

# EX POST PAPER

## RAN RVT ‘The power of victims of terrorism: how to give support’

### Summary

On 12 and 13 September 2017, the RAN Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism (RVT) Working Group met in Berlin to discuss the power that victims of terrorism have, and how to support them. The aim of the meeting was to exchange experiences on:

- The needs of victims of terrorism;
- The challenges around the decision to start an organisation for victims of terrorism;
- Additional activities that can be launched in support of victims of terrorism and the extent to which victims’ organisations can play a role in this.

The results of the meeting are the base for this ex post paper, which is envisaged as a source of inspiration for new and existing victims of terrorism organisations. The following topics are addressed:

- (i) the aftermath of an attack in three phases;
- (ii) starting an organisation (or not);
- (iii) practical support;
- (iv) group work;
- (v) psychological assistance;
- (vi) cooperation with other stakeholders.

## Introduction

Support for victims of terrorism is paramount as they begin the process of dealing with their new reality after an attack. Given the nature of what has happened to those affected, the needs and challenges are multi-faceted: from practical assistance to psychological help, from group contacts with other survivors to individual talks with professional experts, from remembering loved ones to court cases.

Organisations and networks of or for victims of terrorism can play a key role in providing this support to victims and their families. These networks and organisations generally come into existence at a moment when victims have a lot on their minds but feel the need and/or urge to gather. This paper aims to provide information and practical guidelines for any victims of terrorism who want to launch activities or an organisation. It also aims to provide inspiration for existing organisations.

In the process of recovery, many emotions are involved. These can be applied in a positive or a negative way. Building capacities and resources around victims and their families facilitates the empowerment of victims themselves so that eventually they can provide self-support and then support for other victims. Having become an expert through personal experience, they understand other people who have been in a similar situation and are well placed for helping others. In the meantime, governments, institutions and professional experts also have a role to play. Each has strengths to deploy in meeting the needs of the victims as far as possible, but cooperation is key.

Victims of terrorism are not a homogeneous group. They are a very diverse group of people that respond differently to similar experiences, i.e. a terrorist attack. Consequently, the support offered to them cannot be based on a one-size-fits-all approach. The recovery process – even following the same attack – is very much individual. In addition, needs do change over time as life as a victim of terrorism continues.

## Three-phase model: from the aftermath to resilience

The process through which victims go can be divided into three phases. The first is *the immediate aftermath of an attack*. People realise that they and/or their loved ones were involved in an attack, were injured or were among the casualties. This period is dominated by shock, grief and deep sorrow. And it can also be preceded by a period of uncertainty, when it is not clear whether a loved one has been involved in an attack; this means a desperate need for information on whether someone was able to get away, has been injured, or has passed away. The initial, hectic period is comparable with any other sudden loss of a loved one, or recovery after an accident. However, in the case of a terrorist attack, there will be huge attention from the press and public, as well as additional administrative procedures.

In the second phase, the victims try *to come to terms with his/her new situation*. Individuals must construct a new routine. There are different aspects to this: emotional (mourning), psychological (trauma), physical (recovery), practical, financial (dealing with the costs deriving from the attack and ensuring an income for the future). Some victims of terrorism and their families can respond to these challenges and circumstances themselves. Others will need external help (be it from other victims or professional experts) and support from government services (recognition of victimhood, compensation and so on).

By the third and last phase, victims have *re-organised their lives in a resilient way*. Although the attack and the consequences remain a part of their lives, they cope and continue with their lives. For some, this implies that they use their experience to help others or become active in preventive programmes by delivering testimonials in schools. Others concentrate on other aspects of life.

The three phases do not have the same length for each victim. There are situations in which people who felt resilient again fall back to the second or even the first phase. This can happen when a similar event occurs, in response to the loss of an important person, or a new developing related to the attack (e.g. trials, new facts being made public, the feeling of being neglected).

### Different Member States, different circumstances

There are huge differences between Member States when it comes to facilities and recognition for Victims of Terrorism. Countries that have unfortunately been hit previously by terrorist attacks often have arrangements in place for dealing with the victims, as well as laws (on compensation and recognition, for example). For victims of a country's first attack, there is often more work to do as countries don't have processes in place. This can make it harder to get recognition. The recent EU Directive on CVE (March 2017) instructs Member States to have facilities in place for Victims of Terrorism before an attack takes place. Although the standard of required facilities is limited in comparison with current practice in e.g. France and Spain, having something in place will relieve the situation.

## Starting an organization (or not)

One of the experiences mentioned recurrently by victims of terrorism is the overwhelming attention they receive just after an attack – not only from media, but also from communities and in some cases government. In most of cases, this phase seems then to be followed by a phase often defined as a period of emptiness. After the first initial attention, victims feel that they are being forgotten while they are still struggling daily with the consequences of the trauma – and will probably continue to do so for a long time to come. It is at

this point that victims often feel they need to get in touch with other victims. Victims' priority is to look for a safe place where they can get together; 'safe' means not only a physical space but also a place containing people with whom victims know they can freely express their feelings.

