

DEVELOPING STANDARDS FOR CASUALTY RECORDING

Hana Salama, Networks Officer, hana.salama@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk

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Oxford Research Group (ORG)'s Every Casualty programme is engaged in a process with 12 other organisations and individuals¹ to develop internationally recognised standards for casualty recording.

Background

The [Every Casualty programme](#)² at Oxford Research Group is committed to the principle that no individual should die without his or her death being recorded. The programme works to develop and enhance the technical and institutional capacity for casualty recording, and build the political will internationally, for the details of every single victim of armed violence³ worldwide to be properly recorded.

Part of the work of the programme has involved adding to the knowledge base on casualty recording practice, drawing on the ORG hosted- International Practitioner Network (IPN) to complete a research project on recording methodologies. This research project resulted in the publication of a collection of papers [on Good practice in Casualty Recording](#)⁴. The IPN is an association of 40 casualty-recording organisations. These organisations document casualties of armed conflict and armed violence, some dealing with current crises, others with conflicts in the recent past. A list of members and information on their work can be found [here](#)⁵. The purpose of this network is to engage in the sharing of good practice and host spaces for professional peer exchange and mutual support and collaboration.

Through its work hosting and coordinating the IPN and promoting casualty recording as an international norm, ORG has identified a need for recognised standards in this field. Much like the human rights documentation standards (HURIDOCs) or the standards on humanitarian service delivery (Sphere), documenting death in situations of armed violence requires both methodological and ethical standards in order to improve the quality of documentation and promote better understanding of this practice among practitioners and those who use and report casualty-recording data.

¹ Andreas Kleiser, Director of Policy and Cooperation ICMP
Bureau of Investigative Journalism (UK)
Centre for Study of Political Violence, Jindal University (India)
Christophe Billen, Analyst ICC
Colombian Resource Centre for Conflict Analysis CERAC
Colombian Campaign to Ban Landmines CCCM
Documenta, Croatia
Forensic Anthropology Foundation Guatemala (FAFG)
Humanitarian Tracker (USA/SYRIA)
The Resolve/ LRA Crisis Tracker (USA)
Jeffery Villaveces, Chief Information Unit OCHA, Colombia Office
Mathias Nowak, Researcher Small Arms Survey

² <http://www.everycasualty.org>

³ As defined by the World Health Organisation armed violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (WHO, 2002)

⁴ <http://www.everycasualty.org/practice/methods-research>

⁵ <http://www.everycasualty.org/practice/ipn/members>

In order for any future standards to be effective in governing the practice of casualty recording, the process to develop them will be a consultative one, drawing on a number of experiences from practitioners and other organisations that use casualty data (end-users). The process, led by ORG, aims to engage as many stakeholders and experts as possible in the development phase, including non-governmental organisations and intergovernmental organisations, to ensure future support for these standards.

To this end ORG coordinated a first meeting in early 2013 to discuss both the possibility and the commitment towards developing standards in casualty recording with a range of practitioners and end-users. The outcome of this meeting was the formation of a Standards Development Group, composed of practitioners and end-users who are committed to developing standards and steering the process from development to adoption.

The following lays out the planned framework for developing standards in casualty recording:

An Initial Definition of Casualty Recording

The following definition of casualty recording proposed by the first meeting of the Standards Development Group is based on the Charter and Call of the ORG- founded [Every Casualty Campaign](#)⁶, which is a coalition of civil society organisations that calls on every casualty of armed violence to be promptly recorded, correctly identified and publicly acknowledged:

Casualty recording is a standardised process to record all individuals killed in armed violence.

Basic Data Standards

The following data points are the minimum pieces of information required to produce a casualty record. The Standards Development Group has proposed these as the basic data standards for casualty recording. For all data points, recorders should always try to collect as much exact information as possible:

- **Date:** *The day, month and year of the death of an individual or incident should be recorded, and if possible the time should be noted as well: either the exact time or an approximate time of day.*
- **Location:** *The name of the place of death of an individual or incident should be recorded: either the name of the city, township or village. When possible recorders should note other information about the location (e.g. street crossings, GPS coordinates). The most exact location information possible should be recorded.*
- **Individual's details:** *The full name (given and family name) and gender of the individual killed should be recorded. The age should be recorded where possible or a distinction between child and adult should be made. Other demographic information about the individual should be recorded when possible (e.g. profession, ethnicity/nationality, etc.). It is recognised that the*

⁶ <http://www.everycasualty.org/campaign>

details on individuals killed may also support determinations as to their status (was the individual a civilian or not).

