

# EVACUATION

Circumstances that might require evacuation or relocation of the staff and/or their families include mounting terrorist activities and threats, insurrection and other civil disorder, or a sudden crisis such as a natural disaster. In most cases, the National Headquarters, in consultation with the Country Director and Regional Management Unit (RMU), will make the final decision to evacuate. In the event time or communication difficulties makes coordination impossible, the Country Director has the authority to order and conduct an evacuation. Evacuation should be considered as a last resort after efforts to resolve or mitigate potential threats are unsuccessful. In the planning process it is essential that all staff members clearly understand their eligibility for evacuation assistance. In most cases, only international staff and families will be evacuated. This chapter provides information on:

**Evacuation Overview**

**Criteria for Evacuation**

**Evacuation Phases**

**Special Considerations during Evacuation**

## 6.1 EVACUATION OVERVIEW

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All country offices should have a written evacuation plan in order to facilitate a safe and efficient evacuation or relocation. The plan must be updated regularly and rehearsed annually or as needed. Country Directors must communicate in writing what evacuation assistance CARE will provide for each member of the staff and their families in the event of a crisis.

The window of opportunity to implement an evacuation plan is often brief and can close quickly. The staff must use good judgement in recognizing the critical moment when the evacuation plan must be decisively engaged.

The evacuation process involves four distinct phases, although a situation can deteriorate so quickly that the evacuation may start in any one of them. Other agencies and organizations have their own method for designating these stages, such as letters or colors, but they all generally correspond to the same phases.

### EVACUATION PHASES

**Phase One – Pre-planning.** During this phase, operations are normal with periodic update and rehearsal of disaster preparedness and evacuation plans as required. The Country Office must ensure continual monitoring of the safety and security situation, especially in Moderate or High risk areas. Operations should be consistent with the possibility of rapid onset of evacuation.

**Phase Two – Alert Stage.** Mounting tensions and/or instability may lead the Country Director, in consultation with the RMU and National Headquarters, to issue a recommendation to limit operations, increase security measures (in areas of instability or conflict), and review the evacuation plan. Work outside the immediate vicinity of the Country Office may be suspended.

**Phase Three – Curtailment of Operations/Relocation (evacuation imminent).** The situation has deteriorated to a level unsafe for normal operations and may require rapid evacuation. All non-essential international staff and family members may be asked to conduct an administrative evacuation, and staff currently outside of the region should remain in a safe place. The pre-evacuation process is put into effect, including back-up and segregation of key documents and establishment of safe areas.

**Phase Four - Evacuation.** The final evacuation may be done in several stages, usually terminating in all international staff relocating to a safe area. The Country Office may continue curtailed operations with national staff or may close completely.

## 6.2 CRITERIA FOR EVACUATION

All Country Offices in areas with Moderate or High risk levels must have published evacuation plans. These plans must be reviewed, revised, and rehearsed annually or as needed. There are a variety of indicators for evacuation, including:

- *Are staff members exposed to increasing and unreasonable risk?*
- *Have other agencies (UN, Red Cross, etc.) or the government recommended departure? What actions are other international NGOs taking?*
- *Have the embassies advised foreign nationals to leave?*
- *En lieu of evacuation, are there measures that can be taken to ensure staff safety, such as curtailing operations or moving to a more secure area in-country?*
- *What is the impact on the safety of national staff if international staff (foreign nationals) depart?*
- *Is there a requirement to evacuate or relocate national staff members and their immediate family?*
- *What is the possibility of meeting current project objectives safely?*
- *What are the policies and plans for continuing operations using only national staff members? (The timing of an evacuation of international staff may depend to some extent on the capacity of the national staff to carry on operations or coordinate the office closure.)*

***Once the decision to evacuate has been made, all staff must follow the instructions of the CD.***

## 6.3 EVACUATION PHASES

### PHASE ONE PRE-PLANNING

Evacuation planning and rehearsal should be ongoing for every Country Office, even those without current crisis. History has shown that the safety and security situation can deteriorate rapidly, often without warning. Actions to take during this phase include:

- *Coordinate plans with embassies, UN agencies, and other NGOs as appropriate.*
- *Identify which documents, such as contracts, payroll records, etc., will be needed to re-establish your operations once relocated or upon re-entry. Other documents should be marked for destruction. Consider how evacuated documents will be perceived if seized by a particular person or group. They may contain information that may put the evacuating individual(s) or the organization at risk due to misinterpretation, and would be better destroyed or left behind.*
- *Identify essential and non-essential staff. Essential staff members are required to conduct final coordination (Finance Officer for example), office closure, or limited operations. Determine the evacuation order with Priority 1 evacuating first and Priority 4 last.*

**Priority 1** – International staff family members

**Priority 2** – Staff members who are in immediate personal danger due to the conditions of the crisis

**Priority 3** – Individuals other than essential staff

**Priority 4** – Essential staff

- *Verify potential staging areas to assemble staff and their families. Identify potential evacuation routes to international airports, seaports, or land borders. Check to ensure that these routes can be travelled under emergency conditions. Inspect border crossings and safe areas.*
- *Identify potential evacuations routes to other parts of the country or region in the event of a requirement to re-locate within national borders.*

- *Safe houses should be identified and stocked with the following as appropriate:*
  - *Food and water for 15 days for each person.*
  - *Proper clothing, especially outerwear appropriate for inclement conditions.*
  - *Fuel for generator, vehicles, and lamps.*
  - *Medical emergency kit with proper medications as required.*
  - *Flashlights with extra batteries, flares and other signaling devices as appropriate.*
  - *Maps and communication plans as appropriate.*

## PHASE TWO

### ALERT STAGE

Since this phase is generally entered during crisis, when key staff may be occupied, it is imperative that pre-planning clearly defines tasks and responsibilities for this stage. Failure to complete tasks during this phase may mean they go undone, since the transition to other stages may be very quick, leaving no time to “catch up.” As much as possible, normal work routines should continue, with additional security measures implemented as warranted.

- *Communication systems for notification should be finalized and tested. Consider tying into other systems, such as warden systems for other NGO or embassy staffs.*
- *Prepare salaries and place in the safe.*
- *Back up important files onto disks, delete sensitive files, and shred sensitive documents.*
- *Staff members and their family should assemble personal documentation and carry it at all times. International staff families should be considered for an early departure.*
- *Inventory all office equipment and assets. As appropriate, identify the equipment to be evacuated and responsibility for each item.*
- *Assign each evacuee to a specific vehicle so that anyone missing may be readily identified, and ensure that all vehicles are ready.*

Assemble personal belongings to be taken during an evacuation, including:

- *Passport and visa*
- *Driver's license and other identification*

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- *Extra cash (convertible currency)*
- *Flashlight with extra batteries*
- *Hand-held radio with extra batteries*
- *One bag of personal belongings not exceeding 15 kg*

### PHASE THREE

#### CURTAILMENT OF OPERATIONS/RELOCATION (EVACUATION IMMINENT)

The Country Office usually suspends the majority of normal operations to concentrate on evacuation preparations. Potential evacuees may be relocated to a pre-selected staging or safe area. Remote staff may be recalled or sent to a safe area. Non-essential personnel and family members may be evacuated. Tasks during this phase, which may last weeks or only a few hours, include:

- *Coordinate closely with other NGOs, the UN, and other agencies as appropriate.*
- *Pay salaries to local staff, with salary advances if possible.*
- *Give clear instructions regarding responsibilities and leadership roles to those staff staying behind. Establish a means of continued communication between remaining staff and those evacuating.*

### PHASE FOUR

#### EVACUATION

CARE is committed to the safety and well-being of all staff. Under no circumstances should Country Office staff be compelled to remain in an unsafe environment any longer than absolutely necessary. There are a multitude of tasks to be accomplished during this phase, which should be assigned to specific personnel during Phase One pre-planning. Once evacuation has begun, it will take precedence over all other activities and should not be delayed for any reason. Evacuation will be more effective if the Country Office rehearses its Evacuation Plan periodically. Considerations during evacuation may include:

- *If there is a risk of looting, consider disabling radios, equipment and vehicles. Empty and leave open all safes.*
- *Ensure effective communication with national staff left behind (if any).*
- *Evacuate by the safest and most orderly means possible, maintaining communication with all groups evacuating.*
- *All evacuees will proceed only to pre-designated areas, establish contact with the CD or CARE USA, and await instruction.*

