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Safety and Security

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I think being a human rights advocate goes with the reality that you may put your life at risk. One can be abducted or murdered at any time, and justice may not be achieved. I always think that whatever I can attain in the field, no matter how little, would be of great help. This optimism keeps me going. I always share this kind of perception and optimism with those I work with. By sharing a common vision, we draw strength, inspiration, and courage.

The longer we live, we always say, the more we can accomplish. We become stronger when we think as a single group, not as separate individuals.

Joey Lozano, a veteran WITNESS partner, member of its board of directors and trainer, has dedicated his life to using video for documenting human rights violations in the Philippines. He has survived several assassination and abduction attempts in his efforts to assert indigenous land rights, and to investigate corruption and environmental degradation.

Welcome to the “Safety and Security” chapter, which features user-friendly tips for social justice advocates preparing to shoot video in dangerous environments.

This chapter is intended to be a starting point for discussions and to provide comparative examples that can help you make the best choices for your own circumstances. It is not meant to be a definitive list. Rather, it provides some commonsense practical safety measures.

While you may not be able to eliminate risks, you can anticipate and minimize them. This guide draws on the experiences and resources of seasoned WITNESS partners, videographers, journalists and human rights defenders from around the globe. We explore concrete strategies for preserving the safety of people filmed and of human rights defenders while recording violations. We also raise ethical issues that need to be addressed when working in potentially dangerous conditions.

The chapter is divided into three parts: Preparation, In the Field, and After Filming. There are also five “Top Ten Tips” from knowledgeable

filmmakers and activists from around the world. The “Resources” chapter below contains further suggested readings and information about organizations, all of which are accessible via the Internet.

PREPARATION

Preparation is crucial to doing good human rights work and to getting good footage, as well as to staying safe and ensuring the safety of those you film.

Perhaps the most important factor to consider is whether you and your team will be *going in* to an area to film, or whether you will be filming *within your own community*. This distinction will affect many of the safety and security decisions you make.

While *going into* an area may present immediate and critical dangers to you and your team, ultimately, you most probably can leave the area and resume your life. Filming *within your own community*, however, may create risks for you that last for months, sometimes years. Both situations may have long-term impact on community members—those who chose to participate, and even those who have nothing to do with your video project.

In this chapter, we aim to address both sets of circumstances: *going in* to an area, as well as filming *within a place* where you are based. To begin with, we look at conducting preliminary research, risk assessment, issues of trust, deciding whether or not to go undercover, preparing documentation and equipment, planning entry and exit strategies, and learning from others’ experiences.

Knowing yourself and your organization

Before we examine risks and how to avoid them, ask some key questions of yourself and your organization. Some of these may be questions you confront daily if you work in a conflict zone or an area with high levels of risk; others may be related to this specific issue you are starting to work on.

- How much risk are you and your group willing to take, and have you really considered why you are doing it? It is vital to know your own limits, and assess what in your life you are willing—and not willing—to risk.
- Who else could be affected by your actions? What about your family, children, or colleagues? What about the community

where you will be filming? What about the possibility of short-term or long-term damage to a cause you are fighting for?

Be very clear about your assignment, what you wish to achieve, and what you may risk or lose in the process, using the “Risk Assessment Checklist” below. Discuss in detail within your organization what the group boundaries are and how each member will fit into the picture. If you are working within an organization that is using video for the first time, make sure that you have a broad and informed discussion within the organization about what the potential risks are and how these can be mitigated. Know that irrespective of how well prepared you are, there will always be an element of risk and uncertainty.

Anand Patwardhan has been making political documentaries in India for nearly thirty years. He warns:

Never begin to “enjoy” danger. Danger is sometimes a necessity imposed by circumstance; it is certainly not something worth seeking out for its own sake. On the contrary, you owe it to your cause to stay alive. We have too many martyrs—too many Gandhis and Guevaras. Now we need success, not martyrdom. So run like a coward [to tell your story] rather than stand up and die. There is no shame in wanting to live. We do love life; that is why we fight for a better world. Save yourself. Also save your tape or film. You are the witness whose pictures must talk.

Risk assessment checklist

Key question:

Do you even need to use video at all? Is video the best strategy? Consider using other forms of media: print, still photos, or audio only. Video can present dangers that may not be worth the risks.

Preparation for filming in any potentially hostile environments should include a risk assessment, if only a mental one. This develops an initial awareness of likely hazards and the precautionary measures needed to avoid or reduce them.

Likely hazards can include:

- Threats or violence against filmmakers or people filmed, either during filming or at a later date
- Being discovered while filming covertly or without official permission
- Detention/arrest/kidnap of people filming or people transporting footage



- Failure of security arrangements for information and material during filming and at later point
- Inadequate communication around consent and safety issues of those filmed

Precautionary measures:

- Planning and research
- Suitable equipment
- Clear protocols for consent
- Personal security
- Information security
- Competent people
- Communication arrangements—before, during, after filming
- Emergency arrangements for yourself and people filmed—during and after
- Clear exit strategy

Knowing the situation

There are always many sides to a conflict. Know the terrain, and think carefully about the situation in which the filming will take place. If you are not from the community where you are filming, getting as much information about the players, the relationships, and conflicts is key. Sensitize yourself to complicated relationships within a community, some of which may seem counterintuitive. For example, drug traffickers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, “protect their residents” to promote and protect their trade.

Furthermore, be aware that conditions change. You may have had a good trip to a region a year ago, but things can deteriorate rapidly. Check out current conditions. If you are traveling internationally, there are several resources worth checking out: the US State Department, as well as the British Foreign Office, and the equivalents in Australia and Canada, provide useful travel safety assessments. Consult also with locally based human rights groups who are closer to the ground and ask for their advice. They will usually be able to provide a much more nuanced understanding of the specifics of a situation than the travel advisories.

Even if you are arriving in an area with less preparation than you had hoped for, think about consulting people who will be familiar with the specific threats in different areas—for example, drivers of hired cars or public transport who know the word on the street and

have direct experience of travelling to particular areas. However, remember to be careful before you reveal details of your work to strangers.

You need to understand the law and the authorities of the region you are filming in, as well as the general attitude towards journalists or human rights advocates. What are the regulations concerning photographic and video equipment? What is illegal to film? Are journalists respected or are they a target for violence and harassment? How free is the press? What risks do human rights documentors or social justice campaigners face?

Tia Lessin is a US-based filmmaker:

I was detained outside a prison in New Jersey. They kept asking for the tapes. I refused, because there are no laws against what I did. I knew my rights, and I kept demanding that my rights be respected. Eventually, I was let go, and I got to keep my tapes.

Ronit Avni, who works with Palestinian and Israeli peace workers and filmmakers, recommends paying attention to implicit assumptions:

Equipment could be misunderstood as weapons in places where suicide bombers operate. Understand the milieu you are working in. For example, a Palestinian-rights activist should be cautious strapping hidden camera equipment to any part of their body, as it could be misconstrued as a bomb.

Joey Lozano describes how a smile has gotten him out of tight situations:

It's very important to understand the cultural tradition of people in particular regions. For example, in the Philippines we have this very strong affinity for family. Once, a friend and I were arrested by the army. They were all drunk. "This could be the end of me," I thought. They looked menacing—the alcohol, the smell. They tried to pull us into the building. I said: "No, do it out here." The interrogation lasted four hours. Finally, a staff sergeant came. When he paused, I butted-in to ask if he was a married man: "Where is your family? Do they live with you?" He really softened. He missed his kids. He started opening up with family talk. That saved me and my friend. No matter how menacing soldiers look ... when you mention family they soften up. If they hadn't, that would've been goodbye for me. You really have to know these

kinds of techniques to be with the oppressors. To be nice with them, but not forget your mission with the oppressed.

Planning what to get on tape

Once you have decided you want to use a video camera as part of your work to defend human rights, you should use the ideas discussed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 to map out what you will need, and ensure that the material you are gathering is targeted to an audience and with a goal in mind. With a shotlist—your checklist of the video and audio footage that you want to gather—you can start to assess which filming—of who, what, where—will be more risky.

This risk assessment may also affect the order in which you plan to shoot. High-profile interviews with authorities may compromise further shooting, so try to get lower-profile shooting out of the way first. You might want to interview the police/politicians last—because once they get a sense of what you are doing, they may prevent you from filming anything else. However, as with any strategy, evaluate this approach with others who have experience in the same situation—how quickly will your filming project come onto the radar of authorities, and how will this affect your ability to film lower-profile interviews and higher-profile interviews, as well as your ability to keep your footage secure?

Worst-case analysis

Sam Gregory of WITNESS recommends doing a “worst-case analysis” before embarking on any potentially dangerous project. He suggests a systematic approach to identifying what could happen: “You assume the impact if your worst enemy saw this material. Determine the boundaries of what can and cannot be said. It’s important not to scare-monger, but it’s crucial to be aware of all potential risks.” Imagine, for example, if the tapes were taken via a subpoena in a legal investigation and all your material was available to the other side in a legal case.

Frank Smyth, of the Committee to Protect Journalists, recommends: “Never underestimate the ability of bad guys to torture and kill people. So prepare for every contingency.”

It is essential to walk through all the potential hazards with your collaborators and subjects so that everyone involved participates with full and informed consent. (For more, see “informed consent,” p. 42 below.)

Who should film?

Consider who is in the best position to film in a high-risk context. If someone is well known as an activist, a leader, or a “troublemaker,” they are not always the most appropriate person to hold the camera.

Frank Smyth says the best person to collect evidence is often

someone that no one notices. One of those people who enter a room and no one turns their head. When they leave, no one can remember what they look like, perhaps didn’t even notice they were there in the first place. Obviously, not a charismatic leader.

In an investigatory context where you may need to elicit information from unwilling interviewees, Anand Patwardhan recommends sending out people that your interviewees have never seen to do the talking:

Pretend to be a technician and not the director. Pretend to be a foreign crew. A few gringos into the mix can help, but this differs from occasion to occasion. Play by ear what the best profile is. [In some cases] sounding irritable and bossy [may be] more convincing.

Building trust: Subjects, team, and network

Trust is a central element to your work. It begins with you and the people you film, but it also includes the team of people you work with directly as you prepare to film, edit, and distribute. It also may involve your family, your colleagues, local scouts, and friends, and even international connections to watch your back and to provide support if you are in trouble. Remember trust is always a two-way street—there is no inherent reason for people in positions of vulnerability to trust you. Both human rights organizations and newsgathering organizations are regularly infiltrated by intelligence agencies. They may also not always represent the situations they cover with full integrity or with due attention to the security of the people they work with.

