



PEACE NEGOTIATIONS
POST-CONFLICT CONSTITUTIONS
WAR CRIMES PROSECUTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION GUIDE

SPEAKER NOTES

DO NO HARM PRINCIPLE

Hello and welcome to PILPG's module on do no harm. My name is Dr. Margaret deGuzman and today I will be discussing how to employ this principle throughout a human rights documentation mission. Do No Harm is one of four key principles for conducting an ethical human rights documentation mission. The other 3 principles are:

- Acquiring Informed Consent;
- Ensuring Confidentiality; and
- Mitigating Retraumatization

The "do no harm" principle recognizes that human rights documenters have an obligation to avoid jeopardizing the physical and psychological safety and wellbeing of all persons with whom they interact. This includes victims, witnesses, intermediaries, local communities, other investigators and colleagues.

It is important to adhere to the do no harm principle throughout a documentation mission by making every effort to avoid causing harm to anyone, including the documentors themselves.

Adherence to the do no harm principle requires documenters to balance the need to gather information with the potential risk of harm to those who may be able to provide information.

Risk assessment is an ongoing responsibility throughout a documentation process.

Some ways to avoid doing harm through human rights documentation work include:

1. Ensuring adequate preparation and training of all team members, especially those interacting with particularly vulnerable persons such as children and victims of sexual and gender-based violence.
2. Providing complete information about potential risks to all participants in the information-gathering process.
3. Obtaining informed consent from victims and witnesses and respecting confidentiality.
4. Demonstrating respect, professionalism and empathy toward all participants.

5. Watching for signs of emotional distress and taking immediate steps to curtail any possible re-traumatization.
6. Ensuring that appropriate care-givers are present during any interactions with minors.
7. Avoiding interaction with any persons for whom there is insufficient information to ascertain the level of risk to their physical and psychological safety and wellbeing.

These are just a few of the ways that human rights documenters can adhere to the do no harm principle.

In sum, the do no harm principle requires documenters to constantly consider how they can best eliminate or minimize harm to the persons involved in the process.

This concludes the module on the Do No Harm Principle. Thank you!