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DEVELOPING STANDARDS FOR CASUALTY RECORDING

A briefing document prepared by Every Casualty

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1. Introduction

This document presents an overview of the work coordinated and led by Every Casualty since 2013 to develop standards for the field of casualty recording. It outlines the different areas in which standards have been developed and the intended impact of the existence of these standards. It also aims to provide contextual knowledge of the process that was followed to produce them.

The standards currently exist in a draft format and are being further consulted on. It is expected that they will be published by the end of 2016.

Comments about this briefing note as well as requests for access to the draft standards should be directed to standards@everycasualty.org.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CASUALTY RECORDING STANDARDS

Every Casualty Worldwide is committed to the principle that no individual should die without his or her death being recorded. The organisation works to develop and enhance the technical and institutional capacity for casualty recording, and build the political will internationally, for the details of every single victim of armed violence[1] worldwide to be properly recorded.

Part of this work involves adding to the knowledge base on casualty recording practice, drawing on the Every Casualty hosted Casualty Recorders Network (CRN). A research project on recording methodologies resulted in the publication of a collection of papers on Good practice in Casualty Recording. The CRN is an association of 50 casualty-recording organisations, including civil society organisations and international organisations. These organisations document casualties of armed conflict and armed violence, some dealing with current crises, others with conflicts in the recent past. A list of members and information on their work can be found here. The purpose of this network is to engage in the sharing of good practice and host spaces for professional peer exchange and mutual support and collaboration.

The need and the will to harmonise practice within the field of casualty recording first emerged with clarity as a principal consensual outcome of the first global conference of the Casualty Recorders Network hosted in London by Every Casualty in 2011. Key parameters of good practice have since been investigated and systematised in a series of original research studies, beginning with Every Casualty's comprehensive 2012 study of 40 casualty recording NGOs, and extending to more recent studies of state and UN practice. The findings and implications are being progressively shared with state, UN, and civil society representatives. The process made intensive use of the expertise and commitment of the growing membership of the CRN, in support of the principles contained in the Charter and Call of the Every Casualty Campaign.

[1] As defined by the World Health Organisation armed violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself,

Effective standards need to both reflect emerging good practice and also provide benchmarks against which those who wish to use casualty records can assess casualty recording efforts as "fit for purpose". In order to ensure that standards are effective in governing the practice of casualty recording, the development process has been a consultative one, drawing on a number of experiences from practitioners (casualty recorders) and end-users (other organisations that use casualty data). The process, led by Every Casualty, has aimed to engage as many stakeholders and experts as possible, including non-governmental organisations and intergovernmental organisations, to ensure future support for these standards.

To this end Every Casualty has coordinated 6 workshops since 2013, attended by a range of practitioners and end-users of casualty data. At the first of these workshops a Standards Development Group (SDG) was formed (see Section 1.4. for a list of organisations in the SDG), composed of practitioners and end-users that are committed to developing standards and steering the process from development to adoption. The first meeting identified specific topic areas in which standards were needed and assigned specialist smaller working groups to work on each topic. In the Autumn of 2015, the SDG met again for a plenary meeting during which they reviewed a first draft of the casualty recording standards.

1.2 CASUALTY RECORDING: A WORKING DEFINITION

The following definition of casualty recording is based on the Charter and Call of the Every Casualty Campaign[2], which is a coalition of civil society organisations that calls on every casualty of armed violence to be promptly recorded, correctly identified and publicly acknowledged:

Casualty recording is a standardised process to record all individuals killed in armed violence[3].

1.3. PURPOSE OF CASUALTY RECORDING STANDARDS

A wide range of casualty recording practitioners, as well as other stakeholders, have identified standards as a means to improve data quality and promote the more effective use of casualty recorders' work. Standards for Casualty Recording seeks to establish an agreed baseline for the practice of casualty recording that will also enable more actors to access, trust, use and/or share the data produced by casualty recorders.

These standards are not meant to be used as operational guidance, but rather to encourage casualty recorders to consider key aspects of good practice and how these can be applied to their own casualty-recording projects. They aim to be implementable by all in the field and can be exceeded, while they should always be strived towards in the first instance. They have been created to help practitioners of casualty recording to adapt and, where relevant, improve the way they work, to move towards greater harmonisation of practice worldwide. They are designed to establish a standard of

[2] http://www.everycasualty.org/campaign

[3] These standards have provisions on missing persons as potentially killed persons but do not include considerations of injured persons. The methods and implications for recording injuries differ from those for recording deaths and deserve a treatment of their own.

practice that can and should be applied across the field, whilst respecting its diversity of actors, methods and approaches. As well as assisting casualty recorders, these standards also aim to help make casualty data more straightforward to use and share. They provide end users with criteria that can help them to consider whether and how to use the data presented by different sources. The standards provide a means to allow discussions of casualty data to be grounded in assessments of the quality of the data, rather than in assessments of the political stance of those promoting (or criticising) particular casualty numbers.