Apart from the intrinsic need to meet, there can be external factors requiring self-organisation, such as contact with the government and institutions, or contacts with the media. For the government, it is easier to communicate with a few interlocutors who represent victims rather than a kaleidoscope of several voices. It is worth remembering that victims within an organisation have not chosen each other, nor will they necessarily be in the same phase of terms of dealing with the past and their new situation: they remain individuals with different personalities, goals and agendas. This can create problems in terms of speaking with one voice and making cooperation within the organisation work.

#### Finding other victims of terrorism

Victims who want to organise themselves often don't know who and where the other victims are. For reasons of privacy, governments do not usually supply contact details. This complication is solved in some EU Member States by giving existing organisations for the victims of terrorism the option to reach out to new victims. An alternative system involves giving new and existing organisations the opportunity to present themselves, including contact details, on a 'trusted' platform so that they can make themselves known to victims.

Not all victims of terrorism will feel the need to be involved (at all or at that point in time). Some recent attacks have led to more than one organisation coming into existence (e.g. in Nice and Brussels). This is not a problem if the associations are not claiming that they alone are representing the victims and have some form of cooperation when dealing with governments and institutions. Public competition does not generally serve the cause of the victims.

Looking at the ways in which victims are currently organise themselves, different approaches can be identified:

- Creating an informal group: very often the starting position but can also become the final form. This works fine for groups who dedicate themselves to self-help. Official representation, recognition by official bodies and funding can however be problematic.
- Working under umbrella victim support organisation: again, an informal group, but linked to an official organisation that can represent the group on official occasions and can supply expertise.
- Joining an existing victims of terrorism organisation: stepping into a functioning organisation (when in existence) offers two advantages: at least some organisational aspects have already been taken care of, and know-how from other victims of terrorism is available. Having to comply with the way the organisation works can be a drawback for some.
- Establishing a new organisation: this form gives members the most freedom to organise the organisation according to their own wishes. An official organisation allows members to apply for funding and to have formal representation. However, it is also the most time-consuming and often most expensive solution. In some countries, federations offer expertise and support from other victims.

When considering an organisation's form, it is good to keep in mind:

- The needs of the victims are key and should be decisive in choices on if and how to organise something.
- A lot of organisations are contacted by experts offering to help put everything in place or to provide services (communication, legal support, counselling and so on). The quality and sincerity of these offers differs. It is advisable to check them thoroughly, if possible with help from other, more established victims of terrorism organisations.
- Depending on the goals more entities can be established apart from the victims of terrorism association (e.g. a foundation for funding of trial cases)
- A good mission statement (who are we, what the goals are, what we do) is helpful to keep the organisation focused on the tasks and goals.
- Clear rules on governance (who is representing, maximum terms for board members (if deemed necessary), whether membership is possible and if so, what the influence of members and so on) avoid future discussions.
- Have clear rules on who can become member. It is possible to use national definitions describing who is victim of terrorism. However, other definitions can also be used (for example by extending the definition to include families or friends). The more relaxed the rules, the easier it becomes for unwelcome influences to join.

Once launched, an organisation must remain relevant for the victims and other stakeholders. Of course, continuation is not a goal, but should be an important objective for as long as people are still in need of the support the organisation provides. As we saw in the three-phase model, needs change over time; activities need to change to reflect this. When considering new activities, the question must be raised of whether the current organisation is fit to lead them, or whether extra partners, resources or expertise are required to deliver the right quality. Expanding too much, too fast without the right skills can be a pitfall as it can negatively influence credibility. The group may however change over time as people who were young at the time of the attack may become curious later in life).

## Practical support

The practical support given to victims of terrorism by organisations ranges from social to juridical, including administrative and mental/psychological support, and making sure individuals know their rights (benefits) and can claim them. The support can be provided to individuals or groups. In the first case, a one-to-one meeting could involve a visit to the victim's home (*safe place*). When working in groups, the size of the meeting should be very small. In some cases, support can also be conveyed online. This can be the case, for example, once a victim has a question or need that cannot be answered by the organisation, or when there is need to gather information for victims.

Quality is key for both services and information. This means having good contacts as well as institutions able to provide first-hand information (not depending on online searches) and a good way of disseminating information to victims or volunteers/staff. Training for the job is another requirement. Some organisations intentionally do not offer certain forms of support because they do not have people with the right skills to provide them. Instead, they refer people to knowledgeable partners. Even when the victim is 're-addressed' somewhere else, it is important to maintain contact with him/her, to follow-up and make sure the need has

been addressed. In some cases, organisations widen their cooperation to academics and other experts in the field.

