

Toolkit For Ethical Engagement With Survivors



Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights, a charitable organization, supports survivors of human rights violations, defends fundamental freedoms, and promotes democratic values worldwide. The Jiyan Foundation provides mental health and medical treatment, along with other support services, to survivors of trauma, terror, domestic violence, and human rights violations throughout Kurdistan, Iraq, and Syria.

The Coalition for Just Reparations (C4JR), an alliance of Iraqi organizations, advocates for comprehensive reparations for survivors of atrocity crimes perpetrated by ISIS. C4JR provides a safe space for survivors to meet, collaborate, air grievances, and articulate their priorities, promoting practices that are survivor-centric and do no harm.

Cover Illustration: The illustration reflects survivors' discomfort with being placed in the spotlight without their consent, and with having their image and story shared beyond their control.

This publication produced with the financial support of GIZ, in partnership with Civil Peace Service (CPS).

The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights and the Coalition for Just Reparations (C4JR) and do not necessarily reflect the views of GIZ, Civil Peace Service, or the German Government.

Toolkit for Ethical Engagement with Survivors

Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights
Coalition for Just Reparations (C4JR)

2026

Acknowledgements

This toolkit was drafted by Sherizaan Minwalla, a human rights lawyer, founder of Taboo LLC, and consultant with the Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights. It was developed with contributions from Yusra Al-Kailani, a Resilience Programming Trainer with the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) with expertise on trauma informed approaches working with survivors. Dr. Bojan Gavrilovic, Head of Program for Rights and Justice with the Jiyan Foundation and Zoé Paris, Program Coordinator at Yazda, provided extensive comments. Designed and illustrated by **Pin Graphic Company**.

Essential contributions were provided by survivors serving on the Survivors' Council at the Coalition for Just Reparations, who shared their difficult experiences engaging with the media, NGOs, and other actors, as well as their perspectives on ethical engagement and their appeal to be treated with dignity and respect.

Likewise, the toolkit's illustrations and design were developed through a separate co-creation process with survivors. During a workshop led by Yusra Al-Kailani and Wansa Shamoon, a local artist worked closely with C4JR's Survivor Council members to explore how they wished to be represented, and which visual depictions best reflected their views on agency, ethics, wellbeing and engagement with media and other actors.

Also crucial was the support of the C4JR's Ethical Engagement Working Group and the logistical support and technical insights of Wansa Shamoon, Allen Jaleel, Delman Kareem, Zozan Mohammed and Saber Saeed.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Toolkit Roadmap.....	7
C4JR Guidelines and Media Checklist.....	9
Key Terminology in the Context of Ethical Engagement with Survivors.....	12
Do No Harm	12
Safety.....	12
Non-discrimination.....	14
Confidentiality.....	14
Dignity and respect.....	16
Survivor Terminology.....	16
Language and dialect.....	18
Stigma.....	18
Survivor-Centric Approach.....	19
Trauma informed approach.....	21
Informed Consent.....	22
Agency.....	22
Roles and responsibilities.....	23
C4JR’s Working Group on ethical media engagement.....	23
C4JR NGO members.....	24
Survivors’ Council.....	24
Stakeholders and advocates.....	25
Ethically Engaging with Survivors.....	26
Working with interpreters.....	27
An Informed Consent Practice.....	29
Key elements of informed consent for survivors.....	32
Informed consent process.....	34
Protocol to Manage Requests for Survivor Participation.....	36
Facilitating an interview or consultation.....	45
Intervening when ethical issues arise.....	46
Gathering feedback.....	46
Advocacy and raising awareness about ethical engagement.....	47
Annexes.....	49



The media has become one picture – one color – the sole thing they focus on is the idea that there is a survivor who was raped or sold. They forget we are surviving until this moment, but they cannot view us as heroes. They only want to see us as victims.”

– Member of the C4JR Survivors’ Council¹

Introduction

This Toolkit was developed with the support of the Coalition for Just Reparations (C4JR), a project of the Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights. It represents an expansion of C4JR’s media guidelines and efforts to foster an ethical approach to engaging with Survivors’ of ISIS atrocities by the media, NGOs, human rights documenters, governments, and investigators who reach out to C4JR and its member organizations who work closely with Survivors. Survivors who share their stories find their narratives online in published articles, interviews, documentary films, and social media after speaking at public events such as conferences and attending commemorations.

The purpose of the Toolkit is to prepare C4JR members to proactively support and empower Survivors when they are invited to participate in activities where they are frequently asked to discuss past traumatic events surrounding abduction and other crimes perpetrated by ISIS. It expands on the C4JR’s [Internal Guidelines on Ethical Engagement with Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence](#) (C4JR Guidelines) and [Checklist for Media Involvement](#) (Media Checklist), and provides a framework, tools, and a protocol for handling these requests.

1. Survivor, during an in-person consultation in Dohuk, March 2024.

Importantly, the goal is not to replace Survivors as primary decision makers, but to bring these opportunities to Survivors when they are ready, and to empower them through an informed consent practice that is survivor-centered and trauma informed. Additionally, the goal is to strengthen how NGOs themselves engage with Survivors, to improve their response and shift towards a more ethical way of working with Survivors.

The C4JR Guidelines are tailored to the Iraq context², geared towards Survivors from indigenous communities in Iraq that faced brutal violence by ISIS militants and their supporters. Whether from the Yazidi community where women and girls faced intense pressure to relay their stories, or from the Shabak, Turkmen, and Christian communities where Survivors have been pressured into silence, all Survivors have suffered the consequences of stigma associated with abduction, captivity, and the presumption of sexual violence. Many Survivors reflect on the lack of information and unrealistic expectations that led them to share their stories soon after returning from captivity. Those who regret sharing such personal details with the media specifically have later realized that such information is permanently on the internet and cannot be removed.

There can be benefits to Survivors who choose to speak publicly about atrocities, including advocacy that leads to efforts to achieve justice, and to identify the support needed for Survivors. Speaking through intermediaries, Survivors can shed light globally about human suffering and the needs for greater international support. Ultimately, bringing attention to atrocities through different platforms and modalities may contribute to prevent additional violence and trigger calls for justice. The Yazidi case is one example where global attention led to a significant humanitarian response and concrete efforts to document the genocide, such as through the creation of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh (UNITAD) and the Kurdistan Regional Government's Commission for Investigations and Gathering Evidence (CIGE).

Despite the countless hours of testimony provided by Survivors, often repeatedly to different entities, and the extensive evidence that has been compiled of ISIS' crimes, few ISIS perpetrators have been convicted for the crimes they committed in violation of international law, and only outside of Iraq since Iraq has not incorporated international crimes into its domestic law. In Iraq, most of the convictions against ISIS members have been under the Counter-Terrorism Act (No. 13 (2005)).

2. The C4JR Guidelines also draw on previously drafted guidance including The Murad Code, Media Guidelines for Reporting on Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Contexts, International Federation of Journalists Guidelines for Reporting on Violence Against Women. Additional sources for reference include the EU Dart Center Guidelines for Reporting on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and Silence and Omissions: A Media Guide for Covering Gender-Based Violence.

These trials did not respect fair trial guarantees, focused on membership to ISIS rather than prosecution for specific crimes, with the exception of one case that was prosecuted for rape³, did not include crimes of sexual violence as a terrorist act, and failed to include Survivors and ensure transparency. This result thus far has left Survivors disappointed by the lack of justice.

Informed consent provides the foundation of ethical engagement with Survivors. Research⁴ and consultations with Survivors show that media actors, NGOs, and criminal investigators have at times taken information from Survivors in ways that were extractive. Published in groundbreaking research *Voices of Yazidi women: Perceptions of journalistic practices in the reporting on ISIS sexual violence*, were five key findings: 1) Survivors were pressured to talk to the media; 2) Survivors suffered intense emotional distress during interviews; 3) the media exposed Survivors and their relatives to harm by exposing their identities; 4) Survivors felt it was worthwhile to talk to the media in order to help their community; and 5) in the end Survivors were disappointed by the lack of a global response to address their issues of concern.