1.4. LIST OF ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS IN THE STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT GROUP

Casualty recorders:

Conflict Analysis Resource Center Colombia (CERAC)
Documenta
Elman Peace
Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG)
International Commission on Missing People (ICMP)
Iraq Body Count
LRA Crisis Tracker (Invisible Children+ The Resolve)
Small arms Survey
Syria Justice and Accountability Centre
Syria Tracker
The Bureau of Investigative Journalism

End-users:

Christophe Billen, Analyst office of the prosecutor, International Criminal Court
Guilhem Ravier, Head of protection of civilians International Committee of the Red Cross
Human Rights Data Analysis Group
Jeffery Villaveces, Head of Information Management Unit, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Colombia
Jim Ross, Director of Law and Policy, Human Rights Watch
People's intelligence (PI)
Security First

Since its formal inception in 2013, Every Casualty's work on standards process has been supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ifa (Institut für Auslands-beziehungen) with means of the German Federal Foreign Office, and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

2. Basic Data Standard

While each casualty recorder will set the scope of their project according to their goals and define their own categories to sort the information collected, a number of key points of information that all casualty recorders should collect have been identified[4]. Constituting a minimum standard for the field, these will be exceeded by many casualty recorders. They are:

- **Location of incident:** this can be recorded to different levels of detail, for example from town or village down to GPS coordinates. Casualty recorders should always strive to record at the highest level of detail that is available to them, for accuracy and comparison with other data.
- **Date or time of incident:** the highest level of available detail should again be recorded.
- **Source:** At a minimum, the kind of source from which the record was created (a news report, official documents, crowdsourcing, witness testimony, etc.) should be recorded for internal use, with a record of (and possibly link to) the specific document. In cases of witness testimonies, the casualty recorder should make a careful assessment of the risks attached to recording the personal data of a witness and the means available to them to mitigate these risks.
- **Numbers killed:** this is the lowest level of detail about casualties required for the recording of an incident. When the minimum information about an individual victim (name, age, sex) is not available, recording this information constitutes the minimal acceptable level of casualty recording.
- **Name:** this will often require close knowledge of local naming conventions, as well as the ability to accommodate different names for the same individual where necessary (nicknames, noms de guerre)
- **Age:** this means the age of the person at the time of the incident – whether it is the time of death or in case of missing persons the time of disappearance (as the time of disappearance and time of death might differ). Date of birth may be recorded if available. If the exact age is unknown, a casualty recorder may choose to give an indication as to whether the person was a child or an adult (defining the age at which a person is considered an adult and making this definition available), or use additional broad categories, e.g. baby, infant, teenager, elder etc.
  - **Sex/gender:** how a victim was identified at the time of their death
  - **Type of death:** how those involved in an incident died. Casualty recorders may approach this in different ways, for example by describing the weapons used, a medical cause of death, or a description of the incident.
- Involved actors: the groups and individuals that are reported to have been involved in the incident which incurred deaths, e.g. conflict parties present, groups or individuals that initiated or claimed responsibility for violent acts.

[4] The basic data standard was developed through research and discussions with practitioners and end-users during the process of developing these standards.

3. Standards: Core Areas and Principles

Fig.1 Casualty Recording Standards: Core areas and principles

3.1 CORE AREAS OF CASUALTY RECORDING STANDARDS

The following areas of casualty recording are where standards have been developed. These areas have been identified based on the findings of Every Casualty's research into good practice[5], as well as discussions of the Standards Development Group. A brief description for each area is given below:

1. Organisation

Implementation of the standards in this area:

- Ensure that recording organisations are accountable to their stakeholders, specifically the communities in which they work and the end users of their data, for the information they produce.

This area of the standards deals with the principles and steps to follow to ensure casualty recorders and their organisations are trusted sources of information and that they manage their data responsibly.

The sensitive and often political nature of the information casualty recorders collect makes transparency surrounding recording methods, operations, and affiliations especially critical. By being transparent about how, where and why they operate, casualty recording organisations can help their data be trusted for use by the media, international organisations, governments and the public at large.

[5] And with reference to existing standards such as the HURIDOCS manuals, the Sphere Project, and the ICRC standards for protection work.