Diverse tools can be used to ensure the organisation, and/or the group is accessible for victims – these include meetings, public events, a newsletter, a bulletin, a hotline and regular landline, social media groups and websites. The choice of the tool can be influenced by when it is needed, i.e. whether it will be used right after an attack or as part of long-term actions. Journalists can also be involved as messengers, conveying correct information. Some organisations also hope to one day be able to broaden awareness campaigns to include street actions.

#### Practice UK: Tim Parry Jonathan Ball Foundation

The Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Foundation is named after two boys who died during the IRA bomb in Warrington on 20 March 1993. The Peace Centre opened in 2000. Its Survivor Assistance Network (SAN) comprises two caseworkers, one mental health consultant and associates. The target group comprises bereaved families, injured survivors, uninjured witnesses and survivors, families of those affected, organisations, emergency services and first responders. The Network provides a clinically informed model of practice: immediate short-, medium- and long-term support; education and training packages; consultancy, guidance and support to other organisations and professionals; individual and person-centred support; family work; group events and the facilitation of group support networks; memorial and remembrance events. The work of the network in supporting victims proceeds along five concepts (SENSE): stabilisation (focusing on what a person needs), education (promoting and understanding), normalisation (reassurance), support (including family and community support) and engagement (with other sources of support).

## Self-help and peer groups

Self-help and peer groups are often the first to form among victims of terrorism, even before they organise themselves formally. For the most organisations, it remains a core activity. Apart from meetings, online self-help is also very common as it is easy to organise and a relatively cheap way to communicate.

In addition to all the positive aspects that an organisation can help with, such as finding a safe space, being recognised and empathy, there are a few more challenging points that need to be considered:

- Victims take different pathways as they progress through the three phases. An initially homogeneous group may become much more heterogeneous over time when it comes to needs.
- A moderation role is key for the safety of the group and to keep them on track from the content point of view. Moderators can be either external persons or volunteers with the organisation. Having some training and coaching for them is useful.
- A positive atmosphere despite the events the people have gone through is key. Of course, individuals should be able to show emotions, or talk about sad experiences or things that upset them. However, the group should not become a place about revenge, grumpiness, hierarchy of sufferance or rumours. The atmosphere must be safeguarded by the moderator and the group.

Figure 1 Overview of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats for self-help groups. Outcomes workshop RVT Berlin

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Sharing of <i>known</i> traumatic experiences with peers: recognition;</li> <li>ii. Empathy: emotional exchange;</li> <li>iii. Equality: sharing of same final goal;</li> <li>iv. Flexibility due to limited structure;</li> <li>v. Safe space;</li> <li>vi. Sharing of practical issues;</li> <li>vii. Mutual respect and understanding;</li> <li>viii. Empowerment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Fear of being forgotten;</li> <li>ii. Limited structure can lead to disadvantages in terms of equality of members – competition;</li> <li>iii. Re-traumatisation;</li> <li>iv. Differences among victims;</li> <li>v. Goals too ambitious for limited resources;</li> <li>vi. Strengthened sense of victimhood;</li> <li>vii. Lack of professional experience and skills.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Networking with other groups;</li> <li>ii. Social media makes it easier to initiate self-help groups;</li> <li>iii. Involvement of families of victims.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Risk of isolation;</li> <li>ii. Risk of losing historical memory;</li> <li>iii. Lack of resources;</li> <li>iv. Risk of egoistic exploitation by third parties;</li> <li>v. Lack of sustainability;</li> <li>vi. Lack of training opportunities;</li> <li>vii. Lack of deontology.</li> </ul>

## Psychological assistance

Mental support given by volunteers nor non-therapeutic staff members is one of the core forms of assistance provided by victims of terrorism organisations. For some victims, this is not sufficient and professional psychological assistance is then needed. This can be provided individually or in-group and can take place both within or outside of the organisation. Because terrorist attacks are different, individual experiences are different and individuals have different reactions to the trauma, psychological treatment and assistance also must be different, and tailored to the circumstances. If no network exists, as is the case in Spain (see below), an organisation can help find the right therapists. The treatment starts when the victim feels she/he needs it. Of course, if worrying signs are noted by the organisation or family, they can highlight the existence of psychological assistance. Another challenge is acknowledgement by those delivering mental support to an individual that the problems are too huge to be solved by them and therefore referral to a professional therapist is needed. The treatment needs a final objective: the general aim is that victims stop being victims and take back the initiative about their own lives. The focus of the treatment will be on the consequences of the attack.

### Practice Spain: specialised therapists

The Spanish Ministry of Interior has created a network of therapists at national level, who are specialised in dealing with victims of terrorism. The network represents a single contact point for those who might need to get in touch with psychologists specialised in professional treatment for victims of terrorism. The service is free of charge if the following conditions are fulfilled. The individual must have:

- (i) the official status of victim;
- (ii) emotional difficulties directly related to the attack.