When asked why they participated, responses from Yazidi women demonstrated not only a lack of informed consent, but in some cases coercion.

Because they asked us. I said no at the beginning, but they said, "This is for your own benefit." So this is the only reason I talked to them. We talked to journalists many times. The camp management office is far. I walked so far two times because they said I have to, even though I didn't want to. They said, "It's good for you." - Survivor, Voices of Yazidi Women

When Survivors are asked to come forward, to tell their stories including publicly disclose their identities as Survivors, it is essential that they fully understand the benefits and drawbacks of such participation. This includes providing realistic information about the potential for benefits to themselves individually and to their broader community. Even more crucial is the discussion of how the information will be used and shared, and what risks to the survivor are associated with the public disclosure.

3. International Bar Association (2023). Justice and Accountability for the Atrocities of Daesh, <https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=JUSTICE-AND-ACCOUNTABILITY-FOR-THE-ATROCITIES-OF-DAESH>.

4. Foster, J. E., & Minwalla, S. (2018). *Voices of Yazidi women: Perceptions of journalistic practices in the reporting on ISIS sexual violence*. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 67, 53–64.

When the well-being and free will of Survivors is compromised in the process of sharing their stories, the outcome can lead to individual harm and re-traumatization. When an individual has gone through a traumatic experience such as sexual violence in a conflict zone, that individual faces many challenges when returning and integrating to their community. They may experience ongoing threats and stressors (stigma, economic and security) especially with families of missing persons where they experience ambiguous loss, complicated grief and cycles of hope and despair.

It is essential to always remember the context in which the telling of these stories is being negotiated, one that is deeply patriarchal and where male community leaders are often the ones pressuring Survivors to talk, or in other cases silencing them⁵. Therefore, it is crucial that C4JR members take their responsibility to understand and apply the C4JR guidance and tools in the Toolkit, because advocating for the ethical documentation of these traumatic accounts can only be achieved from multiple fronts, and NGOs working with Survivors must do their part.



The image represents solidarity, mutual support, and shared hope among Iraqis, set against a unifying rugged landscape of northern Iraq.

5. Consultations with Survivors from the Yazidi, Shabak, and Turkmen communities.

Toolkit Roadmap

This Toolkit is designed to serve as a comprehensive reference guide for ethical engagement with Survivors. It provides detailed guidelines, checklists, and tools to ensure respectful, informed, and dignified interactions. The Toolkit begins with an overview of the C4JR Guidelines and Media Checklist, outlining the foundational principles and objectives. The scope of the Toolkit is then clearly defined, setting the stage for its practical application.

The Toolkit introduces key terminology related to ethical engagement with Survivors to establish a common understanding of concepts such as dignity, stigma, trauma informed approaches, and the principle of ‘do no harm.’ The Toolkit emphasizes the importance of maintaining confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and ensuring Survivors’ autonomy and agency throughout all interactions.

It delineates roles and responsibilities to clarify the contributions of C4JR’s Working Group on Ethical Media Engagement, NGO members, and the Survivors’ Council. The practical sections include protocols for working with interpreters, obtaining informed consent, and identifying and supporting survivor engagement at public events.

To aid in implementation, the Toolkit offers monitoring and evaluation guidelines and standards for dissemination. Annexes provide additional tools, such as consent checklists, evaluation forms, and visual aids, ensuring that the Toolkit is both practical and user-friendly. These annexes are designed to be easily referenced and applied, making the Toolkit a valuable resource for C4JR and its members involved in ethical engagement with Survivors.

Scope of Toolkit

This Toolkit applies to C4JR bodies including the Secretariat, when acting as C4JR’s executive arm supporting Survivors of ISIS crimes, the Working Group on Ethical Engagement With Survivors, the Survivors’ Council, and NGO members when they implement activities on behalf of C4JR and ideally applied to all work with Survivors.

The Toolkit is anticipated to be applied in all situations where Survivors are asked to share their stories, whether this occurs in public or private settings. This includes media interviews, documentary films, conferences in Iraq and abroad, and commemoration events. It also applies to documenting human rights abuses and criminal investigations, academic research, fundraising, co-creation processes, focus groups, consultations, and UN advocacy where C4JR and its members facilitate access to Survivors.



This image recreates a real photograph of Yazidi and Kurdish women—survivors of two genocides across different eras and by different perpetrators—who came together in a powerful gesture of unity, resilience, and shared pursuit of justice.

C4JR Guidelines and Media Checklist

The [C4JR Guidelines](#) establish a comprehensive framework designed to ensure that all interactions with Survivors, including public and non-public activities, are conducted with the utmost respect for their dignity, autonomy, and safety. They aim to prevent the re-traumatization of Survivors and to protect them from potential risks such as stigmatization, retaliation by perpetrators, and misuse of their narratives in the media. The C4JR Guidelines enforce a do-no-harm principle and insist on a survivor-centered approach where the autonomy of Survivors is prioritized.

They require that Survivors are fully informed of the risks and benefits of their involvement and are provided with the right to review and withdraw from the process at any point. The guidelines also cover the need for informed consent, the protection of Survivors' anonymity, and the confidentiality of their information. Furthermore, they address the provision of support services and the careful handling of logistics when Survivors are involved in C4JR activities.

The new media toolkit and checklist expand the C4JR Guidelines with concrete tools and clearly defined steps to take prior to any engagement between Survivors and the media, NGOs and other actors.

The toolkit requires C4JR and NGO members to:

- Request information through the “Requester Form”;
- Evaluate preparedness of potential Survivors internally before approaching them;
- Going through an informed consent process with Survivors and answer any questions; and
- Supporting Survivors to prepare for interviews and events if requested.

It is important to emphasize that these conversations should be part of a collaborative discussion with Survivors. Such deliberations aim to empower Survivors, cultivate their agency, and equip them with the skills to make informed decisions about public engagement media involvement and establish personal boundaries in sharing their stories story sharing.

The Media Checklist aims to guide C4JR members in identifying potentially unethical issues when engaging with the media in work involving Survivors. It includes a comprehensive list of questions to ask journalists and self-reflective questions to ensure ethical standards are upheld during survivor interviews for public events, consultation reports, or media engagements. The questions cover topics such as the framing and relevance of the survivor's input, precautions for their physical and mental wellbeing, risk assessments for the survivor and their community, measures to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, and the survivor's rights and expectations. This guidance aims to protect Survivors' dignity, safety, and autonomy while ensuring accurate and respectful reporting.

Image: Headlines used by Iraqi and global media companies to depict stories of Yazidi Survivors of ISIS



These real headlines inspired the creation of this toolkit, highlighting the need for ethical engagement, particularly in media reporting.

Key Terminology in the Context of Ethical Engagement with Survivors

For the Toolkit to be most effective, it is important that everyone using it shares a common understanding of the key terms related to ethical engagement. These terms are frequently used by NGOs, but their meanings and applications can sometimes be misunderstood.

To ensure that engagements with Survivors are handled in line with best practices, it is beneficial for NGOs to not only familiarize themselves with these terms but also to integrate them intentionally into all work with Survivors. In the context of ethical engagement, C4JR and its members should master how to apply a survivor-centered and trauma informed approach, and to ensure that do no harm principles are applied.

‘Do No Harm’

The four key ‘do no harm’ components include: 1) safety, 2) confidentiality, 3) non-discrimination, and 4) dignity and respect. By applying ‘do no harm’ principles, NGOs and the media should avoid any action that could cause further distress or harm to Survivors.