Organisational transparency in casualty recording encompasses the provision of accessible and transparent information to these various stakeholders on their methodology, operations, and political and funding affiliations. In this way transparency calls for a continuous dialogue between casualty recording organisations and their stakeholders.

2. Methodology

Implementation of the standards in this area:

- Help casualty recorders create a sound methodology, which will help them improve data quality, engage more end users and increase their potential for sharing data (which can, in turn, further enhance data quality).
- Allow a shared understanding of the processes within casualty recording and outline ways to use its results accordingly.

This area refers to the collection of steps and rules that informs the way in which casualty recording is being done, as well as considerations regarding definitions and categorisation used by casualty recorders to organise and store their data.

A casualty recorder's methodology is the foundation on which its casualty recording is built, and it is therefore critical to sound practice that casualty recorders build their recording around a robust methodology. The terminology (definitions) adopted by casualty recorders and the way they categorise information is integral to this.

Clear definitions and categories are a primary aspect of good practice in casualty recording. More specifically, the choice of definitions and their consistent application is crucial to maintaining the quality of data produced by a casualty recording initiative. This is particularly important because of the nature of and circumstances in which the information is collected, as definitions and categories will often have political and possibly legal significance. In turn, implementing rigorous definitions and categories, and being transparent about them, will allow end users to have a clearer understanding of the casualty data that is presented to them.

Standards on methodology can prevent common methodological mistakes, give guidance on good practice and uphold the principles that should underpin every casualty recording activity. The discrete steps to which standards apply within this area are: collecting data, assessing and evaluating sources, designing processes for data corroboration, entering data, and conducting data quality control. These need not be carried out in a specific sequence, but while each casualty recorder may proceed in different ways, the standards covering this area aim to be applicable to all projects.

3. Security

Implementation of the standards in this area:

- Raise casualty recorders' awareness of the importance of security planning and assessment prior to beginning their activities.
- Support data quality and data legitimacy by ensuring that the data is acquired and kept in a safe and secure manner.
- Build trust between organisations and encourage cooperation and data sharing by ensuring appropriate levels of security.

This area relates to the responsibility casualty recorders hold to guarantee the security of all stakeholders directly affected by their work (staff, affected populations and witnesses).

Considering the various levels of security and resources available to casualty recorders, these standards recommend adopting an assessment and evaluation approach to the design of a security policy. It was considered that by doing this, casualty recorders will be able to adapt their approach in the most appropriate way depending on the constraints and threats they face. The standards address issues of both digital and human security.

4. Publication

Implementation of the standards in this area:

- Support casualty recorders in demonstrating their credibility and that of the content they publish, providing for their data to be used to benefit violence-affected populations in the greatest possible number of ways.
- Facilitate the efficient use of the data collected by a wide variety of factors with very different purposes and objectives (from providing humanitarian aid, to supporting global advocacy efforts, to analysing the dynamics of violence and identifying patterns in conflict).

Standards for this area concern the publication, dissemination, and sharing of data that has been gathered through the work of casualty recorders.

It is clearly in the interest of casualty recorders to publish their data in ways that maximise its usefulness to the widest range of end-users they can address, and attention to this topic can also bring secondary benefits. For instance, effective publication of casualty recording data by NGOs and others that demonstrates the feasibility and benefits of casualty recording can be used as a tool to encourage states to properly recognise every casualty and undertake casualty recording themselves, as the Every Casualty Campaign proposes is their responsibility. Effective and harmonised practice in existing casualty recording supports global efforts to enshrine casualty recording in state practice, and all the more so when casualty recorders publish their data according to specifications exceeding or improving upon those required by states. Such practices provide a robust basis for civil society to advocate for the implementation of better casualty recording mechanisms by state parties.

3.2 PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING CASUALTY RECORDING STANDARDS

The SDG agreed that casualty recording is guided and moderated by 5 core principles which apply throughout a casualty recorder's activity. These are:

Do No Harm

The do no harm principle is derived from medical ethics, and requires humanitarian organisations to minimise the harm they may inadvertently cause given their presence within a particular context and the type of service they provide. Striving to cause no further harm to the living through their activities is the fundamental and overarching principle that all casualty recorders must uphold, and can override other principles (such as the full application of transparency). It applies across all aspects of casualty recording, from collecting data, through devising security policies to sharing and publishing the data.

