

### 3.2.1 Humanitarian Organizations Struggle with the Private Security Dilemma

At about the same time that scandals regarding the actions of private security companies in Iraq and Afghanistan were emerging, speculation grew that these entities were cultivating new markets within humanitarian operations. Humanitarian organizations operate in many of the world's most dangerous environments, and for the past several years have suffered increasing casualties. Reports suggest that humanitarian agencies have been increasingly turning to private security companies for armed protection. A study released in October 2008 by researchers from the Humanitarian Policy Group of the Overseas Development Institute and from the Center on International Cooperation at New York University featured the first quantitative analysis of the use of private security providers by humanitarian organizations, with an aim of providing a foundation for discussion of the often controversial issue of the role of private security outfits in conflict zones.

The report found a measurable increase in the number of humanitarian

organizations (UN and international non-governmental organizations) that have been contracting private security providers, but primarily for unarmed, "soft security" services such as training, risk assessment, and security management consulting. While armed protection remains an exceptional practice, every major international humanitarian organization cited at least one instance of contracting armed security in the past year. Most aid practitioners agree that the use of arms is a deeply problematic approach to humanitarian security, both in theory and in practice, to be undertaken only as a last resort or as dictated by local security dynamics.

In its most striking finding, the report found a near universal lack of policies and protocols among agencies for hiring and managing security contractors. Field staff lack guidance on how to properly vet and oversee security providers, and headquarters personnel are much less informed about field-level security contracting practices as well. Other concerns include the poor

quality, low pay, and weak management of local private security providers, despite the regularity with which these entities are contracted.

Humanitarian organizations were found to favor contracting private security providers in order to reduce costs and increase time efficiency, as well as to cope with a perceived lack of in-house capacity and expertise. However, the report found that the anticipated benefits of employing private security providers did not always ring true. Additionally, the report emphasized the risks that are posed when private security providers lack understanding of the core principles that underpin humanitarian activities.

Given the potential dangers of contracting private security providers in an unregulated environment, the report advocated for a dialogue within the humanitarian community to establish good practices and common guidelines.