Safety

Safety includes physical, psychological and digital safety and applies to the Survivors as well as relatives who could be impacted. Evaluating safety requires taking into account several **objective** factors:

- The survivor’s family situation and whether Survivors face abuse or exploitation from relatives;
- The community’s perceptions and restrictions of a survivor’s choices and ability to reintegrate;
- Concerns about retaliation by ISIS, including perpetrators who caused her past harm but also ISIS members generally who might threaten or retaliate against a survivor who goes public;
- Concerns about Iraqi justice and the possibility that ISIS members will be released from prison in the future.

Survivors may be safe in objective terms, yet subjectively, they may not feel secure due to the trauma they have experienced. Therefore, when engaging with Survivors, it is crucial not only to assess the context to determine apparent safety but also to discuss and evaluate the Survivors' perceptions of their own safety. Adopting a trauma informed approach in these engagements is essential to address both the visible and underlying aspects of their security.

Survivor's subjective fear

A 16-year-old girl who was rescued from ISIS captivity was returned to her family living in the Dohuk Governorate in northern Iraq. To protect the survivor from the scrutiny of others in camps, the family chose to live in a remote house shared with extended relatives. Despite being far from the front lines, the survivor feared ISIS would recapture her. During the hot summer months, it is common for people to sleep outside or on the roof of a house, especially in rural areas. However, despite the intense heat and lack of electricity, the survivor slept inside the house every night with her family. Even though she was safe from recapture, the threat felt very real to her.



The illustration emphasizes the central role of family and community in providing emotional support and protecting survivors from undue external interference.

Non-discrimination

A 'do no harm approach' in the context of engaging with Survivors requires taking care to avoid discriminating based on group affiliation or identity or circumstances. This is particularly important when the involved media, NGO, investigator, or other actor belongs to a group that holds significant political or civic influence in the Survivors' environment. It is crucial not to make assumptions about Survivors based on identity or status factors, including ethnicity, religion, disability, educational level, age, or gender.

For example, local journalists from dominant ethnic or religious groups reporting for local outlets may present a specific political agenda, imputing identities or priorities onto certain Survivors and their communities, rather than giving Survivors the opportunity to articulate these things for themselves. This sort of bias is harmful particularly as it perpetuates discrimination and stereotypes against indigenous groups that predated the most recent atrocities and must be undermined for Survivors and communities to feel safe and ultimately integrate with dominant groups once again.

of bias is harmful particularly as it perpetuates discrimination and stereotypes against indigenous groups that predated the most recent atrocities and must be undermined for Survivors and communities to feel safe and ultimately integrate with dominant groups once again.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality protocols are guidelines that safeguard the privacy and personal information of Survivors. These protocols prevent the unauthorized sharing of information that a survivor has disclosed in confidence. Even when a survivor decides to go public with their story, there may be certain details they prefer to keep confidential.

Media actors, NGOs, investigators and others must establish secure procedures, including digital security protocols, for handling sensitive information that a survivor discloses but does not want shared publicly. This includes refraining from, or deleting data from phones or other personal devices, as well as deleting data once it is no longer needed.

Prior to documenting Survivors' information, it is essential to clearly discuss what information they want to keep confidential, and then communicate how their data will be stored, maintained, and eventually deleted. Furthermore, it's imperative that any material collected is never repurposed or used for purposes other than what was explicitly consented to. Once data is no longer needed, it should be deleted.

Common scenario

An NGO holds a workshop for Survivors and invites Survivors to participate. During the workshop, NGO staff take photos using a personal mobile phone of the Survivors engaging in activities. The staff tell the Survivors, “We will share some photos with our donor, but if you are not comfortable with us sharing your photo you can let us know.” The Survivors agree they can share the photos with the donor. At the end of the workshop, a survivor notices that one of the NGO employees published a photo on Instagram. A week after the workshop, another survivor sees a group photo on the NGO’s website. The brother of one of the Survivors became angry with her when he saw the photo online.

There are several problems to identify in the above scenario:

- The NGO did not get proper informed consent (see below) to take photos;
- The NGO asked everyone to give consent in the presence of others, when Survivors may not feel comfortable speaking up and refusing to have their photographs taken;
- The employee used a personal mobile phone which is not ideal, but even so the employee should explain that these photos will be removed from his phone after they are shared with the donor;
- The NGO did not have permission to publish the photo on the website violating the confidentiality of the Survivors who participated in a privately facilitated workshop.
- The NGO employee violated the Survivors’ confidentiality by publishing their identities on her Instagram page.

Example of good practice: An NGO organized an event that they wanted to promote on their social media, however they wanted to ensure that they did not capture images of people without their consent. The NGO provided consent forms to all participants before starting the event, asking them to indicate their preferences about including their images in photographs and videos. Those who did not consent to having their photos taken were identified from the forms. The organizers then discreetly informed these participants and provided a designated table in a corner where they could sit, ensuring they would not be photographed. This practical arrangement ensured that all photos taken during the event did not incidentally include those who did not consent, respecting their privacy and preferences.

By adopting such practices, the NGO can ensure that the privacy and comfort of all participants are maintained, fostering a more respectful and secure environment for Survivors. See Annex E, *Consent to Use Images and Identifying Information for a sample consent form.*

Dignity and respect

It is essential that Survivors are treated with dignity and respect when their stories are gathered, documented, and disseminated. In the context of ethically engaging with Survivors this requires recognizing and upholding the inherent worth and value of each survivor as a human being, regardless of their past experiences. It involves treating them with sensitivity and empathy, acknowledging their agency in decision-making processes concerning their well-being and recovery.

NGOs working with Survivors need to ask about and respect their boundaries, choices, and privacy. Respectful engagement involves listening attentively to their experiences without presumptions, stereotypes or judgment; believing their accounts, and refraining from re-traumatizing actions or language that can cause distress.

Survivor Terminology

When referring to Survivors, it is important to use respectful and dignified terms rather than degrading language. The media, in particular, has sometimes used harmful terms to refer to Survivors, such as “sex slaves” or, in Arabic, *Sabaya*, echoing the terminology used by ISIS perpetrators of violence. Other stigmatizing terms include “children born of rape” and “NGO babies” or “children.” Such language not only fails to accurately depict Survivors’ experiences but also contributes to ongoing stigma and trauma. It is crucial to clarify the terminology that Survivors prefer to use. Some identify with the term “survivor,” while others feel that “victim” more accurately captures their experience and current position. The term “survivor” emphasizes resilience, strength, and agency in overcoming adversity and the journey toward healing and empowerment. Conversely, the term “victim” acknowledges those who did not survive and died due to violations. For those who survived, “victim” speaks to the initial harm and injustice they experienced, highlighting the need for support, justice, and accountability.

In this toolkit, the term “survivor” is used to reflect the resilience and courage of individuals who have faced their families and communities and are determined to rebuild their lives. However, it is important to note that for some Survivors, this term has become stigmatizing and synonymous with someone who was raped by ISIS. In some cases, being identified as a survivor can hinder reintegration into families and communities. Terminology such as “advocate” can capture a survivor’s actions and efforts to seek justice and rights for themselves and other Survivors. Ultimately, the choice of identification depends on the context and preferences of the individuals themselves, who should be given the choice. It is essential to ask Survivors how they want to be identified. In addition to ‘advocate,’ other possible options include human rights defender, women’s rights defender, community activist, or activist.

Suggested terminology

Harmful language (✗) and preferred alternatives (✓)

✗ Slave, sex slaves, Sabaya

✓ Survivors of sexual violence, wartime sexual violence or conflict related sexual violence

Acknowledges humanity and dignity, accurately describes exploitation, avoids perpetrator language

✗ Helpless victims, rape victims/Survivors

✓ Victims/Survivors of atrocities or grave violations

It respects the dignity of individuals by accurately describing their experiences and avoids perpetuating stigma and shame. It recognizes their suffering and resilience without attributing blame or dishonor.

✗ Children born of rape, ISIS childre

✓ Children of conflict-related sexual violence

This term is broad, acknowledges the context of conflict, and avoids explicit mention of “rape,” making it less stigmatizing.