There is no geographical limitation of the place of the attack. In addition, Spanish citizens who became victim due to an attack abroad have access.

Relatives are also eligible for the status of victim and family treatment can be necessary.

#### Practice France: Project Papillon

The Project Papillon is an international programme run by the AfVT is dedicated to French-speaking youngsters between 15 and 21 years old who are selected to participate. Groups comprising a maximum of 24 persons meet over six days. Half of their time is spent on specifically therapeutic goals. The programme also includes activities like meetings with the mayor, guided tours, sport activities. The level of the trauma is measured at the start and the end of the programme.

The Phoenix project is similar, based on the same concept, but is dedicated to adults. The programme lasts five days and the groups are usually smaller. The Mimosa project is dedicated to children, including those who become anxious, irritable and sleep-deprived because of information they receive on attacks. The first edition of the Mimosa project included children who did not lose their parents in attacks, while the next edition will include children who did.

## Cooperation with other stakeholders

As already highlighted, victims of terrorism and their families can organise support themselves largely. However, this paper has also emphasised that strategic cooperation with other stakeholders is key. The question of who is best placed to deliver the best help and assistance to the victim must be answered. In the initial phase, this will normally be the government. Gradually the role of the victims and their organisations will grow.

It is important for victims to establish a structured dialogue with relevant interlocutors, for example the government. Ideally, this dialogue should be a one-to-one exchange of information, to the extent to which it involves two categories of stakeholder (victims and government) speaking through an established channel. Indeed, victims tend to receive different information from several sources and this leads to confusion. An organisation can therefore also be an important ally for governmental institutions that want to pass on information to victims and make sure non-reliable information from different sources is filtered before it reaches the victims.

Apart from information exchange, contact will be needed to discuss the victims' needs and how they can be met, like psychological assistance for example, or leisure activities, delivering testimonials at school, and so on. The Dutch Information and Referral Centre (IRC) has established good practice in relation to the establishment of a structured one-to-one dialogue. Its one-stop-shop (physical and online) provides centralised information and services for victims. It was also one of the very scarce examples of such interventions that was evaluated afterwards (by Impact Foundation). Using a multi-method approach that

included actual users of the IRC (victims) underlying assumptions were made explicit and were tested. See box 1 below for additional information.

**Box 1. Information and Referral Centre (IRC) during the MH17 air crash disaster**

The goals of an IRC are to a) provide in a central point for relevant, appropriate and reliable information and services; b) facilitate peer to peer contact and c) monitor relevant information – about needs, problems and high risk groups (at group level).

Following the MH17 Ukraine air crash disaster on 17 July 2014, developments were very fast and a first version of an IRC was online by the evening of 18 July. In this specific case, the list of victims was provided by the police, who are obliged by law to refer victims to Victim Support Netherlands. Stakeholders cooperating within the IRC were the Dutch government, police (family liaison officers/identification offices), Public Prosecution Service (victim officers), Dutch safety board, Victim Support Netherlands and the Impact foundation.

Information provided via the IRC included: victim identification and return of remains; return of personal effects of the deceased; practical support; site visits/wreckage viewing; memorial events, anniversaries, monument; guidance on how to decide whether reactions (mourning, stress) are 'normal'; where to find psychological support or treatment; where to find legal aid; where to request financial compensation for damages (mental, physical, loss of income); where to go for work-related problems (sick leave, reintegration, employment contracts); updates on the criminal and other investigations; how to get in contact with other bereaved individuals, etc. Information that families need has to be relevant and timely, reliable, consistent and complete, and up-to-date throughout the process (e.g. when further information becomes available).

How is information distributed? Initially, family liaison officers in contact with the families convey information directly; later, the information is included in a *closed* part of the IRC, before being released to the media.

The use of IRC was systematically evaluated by Impact. Concerning the three goals of the IRC, the evaluation found that:

- a) IRC is seen as a dependable source of information. The availability of news before being broadcasted by other media was highly appreciated, as well as its news archive function;
- b) Findings were more ambiguous on the facilitation of peer-to-peer contact. Some of the bereaved used the IRC for personal contact, most however, had difficulties sharing via an open forum, and preferred real-life contact;
- c) Generating data on specific needs for additional care proved difficult.

The success of the IRC for the MH17 air crash disaster can be traced back to i) the willingness of the stakeholders involved to put the interest of the victims first; ii) the involvement of partners who were used to working together and therefore trusted each other; iii) the provision of relevant, appropriate and reliable information/referrals; iv) the facilitation of peer-to-peer contact.

A prerequisite for a similar tool is therefore solid cooperation between victim organisations, victims themselves and governmental institutions.