Trust, loyalty, and confidence can be complicated and multi-layered, especially when using video. How do you make an assessment and navigate difficult trust issues without endangering yourself and others?

The following four case studies showcase the importance of trust. The first story involves navigating multiple layers of trust, but primarily focuses on the filmmakers' relationships with their subjects. In the next story, we look at how a filmmaker might unwittingly endanger team-members. The third case looks at how team-members may betray you. Finally we look at how important it is to have a strong network of trustworthy people as part of a larger "team."

Case study: Trust between you and your subjects

In the 1990s wars had devastated the Balkans—and consequently, all notions of trust. Then, to make matters worse, the media descended on the refugee camps, and created a whole new level of mistrust: network producers running around in search of news-clips, in time for the dinner-hour news, "I need a 17-year old woman who has been raped and who also speaks English—quick!"

South African sociologist/documentary filmmaker Mandy Jacobson and her Croatian/American co-director Karmen Jelinic set out to make a film that explored the real story of mass rape behind the "media revictimization" plaguing the area. They wanted to create a film that could contribute to the true reconstruction of people's lives. The resulting documentary, *Calling The Ghosts*, chronicles the journey of two women, Jadranka Cigelj and Nusreta Sivac, childhood friends and legal professionals, who, after surviving Serbian concentration camps, take on the mission to make rape an internationally recognized crime of war. Through their brave efforts, their torturers were indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

But when the filmmakers began, Mandy says,

Trust was a big question throughout the making of the film. We had a lot of justifying to do, to prove that we were different than the rest.

For one thing, we took a long, long time before switching on the camera. Karmen [the co-director] spent seven months with the characters before filming, and we allowed them to interview us, as much as we interviewed them. In fact, we saw their initial mistrust of us as healthy.

"We made all sorts of mistakes all along the way," Mandy remembers. She says that, at first, they brought in an outside cameraman, who had done excellent work in South Africa. But he was not accustomed to the slow pace of this particular project, and got frustrated. "In the end," Mandy says, "the story wasn't locked up. Our central characters

weren't signed on. They weren't ready to film." So the cameraman went home, and the filmmakers eventually found a local Croatian cameraman, who was better suited to dealing with the difficult subject and pacing of the film.

"He turned out to be a great feminist himself, and because he was from the area, the women also came to trust him," she says. But when it came time to film in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, the Croatian cameraman was scared by the implications (going into "enemy territory"), and the filmmakers had to find another crew to shoot those scenes.

The characters' mistrust of the media wasn't the only problem. After Mandy had spent several months in the region, she went to Belgrade and then returned to Croatia. Her subjects did not welcome her with open arms. "My main subject was scared that during my visit to the Serbian capital, I had been duped by the Serbian propaganda."

In advocacy media, the key question for trust, Mandy finds, is "how do you keep your subjects as active participants, from the beginning through to the actual distribution phase?"

Mandy remembers that she felt some real measure of trust had finally been gained only three years into the filming, when the central subjects finally entered the International Criminal Tribunal courtroom in The Hague. "At that moment, they became lawyers again, not just victims. They had found a political context in which to locate their personal pain." The cameras were still rolling, following a story of courage, strength and the power of transformation.

Case study: Interpreter protection

How trustworthy are *you*? Human rights advocates need to consider carefully the implications for the people they interview directly, but they also need to consider the people they employ, or from whom they seek support. This may include local fixers, interpreters, drivers, or even those who provide the team with food or accommodation, especially people working in such situations as war or conflict zones, courts of law, prisons, or police operations. How will you protect these people from the consequences of your actions?

Most of us have heard of "witness protection programs," where investigators and police help protect witnesses who have provided evidence against criminals. But very few investigations—especially those probing war crimes—have properly considered the need for "interpreter protection" for people who provide language assistance

in an investigation, whether it be the police, UN, media, human rights advocates and even, by extension, filmmakers.

According to Roy Thomas, a peace operations training consultant,

Interpreters often know of information that is of value to the intelligence organizations of warring parties. Furthermore, they are associated with foreign institutions that not everyone supports... Unfortunately, these professionals are often abandoned to their sad fate.¹

Thomas examined UN-led investigations in the Balkans and his own experiences in Afghanistan, and found that after the investigators had left the area, interpreters had been threatened, interrogated or even killed by opposing sides of warring factions. He urges that interpreters be considered as vulnerable as witnesses themselves.

Case study: Suspicious soundman

If you are working with a set of people who are recruited for a particular video, make sure to do thorough background checks. If you do not feel comfortable working with someone, do not risk compromising your security. Even within an organization there may be risks involved in sharing too much information on a video documentation project—make informed decisions about who needs to know the specifics of who, what, where and when you are going to film. Trust your instincts and the informed advice of others who have experience.

If you develop uncertainties during filming, take time to assess. Always consider that people may have divided loyalties, be under pressure from, or may rely financially on the very powers that you are trying to bring down.

One filmmaker, working on an exposé of poor working conditions in factories, became suspicious of a sound person whom she had hired at the location of the shoot during sensitive interviews. The filmmaker decided to fire him. He, in turn, refused to give up the audio backup tapes to the crew for several days, but finally surrendered them. Later, government officials began inquiring about the secret shoot, and confirmed that the sound person had passed on copied audio tapes of the interviews to them.

Case study: International "phone tree" network

Having a solid, trustworthy network of people also involves creating local, regional, national, and international support networks that can

help protect you and the people with whom you are working. Who can you turn to in case of trouble? Have that list ready for yourself, your crew, and someone you trust at home. This list should include local, regional, national, and international contacts with current phone (and mobile) numbers. This list should include people who can make things happen in emergency situations. If you are in a high-risk situation you can schedule a daily call to confirm your safety, and ask that steps be taken if you do not check in.

When Frank Smyth, a veteran war correspondent, was abducted in northern Iraq in 1991, his mother had a complete phone list that she called to bring media and political attention to his cause. The list included influential politicians and support groups, which all swung into action. Eighteen days later, Smyth was released.

The right documentation

“Anticipate the worst-case scenario and be prepared for it,” says Tia Lessin, a US filmmaker. “At the risk of being alarmist, be prepared! It is irresponsible to send yourself and a crew out without doing your homework.”

Tia recommends creating a mission checklist. This list should include all relevant information about you and your crew, and a copy of it should be left at home with someone trustworthy.

A good mission checklist will consist of:

- Photocopy of passports and identification cards
- Photocopy of all travel documents
- All relevant medical and insurance information
- First aid kit
- Full itinerary
- Emergency contacts locally and at home
- Map of region, with weather data and latest updates on locality-specific security concerns
- Local emergency info (e.g. hospital, embassy, bank)
- Serial numbers of all equipment
- Money for emergencies (rental car, flight etc.)

In situations of risk, you should reach an agreement with your colleagues about whether you intend to fully identify yourselves, or whether this is likely to generate further risk. If you decide that you identify yourself if asked, carry with you as much documentation

as possible, including passport, visa, and proper accreditation. Ask supporting organizations for letters of introduction, press credentials, and any kind of paperwork that can legitimize your position.

Knowing your equipment

In Chapter 4 we discuss how to choose the right equipment for the project you are working on. Here are some tips to consider in choosing your equipment if you are filming in high-risk situations:

- Understand all aspects of how your camera operates (on/off, focus, light, sound, charging batteries etc.), before entering any potentially high-risk situation where you will need to be focused on the filming. Practice filming in fast-changing situations, and review the “filming a one-off event” section of Chapter 4 (p. 159).
- Practice shooting while not looking and without a tripod.
- Practice filming stable wide shots that capture the whole context of an incident.
- Learn how to use the LCD screen rather than the viewfinder, holding the camera less obviously.
- Consider covering the red record light with black electrical tape, or setting your camera so the red light does not come on. Or carry a small cloth that can cover the body of your camera and protect it from sight as well as from the sun.
- If you are going to film using a hidden camera or from an unusual angle—e.g. with the camera in a bag you are carrying—learn how to operate your camera and get the best-quality and best-composed image you can, given these limitations.
- Consider using a format that is not commonly used in the country where you are filming, so that there will be some delay in reviewing the material if it is seized.

Choosing to go undercover

Going undercover involves taking on a false or alternate identity and essentially deceiving the people you film and/or others around you, with the goal of extracting evidence or information. It can have very serious consequences.

Choosing to go undercover requires making a very careful assessment of the personal risks involved. Undercover filming is likely to increase the risks—during and after filming. Clear emergency and communication backup plans are crucial.

There are also legal risks that either your footage will be inadmissible if you are seeking to use it in a legal context (the criteria for this will vary depending on the country and jurisdiction), or you may face legal action for filming someone or something without consent or permission.

In the end, regardless of how secretive you've been during your shooting, you will need to be completely honest with your audience about how you obtained your footage. What will their reaction be? A backlash may take the form of public disapproval—or the disapproval of your target audience—for perceived illegal or inappropriate techniques.

By going undercover, you may suffer retaliation against your reputation, your person or in a court of law. It may be worth it, to ensure a story gets out—but be aware of the risks.

Case study: Backlash to *The Torture Trail*

The Torture Trail was a 1995 British television documentary, which exposed the involvement of the British government and British companies in the illicit trade of instruments of torture (electro-shock batons) to repressive regimes.

To make his film, director/producer Martyn Gregory assumed an identity as middle-man working for arms dealers. He secretly filmed his negotiations with several British companies, including British Aerospace (BAe). BAe, Europe's biggest "defense" contractor, offered to sell Gregory millions of dollars worth of electro-shock batons—an offer that it later confirmed in writing.

However, after the documentary aired on television, instead of investigating the British role in the arms trade, the British government turned against the messenger: the filmmaker himself. Conservative government ministers in Parliament condemned Gregory, and criminal charges were brought against him because of the methods by which he collected his evidence. Ministry of Defence police arrested Gregory and charged him with "incitement to break the Firearms Act" and "handling illegal weapons." These offences carry a maximum penalty of five years in prison. (The police said they had spotted Gregory handling an electro-shock baton in his film as he mingled with top business executives who were offering to sell them to him.)

Yet, three ministers, including the Deputy Prime Minister, inadvertently undermined the government's offensive against Gregory. They replied to viewers who had written to the government to protest the revelations in *The Torture Trail*. These replies were not protected by parliamentary privilege as the attack on Gregory in Parliament had been. In their letters the ministers alleged that the program was "contrived" and "scaremongering," and suggested that Gregory had persuaded the British companies to "offer to supply goods for the purpose of making a story that otherwise did not exist."

