with a model for preparing a basic Crisis Management Plan (CMP). As a CMP for dealing with a kidnapping might not suffice in the event of an earthquake, the basic plan will need to be modified to fit the particular emergency situation, as well as the particular needs of the duty station and staff. These general guidelines will assist the Head of Office in the formulation of the basic CMP, in addition to providing him/her with ideas for preparing a more detailed plan and inspiring UN colleagues as part of the country’s security management team (SMT).

Crisis Management Plan - the planning process...

At the first hint of crisis or emergency, you should:

1. Determine exact circumstances of the emergency/crisis.
2. Determine the status of UNICEF staff – whereabouts and welfare.
3. Determine ability to function, eg. telecoms, vehicles, office premises, warehousing, access and mobility etc.
4. Notify within UNICEF, those who need to be informed (at a minimum, OPSCEN) immediately, of developments as they emerge.
5. Establish a task force.
6. Ensure that a standard package of documentation is on stand-by (technical guidelines, checklists, programme guides, rules and procedures etc.)
7. Begin assessment of situation and particular implications for UNICEF (eg. medical evacuation, potential logistics interventions.)

STEP 1 - Planning

In conjunction with the Crisis Management Team (see below), the Head of Office should discuss, evaluate, and implement the following:

- assess readiness for crisis. This essential step should be undertaken when the Representative/Head of Office assumes that post, or as soon as possible thereafter. Attached is a format that has proven effective for the purpose.
identify all reasonable, potential security threats, e.g., are hurricanes or other natural disasters prevalent? ethnic violence? political instability? civil strife? kidnapping? arrest/detention of staff? etc.;

analyze the security incident that is occurring/most likely to occur next, e.g., what is happening? why? who is involved? what do they feel about it? how stable is the situation? what information is missing? how precisely does the situation threaten UNICEF?

determine levels of authority during an emergency (they may not necessarily mirror the levels of authority during normal operations);

develop procedures, sometimes known as "ground rules" for situations involving the security threats identified above. Thus, if there is a vehicle accident with injuries, who is supposed to do what?

identify and ensure that Logistics capabilities are available to accomplish the plan:

* sufficient funds to address the crisis;
* sufficient equipment to address the crisis (radios, fuel, water, medical supplies, housing, transportation, etc.)

ensure that good Communications are in place to accomplish the plan. Note: Good communications are critical. They will not guarantee success in crisis management, but without them it is immeasurably harder to manage the situation! You should have:

* a local communications network linking key staff members and wardens, e.g. LAN, cellular telephones, and VHF radios; vehicle communications are crucial, e.g. VHF or telephone.

* a country communications network linking the country team with offices in outlying areas, area coordinators, other in-country UN agencies, NGOs, and important embassies, e.g. HF radio and satellite telephone/email capability (Mini-M);

* redundant communications links to the regional and NYHQ, e.g. email, and satellite telephone, and/or HF radio.

prepare local maps, identifying the locations of staff residences and keep it updated;

have available at all times a current staff list that includes names, addresses, etc. of all staff and dependents;

establish network/understanding with local government, police and Ministry of Interior officials, as appropriate;

actively involve national staff throughout this process.

training, then practice to verify that the plans and procedures work.
STEP 2 - Individual Responsibilities

Once the basic CMP planning phase is completed, certain details should be incorporated into the basic plan. Of primary importance is to spell out the specific responsibilities of the individuals involved. Examples include:

**Head of Office**

The first responsibility of the Head of office (HOO) is to ensure that he/she knows the whereabouts of all staff members and visitors during a crisis. This is to facilitate notification, evacuation/relocation, and/or providing assistance. He/she can account for all staff and visitors during an emergency by incorporating the following procedures into the CMP, then practicing them prior to an emergency:

- radio checks for travelers, i.e. when they leave, en route and upon arrival;
- maintaining a list of secondary and emergency phone numbers for all staff and visitors;
- providing all staff and visitors with appropriate emergency phone numbers (representative and operations officer, UNDP, major embassies, etc);
- ensuring that all staff and visitors know how to operate critical communications equipment, and are skilled in radio procedures;
- requiring all staff members and visitors to comply with security regulations.

**Crisis Management Team**

The CMT is intended to assist the Representative/Head of Office manage any crisis. It typically will include a senior operations officer, a senior program officer, an IT officer and one secretary. However, the HOO should select CMT members based on their ability to work effectively during a crisis. Alternate CMT members should be selected in the event of the absence of one or more primary members. CMT members are responsible for keeping Rep/HOO informed of their whereabouts and being alert to any situation which needs his/her attention. (Details of CMT duties are described below.)

