

Field Workers under Fire: Delivering aid in Pakistan, Afghanistan and other danger zones – International Rescue Committee Briefing from the Field

Hear Gerald Martone, International Rescue Committee director of humanitarian affairs, and Denise Furnell, IRC senior technical advisor for safety and security discuss their thoughts on how IRC can continue to provide lifesaving services to our beneficiaries while upholding our duty to maintain the safety and security of our staff. The discussion is moderated by Susan Dentzer, a career journalist and member of the IRC's Board of Directors. Recorded on October 27, 2009.

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE, INC.

Moderator: Janet Harris

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Operator: Good day everyone, welcome to the International Rescue committee briefing from the field.

My name is (Lindy) and I will be the operator facilitating the call. Please know that today's call is being recorded.

At this time, I would like to turn the call over to the IRC's Vice President of Development, Ms. Janet Harris.

Janet Harris: Good afternoon everyone and welcome to briefing from the field. Today we're going to be discussing field workers under fire specifically delivering aid in Afghanistan and Pakistan and other danger zones around the world that the IRC works in.

This is one in a series of briefings that we've been doing for the past several years. If I remember correct, this is probably our 11th or 12th briefing. We've talked about many, many different subjects. We've looked at Sudan, Congo; we've delved into areas of technical expertise such as working with women who have been victims of violence. And today, we're going to be looking at

one of the cross cutting issues in IRC's work, our issues of keeping our workers and our program and our clients, our beneficiaries safe when we deliver aid to them in the field.

So I want to welcome everyone who's joining us. We have dozens of people who have RSVP'd for the call. So welcome to all of you. Many of you are supporters of the IRC and we deeply appreciate your unrestricted support. This is the kind of – what we we'll be discussing today is exactly where your unrestricted support really supplements the funding that IRC gets from other sources and provides our folks expertise and safety and security in delivering aid. So thank you so much for your generous support.

You play a very vital role not only in understanding and supporting what we do but really engaging with our leader who you'll be hearing from today. So towards the end of the conversation we'll have a question-and-answer period and you'll get some instructions a little bit later into the call about how you call in and pose a question to them.

So without further ado I'd like to introduce our three speakers for today. First of all, our moderator is Susan Dentzer. Susan is a member of our board of directors and she chairs our health committee. Susan has traveled to the field with the IRC on numerous occasions including to Indonesia, the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and she's traveled to many other places in the world as well. Susan is currently the editor-in-chief of health affairs, the nation's leading journal of health policy and she is an expert on that topic but we won't be focusing on that with her today. She's an on air analyst on health issues with the News Hour with Jim Lehrer on Public Broadcasting and was a regular correspondent for the News Hour for a number of years.

So Susan, thank you for being here with us today moderating our call and welcome.

And then our two experts from the IRC staff are Gerald Martone. (Gerry) has been with the IRC for nearly 17 years. He was originally in our field program in Bosnia. And then for 10 years was the Director of Emergency Response.

(Gerry) has overseen our emergency assessments and operations and the list is long, but I'll highlight a few Liberia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Ethiopia, Darfur, Northern Uganda, Afghanistan, Iraq and the list goes on and on. After his 10 years as the head of emergency response, (Gerry) now has the position for the last 4 years of Director of Humanitarian Affairs at the International Rescue Committee. He's at our New York headquarters and works on advocacy initiatives that influence policy and public support. He works primarily with the United Nations and the U.S. government. So (Gerry) is a real expert both in our field work and also in communicating our larger purposes and our mission to many influence makers and decision makers on a global scale. So thanks so much (Gerry) for being with us.

(Gerry) and Susan are both here in New York with me. We're all together. Denise Furnell is calling in from our Thailand office or what serves as the Thailand office when it's the middle of the night for Denise.

So Denise has recently become our Senior Director of Global Safety and Security. For 3-1/2 years, she's been our senior technical advisor for safety and security in the Asia and caucuses region. Now, this is an area that covers Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar, Thailand, Georgia and Northern Caucuses. Denise has had her hand full in the last few years and we truly, truly appreciate her high degree of expertise and her willingness to get up in the middle of the night in Thailand and talk to all of you today.

She developed our long-term security protocol and crisis management through our international programs department. But before she reached the IRC she also had 25 years of experience working in the NGO sector, the private sector, and as you will undoubtedly detect in the next few

minutes working – she's a native Australian and she worked with the Australian military and we'll be hearing from Denise throughout the call. So, again, thank you to all three of you for being here. Thank you for everyone who's joined us on the phone. Thank you for your support and interest. Jot down your questions as we run through the program and you will have a chance near the end of the call to ask your question.