Gregory sued for libel, and won an apology from the government in the High Court. The government also acknowledged that the program was "properly researched," and paid him \$100,000 damages and costs. It was the first and only time a journalist has won a libel action against the British government. Two years later, the Ministry of Defence dropped the criminal charges against the filmmaker.

Gregory spent considerable time, effort, and money fighting to reclaim his reputation. This battle was the subject of his 1996 film, *Back on the Torture Trail*, which examined the British government's reaction to the issues raised in the original documentary and how it had deflected demands for an inquiry. The second film also showed how the British trade in electro-shock batons was continuing as usual, despite the scandal surrounding the first documentary.

The *Torture Trail* documentaries inspired years of Amnesty campaigns against British involvement in the torture trade. Eventually, nine years later, in 2004, the government made illegal the practice of "brokering" the sale of torture weapons that Gregory's films had exposed.

Case study: Not "libel" but fraud

Will the public and even a court of law question your moral authority about going undercover, thereby deflecting from the issue you aimed to target? In this case in the USA, journalists were scrutinized for their undercover methods.

Following up on a tip about unsanitary food handling practices at a major supermarket chain called Food Lion, ABC, a major US network, sent in two reporters in 1992. The journalists lied to get jobs with Food Lion in order to videotape, using a hidden camera, food handling practices at the stores. After the exposé aired, instead of facing the accusations of food safety violations, Food Lion sued ABC for trespass, breach of loyalty, and fraud. It did not sue for libel.

Food Lion undermined ABC's reporting methods with a side-door legal strategy focusing on the falsification of employment applications and the failure of the workers to fulfill their assigned duties. In 1997, the jury supported Food Lion's argument and decided on a US\$5.5 million punishment.

An appeal court eventually reversed the verdict, ruling that Food Lion did not prove all the elements of a fraud claim, especially because it sidestepped a libel case.

Nonetheless, for over five years, the case roused public debates around honesty and transparency in newsgathering methods.

Preparing to go undercover

Key questions

Are you aware of all the risks involved in going undercover? What kind of retaliation may you or others face? Is it worth the potential jeopardy? Might your methods backfire in attaining your advocacy goals? Is there any other way you can obtain the information that would involve less threat?

Going undercover may involve preparing a false or alternate identity, as well as learning how to film covertly. Both can be time-intensive processes that should not be hurried.

Arranging to take on an alternate identity can take a lot of time and effort. What do you need to make your false identity work? How long do you need to maintain the identity, and what do you need to do to keep your story straight?

The length and intensity of the undercover mission will determine how much preparation is required. Sometimes, changing your clothes and "fitting in" is enough. For example, in the Philippines, Joey Lozano pretended to be a miner to get inside a gold mine and document human rights and environmental violations:

I looked like a mine laborer. I wore a dirty shirt, denim pants, a T-shirt, and then I wrapped my camera in a T-shirt, put it in a cement bag, and got through the checkpoints. I did that for about a week. I'd go back in the early morning and then pull out before dark came in the next day. I made friends with some laborers, and then I was able to make my film. It was shown on *Inside*

Story, which was at that time the number-one TV magazine program in the Philippines.

One filmmaker decided to create an official “spin” about the subject of her documentary. She wrote a film proposal describing an innocuous documentary focused on port cities around the world. This got her official film permits to enter and film in normally military-sensitive port areas in Dakar, Senegal, and Guinea-Conakry, where she documented the conditions of stowaways and the trafficking of humans on cargo ships.

Simon Taylor of the international environmental NGO, Global Witness, posed as a “ignorant foreign businessman” as he and his partner traveled the border between Thailand and Cambodia investigating the illegal timber trade for three years. “The more ignorant we were, the better,” he remembers. By acting this way, Simon and his partner were able to ask many more questions without raising suspicions.

To film undercover—either with a specialized hidden camera or an adapted or hidden normal camera—you should ensure that you can handle the equipment in high-stress situations without any hesitation, and that you have practiced filming with the camera. See pp. 31 and 144 for more information.

Entry and exit strategies

There are a number of strategies for getting safe access to areas where you need to film, and for being able to film material in areas where this is forbidden or difficult.

Francisco Bustamente of MINGA, a WITNESS partner in Colombia, enters remote parts of the country by joining humanitarian missions in which the UN and other aid agencies are participating. He also enters with foreign journalists and passes for one of them. If neither scenario is possible, he enters the areas via paths through the jungle or routes little used by the armed groups.

Tia Lessin got her crew into Disney World, Florida, by arming each videographer with a makeshift “family”—each cameraperson was given a fake partner and several kids. They were going undercover to examine labor conditions in the entertainment park, and under the guise of mini-families, managed to pull 12 minutes of material from each camera before getting stopped by Disney’s notoriously tight security force. One cameraman, when stopped by security, began

crying, claiming that they had ruined his family's vacation—buying him enough time to pass on tapes to a waiting production assistant, who got out of the park with the material.

In recent years, several filmmakers have used the cover of being a tourist to get into regions inconspicuously. For example, one filmmaker managed to enter Sri Lanka to investigate human rights violations on the pretext that she was filming an anthropological study of ancient archaeological ruins. Another human rights group got into Pakistan by packing their camera in a car trunk full of mountain gear, maintaining that they were going mountain climbing.

Burma Issues is a WITNESS partner that works with marginalized and victimized grassroots communities inside Burma, where a brutal military regime represses its people. Often their documentors must travel through zones controlled by government forces. Every time they move into a new area, the documentors arrange a back-up rendezvous point in case of fighting. To be less conspicuous, documentors will try to dress like locals, and carry their equipment in bags similar to those the villagers use, hiding the camera underneath food or wrapping it in a swathe of cloth. They also keep the labels on recorded tapes blank, until they are in a safe camp.



Figure 2.1 Woman escaping through the forest from Burma's military (Burma Issues/WITNESS)

Before you enter an area to film you should always know how you will leave, and have an agreed alternative strategy. Plan ahead for your exit. Know what to do with your footage once you've captured it. Know how you and your tapes will get out safely. Sometimes, you may have to separate yourself from your material.

Staying healthy

Whether you are traveling to a foreign country, a neighboring state or province, or working in your own community, health and medical issues are fundamental to staying safe. Consult a qualified medical expert about medical risks in the region, necessary precautions, including vaccinations (proof of which may be required in crossing some borders), and medicines.

Carefully consider the medical threats to those around you, and be prepared to deal with them. Also remember not to underestimate the less obvious threat. Far too often deaths in the field are caused not by war, but by road accidents. Tommi Laulajainen of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, an NGO dedicated to providing medical support in areas of conflict), says a crucial safety concern is vehicle maintenance: "Parts, proper care, and safe driving can save your life."

Irrespective of where you are traveling, a first aid kit containing the following is essential:

- Bandages
- Sterile sutures
- Disposable gloves
- Plastic airway device or tubing for breathing resuscitation
- Scissors
- Safety pins
- Plastic bags
- Flashlight
- Adhesive tape
- Crazy glue
- Antibiotic ointment
- Sterile needles

Be careful using basic medications, including aspirin, as some people respond negatively to certain drugs. Be sure of your own medical information (pre-existing conditions, drug allergies, prescription drugs, blood type) as well as those of your colleagues. Finally, stay

healthy and fit. There's nothing worse than becoming an unnecessary burden to those around you, especially in times of danger.

Insurance and pressure to take risks

Health and travel insurance remain a luxury for many people in the world. However, if you are in a position to do so, ask employers or organizations for support. Is there anyone who might be able to insure you for medical attention or evacuation should you or your colleagues require it?

If you are documenting or reporting on social justice issues it is possible that you may be approached by media outlets to provide material to them as a freelancer. Newspapers, TV, and radio stations may be interested in you and your work in the form of stories and images. Increasingly, media organizations are relying on freelancers because it is cheaper and easier than being responsible for full-time employees.

However, in this situation, know your professional and employment rights, and do not let a media source pressure you into taking undue risks. As Tina Carr of the Rory Trust Fund, a support organization for safety and security of freelance journalists, points out, "This means that you shouldn't ever feel forced by an employer to do anything you do not wish to do. Without proper training and insurance you do not have to take any job you don't feel comfortable with." Tina insists that employers need to take responsibility for the potential human risks involved in any story, whether they are sending out full-timers or freelancers. This means proper training, proper pay, and proper insurance policies.

Filming in conflict zones

Recently, much attention has been given to the dangers facing journalists in conditions of war and conflict zones. Many professional (mostly Western) journalists are now offered training in military-style workshops covering first aid, risk assessment strategies, protection gear (helmets, bullet-proof vests, etc.), dealing with biochemical weapons or landmines, what to do in case of kidnapping, and a range of other skills.

An excellent, free guide, *On Assignment: Guide to Reporting in Dangerous Situations*, is available to download on the website of the Committee to Protect Journalists at <www.cpj.org>. This guide first addresses issues facing the journalist who "flies into" a conflict zone: health and physical precautions, emergency contingency plans,

cultural, comportment, and linguistic knowledge, getting close to a story, battlefield and rules of engagement, as well as surviving captivity. The guide also has a new, extended section on “sustained risk” intended for local journalists who work in the areas they live in. It covers issues of assessing personal risk, creating contingency plans, and risks for freelancers and fixers.

Yet, the biggest danger for many social justice advocates may not be a random bullet in a conflict zone. As we discuss below, those most at risk are usually the locally based human rights activists and journalists who dare to cover the stories no one else will cover. They are often killed in reprisal for their reporting, and the real need is for institutional change, not patchwork solutions of training or involuntary exile.

IN THE FIELD

There are many different strategies for staying safe while in the field with video technology. In some contexts, being open and officially sanctioned, and having the paperwork to prove, it can make things safer. In other situations, catching violations covertly may be the only way to prevent further violence.

Now, armed with your plans, preparations, your training, and your wits about you, you are ready to begin shooting.

The camera as a shield or an incitement?

Sometimes the presence of a camera can save lives. In other situations, people with cameras are targeted for particular attention. You will need to determine how this applies in your situation.

Joey Lozano recalls, with a touch of humor, the challenges he faces:

In many situations, when I go with indigenous people trying to recover their lands, the mere presence of a video camera saves them from outright massacre by armed men who are blocking their way. It happened many times in Mindanao [the southernmost island of the Philippines, where Joey works]. When I go out of the community, armed men just wait for my disappearance and [then] they go back and start shooting people. It's those kinds of incidents that really convince me of the power of video ... especially in these kinds of life-and-death situations.