✓ Children born of wartime sexual violence

Explanation: This term places the situation within the specific context of war and uses broader terminology, reducing stigma.

✓ Children born of war

This term is broad and non-specific, which can be less stigmatizing and encompasses a range of situations. It might not fully capture the specific nature of being born as a result of sexual violence. While it is a useful term, it lacks the precision needed to address the unique experiences and challenges faced by children born of sexual violence.

✗ Child soldiers

✓ Children associated with armed forces or groups (CAAFAG)

This term is neutral is less stigmatizing as it avoids labeling the children as “soldiers” or implying their involvement was by choice. The term is recognized and used by organizations like UNICEF, which helps ensure consistency in humanitarian language.

✓ Former child soldiers

Using “former” places the emphasis on their past, indicating that they have left that life behind. It respects their current status and encourages a focus on their rehabilitation and reintegration.

✓ Children used by armed forces/groups

This term highlights the exploitative nature of their involvement, making it clear that the children were coerced or forced into these roles. It shifts the focus from the children's actions to the actions of the armed groups, thereby framing the children as victims rather than perpetrators.

Language and dialect

Language is a reflection of culture and Survivors come from communities that speak different languages and dialects. It is important to ask Survivors if there are specific linguistic ways they choose to refer to themselves, for example in Kurdish, Shabaki, Aramaic, Arabic, and Turkmani. The way terms and meaning is translated can be understood and interpreted differently and it is important to know this specifically when using certain terminology regularly.

Stigma

Stigma, in the context of conflict-related sexual violence, refers to the negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors directed towards individuals who have experienced sexual violence in conflict. This stigma often results from societal norms and cultural beliefs about the value of females being linked to notions of sexual purity, as well as misconceptions about sexual violence. Stigma leads to a spectrum of varying levels of social isolation and marginalization of Survivors.

Stigma at the community level involves collective attitudes and behaviors that a community exhibits towards Survivors of sexual violence. This can manifest through ostracization, discrimination, and even violence towards Survivors. Community stigma can reinforce harmful traditions and social norms, making it difficult for Survivors to seek help or reintegrate into society.

Survivors also experience internalized stigma, resulting from personal feelings of shame, guilt, and fear of judgment. This internalized stigma can significantly impact a survivor's mental health, self-esteem, and willingness to seek support or justice, as they may feel that they are somehow at fault or deserving of their community's negative perceptions. This may lead to self-harm or harm towards others.

Publicly exposing Survivors in unethical ways can have a deeply stigmatizing impact and exacerbate gender stereotypes. In close-knit communities, being identified as a survivor of sexual violence can result in severe stigmatization, leading to a form of social death. This involves the loss of social identity, relationships, and the ability to actively participate in community life⁶.

6. Rose, S. (2023), Stigmatization and Social Death of Survivors of Wartime Sexual Violence, *Global Studies Quarterly*, 3(2), <https://findresearcher.sdu.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/233405334/ksad021.pdf>.

Survivor-Centric Approach

A survivor-centered approach is a way to empower Survivors and recognize their autonomy to make key decisions affecting their lives. Regardless of a survivor's level of education and experience, they are the only expert when it comes to understanding how decisions will impact their life. They understand their communities and the challenges they face, and they also know what risks they are willing or unprepared to undertake.

To take a survivor-centered approach to engaging with Survivors, the media, investigators, documenters and NGOs must prioritize Survivors' choices and perspectives in all key decisions. In practice, a survivor-centric approach recognizes that Survivors must be involved in setting the terms of engagement, including the process of telling their stories, the topics they are comfortable discussing and the information they wish to keep private.

Hypothetical scenario – survivor-centered approach

An NGO works with Survivors in the Christian community. Many people do not know Survivors from this community or what happened to them when ISIS attacked their town, because the community is silent. When a conference organizer reaches out to the NGO to see if they know any Survivors who might be willing to participate in an event commemorating the ISIS attacks, the NGO decides it's best not to ask any Survivors to participate, because they know how the community thinks. They tell the conference organizer there are no Christian Survivors who are ready to participate.

From a survivor-centered approach this is problematic mainly because the NGO made the decision for Survivors without consulting them. The NGO assumed that Survivors would not be willing to risk community condemnation in order to speak about what they experienced, or they assumed Survivors would not be able to evaluate their community and family situation and decide what is best for themselves. What the NGO should have done would have been to gather information about the conference and bring it to Survivors who were interested and ready to consider such an opportunity and discuss the opportunity including the risks and benefits. Once the survivor fully considered the opportunity, the NGO should have asked her whether she wanted to participate and supported her decision without any judgment.

2nd Hypothetical scenario – survivor-centered approach

An NGO is approached by a conference organizer to identify a survivor from the Turkmen community to speak at an event in Baghdad. The NGO collects more details about the conference and contacts a survivor who has previously shown interest in advocating for Turkmen Survivors. Before confirming her participation, the survivor discusses the potential public exposure and criticism with her family, who support her decision to advocate publicly despite the challenges. She then informs the NGO of her decision and her readiness to face her community, expressing that the unfair criticism of Survivors is more distressing to her than remaining silent.

After discussing the risks and benefits with her, the NGO connects her with the conference organizer and commits to providing continuous support throughout the process. They also offer to be present at the conference to assist and support her during the event

In this scenario, the NGO adopted a survivor-centered approach, focusing on empowering the survivor with information and engaging in a thorough discussion about the opportunity. This enabled her to make an informed decision. The survivor was fully apprised of the risks involved, deliberated on them, and ultimately chose to proceed, accepting the risks associated with public exposure.



The illustration validates a survivor-centered approach, where all relevant information is clearly shared with survivors and their close networks before informed consent is given.

Re-traumatization

Various factors can resurface trauma and affect a person's mind, emotions, and body. These may include storytelling, direct questions, hearing others' stories, an unsafe environment, harassment, or a lack of understanding and empathy. Survivors might react and feel oppressed if they are not provided with enough time to prepare for interviews and events. Even though time constraints might affect all participants, a survivor could potentially feel especially silenced and oppressed under such circumstances. To avoid re-traumatization, people engaging with Survivors should adopt a trauma informed approach to their work and practice.

Trauma informed approach

A trauma informed approach within the context of ethical engagement with Survivors recognizes the impact of trauma on the lives of individuals and prioritizes their psychological safety and integrated well-being, focusing on body, social and psychological factors. It acknowledges that the distress Survivors have experienced and can relive when recounting events. It also recognizes how trauma affects memory and can limit the ability of Survivors to retell events. It aims to ensure Survivors are not re-traumatized when engaging with them.

In the context of ethical engagement with Survivors, a trauma informed approach ensures that all interactions, policies, and practices are sensitive to the Survivors' experiences and needs. It fosters an environment of safety, trust, and empowerment, where Survivors feel respected, heard, and validated, taking into consideration cultural, historical, and gender dynamics. This approach involves understanding the potential triggers that resurface trauma, sensitivities related to trauma, and avoiding actions or language that may re-traumatize or further harm Survivors.

A trauma informed program, organization, or a system that realizes the widespread impact of trauma, and understands potential paths for recovery, recognizes the signs of trauma in Survivors, families, staff and others involved. They respond by integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices and actively resist re-traumatization.

Through a trauma informed approach, it is essential to explicitly give Survivors choices to decide what to discuss and share, and how. It does not necessarily mean that Survivors can never talk about difficult things they experienced, but it does mean that when they decide to do so that it has been the result of a process through which they understand what to expect, and that they are supported by a mental health professional or advocate if that is what would help them to be more comfortable.

From a trauma informed perspective, it is safer to work with Survivors who have received MHPSS support that has focused on trauma, as they will be more supported and capable of regulating themselves. These interventions should include:

- Psychoeducation about the signs and symptoms and trauma and raising self-awareness of the person’s own physiological and psychological responses.
- Provision of healthy coping strategies for coping with symptoms of trauma.
- An opportunity to talk about some of the painful memories and experiences in a therapeutic context.