**Drivers**

Drivers play a key role because they are often the first to observe a threat emerging and they are increasingly becoming targets for violence themselves. Therefore, each driver must be especially conscious of the environment in which he finds himself. If he senses that trouble is beginning, he must not drive into the situation. Drivers are responsible for:

- getting clear of the trouble as quickly as possible;
- at the earliest opportunity when it is safe, reporting the situation by radio (or telephone) to the Head of Office;
All staff members

Each person has a responsibility to his/her fellow employees to keep them from harm. The first step toward doing this is for every staff member to make an effort to know the whereabouts of other staff and visitors, to the extent that it is possible. Additionally, all staff are responsible for:

• remembering at all times that his main responsibility is to keep his passengers and himself safe.

• remaining alert to their environment, practicing good personal security and planning ahead;

• ensuring that their whereabouts are known and that they can be reached quickly in an emergency;

• reporting any indications of trouble in a timely manner to his/her superior so that decisions can be made for the welfare of all;

• exercising their best judgement about how to deal with the emergency in the absence of instruction from the Office, e.g., deciding if it is better to stay where one is or move to another location.

STEP 3 - The Beginning of the Incident

Once a crisis has occurred, or is predicted to occur, e.g., a flood, kidnapping, civil disturbance, etc., all staff members with responsibilities laid out in the CMP need to take immediate action. Upon notification that an emergency situation is developing or occurring in the area, the following actions should be taken, as appropriate:

• The Head of Office should convene the Crisis Management Team (CMT), and brief the members on all available information.

• The CMT starts gathering additional information on the incident from available sources, e.g., the Designated Official (DO), Field Security Officer (FSO), the major embassies, local and national authorities. Note: it is essential to spell out in the CMP exactly who is to contact whom for information, to avoid overlapping. A log should be opened immediately and maintained throughout.

• A decision will be made by the HOO immediately, or with the advice of the CMT, to notify some/all staff members about the situation.

• A parallel decision must be made as to whether to direct staff members to seek a place of safety, which may be in the Office or elsewhere.

• If the decision is to notify Staff members, CMT will initiate action to do so within their respective areas, e.g. specific individuals will notify all visiting missions, staff in the office and drivers by radio.
The HOO/CMT must plan to keep outlying offices informed.

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that their staff members are informed, whether they are in the office or away, so long as they are in the country. If a staff member is outside the country but expected back soon, the HOO will need to consider interrupting his/her return if the incident continues and makes arrival unwise or if security conditions require.

If a decision is made to give instructions to the staff, that information will be passed at the same time as the notification.

CMT should decide whether to notify all families of the events immediately so that they will stay at home. **Note:** Some staff members will certainly call their homes, and it is usually best to notify all families at one time.

If a decision is made to notify all families, the **Operations Officer** normally will be responsible for doing so. It is essential to maintain a roster of who has been called, even if it was a staff member who called his own home.

As soon as there is enough information to give an initial report, the HOO will call the DO and/or FSO to advise him/her of what has been learned, and to obtain any additional information they might have. The Head of Office should use the Significant Incident Report (SIR) format (appended) as a reference during the call to ensure that all the available pertinent information is reported. The same process should be accomplished with other interlocutors.

**STEP 4 - Adjustments to the Crisis Management Plan**

Ideally, the CMP that was developed in the planning can be implemented without alteration. Unfortunately, emergencies are not always predictable in their course and outcome. Therefore, the CMP probably will require modification to adjust it to the on-going crisis. Normally, if the planning stage was sufficiently thorough, these adjustments will be minor. The changes should be incorporated immediately into the existing plan, and continually evaluated and updated to fit the changing needs of the situation. Once the basic CMP has had the required adjustments incorporated, the detailed CMP can now be implemented upon the approval of the Head of Office.

**STEP 5 - During the Incident**

As noted above, the CMT should maintain a chronological journal of events as they occur. This can be done by hand in a steno notebook or on a computer. The purpose is to be able to refer back quickly to what happened when: this is unfailingly necessary during any prolonged incident, if only for preparing messages to inform region and NYHQ. And it will be useful at the end of the incident. One typical format would be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event/Action Taken</th>
<th>By Whom</th>
<th>Date/Time</th>
<th>Who Notified</th>
<th>By Whom</th>
<th>Date/Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
(All journal entries should be initialed and dated by the CMT member(s) who makes the entry).