The good thing is that the video can save you from being shot because those guys who hold the guns would avoid getting shot with a camera. I

imagine the indigenous people would laugh at me because it's like a Western show. It's a quick draw with the other side having guns and me with my camera—and we just wait for each other to shoot. It's a funny situation.

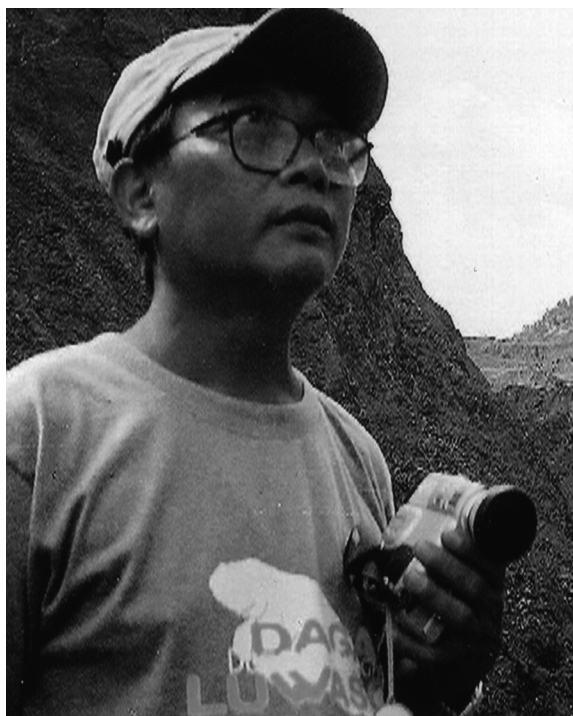


Figure 2.2 Joey Lozano (Necessary Illusions Productions)

On the other hand, at Burma Issues, documentors must travel between dangerous and opposing forces. One of the members says:

It's very dangerous to be caught with a camera, almost worse than having a gun. Government forces don't like filming, and information collectors. They know technology has been improved, and that video can show the truth. The opposing forces also know the power of media.

Anand Patwardhan has seen a shift in reaction to his camera:

Sometimes the camera helps. Police are much better behaved. Not so the fundamentalists these days... They have had too much bad press, and seem

less inclined to live and let live, unless you can pull a fast one and pretend you are one of them. That is not as easy as it sounds.

In the US, protestors against corporate globalization have claimed that people filming demonstrations and rallies are specifically targeted for arrest or harassment by law enforcement officials.

Remembering your mission

Only film when necessary. As Simon Taylor, of Global Witness says:

Don't document everything. You can waste a lot of time. Know what you need. The key lesson is to understand what is worth documenting and what to do with it.

Don't take unnecessary risks. For example, in certain countries simply filming military personnel or even government buildings can be against the law. Why jeopardize a mission with footage that is not relevant or useful? Also, be careful whom you talk to, even informally. Word on the street spreads fast, so remain on a "need-to-know" basis.

Protecting the people you film

Working in partnership with your subjects to ensure their security is the most important consideration in any kind of human rights documentation.

Consent

You must ensure, first and foremost, that the subject understands fully what you are doing and how you plan on using the material. Are they comfortable being associated with the issue, or any issue that may appear on the raw tapes and in the final edited version? It is a good idea to do a "worst-case analysis" in which you discuss the implications of the filmed material being seen by a range of people. See below for more information.

Communication

Be careful how you contact people you are filming in situations of danger or potential danger. Consider using a mediator, and work with your interviewees to determine what will be safest for them.

Location

Be aware of the location you choose for conducting interviews. Is it secure? Choose neutral locations where you and interviewees can enter and leave via different entrances and exits.

Informed consent

Informed consent is critical to responsible video documentation, especially for people who will remain in positions of vulnerability. The key issue in most human rights-related situations is that informed consent protects not only the person filming—i.e. that you have the legal releases to protect yourself against future legal action—but the person filmed, particularly in cases where this person has already been victimized. Informed consent is not a matter of forms and paperwork, but a question of whether someone filmed truly understands the potential impact on them, and consents to the filming and distribution with this knowledge.

As a human rights or social justice filmmaker you should consider three levels of permission and consent:

1. The legal paperwork that TV channels (especially in the US) will require, but which has limited legal standing. The legal language and the written nature of these consent forms may also be difficult for people with limited literacy or exposure to this kind of language.
2. The on-camera consents following explanation of a project. Here a person who is to be filmed hears an on-camera explanation of a project, and then states their name on camera and their agreement to be filmed.
3. The informed consent that comes from understanding possible risks and benefits of being on camera, and making a choice to be there, and to stipulate an acceptable level of risk. This may include the possibility of rescinding permission to use the footage in the future, if the level of risk increases. Usually the discussion around risks and benefits, and the process of informed consent, happens off-camera.

Sam Gregory advises that in remote communities with limited access to television and other media, it may be necessary to explain in detail the potential impact of a TV broadcast, and the fact that what you shoot may end up on TV:

Sometimes people aren't aware of the potential scale of a broadcast, or the impact it may have on privacy. You need to discuss the potential of one million people seeing the material, and you need to discuss the potential downsides, but also how one million viewers may help the cause.

Possible questions for on-camera consent

On-camera consent can include the answers to the following questions:

1. Please state your name and the date of this interview.
2. Do you understand what we are doing? Please, in your own words, explain.
3. Do you consent to your interview being included in this project, including video and (state various forms of media you may use, including print, photos and Internet)?
4. Do you know who may see the final video?
5. Are there any restrictions to using the information you provide us with or video itself that we need to be aware of?
6. Are you aware you can stop the filming process at any time, in order to ask questions or have a time-out?

See Appendixes III and IV for sample personal release forms.

This analysis of the impact of widespread distribution should take place alongside the “worst-case” analysis of the possibility of a person's worst enemy seeing the footage.

You should be upfront about who the audience may be, and into whose hands material may fall once the information goes public. You should advise subjects if you plan to use the material in any other form, e.g. as a still image in a newspaper or a book, or in a written document.

Some people may change their minds later. You have to respect that, and if you can, return to a subject before the images go public to ensure you have real consent. If possible, review the taped material with your subjects, and go step by step through the material and shots you plan to use in an edit.

Case study: Withdrawn consent

Situations and perspectives can change throughout the making of a film, and subjects may decide to withdraw their consent—during the filming itself, or later, during editing—especially after they've seen the rough cut (see Chapter 5, pp. 174–5, for more on informed

consent during the editing process). As an advocate, you need to remain open to the possibility that subjects may decide to withdraw participation altogether, and that it may mean the end of your film—or a sequence or two. Very occasionally, some advocacy projects, like the one described on p. 175, result in withdrawn consent that nullifies the entire film altogether.

When Mandy Jacobson and Karmen Jelinic finished their fine cut of *Calling the Ghosts*, they had a huge argument about whether or not to show their subjects the final film. Mandy, coming from a more classic filmmaking perspective, argued that they shouldn't, and that it would compromise their "editorial control," while Karmen insisted that even though they had the subjects' full, informed consent, this was a moral question, and the participants' final contribution was crucial.

"I am glad I listened to Karmen, for we had to respect the political power of testimony," says Mandy today. It had been two years since they had finished filming, and they were surprised about which segments subjects asked the filmmakers to remove. Two women, who had originally been interviewed (their dialogue had not been used in the final film), asked the filmmakers to remove all video images of them at a refugee camp. This request meant disassembling a beautifully constructed montage sequence.

One of the principal subjects, who had revealed intimate and difficult topics in direct testimony, asked only that one sequence be taken out—that of her parents bantering about her marital status.

In the end, Mandy and Karmen confronted only minor changes. They were changes made on moral grounds, for they had already secured the necessary legal releases. Clearly, the subjects were thinking about rebuilding their lives back in Bosnia, and often filmmakers do not think about the repercussions of their work back in the communities they were filming in.

Obscuring and concealing identity

Some people may agree to be filmed, but ask that you conceal their identity or location. The identity of people on film can be deduced from a number of indicators:

- Their face is visible
- Their name is provided in the dialogue or on-screen

- Their clothing is distinctive
- Their voice is recognizable
- They refer to places, locations, or people who are identifiable and specific
- They are seen in the company of people who can be identified

There are usually two points at which you can hide the identity of someone who you have filmed—when you are filming, and during the editing process.

In general you have more options if you shoot high-quality footage in the field, and then alter it in the editing room. However, security should always be your paramount concern.

If the threat of confiscation of original material—either in transit or from an archived location—is high, it is a good idea to conceal identity during the filming process, and it may be unwise to have subjects identify themselves on camera.

Some subjects may also specifically request that you obscure their identity during the shoot, and not wait till the editing stage.

To do this you can:

- Ask the person not to mention specific names or places
- Ask them not to wear distinctive clothes
- Use strong back lighting to turn the person's image into silhouette, with them either facing the camera or in profile (see Figure 2.3)
- Film out of focus so that the person's face cannot be recognized
- Not light the person's face in a scene
- Film their hands or other part of their body rather than their face
- Film from behind them so that their face is not visible, or film them in profile
- Film them with a cap shading their eyes: eyes are the most recognizable part of someone's face (see Figure 2.4)

Be conscious of asking sensitive questions. Offer to stop the camera at any time, and to replay interviews once you finish filming to give vulnerable subjects a chance to review the material.

In the editing process there are other alternatives. These include:



Figure 2.3 During production, identity can be concealed by silhouetting an interviewee (Oxygen Media LLC/Witness)



Figure 2.4 Wearing non-distinctive clothing and a hat concealing face in an interview on forced labor conducted by Burma Issues (Burma Issues/WITNESS)

- Obscuring faces in the editing process. This can be achieved either be a digitized effect over the whole face or other identifying marks, or by placing a digital bar over the eyes only (see Figure 2.5).



Figure 2.5 A digitized face conceals identity in *Bought & Sold* (Global Survival Network/WITNESS)

- Obscuring identifying marks in the foreground, background or on the interviewee, e.g. a logo on a shirt
- Using sound edits to remove names and place locators.
- Distorting voices to make them less identifiable
- Using only an audio track
- Not showing faces or identifying characteristics, but using other shots of hands or of a non-identifiable interview location (sometimes with the interviewee seen in extreme long shot), alongside the audio track of the interviewee

Case study: Protecting identities in Tibet

Tibet has been called the world's largest prison. For almost fifty years it has been under Chinese government rule.