However, it is also important to note that Survivors can develop resilience and heal over time, and this comes from:

- A sense of safety and security.
- Meaningful and supportive social connections.
- Having a meaningful world view and experiences.
- Solidarity as part of a Survivors’ group.
- Coping skills and strategies.
- A sense of justice.
- Being active.

See Annex D, Trauma informed engagement checklist for additional concrete guidance for working with Survivors from a trauma informed approach.

Informed Consent

Informed consent for Survivors participating in media interviews, documentaries, conferences, and other public engagements is a fundamental ethical practice that ensures the rights, autonomy, and well-being of Survivors are prioritized. It involves a clear, comprehensive, and voluntary agreement by Survivors to participate, having fully understood the nature, purpose, and potential consequences and risks of their involvement.

Agency

In the context of Survivors and ethical engagement, agency refers to the survivor’s ability to make their own choices and act independently, embodying their right to direct their own lives and make decisions about their involvement in media, advocacy, or legal matters. Agency ensures that Survivors are seen as autonomous individuals, capable of making informed decisions about their participation in various activities. Promoting agency involves recognizing Survivors as the authorities on their own experiences and ensuring they feel empowered, supported, and free to decline or withdraw from engagements at any time. This approach is crucial to prevent further victimization and to support Survivors’ self-determination.

Roles and responsibilities

The Toolkit is designed for use by C4JR as represented here by the Working Group and the Survivors' Council, as well as members that are part of the C4JR alliance. This section provides an overview of the key roles these stakeholders play in collaborating to implement media guidelines and utilize the Toolkit in support of Survivors. These Survivors may be approached by the media, NGOs, governments, or other entities for interviews, consultations, or participation in public events.

C4JR's Working Group on ethical media engagement

C4JR developed several thematic working groups for NGO members to co-develop and implement actions. C4JR's Working Group fulfills several pivotal functions. It operates as a central hub for its member organizations, providing essential information, guidance, and support to implementing C4JR's media policies expressed through its Guidelines, Media Checklist, and this Toolkit.

In relation to the Toolkit, C4JR's working group on ethical engagement with Survivors will spearhead the application and operationalization of the media guidelines. This includes supporting trainings on how to implement the Toolkit and ensuring comprehensive understanding and application of the Toolkit by all members. These efforts are critical in empowering members to represent Survivors' rights effectively and to uphold ethical standards first in their own interactions with Survivors, and when supporting Survivors to engage with the media, and other NGOs.



The image shows a box-ticking scene, using pictograms to convey which actions are allowed and which are not when applying a survivor-centered approach to a concrete situation.

Moreover, C4JR's Working Group is committed to supporting Survivors in amplifying their messages by preparing them for in-person engagements, media interviews, and other public events. The Working Group may support the creation of video content as another way to communicate widely about Survivors' views on how their identities and stories should be handled by the media, NGOs, government actors, and the wider community.

Ultimately, the C4JR Working Group's role is multifaceted with leading the Toolkit's deployment while simultaneously supporting its member organizations to understand and apply information, tools, and mechanisms included.

C4JR NGO members

NGO members of the C4JR alliance have a significant role as they often work directly with Survivors, providing essential services, and are the first point of contact for media interactions. It is common for NGOs to organize and participate in events that involve Survivors, where ethical considerations are paramount.

As members of C4JR, NGOs are expected to adhere to established best practices and principles, such as the 'Do No Harm' policy and a survivor-centric approach. It is imperative that these organizations commit to upholding the guidelines set by C4JR, engage in training sessions designed to enhance their understanding and use of the Toolkit, and actively advocate for respectful media engagement.

These member organizations are also tasked with acting as guardians of ethical practices, ensuring that Survivors' rights are respected in public forums and events, especially in situations where individuals might not feel empowered to voice their concerns. This involves not only applying the Toolkit's protocols within their operations but also promoting its principles within the broader community of events and activities involving Survivors. In essence, NGOs are to be both practitioners of these standards and advocates for their application across the spectrum of survivor-related interactions.

Survivors' Council

The Survivors' Council consists of individuals from various communities who have endured the brutality of ISIS captivity. These Survivors bring diverse experiences and viewpoints on engagement with the media, NGOs, and other actors. For instance, members from the Yazidi community have been subject to extensive media coverage, while those from the Shabak, Turkmen, or Christian communities have often faced the dual challenges of being overlooked by the media and coping with being silenced by their own communities.

The Survivors' Council's key function is to provide insight and critique on C4JR's work advocating for reparations, including providing their input on the Toolkit materials and their dissemination.

Participation in training sessions is completely voluntary, recognizing the complex pressures Survivors face, including scrutiny from their own communities and the constraints on their ability to engage as they might wish. C4JR commits to seeking the Survivors' Council's insights on Toolkit content, media inquiries, and prior to key events such as commemorations, reburial ceremonies, or the return of Survivors.

Survivors are also encouraged, should they choose, to engage more actively, including reaching out to media organizations to articulate the minimum standards they wish to see respected, or to engage with other groups with C4JR's support. In all these activities, the Survivors' autonomy and voluntary participation are essential, with C4JR providing support while being attentive to the Survivors' emotional well-being and other personal considerations.

Stakeholders and advocates

C4JR, including the Survivors' Council, works closely with international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Iraqi General Directorate for Survivors Affairs (GDSA) which is under the Ministry of Labor & Social Affairs and is responsible for implementing the reparations program. These organizations must play a key role in ensuring respectful treatment of Survivors by the media. Their presence at commemorative and other significant events, as well as their influence in their respective areas of work, are instrumental in establishing and modeling ethical standards for others



The image recreates a real photograph of C4JR Survivor Council members from diverse backgrounds, symbolically expressing unity and solidarity in their shared pursuit of justice and reparations.

Ethically Engaging with Survivors

This section covers key elements of ethically engaging with Survivors. The media, NGOs, and others interacting with Survivors often use interpreters to communicate. To ensure interpreters act as mediators of language, culture, and meaning, it is useful to discuss beforehand the role of the interpreter and how they should interact with the interviewer and survivor, and that they maintain appropriate boundaries during and after the interview or other engagement.

This section goes into details of informed consent which is the foundation of ethical engagement. Media actors, NGOs, and others can avoid many problems that stem from unethical engagement by incorporating a strong informed consent policy and practice into their work.

This will lead to higher quality work, and a more empowering experience for Survivors who are able to anticipate potential risks and benefits to engagement while fully informed of their rights.

This section concludes with a protocol for responding to requests to engage with Survivors to be applied by C4JR and its members.



The illustration shows a survivor engaging with the media on her own terms, with clear boundaries in place as journalists set aside their cameras and microphones to listen attentively to her voice.

Working with interpreters

“Sometimes I visit the girls with some journalists. They bring with them interpreters from Erbil. Most of them are men - the journalists are men – and the translators are Sorani speaking and the Survivors speak Kermanji and they are very different. So many times when I visit with the journalist I have to translate from Sorani to Kermanji.”

Yazidi woman, Voices of Yazidi Women

Access to competent interpreters is a fundamental aspect of ensuring effective communication with Survivors of trauma or conflict, particularly when they are unable to speak the language or dialect of the interviewer. The ability to communicate in a language in which individuals feel comfortable is paramount to creating an environment of trust and comprehension. The nuances of language and cultural context are often deeply embedded in an individual’s mother tongue; thus, the use of skilled interpreters facilitates a more accurate and empathetic understanding of the survivor’s experiences.

However, some factors should be discussed with the survivor before choosing an interpreter.

When arranging survivor engagements, it is crucial to know what language they are comfortable speaking in. In this context, many Survivors speak the dominant languages of Arabic and Kurdish, but others do not. Even when Survivors speak these languages, they may prefer to speak their local dialect of Kurmanji Kurdish, Turkmani, Shabaki, and Aramaic. The interpreter plays a crucial role as a cultural and linguistic link between the interviewer and survivor.

