



High Level Meeting on Victims of Terrorism
13-14 September 2007-09-07 Hofburg, Vienna

Disaster Action (DA) Background Information

Survivors and bereaved people from major UK and overseas disasters founded Disaster Action (DA) in 1991, as a British-based NGO. Our members all have direct personal experience of surviving and/or being bereaved in a wide variety of disasters of different origin. These include a number of terrorist attacks:

- the Enniskillen bombing (Northern Ireland, 1987)
- the Lockerbie bombing (Scotland, 1988)
- UT772 bombing (Niger, 1989)
- 11 September attacks (US, 2001)
- Bali bombings (Indonesia, 2002)
- 7 July bombings (England, 2005)
- Sharm El Sheikh bombings (Egypt, 2005)
- Dahab bombings (Egypt, 2006).

The organisation consists of an informal national network. Disaster Action's work has been given significant support by The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, a philanthropic trust, which has funded project work on corporate accountability since our inception and some core funding since 2003. DA receives no funding from government.

DA is not a frontline responder to disaster, but largely works in an independent advocacy and advisory capacity. Our aims are to:

- Offer support to those directly affected by major trauma
- Raise awareness of the needs of survivors and the bereaved in the short- and longer-term aftermath
- Help create a safety climate in which disasters are less likely to occur.

DA's purpose is to represent the interests of those directly affected by major emergency, whatever its nature and origin. DA does not become involved in the campaigns run by the individual family/survivor support groups within its membership, but is concerned with the general principles relevant to any disaster.

Support for those directly affected by major trauma

DA directly offers support and guidance to survivors and the bereaved through our leaflet series **When Disaster Strikes** (which can be accessed on our website, see list below) and through telephone and email contact. In addition, we facilitate the coming together of self-determining family and survivor support groups.

When Disaster Strikes

- :: [The Immediate Aftermath for Relatives and Friends](#)
- :: [A Survivor in the Aftermath](#)
- :: [Injury or death overseas](#)
- :: [Overseas Disasters: the Immediate Aftermath](#)
- :: [Beyond the First Anniversary](#)
- :: [The Return of Personal Property](#)

- :: [Setting Up Family and/or Survivor Support Groups](#)
- :: [Reflections on Personal Experience of Disaster](#)

Advisory service

Disaster Action seeks to represent the perspective and interests of those who may be on the receiving end of a major emergency response, as lay advisers to those responsible for emergency planning and response. DA does not charge a fee for this service, in order to maintain our independence. We are not responsible for the decisions taken or policies devised by those whom we advise.

Organisations, statutory and voluntary services, government departments and agencies with which we work include:

- Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)
- British Red Cross
- Cabinet Office
- Coroners' Officers Association
- Coroners' Society
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office Consular Directorate
- Home Office
- London Resilience Forum
- Local authorities around the UK
- National Health Service
- Royal College of Psychiatrists.

This work consists of offering our views and experience of a range of issues relating to victim identification; viewing, recovery and release of bodies; police family liaison; the inquest process; communication channels; death certification; and support networks and family and survivor support groups.

DA is a member of the steering group that devised the guidance on creation of family assistance centres, *Humanitarian Assistance in Emergencies* (Association of Chief Police Officers – ACPO/DCMS) that can be found at http://www.ukresilience.info/upload/assets/www.ukresilience.info/hac_guidance.pdf

ACPO has set up a further steering group to create national guidance on the setting up and running of rest, survivor and family and friends reception centres, which DA is also part of.

Raising awareness

In addition to our advisory role, we participate in seminars, conferences and training events on the human aspects of disaster response around the UK and in Europe for police, local authorities and the voluntary services. Our objective is to promote greater understanding of the needs of individuals following major emergency, based on our membership's experience of over twenty disasters. The fees secured for members' presentations at such events contribute to the day-to-day running expenses of the charity.

Corporate Responsibility

Our work on corporate responsibility resulted in the publication of a book, *The Case for Corporate Responsibility: Corporate Violence and the Criminal Justice System* in 2000. Since the early 1990s, DA has participated in the consultations that have taken place around the need for new legislation governing involuntary manslaughter, which culminated in the passing of the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Bill in July 2007.

High Level Meeting on Victims of Terrorism, Annotated Agenda

The hierarchy of experience afforded to ‘victims’ by outside agencies can be very difficult to accept. This applies to issues such as society’s attitude towards the death of a brother as opposed to a child, as well as what support services are available where an attack takes place outside a country’s geographic boundaries, when compensation, for example, will be almost impossible to achieve.