So Susan, at this point, I'm going to turn the program over to you and welcome.

Susan Dentzer: Terrific. Thanks so much, Janet and good morning or good afternoon or even good evening depending on what time zone you're in, those of you on the call. And I want to echo Janet's remarks and thank you for your support of IRC. Your participation in the call really tells us how seriously you take your role as partners in our work and we are gratified by about that.

Many of you will know that IRC and other humanitarian agencies are operating in what would seem to be an increasingly dangerous and deadly world. And as we know there's a documented trend of increasing numbers of humanitarian workers being killed or attacked. Now, some of these attacks are random and some probably not. All of this really came home to those of us associated with IRC last year when on August 13 of 2008 four IRC aid workers were killed in an ambush in Logar Province in Afghanistan. Many of you may have followed this.

IRC aid workers Shirley Case, Nicole Dial and Jackie Kirk were traveling from the eastern city of Gardez to Kabul in Afghanistan when their convoy of two four-wheel drive vehicles was followed and then fired on by five gunmen. One of the drivers of the vehicles, Mohammad Aimal was also killed and another of the drivers was injured. Now, the cars were clearly marked as being IRC vehicles when they came under fire and apparently the gunman were five Taliban as we best understand it. After all of this happened, IRC which had been working in Afghanistan for 20 years temporarily had to suspend our humanitarian programs before resuming them some weeks later.

This whole episode clearly brought home to us that regardless of whatever is the reality of humanitarian work it is very clear that some groups' perception of humanitarian organization's neutrality or independence or impartiality has changed. This is just a basic fact that is the backdrop of our day to day existence.

But as (Gerry) and Denise will convey, I think, to today we believe at IRC that despite these extraordinarily difficult challenges we face in operating in many of these areas, IRC workers have nonetheless developed really innovative ways to deliver aid in frankly some of the most dangerous places on this planet. So that's what we're going to discuss today and we're going to turn now to (Gerry) and Denise to basically tell us how all of that is working.

So I want to start with you, (Gerry) and ask you, why do we think humanitarian groups like IRC are now becoming a target of attacks? Why are these attitudes change?

Gerald Martone: Part of the reason, Susan is just a sad historical moment since the thawing of the Cold War there's been a tremendous increase in conflict and war around the world. The other thing about contemporary warfare that's particularly frightening is that very few wars in the world right now are fought by conventional trained professional armies. Most of them are fought by mercenaries or insurgents or rebels groups. And these groups are not trained in the covenants of war, the Geneva conventions, humanitarian law.

So we see civilians being targeted in violent episodes a disproportionate amount of suffering among refugee communities than you'd otherwise see and the use of terrible tactics like deliberate forced migration, deliberate starvation, mutilation of civilians, deliberate rape. And so there's – it's a really tragic amount of civilians that are the casualties of these words as well as the tax on relief workers, hospitals and feeding centers. So it's been a tragic kind of warfare that's being practiced by these insurgent groups.

Just another factor that I think adds to it is for IRC and many other aid groups the majority of people we serve right now in the world are Muslim, they're in Muslim communities. And the global war on terror has created some suspicions among various communities. And the western aid groups are sometimes seen, misperceived as handmaidens of this global war on extremism. So I think sometimes we're targeted or misunderstood to be representing them.

Susan Dentzer: Denise, there's obviously also been a blurring of distinctions between military aid and humanitarian aid picking up on what (Gerry) said. I mean sometimes it's a question of perceptions, civilians and others think that humanitarian organizations are an adjunct of the military. But also as the military has gotten into the aid business itself this gets a little blurry. How does this play out on the ground?

Denise Furnell: It's really a development Susan and it does follow on very well from what (Gerry) was speaking about as far as the perceptions of humanitarian aid workers and the projects we do. We've seen not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan, two different militaries moving into the delivery of aid or the coordination of aid if it's either for displaced persons or for national disaster response.

And that has aggravated much of the misunderstanding as (Gerry) said of what are western aid agencies and how are we or how are we not linked to the military. I mean the grass roots level out there you know where the communities are it's very difficult to tell the difference between some international uniform wearing people building a bridge and another group of internationals who are building a school. How does a local community person tell the difference between those two groups? Remarkably difficult. That will then tell us that there's a trust (break) and trust becomes a question.

