

Security and free time

Reflection:

Generally speaking, security rules are followed as long as they do not clash with personal interests. It will, therefore be easier to tackle office security, for example, than free time. Yet, free time is a fundamental element of both individual and organisational security. It requires discussion and understanding of how personal needs can interfere with security.

Free time

Here are a few questions and reflections to help the organisation draft its free time policy. It is important, as with any other security item, to explore them as far as possible even if this exploration might breach privacy (security incidents can breach privacy too...).

We begin with two important reflexions:

- ♦ If someone wishes to attack an organisation, they will probably not attack the best protected people or those who follow safety rules, but rather will target those with weak spots, particularly during their free time (at night and weekends, etc...)
- ♦ If an organisation has 10 members, of whom one or two do not abide by safety rules during their free time, it is the whole organisation, not just the one or two, who are at risk because the whole organisation would be affected by an attack against those two..

The underlying question is always: "is there a security risk attached to..." If the answer is "no", then it is fine. If it is "yes", then it needs to be explored and decided whether there are ways to satisfy a personal need in a protected environment or decide whether the need needs to be postponed for safer times or simply dropped as incompatible with the security of a human rights defender.

Do we care about security only during working hours or 24/7?

Although it is difficult to make the distinction between the organisation's policies and the autonomy of every member during their free time, the prevention of attacks and reactions to them make no difference between attacks during work-

ing hours and those carried out during free time... We must not forget that if a person decides to attack an organisation via its members, they will not do it in working hours, but at times when defenders are at their most vulnerable. A person planning an attack against a defender will search for an opportunity to do so. We must also bear in mind that an attack at night, or on leaving a club, etc. will be much easier to cover up...

In countries where drinking alcohol is a social custom, is drinking to the point of getting drunk a security risk?

Getting drunk in a public place has a definite impact on security. The defender might talk, their behaviour is altered and they might not be aware that they are being deliberately questioned or challenged. There is a definite impact on the organisation image, if not directly on the physical security of the human rights defenders. And remember that a drunk defender provides an opportunity for any hostile group to attempt to take advantage of when contemplating an attack on the defenders' organisation (the same is true for other drugs). The use of alcohol and other drugs with regards to security should not be examined neither from a moral nor a health point of view, but as an objective fact affecting security.

Can hidden relationships and affairs affect security?

- There have been cases of human right defenders not reporting back to their organisations because they had a private affair. The organisation had already alerted its emergency contact only to find out that the defenders were perfectly fine and unaware of the trouble caused. This type of situation obviously gives others an opportunity to discredit the organisation and the defender concerned by drawing attention to the image and ethical implications. Some emergency contacts might even decide to withdraw from the organisation's early warning system.
- The problem is not the affair, but how the affair may affect communication and security. We reiterate that it is not a moral or health issue but a security one. It is important that the organisation is able to deal with these issues in a clear way and that it look for ways to address them.
- What if a defender's friend is viewed as suspicious by others in the organisation? Can the organisation interfere?
- In what ways can information be passed on to friends, families and relatives? Is the human right defender responsible for how that information might be used?

How defenders use free time therefore has a potential security impact. The point is not to deny the need to enjoy free time but rather see how it can be enjoyed.

All defenders' organisations at risk need a policy for the enjoyment of free time, from evenings to holidays. Special mention is necessary for the public use of alcohol and other drugs, how hidden relationships may interfere with security and how free time may affect the image and security of the organisation?

How do we treat the confidentiality of information?

And because information can leak out any time, even during free time, here is an extra consideration related to information security.

The organisation should establish at least two different levels of confidentiality of information (always within the organisation):

- a ♦ What just a few members should know.
- b ♦ What all members may know

This process may reduce the risk of confidential information leaking, whether by negligent behaviour and /or infiltration. It may also help the organisation see where is the leakage is coming from.

Might some aspects of our behaviour during our free time affect the image of our organisation?

- ♦ How do others see us?
- ♦ To what extent do other colleagues know what we do in our free time?
What is the impact of the organisation image on security?
- ♦

Summary

A defender at risk must care about security 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in all aspects of their lives, including during free time.

Free time needs proper consideration

The underlying question is always: "is there a security risk attached to..." If the answer is "no", then it is fine. If it is "yes", the issue needs to be explored and decisions taken about whether there are ways to fulfil a personal need within a protected environment or whether the need must be postponed until safer times or simply dropped as incompatible with the security needs of a human right defender.

All defenders' organisations at risk need a policy for the enjoyment of free time, from evenings to holidays. Special mention is necessary for the public use of alcohol and other drugs, how hidden relationships may interfere with security, and how organisational image about free time may affect security.

As free time involves risks, it is important not to forget to carry out thorough risk assessments.