**UNICEF OPERATIONS CENTRE (OPSCEN)**

The Operations Centre (OPSCEN) has played critical role in crisis management and emergency response since its inception in the summer of 1995. Under the organizational control of the Director, Office of Emergency Programmes (EMOPs) and operational supervision of the Coordinator for Staff Security, OPSCEN supports UNICEF NYHQ and country offices designated as being in emergency or incipient emergency. OPSCEN is UNICEF's focal point for all time-sensitive information, crisis assessment and response coordination. It is physically located on the second floor of UNICEF House, convenient to UNICEF leadership and the Office of Emergency Programmes. OPSCEN is staffed 24 hours a-day, seven days a-week. Contact number: 212-326-7222; fax number 212-303-7924; e-mail opscen@unicef.org.

- OPSCEN provides UNICEF's policy-makers with information, insights and interpretive analysis through daily, weekly and "spot" information reports.

- OPSCEN is a communications hub for managing humanitarian, staff security and crisis information. OPSCEN is the repository for maps and other relevant country-specific documentation required in a crisis. It aggressively gathers information, assists the Security Coordinator and Programme Division desk officers, in advance of and during crisis. Similarly, it contacts other divisions and regional/country offices to obtain and provide essential information as needed.

- OPSCEN supports all elements of UNICEF in pursuing time-sensitive actions outside of normal working hours.

- OPSCEN maintains close liaison with other UN, international agencies and organizations, particularly UN Department of Peace-Keeping Operations (DPKO), the UN Security Coordinator's Office (UNSECOORD), the Situation Centre (SITCEN) and other UN operations centres, as appropriate.

- The OPSCEN undertakes those additional duties as the Executive Director, Deputy Executive Directors and Director, EMOPs, shall assign.

Therefore, its important to the crisis management, coordination and planning process is significant.

The SIR format is a useful reference, even if all the facts are not known. Additional information may be provided at a later time. Since OPSCEN will be the focal point for management outside the affected country(ies) throughout the crisis, the first notification should also include determining who will notify region.

- Country office Operations staff should develop a roster of all UNICEF personnel, including Visiting Missions, who are in country. The roster must reflect the fact that they have been notified (or what is being done to get word to them). Where is the staff? What actions are they taking during the incident, i.e., in the office, staying at home, returning to their hotel, etc.
As further information is given to staff members, the same roster must be annotated to show that the Visiting Mission members/team leader have been contacted.

- Maintaining communication with the DO/FSO is essential, and it is highly desirable to remain in touch with government counterparts, key embassies and other good sources of information.

- If the incident is to continue for more than two hours, a short summary message should be sent to NYHQ, to Security Coordinator and OPSCEN, and to region. Thereafter, at least two messages a day should be sent electrically so that the respective headquarters are fully informed.

**STEP 6 - Conclusion of the Incident**

- Once the CMT is convinced (by information from reliable sources, including government statements, consultation with the DO/FSO, diplomatic missions, and any eyewitness accounts available) that the incident has concluded, all staff members must be informed. The same personnel roster should be employed to ensure that no one is missed. Remember the outlying offices!

- The DO should be notified that an "all clear" message is being given to staff members.

- NYHQ and region should be notified immediately, and a summary message sent afterwards by cc:mail or fax.

- The CMT should review what lessons were learned from the incident so that any strengths will be incorporated into the plan and any weaknesses corrected. This should be accomplished using both individual and group debriefing and discussion sessions, as well as in written reports. The journal will be especially helpful in this regard.

- Using the journal entries and the SIR format, a final detailed after-action report must be prepared following every crisis, with a copy provided to NYHQ. The report provides several important functions:

  * it will serve as a complete description of the crisis from start to end;
  * it will be used as a management tool to correct planning deficiencies;
  * it will serve as the basis for returning to the planning phase and incorporating all lessons learned into the basic CMP.

**Special Circumstances...**

- Incidents which occur during non-working hours. If the events begin at night or on a weekend, as they often do, staff members must have a clear understanding of what they are to do. If they are to use their own judgement, they must know that this is the case. If they are expected to call in to the office for instructions, this must be made clear to them in
advance. Above all, they must understand that their safety is the primary concern and that the OPSCEN is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and is prepared to assist.