So all in all what it means for us is we have to work very much harder at community outreach programs to be able to explain why we are different you know what our mandate is, how our

neutrality exists, and the fact that we distance ourselves from the military. And you know not using it ((inaudible)) some countries can help in that regard.

Susan Dentzer: (Gerry), you've got something to add to that?

Gerald Martone: Yes, just to add what Denise is saying and what we've seen is aid work as a profession has become very dangerous. And John Hopkins University recently did a study where looking at American professions and international aid work was – had the fifth highest death rate, job related death rate of all of the professions in – that Americans can have, and the only one where the cause of death of was overwhelming intentional violence.

Last year, 2008, there were more aid workers killed than UN peacekeepers.

Susan Dentzer: Well, so obviously this has changed the way IRC and all humanitarian organizations operate. Let's talk about some of those details. Denise, just from the standpoint of overall security, how have things changed?

Denise Furnell: It's changed in many, many different dynamic sort of ways but probably the easiest way to explain it, 7 years ago when I started first working in Afghanistan it was quite easy for myself or other international colleagues to travel out to our field locations. You know may 120, 200 kilometers away from the capital city and be greeted as we step out of a car in the marketplace, in the bizarre with very happy Afghans and Pakistanis very pleased to see, very welcoming, offering obviously a cup of tea and very much the classic hospitality response that you get in South Asia.

Unfortunately, now today, 7 years on it's almost impossible for us to send the international staff out to the town bizarre that we could go to 7 years ago. If we do go out there, we're probably going to be met with distrust, fear because the communities are now being pressured by insurgent groups and you know an international turning up or a high profile humanitarian convoy

turning up added additional pressure to the communities themselves from those insurgent groups. And that's above and beyond the direct threat or risk on the humanitarians themselves. That's one of the ((inaudible)) easiest ways to explain the changes.

Susan Dentzer: So in many cases we just don't have access to the displaced or other populations that we're serving. So how do we monitor our progress (with respect) to what IRC is accomplishing in these areas, (Gerry)?

Gerald Martone: There's been some kind of clever innovations in my mind. I mean our field staff are notorious for their ability to innovate in the face of dangerous situations. And one example, I was talking to Bruce Hickling who's our Director in Somalia and there was this period where our international staff could not go into Somalia for 5 months. And so we had our national staff and also some local community groups, Somali groups that we worked with.

And they innovated some, I think, some clever ideas of using video on their Bluetooth, on their cell phones to monitor, to film distributions being taken as well as photographing asset numbers and tags on the commodities and assets we distribute. They have a lot of Skype, the voice over the Internet protocol meetings both audio and video. And they bring their staff out of Somalia into Nairobi for frequent meetings. Bruce was telling me and it's not just about monetary, it's not auditing, it's just building the relationship and having the rapport with their staff and the community groups that they work with but they've really taken advantage of the technology that's available and I think have come up with some pretty classic interventions for keeping track of our programs.

Susan Dentzer: And we should just make the point that a lot of the folks doing these innovations are as (Gerry) just said are our local staff, not our international staff. Ninety-seven percent of IRC staff overall are actually citizens of the countries they're working in. So these are the innovators right

at the front lines figuring out how to operate often within their own countries, which is what's really remarkable.

Well, Denise, we also know that there are lots of differences in the operating situation for IRC staff everywhere with regard to health, water, safety conditions, et cetera. How are those issues playing out on the ground?

Denise Furnell: Well, ((inaudible)) respect to Afghanistan and Pakistan and obviously because I've just come back from Afghanistan so this is the latest information that we have.

Our teams, again, as you say are 97%, 98% international staff are remarkably creative. We're actually still able to deliver a significant number of programs in Afghanistan. The environmental health says that we can get water supplies and safe drinking water into villages that we can actually support returning refugees. There's a significant number of refugees that have returned from Pakistan ((inaudible)). We're still working with our (governments and roads) program in community driven reconstruction programs, although some people may have heard of the National Solidarity Program. It's a large national program in Afghanistan.

We're still able to work on the economic recovery and development programs. The ((inaudible)) (Turkey) is our staff to come up with as, (Gerry) said you know pretty innovative solutions for things where we don't have access or access to an area is difficult and we're having to do a lot more capacity building of their (national terms) which is completely and utterly appropriate. I mean you know very much the Afghanistan and Pakistan ((inaudible)) national staff are working for their own affected populations which is actually a fabulous dynamic to have.

