

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE NEWS RELEASE

Attacks on aid workers increase as targeting becomes increasingly political – 7th April 2009

2008 was the most dangerous year on record for humanitarian aid workers, according to a new report from Overseas Development Institute. Last year 260 humanitarian aid workers were killed, kidnapped or seriously injured in violent attacks – the highest annual toll on record. Kidnappings have increased 350% since 2006 and the fatality rate of aid workers from malicious acts surpassed that of United Nations peacekeeping soldiers in 2008.

These findings are presented in a report of an ongoing study, *Providing Aid in Insecure Environments - 2009 Update: Trends in violence against aid workers and the operational response*, which analyses 12 years worth of data on attacks on aid workers. The report finds that the sharpest increases in attack rates have been on international (expatriate) staff of NGOs. However, the long term trend suggests the casualty rate of national staff is rising faster than that of international staff – despite the recent upswing in international staff attacks.

The majority of these attacks took place in Sudan, Afghanistan and Somalia, where international aid organisations have been identified as legitimate targets by armed groups pursuing broad political aims.

The reports' researchers, Abby Stoddard and Adele Harmer of [ODI's Humanitarian Policy Group](#), said:

"We didn't expect to see such a surge in violent attacks against aid workers. It is a very alarming trend.

"Although there has been improved and professionalised security management, humanitarian organisations are unable to secure their personnel in a small number of the most dangerous operational settings, particularly Afghanistan and Somalia, where they have are perceived as part of Western geopolitical interests.

"There is a trend of aid organisations attempting to disassociate themselves from political actors and reinforce the principles of humanitarian independence and neutrality. But, in these most highly contested political and military environments, this approach will not necessarily achieve security for aid workers on the front lines."

- [Details for *Providing Aid in Insecure Environments - 2009 Update: Trends in violence against aid workers and the operational response*](#)
- [More from the Humanitarian Policy Group](#)

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