

EXERCISE:

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FORMAT:

PRESENTATION

Example Text for Introducing Threats

TIME: 20 MIN

REQUIRED MATERIALS: NONE

SUMMARY:

This presentation is an example of how the concept of threats and risk can be introduced to the group, facilitators should use this to develop their own explanation points.

KEY EXPLANATION POINTS:*Threats are Strategic:*

It is clear that there are strategies behind many of the threats human rights defenders receive. These are targeted threats.

- These are about who you are and what you do.
- There is intent to do harm, and there is an objective.
- That objective is to hinder, or stop your work. To hurt you, to discourage you.

Even though we do not always know who is behind them, these threats also *always have a source* – an individual or a group of individuals, acting alone, or as part of a sanctioned institutional policy.

Threats are Based in Fear:

There is an irony to threats, as well.

People only react when what you do attracts their attention and on some level, *threatens* them although it sounds strange, ‘threats are almost a measure of effectiveness’.

You are not normally threatened or attacked if what you are doing is ineffectual. It is when you touch on powerful interests that your opponents take notice. And get scared – of you.

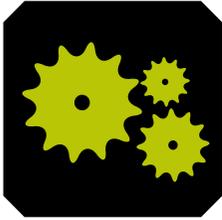
And women human rights activists do scare their opponents.

Sometimes this is simply because there is a lack of awareness or knowledge, about who you are and what you do. The media or community members might portray you as home-wreckers, wanting a world without men. Or they may call you a spy or traitor. But when they get to know you better, you can dispel these fears. People begin to understand that you want a better world for everyone.

Sometimes, though, your opponents really should fear you. Because if women activists win their battles, there will be losers. Powerful people will lose political control. Money. Freedom. Their lives.

Repressive regimes will fall. Organised criminal gangs will see their profits from human trafficking and drug-running disappear. Politicians and corporations will be exposed for corruption. Scores of people will face trial at last. Many will spend the rest of their lives in jail.

This is why so many people – politicians, paramilitaries, friends and even family members – try their best to stop you.



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Subtle Tactics:

They will use a number of different tactics to threaten you. Direct violence is one. But there are so many other ways – often more subtle.

Isolating women is a key tactic, particularly because women human rights defenders draw so much of their power – and protection – from relationships and from solidarity with others.

There are a number of ways to isolate women directly:

- cut them off from local, national and international sources of support;
- limit freedom of movement; or
- imprisonment (in jails or in their own home).

There are more indirect, but effective ways of increasing isolation as well, such as planting seeds of doubt and mistrust within communities (through defamation and slander) and even among women defenders themselves.

Another tactic is to wear women down psychologically to discourage them from continuing their work. Sometimes this is done through persistent, constant harassment – such as when the police visit and search offices daily for weeks on end.

Other times it is through ongoing surveillance intended to create a climate of fear.

Conclusion

We need to be clear about the threats you are facing – to uncover them, to extract them from this hidden, subtle, context, by:

- recognising the *strategies and motives* behind the threats;
- understanding the *what, the why and the who* behind the threats;
- assessing your *vulnerabilities* – and your capacities to combat these threats; and
- determining *what level of risk a threat poses, and what level of risk is acceptable* to you, your organisation and your family.

By talking about these threats, sharing them openly, in a way, we shine a light on them.

And by seeing them together, by using tools, we can recognise and strengthen our strategies to combat them.

FACILITATION NOTES:

- Facilitators should adapt this text as appropriate to the group and the flow of the workshop, the key points can also be woven into group discussions.
- This is a good presentation, in full or adapted form, to prepare the group to discuss threats and analyse them through the threats analysis exercises.