Susan Dentzer: And (Gerry), let's talk a little bit more about some of these innovations. I know you've been talking about donkey caravans in Afghanistan as being the case in point. Tell our callers about that.

Gerald Martone: Yes, well during the famine in 2001-2002 in Afghanistan, the central area Hazarajat of Afghanistan is really the hunger belt and it was ground zero for the drought in 2001-2002. It controlled a lot by extremist groups in the area. And the only way we could get – IRC did major food relief during that operation was through using donkeys. We couldn't use vehicles.

We had a fleet, IRC Afghanistan had a fleet of 450 donkeys that hauled several thousand metric tons of wheat up these snow covered mountains. It was really something to see. But IRC has had some glorious moments, I think, in terms of high water marks for delivering aid in extreme environments.

I remember when I first started with IRC a problem we had serving in Sarajevo, the besieged city that was surrounded by the Yugoslav army every time a truck convoy went through the checkpoints, the Serbs would exact a toll on us, a tax of 30% and we'd have to unload 30 % of whatever was on the truck. And it was a terrible feeling to see 30% of our food being used to feed the Yugoslav army. Our staff in Sarajevo got smart and said we're going to ship in seeds. The soldiers won't them and they'll pass right through.

And it was a wonderful experience to drive around anywhere in Bosnia in the early 90's and see cemeteries, sports fields, little slivers of sidewalks everywhere there were crops growing. People were out there tilling soil. Now, this is a population that had felt neglected and isolated during the war and had no hope. They – Bosnians, the famous refrain that Bosnians used to say which is we'll die with full stomachs. You're helping us but we feel we have no ((inaudible)). We're hopeless in terms of the war.

And I remember meeting one of our truck drivers who told me he was doing a mental health program in Sarajevo and I thought what are you talking about, you're a truck driver. And he said, look around you, look at all of these people tilling the soil, planting seeds, they're providing for

their family. They have a hope and a future orientation. They have structure to their day. They have meaningful activity and they control their destiny. And it was actually the most elegant definition of mental health that I've ever heard and a wonderful tribute to the cleverness of IRC Bosnia staff.

Susan Dentzer: And we can imagine that similar stories are playing out day in and day out now in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Gerald Martone: Exactly, yes. I think IRC has learned in terms of our programs the success of people helping themselves that they're most powerful relief workers. You know a lot of our programs are designed to really empower them. It's a more elegant kind of aid than the traditional paternalism where you just give people things.

Susan Dentzer: Well, Denise what (Gerry) said underscores that the core of so much of the work that we do at IRC really is about building relationships with local populations and empowering affected people themselves. You brought up the community driven reconstruction which is all about essentially helping a community get back on its feet after conflict or displacement or what have you.

Give us a sense of how IRC is now working with various people in Afghanistan from different ethnic and other groups to create this relationship and particularly the relationship of trust which is so important to us being able to operate there.

Denise Furnell: Absolutely, Susan. Often, I know I end up saying that if we don't have trust – if the community doesn't trust us and we don't trust them we don't have the program. And it's interesting because that may be how I see it, but it's also interesting that's exactly how Afghan staff see it as well and also local Afghans.

About 15 to 16 months it became obviously to – I was in Afghanistan one of the trips and talking to some of the (senior) staff and it had become obvious that the insurgency was targeting (NDA) workers. There were kidnappings, shootings and these sorts of things. So I said to our senior staff who had been with us 21 years and I said, how did we reach out to communities, for example, when we were here through the Taliban time or when we were here through the Mujahideen time?

It was interesting because the staff turned around and said we were at one with the community. They knew us and we knew them. And I said OK. And what would it take for us to – are we as strong in that community link today? Or can we improve? And they said, no, we could improve. So we had a long, long conversation. Ultimately, what has occurred is we've now formalized what we call our community outreach program. We have one of our senior staff who's leading that who goes after communities and actually starts off talking to the community by the same way that if where to meet another Afghan. There's a long, long, long introduction. It's hello, this is my name. I am the son of so-and-so. We come from this part of the country. And two Afghans will continue this conversation until they can go back through their family history to find a point of connection.