Robbie Barnett, Lecturer in Modern Tibetan Studies at Columbia University, and one of the founders of the Tibet Information Network, says:

Over and over again, in the last 25 years, we've seen Western journalists going in opportunistically, looking for forbidden footage to "shed light on the repression," while putting local people at risk, and exposing them to potential severe retaliation at the hands of the government

The first such documentary project came out in the late 1980s, when, seeking first-hand eyewitness accounts of torture and repression, Vanya Kewley, a British journalist, filmed and used interviews with nuns describing the torture they'd endured under the Chinese regime. Even though Kewley blurred some faces to obscure their identities in the final film broadcast on British television, other faces were shown openly. Chinese authorities were able to track down several Tibetans, who were then arrested, according to the *Guardian* newspaper. Those arrested included a nun who later said she was tortured.

Prior to the television broadcast, Robbie Barnett says he asked Kewley and the television station a few questions. He recalls:

I asked them how they knew that the women in the film would be safe. "What measures had she taken to monitor their situation after the broadcast?" She told me the women had consented to the interviews, and that was enough for her. I couldn't convince her that so-called "informed consent" wasn't enough in this situation. But the onus was on her to prove why she "needed" to show these interviews. What purpose would it serve? Too often people are persuaded that the film will revolutionize their world, that the film will make a difference if they participate. Unfortunately, that's not the case. The extra impact of revealing their faces is minimal and is rarely worth the suffering they will endure.

Much later, Robbie heard of further acts of retaliation by the government, on a woman who had not even appeared in the film, but was tortured in prison for six months because she had merely provided the filmmaker with shelter during production.

In a similar case in the late 1990s, a Tibetan man escaped from prison in Tibet. He had been imprisoned for more than four years after he was caught working for a German woman making a secret documentary there. He said he had been beaten up and accused of being a spy. Maria Blumencron, the film's director, told the *Guardian*: "For more than four years, I lived in hell wondering what happened to my guide, and I often wished I hadn't done this film."

But Bluemencron never explained why she had needed to put the Tibetan at risk in the first place, notes Robbie: “She could have shot her film in Tibet as a tourist without employing any local people to work with her.”

Recently, a 2004 Canadian project, called *What Remains of Us*, came under fire by human rights groups for threatening the lives of Tibetans. The filmmakers had secretly filmed people in Tibet watching a recording of their exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. It is a political crime in Tibet even to possess an image of the Dalai Lama. The film features close-ups of people’s faces watching a laptop computer recording of the Dalai Lama’s message, and their personal reactions.

The filmmakers and producers (from the National Film Board, funded by the Canadian government) insisted they had taken precautions while filming, and would now place security guards at the public screenings at film festivals, searching for cameras and recording devices at the door.

But critics remain concerned about the efficacy of this method. Robbie Barnett suggests “The security measures at these screenings were always more of a publicity hype than true protection for the people involved in the film.”

“We are very concerned with how this film was shot and the fact that it is being shown,” said John Ackerley, of the International Campaign for Tibet, told the *Guardian*. “The desire to show films like this often outweighs the risk to the people inside. All too often, the filmmakers’ results are disastrous for the Tibetans involved.”

Key question

If confiscated, will the pictures you record seriously jeopardize someone’s life? Consider recording and/or transporting audio only, if any kind of visual clue might compromise your project and the people involved. Audio can now be recorded digitally, and stored on very small discs. Audio can be recorded on your video camera, or recorded and transferred to some cellphones, Walkmans, iPods, handheld computers, hard drives and laptops. Importantly, audio is much more difficult to trace than video.

Conducting a hostile interview

In some cases you may be filming interviewees who are hostile to you, your project or your community. In these cases you should take extra care with:

Timing

- Will the rest of your filming be compromised after you request this interview? (Perhaps you need to do this interview last.)
- Could your interview interfere with other decisions affecting the community?

Confidentiality for other interviewees

- Can you ensure you will not reveal information about other interviewees to your hostile subject?
- Will you be under surveillance after you request/conduct this interview, and might this endanger others?

Legal consents

- Ensuring you have the proper, signed release from your subject is key.
- Ensure that you can stand behind the description of your project that you give to the interviewee. Remember they may be taping the interview so that they have a record of it too.

Securing the interview itself could well be your first problem. There may be limited access to the subject, or you may have to go through others—even public relations departments—to request the interview. You may be faced with delays and silence. At this stage, you may need to convince the subject why it may be in their best interest to have a voice in your project.

You may need to be persistent in acquiring the interview: phone calls, letters, and even personally waiting for someone in their waiting room or office. If you can, be sure to film the process of attempting to gain an interview. The footage can work well in editing, and can be used to demonstrate that you were even-handed in seeking to represent the “other side.”

Once you have access to the interview subject, you need to consider:

- Signing the legal release/consent form *before* you begin the interview.
- *Prioritizing* your interview questions—start with easy questions, but don’t wait too long for the tough ones, because the interview could end at any time.

- There is essentially *one key question* in any interview—the one you want the subject to answer. Do not be afraid of rephrasing your question and asking it again if you feel their answer is not complete. Do not be afraid of repeating it, again and again.

Interview strategies vary. Sometimes it can work to your advantage to sit back and let the subject do the talking. Other times, you may need to try a more confrontational interview approach, in which you are ready with your facts and your questions, to challenge your subject, and not let them get away without dealing with the issues.

Bear in mind different visual strategies: consider including the interviewer in the frame, as audiences will see how the subject is reacting, and to whom he/she is reacting.

Surprise and ambush interviews

You may never get access to your hostile subject using the conventional routes of simply asking for an interview. If the subject is a public figure, consider using one of their public appearances as a platform to conduct a *surprise interview*. For example, a politician may appear at a school opening. Might you be able to get close enough and ask a question or two before, during, or after the ceremony?

Sometimes they will be less willing to dismiss your questions as they want to maintain their public image. By getting them on camera in a public situation you may also be able more readily to hold them accountable for what they say.

Some filmmakers have resorted to *ambush interviews*. This involves “ambushing” the subject while they are leaving their office, or at the airport, or the street. You will need to have the cameras rolling at all times, and in reality, you will probably not get many answers to your questions. Rarely do hostile interview subjects stop and talk to you on the street if they have already declined an interview in their office. But what you can get, if it is not too risky, is visual imagery that clearly says “This person refused to talk to us, even though we tried!”

Security during a hostile interview: Exit strategy

If you feel you or your crew may be under direct physical threat during or directly after the interview, make sure someone on the outside is ready to respond in case of emergency. Ideally, you will have contact by cellphone, but also arrange a deadline by which, if

you do not emerge, a back-up plan kicks in. Who should be called if you do not emerge on time? What is the plan to get you out safely? See p. 35 for more.

Surveillance and routine

In areas where there is a continuous threat of abduction or assassination, change your routine constantly. Where kidnapping is rife, avoid sleeping in the same place twice and eating at the same place at the same time every day. Vary your routes. Do not inform strangers where you are going, or when.

Also be aware of potential surveillance. For example, in Ecuador, Frank Smyth noticed that an ice-cream vendor kept parking outside his house, every day, yet never sold any ice cream. “Sometimes,” he says, “intelligence services are not very competent.” Watch out for new people who appear in your neighborhood. If you think you are being followed or watched, ask a friend to follow you as you take a new route to work, for example, and see if anyone else is also following.

Case study: Informants next door

Burma Issues makes video films about the people’s movement in Burma—examples of their work can be seen on the WITNESS and Burma Issues <www.burmaissues.org> websites. The group sends out Karen ethnic minority documentors to travel to remote communities. These villages are under the control of either the SPDC (Burmese military government) or ethnic minority opposition groups. They also travel to the temporary camps of internally displaced people who have been driven from their homes by the military. Documentors will stay in these sites for up to two weeks to collect evidence of human rights abuses.

Once they are in villages, it is a challenge to find people who will speak out. In areas under government control, the most informed individuals (the ones with an overview of the situation) don’t want to be filmed/seen on video as they will be recognized; while those who are willing to be interviewed tend to be people with specific grievances. People who are most likely to talk include: people who have lost hope because they have been disabled or are elderly; people in areas under ethnic opposition control, and IDPs (internally displaced people), who will tell all, except where they’re located.

People also cannot trust their neighbors. There are informants in all villages, and they will report on the presence of a documentor. In addition, the headmen of villages are obliged to report intruders to the authorities or potentially face penalties themselves.

One of the documentors notes that:

Everything that happens in the village, the villagers should tell the SPDC. The headmen have to tell, because there are people who will tell the SPDC that people have visited even if they don't. When I visit, most times they don't tell, but sometimes in the village there are visiting Burman traders (for example, ice-cream vendors), who are not Karen [the local ethnic minority]—and they may go and tell.

In many cases a Burma Issues documentor will take subjects to a safe place outside the village to do an interview. Another documentor says: "I'll bring the villagers aside to a quiet place or inside a house... Or an opposition soldier ... brings them to me without them being directly linked to me."

People are wary of sharing information with human rights groups. They have done this before with no discernible improvement in their lives. For this reason Burma Issues says it's important to explain why the filming is taking place and who the intended audience is. Burma Issues staff will explain their organization and the video project. They explain the importance of documenting abuses, and promise that if anonymity is requested, they won't show a subject's face.

The important thing for the documentor is to be friendly with the villager, so the relationship between the villager and the person filming will be good, and so we can get more information. Sometimes, when we are in an opposition-controlled area, we spend a week with a villager, celebrate a festival with them, and go and sleep in their house and eat with them. In this way we can increase the relationship with them. But they still worry about what will happen to both the documentor and them if they are caught.

We also sometimes make an agreement with villagers that if someone they don't trust comes in to the village, they are going to lie and say that we are their brother or that we come from such and such a village. The problem here is not in SPDC areas, where Burmans cannot tell one Karen ethnic person from another, but in areas controlled by ethnic-minority allies of the SPDC, as they are also Karen and can recognize us.

Protecting your equipment/tapes

Frank Smyth says: “Try and get the information and the tapes out of the situation of immediate risk. The most dangerous time is when you have the tape.”

Making the right decision about how to protect and securely transport your tapes will always depend on the local situation you face. The scenarios and tips below should help inform this decision. However, if in doubt get rid of a tape, or destroy it, particularly if it contains sensitive information or if it contains unconcealed identities that might jeopardize an individual’s safety or life.

In general, carrying a spare, unwrapped tape readily accessible and half-shot, or fast-forwarded is always a good idea. This tape should contain innocuous material. If you are approached while filming and told to hand over your tape, you substitute the “dummy” tape for the tape in your camera.

One strategy for tape protection is to never let them out of your sight. Tia Lessin says:

When I am in the field, I carry all my material with me. I do not even trust the crew to carry the recorded tapes. I carry them. I don’t ever leave recorded tapes in a hotel room, in a car, anywhere. They are always on me. I have a big backpack. It’s just a good habit to get into.