- Incidents occurring outside the capital. If a serious incident is reported outside the city, but which is not yet occurring in the capital, the CMT should convene. The Head of Office must immediately determine where all staff members, including visiting missions, are physically located. A roster then should be created as efforts are made to contact these staff members to warn them of the events. At the same time, these staff members/visiting missions may have useful information from their own location, and they must be asked about that. Ultimately, an estimate must be made of the probability of the incident(s) spreading to the capital or affecting staff posted outside the capital or on mission to the field. In reaching that judgement, the DO, FSO, local/national authorities, relevant embassies and others may be helpful as they receive information from staff members they have in various parts of the country. Based on the conclusion the Head of Office and CMT reach about the threat of trouble in the capital, a decision can be made about warning all staff personnel.

- Regardless of the nature of the incident, DO should be informed of field office actions. It may also be advisable to keep government counterparts and other international offices informed because of their own information and/or security systems.

- The HOO will decide whether there is enough importance to any situation outside of the capital to warrant reporting it to UNICEF Headquarters. Remember: if in doubt, report! It is given in the crisis management arena that first reports will be incomplete and often completely wrong. We understand this! Do the best you can with the first report, then keep digging for more/better details.

Planning Points to Remember...

- Once an emergency occurs, even the most carefully laid plans are likely to be tested by circumstances that were not anticipated. These circumstances should be expected and addressed as they surface.

- Events in one country may quickly affect neighboring countries, making it essential to keep regional offices and the neighbors informed.

- Crisis management is an on-going process. As the CMP is implemented it will impact on other factors and the situation could evolve to a point where the plan may need to be modified to meet the changing situation -- crisis situations are rarely predictable.

- The UNICEF OPSCEN and Security Coordinator are available to assist the Head of Office during any stage of the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the CMP. They are available 24 hours per day.

- Stress in crisis situations rapidly increases and may become very intense -- all staff must be continually reminded to stay calm, and encouraged to be optimistic. Depending on the situation and the level of stress experienced by the staff, the Head of Office may need to consider stress counseling for the staff once the crisis has concluded. OPSCEN will help arrange, if needed.
Rest and diet are crucial. If the crisis is going to continue for days (or longer) then staff members must establish patterns of resting/sleeping, eating appropriately and getting exercise. The hard chargers -- those who insist upon working through a crisis non-stop -- will not want to leave, but they must. If the Head of office is unwilling to rest, someone must remind him/her - tactfully but effectively - of the need to delegate authority.

Management of a Crises Affecting All UN Agencies...

If a situation is occurring which affects several/all UN agencies in a country then crisis management will be conducted by the Security Management Team (SMT) in accordance with the UN Field Security Handbook. The SMT is chaired by the Designated Official for security in each country. The size of the country team and number of UN agencies present determine its composition. In general, however, the SMT will be composed of a small group of professionals, including Heads of Office for the various UN agencies, as well as those with backgrounds in security, law, finance, administration, logistics, communications, and public relations.

The following is a brief synopsis of the responsibilities and actions of the SMT in a crisis situation. For more details related to the SMT and their own countrywide Security Plan, as well as for additional assistance in developing his/her own CMP, the UNICEF Head of Office is encouraged to consult the United Nations Field Security Handbook and/or the Designated Official in his/her area.

**SMT responsibilities in a crisis**

- under the direction of the Designated Official, managing all incidents affecting United Nations security in the country;
- recommending actions for the management and successful resolution of all security and safety related incidents;
- developing and communicating to all staff members the applicable procedures and practices to be used during a crisis;
- assisting the Designated Official in developing recommendations to the UN Security Coordinator, who is the person empowered by the Secretary-General to operate the UN security management system.

**SMT actions in a crisis**

- developing and exchanging information regarding the crisis event;
- identifying and marshalling resources available to resolve it;
- developing detailed plans and procedures for handling emergency situations (Plans should contain the names and telephone numbers of key host government, United Nations Headquarters and agencies, local foreign embassies, other key organizations and
individuals the SMT should brief or consult with before, during, or directly after an emergency situation);

- establishing a Crisis Management Centre (normally, the Coordination Centre identified in the Security Plan) located in UN facility and capable of 24 hour operations. This centre will control and direct all actions of the crisis event. Centre support personnel should be identified and trained, and the centre should have all necessary equipment for emergency management;

- assessing the nature, degree, and likelihood of threats to United Nations interests (personnel, facilities, and other assets) and determining the vulnerabilities of United Nations interests to those threats;

- Regularly testing their own countrywide CMP to ensure that it is feasible and realistic.

Crisis Management at UNICEF NYHQ...