Now, interesting enough when we translate that into humanitarian work what happens is our staff will now go out to the communities and say I'm so-and-so, I am from IRC. And I actually have worked with Afghan people for 29 years. We started in Pakistan. We walked home across the border with you back to Afghanistan. And look at the work that we have done in our proud, long history. And that reinforces the heritage of IRC in the Afghan context. It brings back the memories of this field over here in Logar province, for example, say there's 75 kilometers of irrigation channel that we built together with the community. That whole area now is green with crops. It's fabulous. And those are the things that stick in the minds of everyday people.

It's what you did, the fantastic job you did 20 years ago, the fantastic job you did 5 years ago, the fantastic job you did last week and the fantastic job you're going to do today and also tomorrow. And that's very much the basis of the community outreach program. But then I was talking to our senior staff and he said hang on there's one more presentation. And I said, oh really. He said yes, I've changed the IRC program framework and I've explained in this presentation how that links to the community Afghan culture and good Islamic principles.

So I sat down, I said OK show me. This is fabulous. Just show me this. And we went through and literally I have seen many program framework presentations which is the guiding principles of our durable solution programs. This is fabulous. This has been completely changed from IRC program lingo into something that speaks to the communities and makes sense and is tangible for them. That is how you build trust. That's how you build trust in anybody ((inaudible)) we particularly can build trust and do build trust in Afghanistan. This is what opens the doors, to be able to spend money on projects that communities want, that keep our staff in the main when they're in the communities, will keep them safe because the community will protect them and consider them one of their own.

That's the sort of relationship nature that we need and do have in Afghanistan.

Susan Dentzer: Wow, that is an amazing story. Well, (Gerry), does that play out not just in Afghanistan and Pakistan, is that essentially the way we go about establishing the relationship of trust with local populations broadly?

Gerald Martone: Yes. Building rapport with communities is a distinct part of the approach to security. This acceptance strategy, having communities advocate for you against people that might otherwise harm you. And I think not only from the fact that the overwhelmingly majority of our staff are actually from the communities we serve, but we also make sure that we deliberately

have programs on radio and in print media so that people hear about what we're doing and know what we're doing.

Denise's colleague (Eric LeGuinn) was telling me a great story that in Kisangani in Central Congo there were some rallies and protests against foreigners and this was, of course, of great concern to our IRC office. And they – on the office wall the compound wall that borders the office, they painted pictograms, pictures of the work that IRC does, pictures of IRC building shelters, putting in (bore holes), capping springs and the kinds of work as a painting around the building to sort of illustrate what it is we're doing.

Susan Dentzer: Denise, I imagine being out in the field as you have so frequently been in these very difficult situations it has to be very hard to maintain your own sense of hopefulness in a region. And essentially keep in mind all of the things you have to worry about, the security issues, the threat level, et cetera, and still go on. I'm curious as to how you or others like you have overcome various obstacles of mental or otherwise to staying able to deliver services to refugees or other displaced people in need?

Denise Furnell: I totally understand the question. I think my father asks me this nearly every year. I'll speak of what drives myself. I daren't speak on what motivates others or how others can get through things. One of the – having worked in the humanitarian sectors now you know with IRC, with other agencies, for 9 or 10 years now, one of the things I find remarkably striking that even on the worst day, you still you hang on to that, is the fact that every population that we're working with the displaced persons, conflicted affected, natural disaster affected people, every single person I meet behind their eyes and in their actions there is still hope in their eyes. They've still got pride to some degree. And they've still got a glimmer of hope in there. And it's a hope that is about their homeland, their families, the shared stories and histories that they'll tell you.

And the other one is the thing that I always find so incredibly humbling is the gratitude that you get shown from people who are in you know the depths of despair, in the rain, in the dust, in the heat, don't have enough shelter under a small canvas tent. But they are very gracious. Always saying thank you. Very much appreciating the fact that there are aid workers from their own country but also internationals that will come and help them. And who will often spin around and say please thank the donors. I don't know the number of times that I hear that in Afghanistan or Pakistan from people and they say, please thank the donors for caring about us.

And that – and fundamentally that's the thing. It's every day you see that. It doesn't matter how difficult or ((inaudible)) or whatever it is something about human nature keeps people hopeful. And yes, there's a good reason that IRC you know in terms of we're taking from harm to home there's a very good reason for that and it helps if you believe it as well.

Susan Dentzer: (Gerry), I imagine you can build on that?

Gerald Martone: Yes, I think one of the things that I found very encouraging is just the communities we help, refugees themselves are not passive and helpless objects. They activate themselves and mobilize very quickly in the face of various situations of violence or disaster.

