

# Human Rights Training for Security Forces in the Extractive Industry

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A comic book may not seem like an obvious method of training military forces on human rights, but that is exactly what the Fund for Peace (FFP) has used for training in Cameroon. FFP has developed a human rights training program, in partnership with oil and gas exploration and production company Kosmos Energy and Cameroon's Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide (BIR). This training seeks to provide soldiers, or "combatants" as they are known in the Cameroonian elite forces, with a practical understanding of how to ensure that the safety, security, and human rights of the people they come into contact with is safeguarded. The participatory nature of the training – where the combatants took a significant role in crafting the program – and its focus on the practicalities of human security will help to ensure the program's acceptance and long-term effectiveness.

In Cameroon, as in many countries, extractive industry operations are

considered national assets and are thus afforded the protection of state security forces. Such projects will sometimes be in close proximity to local communities, either due to the location of the block or concession itself or because of the conveying of materials and personnel to and from the site. Whenever the circumstances arise for security forces to be brought into contact with communities, there is a potential for conflict. As such, it is critical to ensure that those security personnel are provided with the protocols, training, and equipment that will help to ensure that in such a situation, they will make the most responsible decisions and their actions (or restraint as the case may be) will avert rather than further the escalation of conflict.

Until recently, oil projects in Cameroon have taken place offshore, and the military branch charged with protecting those operations, the BIR, have thus had the majority of their operational experience off the coast. When Kosmos Energy began exploration onshore, it represented both the first time that an oil project in Cameroon had been situated onshore and the first time that the BIR would be brought into onshore oil project protection. Though offshore operations are by no means themselves free of the potential for conflict (after all, the issues involving fishermen coming into conflict with offshore oil operations are well-known), this shift nevertheless represented a significant operational change for the BIR. For Kosmos Energy, this further represented an

increased risk in the potential for conflict between local communities and the security forces.

## The Basis for Human Rights Training

Recognizing the need for robust training for the BIR, Kosmos Energy asked FFP to partner with the BIR in creating and implementing a program that would seek to not only provide learning for combatants on how to operate responsibly and with respect for human rights, but also to encourage combatants to be thoughtful and considerate in their actions and reactions.

All too often in the past, it has been considered adequate to lecture soldiers on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Geneva Conventions and expect them to work out how to apply these sometimes lofty and nuanced ideals to their daily operations. Indeed, this essentially constituted the resources on human rights previously supplied to the BIR. This methodology is akin to throwing the Highway Code at someone who has never been taught to drive and immediately expecting them to be an expert motorist without any practical guidance or on-the-road training. Thus, the FFP program sought to guide combatants on what the application of human rights obligations looks like at a practical level.

As part of this program, the core of which is a classroom teaching module, combatants are provided with comic books that present a practical representation of situations they

may commonly encounter, and the “right” and “wrong” ways of dealing with those situations. In scoping the requirements of the training program, FFP determined that, besides the classroom teaching module, further support materials would be useful to reinforce the messages conveyed by the training and to represent those messages in a practical way. We weighed various options, including creating short films or even ‘community plays’ which have proved successful in other situations such as in programs on reproductive health awareness. However, we elected to pursue comic books, in both English and French, as they would be easy to disseminate throughout the battalion – plays are generally one-off affairs, and videos require hardware with which to view them. Comic books, however, can be taken to post and easily picked up and read by combatants anytime.

The series of comic books focuses on three primary characters – Private Alpha, the upstanding, well-presented, and honorable combatant who makes the right decisions and demonstrates disapproval of irresponsible actions; Private Charlie, the sloppy, disrespectful, lazy, and ultimately irresponsible combatant who creates most of the mayhem and to whom Private Alpha directs much of his disdain; and Lieutenant Delta, the group commander who not only shares the respectability of Private Alpha, but articulates these virtues in his orders to his combatants and who often disciplines Private Charlie for his malfeasance. Underlying all of their adventures is the message that combatants should seek to emulate Private Alpha, look up to Lieutenant Delta, and share their contempt for Private Charlie’s bad behavior.

Combatants are able to follow these characters throughout the series as they deal with situations that are, for the BIR combatants, ‘ripped from the headlines.’ As part of FFP’s scoping, we interviewed both combatants and their commanders to determine the nature of incidents they encounter. This learning was supported by our own observations and meeting with the local communities with whom the combatants come into contact on a regular



The comic book series is entitled "Captain Cameroun."

basis. Thus, the comic book storylines focus on issues such as road blocks, protests, traffic issues, general respect of the population, and dealing with bad actors in a responsible fashion. In other words, combatants are able to see themselves in the comic books and are able to directly relate to the situations the characters encounter.

### **There is Actually More to It than Cartoon Characters**

Given the attention that the comic books have garnered, it is easy to forget that the comic books serve only as support materials to the training program. The very core of the program is a classroom curriculum that underlines the human rights training, outlining the expectations of combatants when it comes to respecting the community and conflict avoidance.

The curriculum discusses basic human rights and the importance of respect for those rights, but it does so from a new approach. Rather than focusing directly on “human rights”, the program instead focuses on honor, respect, and ensuring human security. The program refrains from lecturing combatants on the human rights obligations but rather guides them through how to make responsible decisions in situations they may encounter, the responses to which are grounded in acceptable conduct. Combatants are encouraged to examine situations they have encountered and to discuss how such situations should be most appropriately handled. Further, the training program takes the perspective of enlightened self-interest, in discussing how acting

responsibly improves operational effectiveness and the security of combatants themselves – that is, where a local community feels threatened or abused by security forces, the environment will become less and less permissive for those security forces and thus their own safety, security, and operational effectiveness is likely to be undermined.