Joanna Duchesne, a producer and filmmaker who has covered human rights worldwide for Amnesty International, recalls:

A few years ago, we were filming a story of a human rights lawyer who was being targeted for her work in Tunisia. The government was not keen for this story to be told. We knew that our rooms were being searched while we were out filming, and that we were being followed. I carried the tapes on me at all times, and labelled them so that they looked like tourist tapes. We knew that other film crews doing human rights stories had had their tapes confiscated by the police at the airport, so we smuggled the real tapes out of the country and carried a dummy set through customs.

Avoid labelling tapes with actual names, and separate information on people from the tapes themselves if you are transporting them in a situation of risk. Use coding and numbering that only you and someone at home base understand.

If you believe that your tapes might be erased or destroyed rather than used as evidence against you or people you have filmed, consider copying your tapes as soon as possible after filming. This can be as simple as making a camera-to-camera copy between two cameras in the field. In situations where you have a support team around you, consider having a person who acts as a “media-runner” and takes tapes to a safer location as soon as they are filmed.

In tandem with this strategy it is also possible to deploy multiple cameras—one, a larger, more ostentatious camera, and other smaller or hidden digital cameras with no accompanying crew that can search out the candid shots while the larger camera absorbs people’s attention.

If you can’t get your tapes out, it may be better to hide them. During the 1991 Santa Cruz cemetery massacre in East Timor, Max Stahl, a videographer, had his camera rolling while the military carried out atrocities. He then hid the tapes among the gravestones, and put a blank tape in his camera, which was later seized. Afterwards he returned to the cemetery, and retrieved the original tapes to show the world how several hundred people had been gunned down during a peaceful funeral. International awareness and recognition of Indonesian repression in East Timor hugely increased as a consequence.

Being undercover

Being undercover is often a gruelling experience, and remaining confident is key to keeping up appearances.

Joey Lozano notes:

Don’t look too different from the people you are with. Shoot as if it were a natural thing, not giving the impression that you are doing something against the law. Be on alert for any potential danger and be ready to move away when the situation so demands. Being, or looking, too brave is sometimes taken by an enemy as an act of provocation. Wearing a constant smile does wonders.

Remaining flexible and adapting quickly to circumstances can help you improve your techniques. When Simon Taylor was first investigating timber camps on the Thai–Cambodian border, posing as a businessman, he spent a lot of time talking to the “flunkies,” the low-end workers at the checkpoint gates of the camp. He soon realized that it was not only getting him nowhere, it was raising

suspicious. He began to understand the hierarchy. So he started “leaving the flunkies in the dust.” He tried driving straight through the checkpoints, and arrogantly demanding to speak to the boss deep inside the camp. Suddenly, he was getting access to the top level, and getting exactly the information he required.

Case study: Undercover with the mafia

Gillian Caldwell (Executive Director of WITNESS, then with the Global Survival Network, now called WildAid) and Steve Galster (of Global Survival Network) conducted a two-year undercover investigation of the Russian mafia, the sex trade, and the trafficking of women (see also Chapter 1). Their investigation spanned several continents: they filmed in Moscow, Vladivostok, Germany, Hong Kong, Macau, Switzerland, Japan, and Brighton Beach. Their mission was to document all aspects of the recruiting, contract negotiation, transportation, and placement of women in the sex trade.

Before embarking on their investigation, they created an entire dummy company, complete with a press kit, business cards, PO box, phone number, and fax number—all under the name “International Liaisons.” Under this company name, they claimed to deal in foreign models, escorts, and entertainers. This pretext, coupled with the right introductions, gave them access to a global network of traffickers and women involved in the sex trade around the world. They rented an apartment in Moscow, and began their mission.

“The risks were substantial,” Gillian says. “We were doing this in the mid-1990s, at a time when the mafia had ‘pay scales’ to kill people, anywhere in the world.” Should they have been discovered with the camera, simply leaving Russia would not have guaranteed their safety: the mafia’s tentacles reached far and wide. Their investigations involved setting up meetings with the mafia, as well as hiring prostitutes and talking with them about their experiences. Because gender was a factor, and the presence of a woman would have raised suspicions during meetings, Steve did much of the up-front work alone.

Meetings were secretly recorded, mostly with miniature cameras inside buttonholes and ties, and microphones, strapped to Steve’s body. Most of the recording devices and the long-play batteries were sewn into a wrestler’s weight belt. The wires were hidden under several layers of dark clothing.

Often, they had to scout out locations (especially clubs) for metal detectors before entering with the recording devices. But that wasn't the only threat. "In one instance," says Gillian, "while Steve was in a club talking to women, one prostitute sidled up to him and started stroking him. She discovered the recording device on his belt. He said it was a gun. Luckily, in that context, she believed him, and wasn't concerned."

The secret equipment required a lot of maintenance in the field. Steve frequently had to check to make sure the audio wires had not come undone, and regularly went to the bathroom to play back tapes.

They also set up numerous meetings in their own apartment, which they had rigged with hidden cameras. Conducting meetings in the place they were staying had its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it was an environment they could control (including light and noise) but on the other, it left them vulnerable, with no safe place left for retreat.

Meanwhile, Gillian was playing the official role of the company's press relations manager, but often had to leave the apartment during sensitive meetings.

Her real role in the investigation was to keep track of whether they were getting all the information they needed to make their case. She would review all the tapes and steer Steve in the right direction to make sure they got the material they wanted on tape.

It was a partnership and, naturally for Steve, the situation started to really wear on him, emotionally, psychologically. Because I had a backstage role, I had to make sure we stayed on track in terms of the material we were getting. He began feeling I was critical. We really had to find a balance to support each other, and to make sure we were not risking our lives for nothing.

Shooting in dangerous crowds

Filming demonstrations can involve several dangers, including the police/ militia or the demonstrators themselves.

"Compared to the dangers faced by people I have filmed and interviewed on many occasions, the dangers I face are minimal," says Anand Patwardan. But he does face physical danger "from time to time in riot situations. These can, at times, be minimized by using a telephoto lens and being relatively far from the action, but at times it is not possible to be far away and shoot decently."

While filming clashes between demonstrators and police, Paul O'Connor of Undercurrents, a UK-based video activist group, has been threatened with “getting shot, being run over by bulldozers, being attacked by police, army, security guards, and violent people, and being tear-gassed.”

Paul minimizes risks by

having a camera buddy to watch my back. In Washington, DC, during the protests against the IMF, this proved invaluable when police were firing rubber bullets and gas into peaceful demonstrators. With a buddy keeping an eye out for rounds and police aiming at us, I could concentrate on getting the story. Having a gas mask is useful as well. A tight-fitting set of goggles and a mouth mask is probably easier to handle. A bottle of water is essential to wash out eyes.

For further information on filming in protest contexts, sites such as <www.videoactivism.org> provide extensive advice, and there is additional information in Chapter 4.

Communication—via phone and email

Stay in regular touch with someone at home, or headquarters, who knows when and from where you will call next. Consider a daily check-in call.

When using email, consider using encrypted email or use services that are server-based, such as Yahoo! and Hotmail. Use them on both ends, not just for the person in the field. Avoid using names or key words in messages, especially in emails, as they tend to trigger attention and may be noticed by email surveillance systems. Use code-words rather than real names and places.

Frank Smyth advises against encryption systems because government surveillance often looks for encrypted messages on the Internet, and most can be decoded. However, many major advocacy organizations insist on encrypted email. Organizations such as Privatererra <www.privatererra.org> provide information and training on encryption and electronic information security.

Joey Lozano has several communication strategies in place:

I keep WITNESS informed if I am in a dangerous situation so they could immediately stir international attention should something happen to me or the community. It's always excellent to maintain this kind of international relationship. Locally, it's good to establish contact with such personalities

as the bishop or parish priest, if you find out that he is sympathetic to the indigenous peoples' struggle. If not, find others.

Stay in close touch with your team and follow your instincts. Simon Taylor had a simple "buddy-system rule" during an undercover investigation: if either he or his partner ever felt uncomfortable in a situation, whether it was well-founded or not, they would always back out together.

AFTER FILMING

You've successfully filmed the images you need and may no longer be at the location of filming. Now what? How you decide to use the tapes will directly affect the security of you and your subjects.

Safe records, safe tapes

First and foremost, once you have arrived in safe location, make and keep in a secure location good transcripts and logs of your material. Tapes that have no reference material rapidly become of limited value, because very few people will remember what was on them.

There are a number of additional simple steps you can take:

- Keep records safely apart from tapes to protect identities.
- Make sure to keep track of all your copies and label them with clear instructions in case they do go astray.
- Destroy rough cuts of videos where the process of obscuring identities is not yet complete, and ensure that public scripts do not reference identities.
- Keep details of where and how the material can be used—for example, only as evidence, or for private screenings.
- Avoid heat and humidity, and don't rewind the tapes unnecessarily.
- Make back-up copies of important material and store them somewhere else, preferably out of the country, and ideally in a secure, temperature-controlled archive facility.

Case study: Good tape logs mean convictions

Ondrej Cakl, a human rights activist in the Czech Republic, has been following the neo-Nazi movement in that country for over

ten years. Using a video camera, he has documented neo-Nazi demonstrations, meetings, and movements. He has lived in hiding for much of that time.



Figure 2.6 Video shot by human rights activist Ondrej Cakl showing racist harassment in the Czech Republic (Ondrej Cakl)

Some of his most important material only becomes relevant years after he has shot it. For example, when a member of the neo-Nazi organization is on trial for a violent crime, the prosecution needs to prove that it is racially motivated. With his logs, Cakl is able to dig up footage from years before, in which the person in question is attending a neo-Nazi meeting. This evidence becomes a sound basis for proving affiliation with a hate group. Without good logs, he would never be able to retrieve that kind of visual evidence.

Communication after filming

Maintain secure communications (including phone and email) after filming, and follow the same precautions you did when you were in the field. Although you may now be in a place of safety, discuss with your partners and collaborators whether and how communication will endanger those left behind.

Editing decisions and safety

Editing can radically change the meaning and context of material. Consider how “guilt by association” can threaten some of your subjects. Verify that all of the individuals contributing to the video will not be endangered if they are associated with other figures in the video. See Chapter 5 for more discussion on this.

The issue of consent is not a factor you only worry about during filming. There are many layers to consent, and many of them emerge during the editing process. If at all possible, talk it through again with people you have featured to make sure they are aware of any changes in the mission, in the editing, or in the context. Review the video with trusted allies in the local community, or with locally based groups who can provide informed feedback on the current situation and risks.