One of the things we just saw recently in Pakistan a couple million people were uprooted from their home because of fighting against extremism in the mountainous valleys of Pakistan. The overwhelming majority well over 2 million people were not in refugee camps. It was Pakistani families that opened their homes and took in people, sometimes hundreds of people into their various family compounds and that kind of hospitality was just very encouraging that indigenous philanthropy. We saw this during the Kosovo crisis, the majority of Kosovo refugees were living with Afghan families, not in camps.

I remember in West Africa, IRC had some tremendous education programs where we're working in schools and providing curriculum and school books and furniture to the schools in the refugee camps. These schools were started by refugees themselves. They formed PTAs and that's what they called them, parent-teacher associations. They found teachers among the refugee population, identified old abandoned buildings and started school and they came to IRC and said can you help us put a roof on this? Can you help us develop a curriculum? Can you help us find some way to compensate our teachers?

One last example that I was traveling in Aceh, Indonesia a secessionist province there was a war of separation a couple of years ago. And our IRC vehicle was surrounded. There was a lot of chaos and noise and surrounded by a group of young men and we were brought to a stop. And it was a very kind of tense and scary moment until we realized that these people were doing a fundraising. They were dancing around the car hoping we would give them handouts for the local refugees that they were taking care of in their community.

So there's a lot of altruism in every society in the world. It's a tremendous privilege, in my mind, to travel IRC programs and actually see this first hand.

Susan Dentzer: We're going to open up now to questions from those of you on the phone. You can queue up to do this by pressing star 1 on your phone. That will put you in a questioning queue. And if you are listening in a group on a speakerphone, let me just ask you to please use the phone handset when asking a question and that will minimize some of the background noise.

While we're waiting for callers for queue up, (Gerry), let me ask you, back to somewhat more mundane issues I understand that theft is increasingly becoming a problem for us as well as other humanitarian agencies. How do we basically prevent our commodities, other assets, vehicles, et cetera from being stolen?

Gerald Martone: Yes, it's been – it's a problem in some areas that humanitarian aid groups are specifically targeted. And certainly when I started in this field our vehicles, our clothing, we wore bright t-shirts with our logo on them. We had a lot of visibility material like flags and signs. And now aid workers often are in a lot more low profile, a lot more clandestine, where we don't have such a high profile. We tend to use the same kind of vehicles that the community uses so we don't stand out because sometimes we're misunderstood as part of the conflict.

I remember years ago in Bosnia IRC used to have a green logo and that might symbolize a partisan stance aligning with the Muslim party, for example, in that conflict. We had to actually change our logo colors to blue and gold.

But Somalia, I think, just as a last example as a place was a tremendous amount of theft of food convoys and vehicles. And an approach was learned called smart aid where we did better targeting of what we're doing, precise targeting and monitored things very closely. But then, also some clever substitutions of things that were being stolen. Maize, corn was very valuable but we replaced it with sorghum. It had less of an appeal for these thugs that were stealing from us. We would replace bulgur for rice. We would distribute pesticide coated seeds instead of bulk foods and this helped.

In West Africa, where there was a lot of theft of our radio communications equipment by rebel groups and one of our staff started spray painting the radios all pink and this seemed to have an effect in reducing their attraction to these rebel groups. And other things such as repacking bulk foods into family ration sizes. Or in one instance we had high protein biscuits that kept being stolen. And our staff relabeled them as women's biscuits and the rebels stopped stealing them for some reason.

Susan Dentzer: Whatever it takes, I guess, right. Well, (Lindy), our operator, let's go ahead and open it up to questions from the callers on the phone.

Operator: And again if you'd like to ask a question, please press the star and 1. If you are on a speakerphone, please pick up the handset to ask your question.

And our first question today will come from Karen Heim; please go ahead.

Karen Heim: Hi, all. Very, very impressive, the professionalization of security at IRC. I know that the area security has now attracted a variety of people with a variety of backgrounds including people with military background, with law enforcement or even private security firms. I'm wondering how IRC uses these people either internally within IRC or do you ever outsource to them? And if so, for what sorts of functions?

Susan Dentzer: Denise, can you take that?

Denise Furnell: Certainly, I can take that. A fabulous question. The use of security contractors in many sectors is challenging. The structure for IRC is we have five internal security professional positions. All of our positions require the people who staff those to have 5 years NGO or humanitarian experience. That doesn't discount people with military experience, law enforcement or private security contractor. But every one of our dedicated security professionals within IRC must have all ready had experience within the humanitarian prior to joining us.