Transparency

Casualty recorders should be as transparent as possible about all aspects of their activities, from the details of their organisation through to their methodology, definitions, exclusion and inclusion criteria, and data publication rationale; how the security of their staff, witnesses and data is safeguarded (but without disclosing security procedures that would compromise this safety). Transparency helps to foster trust among practitioners and between practitioners and end-users, and assists in the recognition of the legitimacy of data. Transparency also helps users understand how to use the data correctly based on awareness of its limits, helping to prevent the misinterpretation of the data. Transparency allows scrutiny of a casualty recorder's data and any errors it may contain to be identified, which can ultimately lead to improved data quality.

Responsibility

Responsibility refers to the need for casualty recorders to consider the rights and needs of different stakeholders affected by or involved in a project. An organisation can show responsibility in the protection of sources, staff and other people affected by the data collected, but can also exercise responsibility by being open about the fact that this is being done. Applying the principles listed here throughout their practice is a marker of responsibility on the part of a casualty recorder, which will support their being trusted by those providing information and using their data.

Inclusiveness

Casualty recorders will not necessarily be neutral, and some will be motivated by reasons which will be deemed to be politically partial. This should not discredit their casualty recording work if they seek to uphold professional standards. Implementing the principle of inclusiveness within their recording methods is important for such organisations in particular. It means seeking to include all events and victims in their records without regard to whether this data supports an organisation's political or other goals, and striving to use terms and definitions in their data that apply equally to all.

This is closely tied to transparency – it is important for casualty recorders to state clearly what data they exclude from their recording, if any, and for what reasons (which may for example include difficulty in accessing information from communities opposed to an organisation's political stance or its community affiliation).

Consistency

This principle applies mostly to the methodological aspects of a casualty recorder's work, and in particular to their data collection and data processing. Casualty recorders operate in very different contexts and some situations will make it difficult to record all the information that a project may wish to. Being consistent in how they collect information and process it is the best way for a casualty recorder to ensure that their data is usable by and useful to others. Where the consistency of their methodology is affected, for better or worse, due to changes in external circumstances or improvements to their methods, this should be indicated (see Transparency, above).

4. Structure of the standards

In their current draft form, the 58 standards for casualty recording are presented in five chapters that align with the identified core areas that need addressing in casualty recording (see 3.1. of this document):

Core areas	Chapter titles of the standards document
Organisation	Chapter 1 – Organisational Transparency Standards
Methodology	Chapter 2- Methodology Standards Chapter 3 – Definitions and Categorisation Standards
Security	Chapter 4 – Security Standards
Publication	Chapter 5 – Publication and Sharing Standards

Each chapter is divided in two or more sections. The first section of each chapter is dedicated to recalling the principles of casualty recording which apply particularly to the core area at the centre of the chapter; these first sections do not constitute the standards. The following sections are organised thematically and structure the chapter by addressing distinct aspects of each area. This way of structuring the Standards has been chosen to enable anyone inquiring into a specific theme which is of particular interest to them to consult the most appropriate chapter, or section within it. Nevertheless, the Standards document will need to be read in its entirety in order to properly understand the parameters of casualty recording and to be able to accurately assess the casualty data provided by a particular organisation.

Each numbered standard is accompanied by an explanatory note. These notes capture the main elements that sustain and justify each standard. They outline the main challenges the standards are designed to tackle, their limitations and constraints, and the dilemmas they might pose to casualty recorders. They also cover some practical considerations as to their application. These notes aim to be illustrative, as they cannot be exhaustive. They do not therefore constitute a full operational manual on the application of the standards. The responsibility to determine how to best incorporate these standards into their practice currently remains with each casualty recorder.

5. Adoption and implementation of the standards

In the process of developing these standards, it has become clear that practical aid in the form of tools and templates would support and considerably strengthen the effective implementation of the standards by casualty recorders. It is intended that this document will be complemented by a growing resource bank or knowledge base designed to assist casualty recorders in developing and refining their practice and ensuring that it corresponds to the standards. These resources, which are needed to promote the effective implementation of the standards, will require further support to be fully developed.

Nonetheless all the standards that have been outlined are meant to be implemented, and represent a baseline of requirements that current practicing casualty recorders can aspire to implement as soon as it is possible for them to do so. Casualty recorders work in a wide variety of contexts and challenging environments with considerable resource differentials. These factors affect the methodologies and procedures that organisations are able to deploy. The standards have sought to be inclusive of all present-day practitioners in order to unify and improve the field as widely as possible. They are drafted to reflect the fact that for some practitioners, some requirements may be harder than others to comply with, particularly under certain conditions such as during conflict. But they require all casualty recorders to indicate their adherence to the standards in principle and aspiration to implement them fully as soon as possible.

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