Who’s in charge of editing? If you are giving your material over to the mainstream media, make sure to include caveats that will protect you and your subjects, and sign a legal contract that will hold the media to their word. Consider all the possibilities of sensationalism, getting the story wrong or half-wrong, and how it could affect the community.

Impact of broadcast or distribution on you

Broadcasting an investigation can also have a huge impact on the person behind the camera. You yourself can become a target of assault or harassment.

Anand Patwardhan says:

There is a danger of being recognized by people who are your political enemies—for example, fundamentalist groups you have infiltrated. The danger can be reduced if you keep a low profile to begin with. Don’t do unnecessary TV interviews. Don’t get yourself photographed by the media too often. When entering areas where danger does exist, go in broad daylight with other media people, so anything done to you would be reported. The major risks come after you have published or exposed your material. My films at times get banned by the state and involve a long legal fight. Even when they become legal, screenings have been disrupted or stopped by right-wingers and fanatics. But for every negative story of this kind there are at least a hundred screenings that went well, were useful. So the moral of the story is that it is all well worth the trouble.

Joey Lozano's most obvious danger comes when he remains in the communities in which he has been filming.

So normally, I stay home for a while—a week or two, depending on the “heat” that I had generated. But before doing this, arrangements are made with the community on what to do when something happens to them. We exchange numbers, give them directions on how to reach me or other people for refuge. If there is a need for me to go back to the community immediately, I don't follow the usual entry or exit pattern. New ones are arranged with the community. We always see to it that only a few would know when I would come or leave, and that I would always have a companion when in the area.

For people in situations of sustained risk, who live in or near the community where they film, sometimes the only way to ensure security is to leave the area or country permanently. Frank Smyth notes that, “Unfortunately, this perpetuates a brain drain, and that causes new kinds of problems in a country.”

Reactions to stress and trauma

Many human rights activists and journalists do not take into account the personal emotional impact of covering violence and violations. They can experience direct trauma from witnessing violations, secondary trauma from working with people who have suffered trauma or violence, as well as counter-transference where their own painful memories are triggered by exposure to trauma. Stress, vicarious traumatization, exhaustion, and burn-out are frequent consequences of exposure to these kinds of trauma. Secondary trauma can also be experienced as a consequence of repeated exposure to traumatic imagery at a remove—for example, by a filmmaker or editor working with violent or disturbing material.

Symptoms of “secondary trauma” are often subtle, and can include irritability, fatigue, depression, cynicism, poor concentration, hyper-arousal, sleep disturbances or nightmares, weight loss or gain, emotional numbing, and feelings of helplessness, anger and insecurity as well as physical pains. Talking about memories with peers or professional listeners can help, and in many cases services exist for survivors of torture or abuse that may also help activists and journalists. Other ways to prevent and treat secondary trauma include taking adequate and regular rest periods (the most critical way to avert secondary trauma in the long term), using relaxation techniques and

taking regular exercise, and developing support relationships with family and friends.

Professional counseling, says the Committee to Protect Journalists, is especially important in cases where journalists have been subject to torture or other forms of physical or psychological abuse, including witnessing the torture of others.

Joey Lozano finds strength in the conviction that his work is making a difference:

It's a very painful experience for me to interview indigenous peoples alive, and then to come back a few months later and see them in a coffin. To me that is one of the most difficult situations I find myself in. But that same experience can be a very powerful medium to show other people and arouse anger, so people start looking into issues that beset indigenous people. In practice, I always feel that I belong to their community, that I am among them and with them. Their commitment to be with me, in return, gives me strength, and my commitment to be with them does the same to them.

Impact of broadcast distribution on people filmed

As Eric Rosenthal, who documents human rights abuses of people in psychiatric institutions around the world with Mental Disability Rights International (MDRI), puts it: "Victims of human rights abuses are in danger. Often, whomever did it to them the first time—once you release an image of that victim—can do it a second time."

Sometimes, Eric has ended up not using certain images at all, for fear of reprisals on the subjects. In one case, he did not have enough evidence to ensure the perpetrators of the crime would be removed from the scene, so he did not use any of the material he had recorded.

When Gillian Caldwell and Steve Galster edited their film, *Bought & Sold*, they decided to digitize the faces of the women as well as those of the organized crime figures. They did this to provide safety to the women and the investigators. "We were doing the investigation to document the methodologies of trafficking," points out Gillian. "We were not doing it to provide specific information to law enforcement."

Beyond safety, other dangers can seriously affect subjects long after images have been used.

Eric Rosenthal notes: "Some subjects fear social stigma once the public has seen them in compromising and dehumanized situations,

such as being naked and institutionalized.” For example, women in Kosovo who have been institutionalized may be disowned by their families, simply for the shame they cause the family for being placed in an institution.

Rosenthal also notes that his organization, Mental Disability Rights International, has been criticized for showing degrading images of people with disabilities, in any context. These critics worry that it only serves to create another danger—the perpetuation of stereotypes. A similar danger exists with using sensational or graphic images—you may induce a fatigued reaction of impotence from the viewer, or the need to shock may have a human cost on the person filmed. You need to evaluate whether this kind of imagery is helpful or harmful, and you have to weigh up and consult with the survivor or victim on the potential damage.

However, Eric Rosenthal also says you need to evaluate *who* is doing the criticizing:

Most individuals with disabilities detained in institutions want their photographs used. It is much more often the mental health authorities who object to our use of photos, and their use of “privacy” arguments are usually a cover for their desire to cover up abuses at their facility.

When Binta Mansaray teamed up with Lilibet Foster to make *Operation Fine Girl*, a film about the use of rape as a weapon during Sierra Leone’s civil war, she wanted to make a firm statement. She did not want to digitally obscure any of the faces of the women and girls interviewed, because she wanted to send the message that the women had done nothing wrong, that they had nothing to be ashamed of.

Decisions are not always clearly right or wrong, but your choices always send out messages that affect people’s lives and reputations in concrete ways.

Case study: One photo, irreversible damage

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) provides emergency medical assistance to populations in danger. On one occasion, the MSF press office arranged for a Western journalist to visit one of its missions in an area of severe conflict between two ethnic groups. The journalist, while seasoned, was not debriefed before leaving the area. A few days later, an excellent article appeared in his national newspaper on the other

side of the world. Unfortunately, the photo accompanying the story showed MSF handing out boxes to only one of the ethnic groups.

A copy of the article and photo quickly made its way back to the region, and within a week, the mission was being harassed and threatened by the other ethnic group, and accused of being “one-sided.” Despite all attempts to prove (using official mission records) that they were handing out materials equally to both sides, the mission had to withdraw the entire operation. One photo in a newspaper on the other side of the world had damaged its reputation irreversibly.

Dealing with sustained risk and long-term impact

As Frank Smyth cautions, “the vast majority of journalists killed in the last decade did not die in the crossfire of war. Instead, they were hunted down and murdered, often in direct reprisal for their reporting.” Similarly human rights and social justice advocates are often at risk in every moment of their lives, not just when they are in the field documenting. Those most at risk are people who live and work in the communities they are investigating. However, most locally based journalists, “non-professionals,” and human rights activists—especially those living in remote areas, –have limited or no access to training and institutional support.

Corruption is the number-one killer [says Frank]. And the reality is that local journalists holding political and economic elements accountable, in isolation, are at enormous risk. In ninety-four percent of murdered-journalist cases, the perpetrators get away with complete impunity. What we need—ultimately—is functioning civilian judiciaries.

The effects of a shoot can last for years, even decades. Be aware of these potential risks, and be prepared to deal with them.

Case study: When people risk their lives to get the truth out

In the Eastern Congo, in 1999, local workers for the Christian Blind Mission (CBM), began warning their head office about a potential disaster unfolding. They telephoned David McAllister, then working for CBM in Nairobi, and told him what they were seeing: severe hunger, villages and crops destroyed, and hundreds of displaced people from neighbouring villages flooding the area. The local CBM

workers, who wished to remain anonymous, very wisely recognized these conditions as signs of impending war in the region. This was the beginning of war in the Congo, whose impact has cost over three million lives to date.

At the time, McAllister says, “We found it very difficult to get the attention of the world press.” So the local CBM workers picked up amateur video cameras (cameras they had been using to make videos for funders) and began filming horrific images of slaughter—the first images of the war in the Congo to get out of the country:

We were able to get this on video—horrific video—and once the media saw the macabre sights of women and babies slashed open with a machete, this is what galvanized action.

McAllister called a press conference to release the graphic video, and all the major media players showed up, including CNN, BBC, Deutsche Welle, and others. Soon, the images were playing on TV around the world. McAllister says:

I know that Mr Mandela [then President of South Africa], he was contacted, and he telephoned Mr Kofi Annan [Secretary-General of the United Nations]. It went to the very highest levels, this I know. These videos went to the highest levels—so it did have an impact.

Meanwhile, back in the Congo, the amateur videographers were in increasing danger:

It became very dangerous for our local colleagues to keep working in the local communities; too dangerous. After a while, they said, “I need to get away, I can’t accept the danger any more.” So the videos won’t show that, but one must remember that the people who filmed this are from the community and are known as the ones who filmed and blew the whistle.

To this day, years later, we are still involved in the long-term care of the people who put themselves at risk in filming. We brought the videographer who took the original footage, and his wife and kids, to Nairobi a couple of years ago. Unfortunately he lost twenty members of his extended family last year [in the war], and so, when we knew his mother and sisters were in a house in Bunia that was being surrounded by members of the other ethnic group, we sent a plane in for them too.

Using international pressure

If there is continued and dangerous pressure on you or your subjects after you have exposed an issue, Frank Smyth suggests that international pressure can be very useful. The politics of shame and embarrassment can still carry weight. “If it’s a country that has a reason to respond to international pressure (due to outside aid or investment) there’s a good chance you can make things happen.” Media attention, and organizations such as human rights advocacy groups, religious groups, and lobby groups, may also help.

TOP TEN SAFETY AND SECURITY TIPS

How did they do it? We asked five seasoned filmmakers and activists to share their own tips, drawn from their professional and personal experiences.