Some Survivors prefer interpreters who are outside of their community, due to fear that their stories will be revealed to their community. Interpreters from the survivor’s community may judge the survivor or reinforce certain narratives that are accepted in the community but that might not apply to the individual survivor.

Furthermore, **the gender of the interpreter can be an important factor in establishing rapport with Survivors**, especially when discussing sensitive topics. For example, female Survivors may feel more at ease disclosing information to a female interpreter, particularly if the interviewer is male. This consideration is vital in maintaining the dignity and comfort of the survivor.

In cases where an appropriate interpreter is not available, it is preferable to postpone the interview rather than risk further discomfort or misunderstanding by proceeding without proper language support or gender-sensitive accommodations.

The goal should always be to uphold the survivor's well-being above all procedural requirements.

It is important to ask the survivor what they prefer in an interpreter and to try to accommodate their request. If their preferences cannot be accommodated, discuss whether they agree to proceed or if they prefer to cancel.

Some mistakes that are commonly made when working with interpreters include having side conversations between the interviewer and interpreter without the survivor understanding what they are discussing; the interpreter summarizing rather than thoughtfully conveying information; and the interpreter and interviewer speaking to each other – past the survivor. It is essential that interpreters understand that they are not part of the conversation but are there to facilitate the interview or other type of engagement.

Below are some tips to consider when working with interpreters and Survivors.

Tips for working with interpreters

- Before the interview, provide the interpreter with the necessary background information and any specific terminology that will be used.
- The interviewer should always speak directly to the survivor, with the interpreter acting as a conduit for communication rather than a participant.
- Stress the importance of delivering the speaker's exact message instead of summarizing or omitting details. Interpreters are not part of the conversation but are here to facilitate the interview or other type of engagement. The interpreter should adapt the translation to be culturally understandable while ensuring that the intended meaning is preserved.
- The interpreter should avoid side conversations with the interviewer. If clarifications are needed, they should inform the survivor that they are clarifying information so the survivor does not think they are talking about them.
- The interpreter must agree to treat information confidentially, especially when sensitive information is being disclosed. The interpreter must agree to refrain from discussing information outside the interview or event, and to treat the survivor's information as confidential. This is crucial to explain to the survivor and to emphasize when the interpreter is from the same community.
- The interpreter should be aware of the importance of non-verbal communication and should try to convey the survivor's non-verbal expressions when significant.
- After the interview, discuss any challenges that arose with the interpreter to improve future interactions.

An Informed Consent Practice

Preparedness and trauma

C4JR and its members should consider whether Survivors are ready or prepared to engage in activities that publicly expose them before approaching them about opportunities, and prior to obtaining informed consent. For example, a person who returned from prolonged captivity is likely unprepared to decide the implications of being interviewed by the media. However that same survivor might be better prepared to engage with the media after some time has passed and their situation has stabilized, even if that person continues to experience difficulty or symptoms related to their past traumatic experiences.

Not all mental health challenges limit the capacity of people; many acute or chronic challenges can be regulated and managed with proper interventions, safety and social support. Mental Health challenges that affect orientation to self, time, place, and reality, with self and others harm such as schizophrenia or psychotic depressive disorders, might be challenging at times.

Regarding trauma, not all Survivors have received a classic diagnosis of PTSD but might exhibit symptoms keeping in mind the unique aspect of each survivor. To assess their **readiness** to tell their stories, it is important to consider their goals and expectations, any previous experiences with documentation or media, and their current challenges and impacts on daily functioning and social roles. If there is a high level of emotional distress or impaired functioning, therapy may be necessary before the person is ready to tell her story to the media or engage in any other event or activity related to human rights violation she endured.

Red flags to watch for include self-harm, suicidal thoughts, being at risk, derealization, flashbacks, inability to take care of oneself and others, and a huge impact on functionality, such as work, social roles, self-hygiene, social connections, religious or spiritual practices, and others.

It's also crucial to check on resources that help the person manage their lives. Consider the person's current coping strategies and support structure. If these are lacking, then culturally appropriate psychological support may be needed before the person is ready to engage in a public engagement, media, or **documentation process**.

Consider whether they have previously received any form of psychosocial support to help them cope with what happened? If so, it is useful to know about this support, including the time, type of support, people involved, and how helpful it was. If the person has not received any psychosocial support, then it is important to assess, based on the information they have shared and your observations, whether this is necessary before engaging in documentation, media or any public events. Consider any other medical constraints. *See Annex B, Preparedness Checklist for more guidance.*

Case Study – Readiness / Preparedness to Engage

A journalist interviewed a 16-year-old girl four days after she returned from three years in ISIS captivity. Despite the summer heat, she was so cold that her family wrapped her in a blanket. The journalist from outside Iraq, spoke to the girl through an interpreter and through her uncle. The journalist reported that the girl's uncle and mother consented to the interview and to using the survivor's name and to take photographs. During the interview, the journalist asked the survivor questions such as, "how many times was she sold?" and "did ISIS give her birth control?" and "did ISIS pray before they raped her?" The journalist published the survivor's story in print, on the internet, and in an audio recording for a podcast. The survivor was barely able to lift her head off the floor of the tent as she responded to the journalist's questions.



The illustration portrays a real case where a visibly unwell survivor is photographed and questioned without regard for her health or wellbeing.

Based on the description provided, it is clear that the 16-year-old girl was not yet ready or prepared to be interviewed by a journalist. Here are the points to support this conclusion:

Recent trauma: the timing of the interview—only four days after her return from three-years in captivity was before she had the opportunity to recover or reintegrate into her community.

For minors consent must be given by the parents or guardians, and assent from the minor himself or herself.

Absence of psychological support: there was no mention of the survivor receiving any psychological support before being interviewed by the journalist. This lack of support was a critical gap, especially for someone displaying signs of severe trauma.

Impact on functionality: the survivor's inability to perform basic functions and social interactions, suggested that her functionality was greatly impaired, which was a significant red flag indicating that she was not prepared for media exposure.

Potential risk of harm: given the symptoms, such potential flashbacks, engaging with the media and recounting traumatic events could increase the risk of self-harm or other harmful outcomes.

Lack of coping strategies and support structures: the absence of coping mechanisms and support systems before engaging in activities that could trigger traumatic memories also supports the conclusion that the survivor was not ready.

Origins of informed consent

Informed consent is an ethical principle originating in medical research, established by the Nuremberg Code of 1947. This code was developed in response to the atrocities of World War II, which were sometimes justified as medical experimentation. The Nuremberg Code, formulated by the Nuremberg Military Tribunal during the Doctors' Trial, sets forth ethical principles for conducting experiments on human beings⁷. It was created to address the inhumane and unethical practices, such as experiments in concentration camps and mass sterilizations, carried out by German physicians during the war.

This principle established the requirement for obtaining consent from individuals before conducting medical research. It has evolved over the years, enshrined in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report of 1979, to require qualified professionals to understand and apply consent protocols, stressing the importance of confidentiality, an assessment of risks and benefits, and the autonomy of research participants. These principles apply beyond researchers to include doctors, lawyers, and mental health professionals who can face legal consequences if they violate these rules.

7. Rubenfeld, Sheldon, and Susan Benedict, editors. *Human Subjects Research After the Holocaust*. Springer, 2014. ISBN 978-3-319-05701-9. eBook ISBN 978-3-319-05702-6. DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-05702-6.

Informed consent in the context of engaging with Survivors

Currently, there is no legal mandate requiring media outlets or NGOs obtain informed consent from Survivors before gathering, documenting, and sharing their stories. In the absence of specific organizational policies or legal obligations that apply to professionals like lawyers or doctors, there is generally no accountability for ensuring that Survivors fully understand their rights, the risks and benefits, and other aspects of informed or meaningful consent.