Though it may seem odd that a human rights training would be somewhat light on the attention it gives to directly addressing human rights, there is good reason for this. Certainly, it is absolutely critical that security forces respect human rights and that the basic tenets of human rights instruments be upheld. But ultimately, human rights are generally abridged through actions that run contrary to acceptable behavior, not due to any specific desire to undermine those rights. Thus, instead of lecturing combatants on what their human rights obligations are, it is more important to encourage behavioral change and to address the manner in which combatants think and act in challenging situations.

It is fairly unlikely that an individual security officer wakes up one morning and decides the he or she is going to go out and violate human rights. Rather, human rights are affected when security forces, in going about their duties, fail to observe accepted protocols, react badly under pressure, or face situations they are unsure how to deal with and as a result make poor decisions. Therefore, when providing training to boots-on-the-ground combatants, though it is unquestionably important that they be aware of the concept of human rights and what this entails, it is ultimately more important that they understand how to



The comics focus on the good example set by Private Alpha (above, wearing the black cap) and the poor example set by Private Charlie (above, bald-headed). In the example above, a local community has blockaded a road in response to maltreatment by Charlie. As in all the comics, the importance of respecting the community -- and the consequences of not doing so -- are made clear.

respect human rights in daily, face-to-face interactions. From the point of view of security forces, such interactions are going to nearly always center on issues such as honor, respect, and ensuring human security. Thus, as much as the FFP training for the BIR focuses on human rights, the crux of the training is, in essence, how to be responsible actors in potential conflict environments and situations.

## Implementation

For many casual observers, there can frequently be a stereotypical view as to the capacities and activities of security forces in and around extractive industry projects, particularly in developing countries. Though there has been plenty of behavior by such forces over the years to somewhat justify

that perception, to prejudge all security forces in this way is to ignore the capacity, professionalism, and thoughtfulness of many within those forces. By and large, when violence involving security forces does occur, and even where abuses are alleged, it is often a result of poor planning, faulty procedures, and/or inadequate training, not because of some intrinsic malintent of security forces. Such preconceptions are potentially dangerous, as they can lead to improper design and implementation of training curricula that is at once condescending and, more often, inappropriate, dogmatic, and ineffective in achieving purported goals – assuming that stakeholders are even open to engaging with such security forces in the first place.

When FFP first conducted its scoping

mission to evaluate the context and discuss the needs with the Cameroonian military, we were struck by the cooperativeness, openness, and capacity for self-assessment that both officers and boots-on-the-ground combatants demonstrated. Later, as FFP implemented the program through training key Non-Commissioned Officers, who themselves will continue to implement the training program among their battalion, we were further impressed by the liveliness, thoughtfulness and introspection of the discussions that ensued.

The scoping mission was also important in allowing us to better understand the conditions in which the combatants operate, and the challenges they face on a daily basis. It also gave us a unique insight into the local culture. And this is where the

program became a true partnership – while FFP was able to contribute its knowledge and background in general human rights training, the combatants were able to contribute their own operational experience. Through this collaboration we were, for example, able to learn of the deep importance of family to Cameroonians, and thus were able to craft the program to reflect this. Thus, much of the program was tailored to focus on human security from the perspective of the family. Notably, it was this customized focus that truly seemed to resonate with combatants during the initial training workshop.

In the initial train-the-trainer workshop, what was intended to be a half-hour module turned into a two-hour-plus spirited exchange on various scenarios combatants had experienced and what constituted the right courses of action. A common denominator to every situation was an emphasis on de-escalation and restraint. Indeed, it became clear to FFP trainers that just as important as providing those combatants with the training was giving them the opportunity and forum to discuss, peer-to-peer, how to act responsibly in challenging situations that they have encountered or may encounter. The training program, therefore, is not only an opportunity for learning, but equally is a catalyst for discussion and thoughtfulness, a platform that had not previously existed.

## Future Applications

Oil and mining projects around the world have been associated with human rights abuses involving security forces. For this reason, the Voluntary Principles on Security & Human Rights (VPs) were created in 1999-2000 by a group of extractive companies, governments, and NGOs. The VPs revolve around three main themes with the goal of reducing security-related human rights abuses – risk assessment, relations with private security, and relations with public security forces. Underscoring the VPs is a responsibility to ensure, as much as possible, that security forces are provided with proper protocols, equipment, and training to allow them to act in a manner respectful of human rights. Beyond this, the VPs have provided the common language, forum, and platform for dialogue between stakeholders that can make programs like this possible.

The VPs initiative has been a major catalyst for the change in thinking and procedures that lead to projects such as the one in Cameroon. Companies and institutions now more deeply examine the potential for human rights abuses and work more collaboratively to mitigate those risks. Thus, the training program implemented in Cameroon can serve as a model for companies seeking to encourage human rights training with other security forces,

particularly for its focus on engaging combatants to recognize the importance of responsible behavior and encouraging more thoughtfulness in their actions. The training program was also designed in partnership with the forces to be trained and the specific needs of, and challenges faced by, those forces were made central to the curriculum. This ensured that the program is seen as relevant by those whose behavior it seeks to influence. This creates real local ownership of the program, better assuring its continuance.

The Human Rights Training program devised by FFP and the BIR will hopefully continue to provide combatants in Cameroon with a better understanding of their obligation to act in a responsible manner and to respect the communities in which they operate. No one should be naïve enough to expect that no incidences will take place again as a result of such training. The true success of this training will be felt when a combatant, faced with a tense scenario and a difficult decision, makes the acceptable choice, defusing and de-escalating the situation. Such successes are neither easily quantifiable nor easily measurable, but if this type of training provides security forces with the guidance and wherewithal to be more thoughtful in their actions, then it stands to reason that human rights abuses will more easily be prevented.

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