- **Numbers killed in incident:** *If individual identities of persons killed are not known, the number of people killed in a violent incident should be recorded. If the exact number is uncertain, recorders should express the number of deaths as a minimum-maximum range.*
- **Description of the violence/weapons used:** *How the victim was killed including the weapons used or type of weapons should be recorded.*
- **Sources:** *The source of the information above (e.g. media and social media information, witness testimony etc.) should be recorded, referenced and stored.*

Six Core Areas for Casualty Recording Standards

The following areas of standards to be developed are based on the findings of ORG's research on "Good Practice in Casualty Recording Practice", as well as discussions from the first meeting of the Standards Development Group. The area heading and a brief description of key initial principles for each area are given here:

- 1. Organisational transparency**
Organisations that record casualties in armed violence should disclose the motivation for their activities, political and funding affiliations.
- 2. Definitions and inclusion/exclusion criteria**
Organisations should publish and make clear the legal, political and other definitions used in the context of their work, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria that apply to their data.
- 3. Transparent and rigorous methodology**
Recorders should show evidence of a rigorous methodology, including a data collection plan that includes multiple sources, source evaluation criteria, and a multiple-stage checking procedure. The recorder must be able to publish this methodology, and their data be open to correction and able to receive updated information.
- 4. Publishing standards**
Information on casualties should be published in a format accessible to the relevant communities and end users, taking all necessary security measures to prevent further harm.
- 5. Security standards**
Organisations should have in place appropriate security measures to protect their own staff, sources and information recorded.
- 6. Basic ethical standards, and dealing with affected communities and victims as sources and end-users**
Organisations should have in place and implement measures to avoid re-traumatisation of victims, witnesses and further harm to the affected community.

Process and Next Steps

The process of developing standards is expected to take 2-3 years. In 2013-2014 the standards development group has chosen to prioritise three out of the six core areas of standards. These are:

- **Definitions and inclusion/exclusion criteria**
- **Transparent and rigorous methodology**
- **Basic security standards**

Each of these areas will be developed by a smaller working group of three to four individuals and organisations from the Standards Development Group. This will include elaboration on the principles that underpin each of the standards areas, as well as details regarding the processes necessary to implement in order to achieve the standards. ORG will have an overall role of coordinating and supervising the working groups to ensure synergy between outputs.

Prior to drafting the three priority areas, the Standards Development Group will map out existing standards relevant to the field (e.g. guidance on documentation, protection, areas of law) in order to collate all information that can be applicable to casualty recording standards. This will help support the development of the six areas of standards mentioned above, and along with extensive consultation with stakeholders will ensure that any future standards produced by the group will be connected to existing standards.

A second meeting of the full Standards Development Group is planned for the beginning of 2014, to discuss the first drafts by the working groups of the three priority areas of standards, how these standards will be adopted by practitioners, and the next areas for development. On-going consultation with stakeholders will take place during the entire development process. ORG will aim to ensure that all relevant state and interstate agencies as well as civil society organisations are consulted on the content of the standards documents that will be developed.

If you would like to know more about the standards development process, or are interested in being consulted, please contact Hana Salama, Networks Officer of the Every Casualty programme at Oxford Research Group hana.salama@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk.

About Oxford Research Group

Oxford Research Group (ORG) is a leading independent think-tank, non-governmental organisation and registered charity, based in London. ORG has been influential for thirty years in promoting the idea of sustainable approaches to global security as an alternative to violent confrontation, through original research, wide-ranging dialogue, and practical policy recommendations.

ORG is committed to the principle that every life lost to armed violence should be properly recognised. For this to become possible, every casualty of armed violence, throughout the world, must be promptly recorded, correctly identified and publicly acknowledged. In support of this goal, the Every Casualty programme at ORG (www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/rcac) works to develop an improved understanding of the range of available casualty recording practices, along with guidance for their implementation. This work has included extensive research into existing casualty recording practice, research which is contributing towards the identification and development of standards and good practice that can be implemented by a range of actors, including non-governmental organisations, states, and intergovernmental organisations alike.

In addition to carrying out research, ORG facilitates an International Practitioner Network of casualty-recording organisations (www.everycasualty.org/practitioners/ipn) and is at the forefront of integrating policy goals into existing policy frameworks at the national and international level.

Please direct all enquiries about this document to Hana Salama
hana.salama@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk.

Oxford Research Group

Development House, 56-64 Leonard Street, London EC2A 4LT
T +44 (0)20 7549 0298
F +44 (0)20 7681 1668
E org@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk
www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk
Registered Charity No. 299436

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