Nevertheless, in the context of Survivors engaging with media, NGOs, and other entities for public activities, securing informed consent is crucial. An informed consent practice safeguards Survivors from exploitation or harm during participation in interviews, commemorations, or other public events.

If there is insufficient time to thoroughly conduct the informed consent process, engagement with Survivors should not proceed. Viewing informed consent as merely a procedural hurdle is misguided. Rather, it should be seen as a fundamental practice that ensures the safety of Survivors in potentially high-risk environments and enhances their overall experience, minimizing the likelihood of later regret or harm due to insufficient understanding of what their participation entails.

It is also essential to remember that obtaining informed consent is an ongoing process. It is not something that is only obtained at the beginning. Instead it is important to continue to check back with Survivors when key decisions are being made, and if possible, before their information is published. If that is not possible, then Survivors should be informed about this explicitly as part of the process.

Key elements of informed consent for Survivors

Full disclosure: Survivors must be provided with all relevant information about the engagement, including the scope of the interview, the topics to be discussed, how the information will be used, and where it will be shared or published, and whether it can be later removed. This disclosure should also include any potential risks, current and in the future, such as emotional distress, privacy concerns, or public scrutiny.

Comprehension: it is crucial that the survivor understands the information that has been provided. This understanding should be confirmed through discussions or other means to ensure that the survivor has grasped the significance of their participation, the nature of the content, and the potential impacts. Survivors should be given sufficient time to decide without pressure.

Voluntariness: consent must be given freely without coercion, manipulation, or undue influence from interviewers, filmmakers, conference organizers, or others. Survivors should feel they can decline or withdraw from the engagement at any point without any negative consequences.

Capacity and age considerations: The capacity to consent must also take into account the age of the survivor. Minors generally do not have the legal capacity to consent on their own.

Therefore, consent must be obtained from a legal guardian or parent and assent from minors themselves should be given in a way that also considers the minor's assent to participate. It's crucial to ensure that the guardian fully understands the implications of participation and acts in the best interest of the minor. For adult Survivors who are impacted by mental health issues or developmental delays, additional support may be required to facilitate their understanding and ensure their consent is truly informed

Explicit agreement: consent should be explicitly obtained, ideally in writing, but at a minimum verbally, and it should be clear that the survivor agrees to the specific activities and uses of the information discussed.

Ongoing process: informed consent is not a one-time event but a continuous process. Survivors should have the opportunity to revisit their consent as new information arises or as their understanding or comfort level changes. This is particularly important in long-term projects like documentaries.

Cultural and contextual sensitivity: the process of obtaining informed consent should be adapted to the cultural, societal, and individual context of the survivor, ensuring that language barriers, cultural nuances, and personal circumstances are appropriately addressed.

See Annex D, Informed Consent Checklist for guidance when seeking the consent of Survivors to engage.

Informed consent process

The process of obtaining informed consent from Survivors is a critical step in ensuring ethical engagement and protecting the rights and well-being of individuals who choose to share their stories. This process involves clear communication, respect for the survivor's agency, and a thorough understanding of the consent terms. Below is a comprehensive checklist designed to guide the consent process, ensuring it is conducted in a respectful, clear, and supportive manner.

Checklist for obtaining informed consent:

Before meeting with the survivor

Ensure the consent document is available in a language that the survivor fully understands.

Create a setting that is private, comfortable, and conducive to an open dialogue, minimizing any potential feelings of discomfort or intimidation.

During the meeting with survivor

Use plain, straightforward language to explain the consent form. Avoid technical jargon and simplify complex terms as necessary. Discuss all key points of the consent form, encouraging an interactive conversation rather than reading the document verbatim, which can cause confusion or loss of focus. Actively invite the survivor to ask questions, providing ample time for them to seek clarification on any points they find confusing.

Enhance understanding by providing real-life examples or scenarios that illustrate the implications of certain sections of the consent form. Consider sharing articles or videos from previous work with Survivors to give a clearer picture of what to expect.

Regularly check in with the survivor while reviewing information to ensure they understand the information presented. Ask if they need more time to consider or if they have any additional questions. This applies during the initial informed consent process and throughout as long as the engagement continues.

Recognize that some Survivors may be uncomfortable with written consent. Offer options for verbal consent or, if necessary, a thumbprint, especially if literacy is an issue. Inform the survivor about any available support services or resources they can access if they have additional questions or require further assistance.

Discuss the survivor's goals for the engagement, potential difficulties in discussing traumatic events, and whether there are certain topics that are off limits.

When requesting an interview, ask the survivor about their preferred timing and location. Also, inquire if they would like a trusted person to accompany them. Ensure to separate the survivor from family members or others present before asking who they would like to be there. This avoids putting them in a position to answer in front of others. If the survivor expresses a desire to be alone, explain to the accompanying person that it is part of your process to meet privately with the survivor.

Ensure the family member understands the importance of this procedure. Inform them about their rights during the engagement (be specific about what to expect if they change their mind, want to see information prior to publication, and other factors outlined above).

Provide a copy of the consent form for their records if they want a copy and if it is safe for them to take home.

Provide a point of contact within the organization and encourage the survivor to reach out with any follow-up questions or concerns.

Consider adding specific examples to the discussion prompts, such as asking, “Do you think those close to you might be uncomfortable with your appearance in the media discussing your experiences before, during, and after your captivity?” Such questions can help assess potential external pressures and prepare the survivor for possible reactions from their community.

End the process by asking the survivor if they have any questions and if they need more time to decide.

See Annex E for a sample Consent for Use of Images and identifying Information, and Annex F for a sample Consent for participation in Events Including Media Engagements. C4JR members should adapt these to suit the specific event and context.

Protocol to Manage Requests for Survivor Participation

We hope that C4JR members will endorse the Toolkit, and use it to support Survivors' engagement. Each member is free to decide how to apply this Toolkit and it is recommended that each member set up its own internal protocols for handling requests to engage with Survivors. In some cases, a member may decide not to facilitate such requests, and in other cases a member might frequently receive and respond to such requests. There is no "right" way to manage this. However the Protocol below provides a suggested process for receiving and responding to requests by the media, documentary filmmakers, other NGOs, governments, and anyone else requesting to engage with Survivors.

The Protocol is designed to be practical and manageable for C4JR and its member NGOs, especially given limited resources. The primary goal is to equip Survivors with all the necessary information to make informed decisions about their participation and to ensure that engagement processes are ethical and supportive.

Who is advised to follow this process?

C4JR Working Group led by a focal point

C4JR Survivors' Council

C4JR members, each recommended to appoint a focal point for survivor engagement requests

Relevant tools / forms (annexes)

Survivor Participation Request Form (Annex A and [online](#))

Preparedness Checklist (Annex B)

Informed Consent Checklist (Annex C)

Event Feedback Form (Survivors) (Annex E)

Event Feedback Form (C4JR Members) (Annex F)

STEP 1: Information gathering

When a request is received, the focal point for C4JR or its NGO member should send the link for the Survivor Participation Request Form to the requester. This form is used to perform a preliminary screening to assess whether the request is well-informed and ethically sound enough to consider involving a survivor.

STEP 2: Conduct preliminary assessment

Once the requester completes the form, the focal point carefully reviews it to evaluate the suitability and ethical alignment of the request. If the requester appears unsuitable, or if there is a documented history of unethical behavior, the focal point can consider denying the request. This decision aims to ensure the integrity and safety of the process before proceeding to involve any Survivors.

Survivors may be invited to individual or group consultations, which each having implications that could be beneficial or less than ideal. It is important to understand whether the person requesting survivor consultations wants to meet with privately in an individual meeting or with several Survivors together and then to discuss this with Survivors to ensure they consider the implications for themselves as they decide whether to participate.



The illustration shows a survivor receiving professional mental health support, with clarity and hope gradually dispelling darkness and depression.

Individual survivor consultations

Potential benefits of individual consultations: privacy, confidentiality, space to speak without interruption, feeling of safety and reduced likelihood of being judged by peers/community members.