## 6.4 SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS DURING EVACUATION

**Self evacuation.** Individuals that are working remotely from a local office, or who find themselves isolated during crisis should use their best judgement concerning the safety in their area. All staff members are authorized to conduct self-evacuation in accordance with established criteria and procedures of their country or region when they feel their safety is threatened. Every effort should be made to communicate with the CO during the process, and once in a safe area the individual must contact the appropriate authority immediately. No one may re-enter an area after self-evacuation without specific authorization from the Country Director or RMU.

**Evacuation refusal.** Persons who are ordered to evacuate, and who refuse, must understand that they are staying at their own risk and that CARE will not accept responsibility for their safety. Whenever possible, the decision to remain behind should be discussed during Phase One pre-planning. Once the evacuation has started, it is possible that the staff member may not have sufficient objectivity to rationally evaluate such actions. The CD and National Headquarters must approve any subsequent support or actions for those refusing evacuation, such as rejoining CARE upon resumption of activities.

**Alternate evacuation methods.** In some cases, a CARE office may sign on to another agency's evacuation plan (UN, host nation or other NGO). Such an arrangement may improve support and logistic capacity and may be the safest and most effective method for relocation. An office that signs on to another evacuation plan must ensure that when a crisis occurs they retain the right to make an independent decision when to stay or go. National Headquarters must be informed if such arrangements are made.

**Embassy evacuation.** International staff and family members must register with the appropriate embassy upon arrival and are usually able to participate in their embassy's evacuation plan if desired. The decision to take advantage of the embassy evacuation should be discussed with the CD during the planning process. In some cases, the Country Office may recommend family members and non-essential staff evacuate with their respective embassies.

**National staff evacuation.** All staff members should clearly understand their eligibility for evacuation assistance. In most cases, only international staff will be evacuated. If the CD believes that the national staff and/or their families face a direct threat because of work for CARE, then evacuation should be considered. National staff members not evacuated should comply with the office's "internal evacuation plan."

**Internal evacuation plan.** An "internal evacuation plan" gives a clear line of authority and detailed responsibilities for anyone not evacuating. The plan would include payment procedures, use of assets, continuation of operations, and resumption of activities upon re-entry of international staff.

**“Remain in Place.”** If the situation prevents the staff from evacuating, upon order from the CD, they should move to a pre-designated “safe” location, such as their homes, the office, their embassy, or, if appropriate, with another NGO or agency. Ideally the selected site should have access to a sufficient amount of food and water per person and appropriate communications equipment. Critical office equipment should be packed and taken to the safe location. Evacuation may follow when the CD feels the situation allows. Alternatively, the crisis may “blow over” and allow resumption of normal activities. This is a last resort for situations where evacuation is warranted but not possible due to the unsafe environment. It is not an alternative to a well-planned and timely evacuation.

**Return and resumption of activities.** This may occur soon after evacuation or take many months. The displaced Country Office personnel may conduct operations from a safe area outside the evacuated region, communicating with and working through the national staff if possible. If a decision is made to close the office completely, the CD and National Headquarters will coordinate disposition of staff and assets.

### THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF EVACUATION

An evacuation is not easy for the evacuees or for those staying behind. It is a very emotional event, giving rise to feelings of guilt, hurt, frustration, and powerlessness. The departure of Western aid agencies can have a variety of meanings to the local population, including the removal of a symbolic safety barrier. Thus, an evacuation is not a neutral act and may even aggravate a crisis. When a Country Office evacuates it should consider providing a statement for the media and others explaining the organization’s reasoning and any continuation or possible resumption of programs or aid.

Re-establishing operations after an evacuation can be difficult. National staff “left behind” may have experienced hardship and threats to themselves and their families. They may perceive that evacuated international staff members were in relative safety, perhaps receiving critical incident debriefing, stress counseling, or rest and relaxation, options not available to those left behind. This must be considered when re-establishing a Country Office. Restoring relationships with national staff, local authorities, beneficiaries, and the local population can be made easier if honesty, tact, and transparency are used with constituents prior to and during the evacuation.