JOEY R.B. LOZANO *uses his personal video camera to assert indigenous land rights, and to investigate corruption and environmental degradation. He also writes investigative features for the Philippine Daily Inquirer. Joey’s investigations began in 1986, when he helped the US investigative program, ABC 20/20, uncover the “Tasaday hoax,” a highly successful fraud to pass off local tribespeople in the Philippines as a newly discovered Stone Age culture. He soon embarked on his own, probing into illegal logging, gold mining and land-grabbing. His exposés quickly made him the object of repeated assassination and abduction attempts, in a country that is one of the more dangerous places to do human rights and media work. Since 1986, over 40 Filipino journalists have been murdered in the line of duty. Joey and Renee Lozano, also a community worker, live in South Cotabato with their five children.*

Joey R.B. Lozano’s top ten tips for security

1. You are not Superman, out to liberate a people. Recognize that you are a mortal, with your own limitations. When you do that, the art of being safe becomes a normal part of planning when you go to a dangerous assignment.
2. Develop trusted contacts at the local, national, and international level. Let them know where you will be, and when to expect your return. Leave contact addresses.
3. Gain acceptance for what you do from your family members or trusted associates. This will give you additional courage to move

on, and shoulders to cry on later, when failures or accidents happen.

4. Always bring lots of identification cards (press card, social security number, etc.) that you can afford to lose but nonetheless are helpful in identifying who you are. Never bring ID that might just increase the heat on you.
5. Develop a happy disposition. This helps take out the fear in you and makes you easily accepted by others.
6. Be culturally sensitive, especially in indigenous peoples' communities. Belong to them, for that is your guarantee that they will protect you.
7. When in depressed communities, avoid being an additional burden (e.g. by demanding better food and accommodation), or else you may end up being given away by your host community.
8. Bring along multivitamins and first aid kit/medicines, just in case.
9. Of course, check if you have your complete equipment and accessories before entering the area and devise means to keep them safe.
10. Act normally when you shoot, not so showy as to attract attention, and be able to easily mix with people around you.

Optional: Believe in divine interventions! *Deus ex machina* ... that is, if you believe in somebody more powerful than human beings.

TIA LESSIN produces and directs social issue documentary television and film. She has worked on three of Michael Moore's films, including as supervising producer of both *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the winner of the 2003 Cannes Palme D'Or, and the Academy Award winning documentary *Bowling for Columbine*. She was coordinating producer of *The Big One*.

Tia won the Sidney Hillman Prize for Behind the Labels: Garment Workers on US Saipan, a collaboration with WITNESS about indentured servitude in the garment industry on a US territory in the Pacific. She has been twice nominated for Emmy Awards for her work on the satirical television series The Awful Truth. Tia was field producer of the PBS series Surviving the Bottom Line and associate producer of the Academy Award-nominated Shadows of Hate, distributed free to high schools around the country as part of the Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance curriculum. She has contributed segments to National Public Radio, NOW

with Bill Moyers and National Geographic Television, and has produced two music videos.

While shooting video she has been detained by the New Jersey State police, Iraqi Secret Service agents, the private police force at Disneyland, and by corporate security guards throughout the US.

Tia Lessin's top ten tips for security

1. Take seriously your own safety and that of your crew. Get the appropriate medical shots for the region and obtain medical travel insurance; carry a copy of your passport, visa, IDs, medical history, and emergency contact info as well as for your travel partners and crew members; use seat belts in vehicles; drink only bottled water when traveling to rural areas.
2. Be discreet. Don't say anything on phone lines that would compromise your mission or your sources. Be aware that conversations in public places may be overheard and act accordingly. Unless it's useful to be identified as a journalist or filmmaker, keep a low profile with your equipment; use regular luggage bags instead of professional cases. Be aware that people you talk with (and employ, such as drivers, guards, crew and fixers) may be questioned about your activities.
3. Protect your confidential sources. Keep your tapes and tape logs separated; don't allow your sources to say their names on tape if they want their identity concealed; write your notes in code, if necessary; be prepared to expose shot film if necessary; park your vehicle away from your source's home.
4. Protect your shot tapes. If possible, carry them with you at all times; don't leave them in cars, hotel rooms or even in private homes; carry them on the airplane or bus or train rather than checking them; arrange to hand off your tapes to a "runner" who can bring them to a safe place; be aware that excessive heat and humidity may damage tapes.
5. Understand the risks. Typically, you have the right to shoot on public property, but know where public property stops and private property starts; if shooting police stations, jail exteriors, government buildings, factories (even from public property) leave that till the end of the shoot; don't take your tapes with you when you film in risky situations.

6. Prepare to be questioned. Review your “story” with your crew and translators in anticipation of interrogation by security forces if you are approached by the police, military, or other “security” forces. When confronted, discreetly eject your camera tape and replace it with a blank or dummy tape, and take down the badge numbers and names of the officers who are detaining you. Always carry the contact numbers for a human rights lawyer who can help defend you in an emergency. Be courteous but firm with local authorities.
7. Know the local conditions where you are shooting. Get weather forecasts, and have maps on hand. Carry a list of local hospitals, international embassies/consulates, and other journalists and NGOs in the area.
8. Legitimize yourself and your mission. Carry press credentials; obtain a letter of introduction/assignment from a media outlet or human rights group such as WITNESS.
9. Maintain contact with “home base.” Have someone there know where you are and have a full copy of your travel documents, contact info, and itineraries. Set check-in times for email and telephone with home base.
10. Don’t go anywhere alone, if you can help it.

ANAND PATWARDHAN has been making political documentaries for nearly three decades, pursuing diverse and controversial issues that are at the crux of social and political life in India. Most recently he produced the widely debated film War and Peace, on the peace and anti-nuclear movement in India and Pakistan. His other films include A Time to Rise in Delhi, In the Name of God and Father, Son and Holy War, and he has won over twenty international film awards. Many of his films were at one time or another banned by state television channels in India, and have become the subject of litigation by Patwardhan, who successfully challenged the censorship rulings in court.

Patwardhan has been an activist ever since he was a student, having participated in the anti-Vietnam War movement; been a volunteer in the Caesar Chavez United Farm Workers’ Union; worked in Kishore Bharati, a rural development and education project in central India; and participated in the Bihar anti-corruption movement in 1974–75 as well as the civil liberties and democratic rights movement during and after the 1975–77 Emergency. Since then, he has been active in movements for housing rights of the urban poor, communal harmony, and the environment, and

in movements against the Narmada Dam, against unjust, unsustainable development, and against nuclear testing in South Asia.

Anand Patwardhan's top tips for minimizing risk

1. Be light and mobile.
2. Have a back-up support team that can bail you out of trouble.
3. Get national and international support.
4. Get decent digital equipment and a good microphone.
5. Learn to shoot and record competently. (There is no sense risking bodily harm to create a program that is too poor in quality to watch.)
6. Give copies of the most important materials you have shot to friends in a safe house.
7. Either be totally anonymous or very famous: nothing in between.
8. If you choose the latter approach, don't let it change your original motivation.
9. Spend forty percent of your time making your program and sixty percent doing screenings. If you don't show your film, not many others will either.

MINGA (*the Asociación para la Promoción Social Alternativa*) is a Colombian human rights organization and part of the WITNESS partner network. MINGA, which means "collective work project" in an indigenous Colombian language, was founded in 1992, and is dedicated to representing political prisoners and families of victims of violence. MINGA works to protect and promote basic human rights by engaging in four projects: legal advice and representation, investigation, community education, and media relations. Its work is focused in the three rural provinces of Colombia: Ocaña, Catatumbo, and south of Cesar. Colombia is a dangerous country to be a human rights activist, and MINGA often films in heavily militarized areas (government forces, guerrillas, paramilitaries), where they are confronted by armed forces, who demand to see their filmed material.

MINGA's top tips for security

1. Have cameras that are discreet and don't call attention to yourself.
2. Be in permanent contact with the leaders of the regions where you are going to enter.

3. Accept the security recommendations of those leaders.
4. Have a bit of luck and guts.
5. If the organization for which you work has security problems in the region where you are going, it's good to have the cover/protection of another organization so that you can pass for a member of it.
6. Know the terrain/landscape before you go in with your crew/equipment.
7. Hide the equipment as much as possible in luggage.
8. Have a mobile communication device (satellite, mobile phone, radio).
9. Always believe that a better world is possible.

GILLIAN CALDWELL is the Executive Director of WITNESS. She is a filmmaker and an attorney with experience in the areas of international human rights, civil rights, and family law. Gillian was formerly Co-Director of the Global Survival Network, where she coordinated a two-year undercover investigation into the trafficking of women for forced prostitution from Russia and the Newly Independent States. She also produced and directed *Bought & Sold*, a documentary film based on this investigation. Gillian worked in South Africa during 1991 and 1992 investigating hit squads and security force involvement in township violence, and has worked in several US cities on issues related to poverty and violence.

**Ten things to keep in mind when doing undercover video work
(in no particular order)**

1. Be clear about what information you are looking for before you go into undercover situations.
2. Be clear about your cover story and have well-conceived materials supporting it where relevant (phone, fax, business card, brochures).
3. Scout the site of any meetings in advance to determine the presence of metal detectors.
4. Be sure key allies know where you are, when, so they can follow up if you don't return when expected.
5. If you require an interpreter, choose very carefully and find someone you trust implicitly.
6. Decide in advance whether it will be a benefit or a burden to admit knowledge of relevant languages (in our circumstances it actually would have endangered the investigation).

7. Keep all batteries fully charged and check periodically during the meeting to ensure that all wires are still connected and sound is being recorded.
8. Stay well fed and well rested so that your judgment is not impaired.
9. Select the genders, races, and nationalities of your investigator(s) carefully, based on an assessment of the circumstances.
10. Try to have a safe and secure space to return to after or in between negotiations.

Kat Cizek thanks:

Ronit Avni	Robbie Barnett	Dhurba Basnet
Gillian Burnett	Gillian Caldwell	Arturo Carillo
Tina Carr	Ondrej Cakl	Sean Dixon
Joanna Duchesne	Steven Galster	Marc Glassman
Martyn Gregory	Sam Gregory	Shabnam Hashmi
Sandrine Isambert	Mandy Jacobson	Tommi Laulajainen
Tia Lessin	Joey Lozano	David McAllister
Liz Miller	Paul O'Connor	Anand Patwardhan
Erica Pomerance	Eric Rosenthal	Paul Shore
Atossa Soltani	Theeba Soundararajan	Frank Smyth
Simon Taylor	Amadou Thior	

NOTE

1. Roy Thomas, "The Critical Link 3: Interpreters in the Community," in L. Brunette, G. Bastin, I. Hemlin, and H. Clarke, eds, *Follow-on Protection of Interpreters in Areas of Conflict: Selected Papers from the Third International Conference on Interpreting in Legal, Health and Social Service Settings, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 22–26 May 2001* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2003), pp. 307–17.