While the Rep/HOO and the CMT are dealing with a situation in the field, the OPSCEN is the focal point for NYHQ efforts.

Certain assumptions apply to the following procedures:

1) The time frame for decision-making will vary with each situation, from 24 hours to several weeks; generally, it will take a few days.

2) The Operations Centre is staffed 24 hours - 7 days a week.

3) UNICEF leadership will be intensely interested in the crisis and will expect to be kept informed of all relevant information.

Staff analysis, briefing leadership, and decision making process:

- Director, EMOPS (Dir) convenes appropriate staff elements, e.g. establishes a Crisis Working Group (CWG) which will have as its locus the OPSCEN. The CWG will have representation from EMOPS, PD, DOC, DHR, Supply Section, and PFO, as appropriate.

- Analysis of crisis begins and will continue throughout (Dir, CWG, Reg Off*).

  * Nature of crisis is defined, i.e., a statement of the problem is developed.
  * Possible responses are identified, i.e. courses of action are developed.
  * Courses of action are compared and rank ordered.
  * Recommendations for ExDir and deputies are developed.

- Decision briefing is held for ExDir and deputies (Dir, CWG, SC).
*The model for Regional Office participation is ESARO precisely because it has an emergency response unit.

**Dissemination of decision/operational instructions to those concerned:**

- Crisis working group (CWG) convenes to translate ExDir decision into appropriate instructions.
- Instructions are disseminated to affected country and regional offices (OPSCEN).
- UN Secretariat (DHA/UNSECOORD) informed (OPSCEN/SC).
- As appropriate, instructions are disseminated to other NYHQ divisions (CWG, OPSCEN).
- As appropriate, instructions are disseminated to Supply Division (CWG, OPSCEN).
- As appropriate, other UN agencies, governments, etc. are notified of decisions that have been taken (CWG, PD, PFO, Dir).

**Conduct of the emergency operation:**

- Office asked what it needs (CWG, Reg Off).
- Risk assessment continuously provided (SC, OPSCEN, country office, Reg Off, etc.).
- ExDir/leadership continuously briefed (Dir, SC).
- CWG continuously evaluates and supports operation. Periodic formal reviews and reassessments are made, and these are briefed to ExDir (Dir, SC).
- As appropriate, ExDir's new guidance, which results from the review and reassessments, is disseminated as directions to all concerned (Dir, SC, CWG).
  
  * Assembled
  * Final briefing
  * Personal equipment issued (OPSCEN, Supply Division).

**Termination of the emergency operation:**

- Determination that a major change is occurring, i.e., reaching a point where crisis operation can return to normal or risk has changed for the worse (Country office, Reg Off, CWG).
- Possible responses to change are identified, i.e., courses of action are developed (SC, CWG, Reg Off).
- Courses of action are compared and rank ordered (SC, CWG).
- Decision briefing is prepared for the ExDir (Dir).
- ExDir decision is converted into instructions (Dir, CWG).
- Instructions are disseminated to affected country and regional office(s) (CWG, OPSCEN).
- UN Secretariat (DHA/UNSECOORD) informed (SC, OPSCEN).
- As appropriate, instructions are disseminated to Supply Division (OPSCEN).
- As appropriate, other UN agencies, governments, etc. are notified of decisions that have been taken (CWG, OPSCEN, Dir).

**Evaluation of the just completed Emergency Operation:**

- D/EMOPS oversees a rapid assessment of the operation, i.e., what were the results and how did they compare to the intended effects of the operation (CWG).
- Information briefing is prepared for ExDir/leadership (Dir, CWG, etc).
- ExDir decisions/comments are converted into appropriate instructions (Dir, CWG).
- Formal evaluation is requested from the appropriate office (Dir, OPSCEN).

**Conclusion...**

Through coordination, as well as by working independently to fulfill their individual functions, the Head of Office/CMT, Regional Office, UNICEF NYHQ/CWG, the DO/SMT, sister agencies and UNSECOORD should be able to manage any crisis that might occur at a particular duty station. We have done it repeatedly over the last two years!

With appropriate crisis management planning and cooperation, plus good, reliable communications, the preceding guidelines will work to streamline the actions and responsibilities of the individual participants to ensure that the crisis will be dealt with effectively. In addition to the Head of Office's actions and responsibilities prior to, during and after a crisis situation, seeking assistance and cooperation from those trained and willing to help (SMT/CWG/SC) is crucial to a successful outcome for all concerned. **The key is teamwork.**