Data sharing, trust and confidentiality issues within the response to people’s needs are issues of paramount importance. DA’s views on these topics can be found on our website.

Personal testimony

‘Terrorism vis a vis other violent crimes: We have always understood that what happened to us could have been the outcome of something like a car crash, and so we’ve never believed that we should be treated any differently simply because of terrorism. However, there are some quite key differences:

We have been treated differently by the media, the government and by the public at large, so regardless of our own opinion we have been accorded a wholly distinct identity by external agencies over whom we have no influence. Thus difference has become a matter of fact, regardless of how appropriate this is.

In terms of financial redress and compensation we are placed in a wholly different category from for instance those who were involved in accidents, because we have no access to insurance cover or the possibility of suing those responsible. The UK Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority scheme and private donations via the disaster trust fund.’

Session 1: the Victim

We believe that the *victims* of a terrorist attack are those who have been killed. Those who remain behind, whether physically and/or psychologically injured and whose friends and relatives have been killed, we refer to as survivors and the bereaved. We reject terminology that may be interpreted as disempowering, and do not wish to be labelled as ‘victims’, with the implication of helplessness that this word carries.

Personal testimony

‘We are not the only people connected to 7 July 7 (London 2005 bombings) who reject the label "victim"; if governments and NGOs want to connect with us, they should consider our own description of ourselves as "survivors". A small point maybe, but terribly important to us.’

There is an expectation that we must behave as ‘good victims’, with dignity and restraint at all times, with the ‘bad victims’ being those who give vent to their feelings, push the authorities for a full investigation of what happened, and continue to seek answers to detailed questions.

Session 2: Victims’ assistance programs

Humanitarian support services are now recognised in the UK as an essential element of responding to any form of disaster, including terrorist attack. This acceptance has evolved over the past 20 years of working with the authorities in presenting the perspective of those directly affected.

Disaster Action promotes a needs-driven, user-led approach, which is intended not to be a substitute for self-support, but as an addition to it. It is now recognised that appropriate practical and emotional assistance in the immediate aftermath of a trauma can help to prevent any future mental health disorder, which supports the long-term views and experience of Disaster Action.

The ideal is to enable people to help themselves, while facilitating access to organised support for ongoing practical/medical/financial help for those who may fall through gaps, or for whom disaster-related needs may not become apparent till some time after the disaster. The need for practical/medical/financial help to be available may continue for a considerable period of time.

The most effective support in our view is a practical, signposting service that enables people to access the services that they may require.

See DA's leaflet as follows on longer-term support needs on our website.

Personal testimony

'Following September 11, the Canadians come up with a package to help victim's relatives travel to New York. I approach them for assistance because my brother is Canadian. They reject me because I am not Canadian. Then I approach the British FCO and they reject me because my brother is not British, although I am British. And then I have to fight and complain at the worst time of my life. This story continues to be a problem for some years after 2001. For example, it took me months to get my name on the British distribution list for most essential information, again because initially I was not on the radar on the British consulate. Similar problems happened with my application for financial assistance through the disaster trust fund set up in the UK. Only after I filled out a very long form with most personal information on my salary, savings, and psychological health and so on, I was told I do not qualify because my brother was not British.'

Session 3: Victims in Legal Proceedings

International co-operation through effective exchange of information and intelligence, leading to prevention of attacks and then successful prosecution of the perpetrators is important. Survivors and bereaved feel that in the UK, a criminal inquiry into a terrorist attack will take precedence. It is extremely frustrating to have to wait for the outcome of criminal proceedings before answers can be gained to questions about how and why an attack took place, the events leading up to the attack, and those subsequent to it.

Personal testimony

'My own strong feelings would be about the legal proceedings, where our tragedy has clearly been seized upon as a useful incident to be manipulated for political purposes. The relatives' justifiable need to know the full truth about the disaster has been seen as completely unimportant. In the long run, quite apart from the callousness and cynicism of this attitude, it would seem obvious that establishing the truth about what actually happened (and why) about any disaster is essential to attempts to avoid future incidents.'

Session 4: The Role of Civil Society

Some of our members feel strongly that through financial and other immediate, short- medium- and longer-term support a society shows solidarity with those directly affected by a terrorist attack.

There can be a conflict between the needs of the wider public for reassurance and the restoration of normality, and the needs of survivors and the bereaved to learn the full truth about what happened, for the horror of their experience and that of their family and friends to be acknowledged through public recognition and memorialisation. There is an expectation that we must behave as 'good victims', with dignity and restraint at all times, with the 'bad victims' those who give vent to their feelings and push the authorities for a full investigation of what happened, and answers to detailed questions.