I look after currently eight, nine countries over the world and shortly will be taking over a larger role. And to answer the question of do we use security contractors and if we do and in what role, the very simple answer is in the last – my last 5 years with IRC to the best of my knowledge we've never used a security contractor, not the sort that we're hearing in the press and stuff. We manage our own security systems. We design them. The security specialists that we have within IRC are top caliber people who understand the nature of humanitarian security which is quite different to protecting say, for example, a factory or an embassy.

The security we need is to understand that we have to reach out and touch the community. We can't stand back and isolate ourselves. So we have as (Gerry) said an acceptance strategy that's first and foremost. And then we, of course, take all of the appropriate measure to you know reduce theft. I mean we don't need to put off a big war. Maybe you just paint the radio pink, maybe that will make the difference. So I hope that answers the question you actually had.

Karen Heim: Thank you.

Denise Furnell: Thank you.

Susan Dentzer: Operator, let's take another question.

Operator: Absolutely. If you would like to ask a question, please press the star and 1 on your touchtone phone. And our next question comes from Alia McKee; please go ahead.

Alia McKee: ...a high percentage of locals employed in the field, I believe you said 97%. So firstly with the relative recent increase in distrust of humanitarian groups that you mentioned, particularly in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan, how does the IRC engage locals to work for you? And is there a different approach in securing their safety than say securing the safety of internationals.

Susan Dentzer: (Gerry), why don't you take that?

Gerald Martone: Yes, thanks Alia. One of the things – the majority of our staff overwhelmingly are either refugees themselves or people from the country we're helping. That helps to some extent represent the communities and diminish the misperception that we're a foreign group that has some mischievous reasons for being present.

A lot of the national staff, the local staff that work for us are actually quite proud of being able to serve their communities and they've become a very credible charismatic presence for us in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We have staff that have been working with us for 20 or 25 years. These Pakistanis and Afghans are some of the more experienced aid workers in the world. They are just remarkably skillful and savvy with working with local communities and in efficiently delivering aid. It's truly an honor to work with these staff.

But we're acutely aware that we cannot transfer the risk that us as western staff or foreign staff have on to national staff, that they still have a risk in that country just by their mere representing or working for a foreign agency. So they're included in our trainings and orientations. They carry communications equipment and radios just as much as we do. And they're always invited to help us regulate and make the difficult decisions when we must withhold or temporarily stop serving a region because the risk is so high.

Susan Dentzer: Great. Thank you. Caller, or operator, let's take another question, please.

Operator: And once again, if you would like to ask a question, please press the star and 1 keys now.

Susan Dentzer: OK. While we wait perhaps there's another question on the line, I think, Janet has something she wants to bring up.

Janet Harris: I do. I'm going to ask a question of my colleagues. You know one of the things when I talk to our supporters that I realize they sometimes have trouble envisioning is that IRC actually works in many different settings. We work in urban settings. (Gerry) you were mentioning that our host communities often times are the ones who are taking people and giving them refuge in their own homes. I know having traveled to the field that we often work in very rural or bush kind of settings and then also refugee camps, of course, which is kind of the classic way that people think of us.

And I think that we think about refugee camps as a place of refuge but turning to the security question I'm wondering if you can address that whether, in fact, in refugee camps there is also some security and safety concerns that need to be grappled with whether it's in Darfur or in Kakuma Camp in Kenya or Thailand. Maybe you could take that – maybe (Gerry) start with you and then Denise if you could answer that?

Gerald Martone: Yes, Janet, I mean one of the things about refugee camps or displaced camps you've got entire communities fleeing and sometimes there are wolves among the sheep. There are fugitives. There are fighters. There are militias hiding, living within the refugee community and we're aware of this. We're not native to it and it's more often the case, sadly, that that happens.

It puts a huge stress on an aid group to consider that we're simultaneously feeding belligerents as we are the communities. But you know our – the targeting of IRC programs is just not that crude. In particular, we look at the you know the epidemiology of refugee populations, what are the illnesses that people are suffering from and overwhelming it's children that are suffering. So a lot of our vaccination programs, our treatment for waterborne diseases these are mostly for children.

The other group that suffers a great deal in refugee camps is young women and girls particularly of reproductive health age. And they're also a very special focus for our work. So the kinds of work that we do working with the most vulnerable are often not some of the predators we see in these conflicts. But either way it is not our as an impartial aid it is our decision to determine the deserving and undeserving. We feel that anyone who is seeking refuge and seeking help deserves to receive humanitarian aid. Those are judgments we won't make because we believe that all people who are fleeing any kind of violence need some help.

Susan Dentzer: As we edge towards a close here I want to ask a final question of Denise. Denise you are about to, as Janet said, transfer back to New York here in this incredibly important position

overseeing security for the entire organization and a very, very important role. But I know you're probably going to miss some aspects of being in the field, what are you going to miss the most?

Denise Furnell: A fabulous question Susan. I'm actually going to meet the cups of tea under the tree with some of the Afghan drivers that I've had for the last 5 or 7 years. I'm going to miss having discussions and debates with Pakistani staff about you know what's happening to have a feel about what's happening in their country.

I'm going to miss being up on the Thailand border with Myanmar and driving on some of those rough roads while we're trying to get into a refugee camp to see how we can improve safety and security elements of it. What I'm actually going to miss is the people, the field people. The real deal. The ones who are doing the real work. The ones who are out there you know waving the flag and doing all of the fantastic stuff that makes us incredibly proud and certainly makes me very proud of the organization and the work that we do.

So to me it's the people. It always is the people. My job is principally concerned with the safety and welfare of people first. And I don't differentiate between where people come from. People are people. They give their best efforts. And they're our ambassadors at the same time. That's how we get to communities. That's how we get to deliver programs. And that's how we get to make the difference.

Susan Dentzer: And before I turn things back over to Janet, let me just say as an IRC board member, I think, callers you've just heard what we feel as the IRC board which is that it is all about our people, people like Denise, like (Gerry), the leadership they exhibit every day and the incredible humanity they exhibit in the course of their work.

As you've heard today we as all humanitarian agencies now operate in an increasingly diminishing space for humanitarian agencies. The dangers are – and challenges are real and

only growing. We're facing these issues of mixed perceptions of what we do in the community. And it hasn't helped that we've had the blurring of these lines what military organizations also dispensing aid just as we are dispensing aid. So no wonder people are confused.

But I think you've also heard about the innovativeness that our people have been able to bring to these problems, how they're able to operate in the face of danger and whether something as nifty as labeling something women's biscuits or painting cars different colors or changing the logo you can see a real commitment to people wanting to say in the field, wanting to work as hard as possible on behalf of the effected populations. And as Denise said finding that element of humanity and altruism that is present wherever we operate.

So with that let me say thanks again from my standpoint for joining this call today and let me turn things back over now to Janet.

Janet Harris: Thank you, Susan. And I echo the thanks to (Gerry) and to Denise for joining us from Thailand. And to all of you supporters who have been on the line from all of this country and from many spots in Europe as well. Thank you for joining us on the front lines of addressing some of the most pressing issues that we as a humanitarian organization deal with at the IRC.

We, again, want to express our appreciation for your support for our work in many, many ways so I'm just going to mention three of those ways that are really important to us.

First of all just staying informed. Joining us for these briefings from field and sharing them with your friends and other interested parties are one of the ways that the good work of the IRC and our fellow humanitarian aid organizations is conveyed to others. Finding solutions that (Gerry) and Denise have been talking about today is really important that we share with you.

Go to our Web site www.theirc.org. That's T-H-E-I-R-C dot org. Sign up for our e-mail alerts, read our blog, look at our photos from the field, see our updates, and find out the latest of what IRC is doing in its programs and services.

Then be our partner further to that. Take action with us. When you go to our Web site you'll see a take action button. Right now, we have a petition posted on our Web site. It's for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. And what we are doing is urging President Obama to send a bill to the Senate to sign on to this important convention. Guess what, there's two countries in the world who have not signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they are Somalia and the U.S. That's not very good company for us to keep. So help us urge our Congress to do the right thing by going to our take action button and joining other – 7000 other supporters who have signed that petition.

And finally, I'd be remiss if I didn't say keep on supporting the IRC with your financial contributions. They're really, really important. Your unrestricted support not only helps to convey the word about what the IRC is doing, build trust in local communities, but it also helps directly support our great staff like (Gerry) and Denise. So thank you again for joining us today. We appreciate your partnership and your interest in our work. Thanks, Susan for monitoring. From all of us here in New York and around the world thank you for joining our briefing from the field, field workers under fire. Have a good day.

Operator: This concludes today's program. You may disconnect at any time. Thank you and have a great day.

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