When discussing sensitive subjects and experiences, individual consultations provide space for Survivors to feel safe sharing information and expressing themselves in more detail. They may be willing to say things they would not share when other people are in the room, including other Survivors.

Possible drawbacks to individual consultations: feelings of isolation, anxiety, reduced confidence. Survivors might feel more comfortable if other Survivors, especially those they already know, are with them in the room. Also Survivors speaking about issues as a group can lead to more detailed or nuanced information as they bounce ideas off one another.

Group survivor consultations

Potential benefits of group or collective consultations: allows for Survivors to share their grief, experiences, ideas and solutions, and help Survivors to feel less isolated and alone. Can create space of discussions between communities of groups of Survivors who are not usually in contact.

When conducting a collective consultation, it is essential to set some ground rules such as request that all information shared, and the participation of Survivors is kept confidential; that the space is judgment-free, and always be mindful of the need to give all Survivors the opportunity to participate while at the same time not pressuring Survivors to talk if they are not ready.

STEP 3: Internal assessment

The focal point should consult with their organization or the C4JR focal point for guidance as needed. The decision-making process remains internal, with each organization establishing its own procedures.

While it is crucial for C4JR and its members to avoid acting as gatekeepers, ultimately allowing Survivors the choice to participate in events or interviews, there are certain circumstances when it might be necessary to make decisions without consulting Survivors:

The requester has a history of unethical interactions with Survivors.

The requester shows a significant disregard for ethical engagement practices.

The requester lacks experience in engaging with Survivors and demonstrates no interest in adhering to ethical guidelines.

The request poses a clear threat to the safety and well-being of Survivors.

Hypothetical case – declining media request

A journalist recently approached C4JR to request contact with a survivor who returned from Syria two weeks ago. He intended to interview her about her captivity and subsequent return to Iraq. C4JR, familiar with the survivor and her family, decided against facilitating the interview, citing the survivor's recent return after many years in captivity and her current unpreparedness to discuss her experiences. (See Preparedness Checklist outlined in Annex B).

The C4JR focal point explained to the journalist why it was inappropriate to contact the survivor at this time. They used this interaction as an opportunity to educate the journalist on C4JR's policies and the ethical guidelines for engaging with Survivors of sexual violence, emphasizing the importance of respecting the survivor's recovery process.



This illustration, based on a survivor's sketch, depicts the scales of justice balancing the public's right to know with survivors' wellbeing.

STEP 4: Contacting Survivors

If the request is approved, the focal point should contact Survivors through the appropriate networks, providing them with detailed information from the completed form. Survivors who express interest must undergo an informed consent process, facilitated by the entity managing the engagement, such as C4JR's Working Group or one of its member organizations.

The facilitator (C4JR or the member organization) is encouraged to discuss obtaining informed consent with the requester and to go through the process jointly with the survivor. If a joint process is not feasible, then C4JR or the member organization should directly obtain informed consent from the survivor to ensure they are fully informed about the opportunity.

Additionally, for Survivors new to public speaking, the focal point should utilize the Preparedness Checklist to assess their readiness. Any concerns about their preparedness should be discussed directly with the survivor. Keep in mind that people's readiness might change due to personal, health and other circumstances.

Tip

Given your role as a service provider and your relationship with the survivor, be mindful of the potential for inadvertent pressure to participate. It is essential to ensure Survivors understand they are not obligated to participate and that declining an opportunity will not result in any adverse consequences. This awareness will help maintain the ethical integrity of their decision-making process. One of the best practices is to have another staff member at the organization to be part of the process. It can be beneficial to have the service provider who supported the survivor in terms of safety and trust but be aware that it can affect the survivor's decision.

Guidance regarding remuneration

Offering remuneration to Survivors for media interviews is well established as an unethical practice. In the media, the ethical guideline against paying sources stems from the need to preserve the credibility and objectivity of journalism. Paying sources could incentivize them to provide sensational or biased accounts, compromising the integrity of the news and potentially leading to skewed or untruthful reporting. However, journalists may cover necessary travel expenses if they need to interview Survivors on-site, without offering remuneration for their testimony.

When discussing per diems, which typically cover transport and costs of food and drink, it is essential to consider the context. Journalists often travel to the site where Survivors live, however that may attract unnecessary attention and it is important to give the survivor a choice about where to meet privately where they are comfortable. NGOs often invite Survivors to attend conferences or focus groups, where per diems are more commonly provided. In such cases, per diems ensure that Survivors travel, accommodation, and any other expenses for participating are covered.

However, in situations where Survivors need to travel or miss time at work to attend workshops or conferences, it is encouraged to consider compensating for lost wages. This ensures that participants are not financially disadvantaged for their involvement. Additionally, for Survivors who engage in unpaid work, such as household duties, compensating for their time spent participating in events is important to recognize their contribution and effort.

Transparent communication about the reasons and conditions for this compensation helps maintain the integrity of the process, ensuring that all parties understand that this is not an incentive to alter their testimony or experiences but rather a recognition of their valuable input.



This real photo captures Yazidi women survivors speaking at C4JR's Baghdad event, commemorating one year since the Yazidi Women Survivors Law was enacted.

STEP 5: Support to prepare Survivors to participate

Provide necessary support for Survivors who choose to participate. This may include preparing Survivors' talking points, rehearsals, arranging logistics, and offering emotional support.

Engaging Survivors in media interviews, public events, or conferences can be facilitated through coaching and mentoring approaches, tailored to the individual needs and circumstances of each survivor. While formal training programs are not necessarily available due to limited resources, C4JR and its members can offer personalized support to help Survivors prepare effectively. Below are some **options** for preparing Survivors for interviews and public events.

Personalized coaching sessions: Provide Survivors with one-on-one coaching sessions aimed at building confidence, enhancing communication skills, and addressing specific concerns related to media interviews or public speaking engagements. These sessions can be tailored to the survivor's level of experience and comfort level.

Mentorship opportunities: Pair Survivors with experienced advocates or mentors such as more experienced Survivors who can offer guidance, advice, and support throughout the preparation process. Mentors can share their own experiences, provide practical tips, and serve as a source of encouragement for Survivors navigating public engagements.

Mock interview practice: Conduct mock interview sessions where Survivors have the opportunity to practice responding to potential questions, refine their messaging, and receive constructive feedback in a supportive environment. These sessions can help alleviate anxiety and build confidence ahead of actual media interviews or public events.

Resource sharing and guidance: Provide Survivors with resources, such as informational materials, Toolkits, or sample interview scripts, to help them better understand the media landscape, navigate ethical considerations, and prepare effectively for their engagements. Offer guidance on key topics to address and ways to frame their narratives authentically and powerfully. Ensure these resources are accessible, adapted to the different education levels and in the language understood by Survivors.

Flexible support options: Recognize the diverse needs and constraints faced by Survivors and NGOs and offer flexible support options that accommodate their schedules, preferences, and availability. This may include virtual coaching sessions.

Encouragement and empowerment: Offer ongoing encouragement, affirmation, and validation to Survivors as they navigate the preparation process. Celebrate their strengths, resilience, and courage in sharing their stories and advocate for their rights. Empower Survivors to assert their boundaries, voice their needs, and make informed decisions about their participation.

Guidance managing different viewpoints

Survivors' views may differ from a position taken by C4JR and/or its members, and with established principles such as 'do no harm.' It is critical for C4JR and its members to navigate these situations with sensitivity. There are often valid reasons for why Survivors might have strong positions that are not aligned with globally accepted human rights and survivor-centered principles. For example, many Survivors in Iraq feel strongly that mandatory criminal investigations as part of the YSL reparations process helps prevent fraudulent cases. While this goes against a do no harm and survivor-centered approach, it is understandable that Survivors are concerned that court procedures offer a safeguard against false claims.

Establishing clear guidelines and expectations at the outset can help set the stage, ensuring that Survivors are aware of the organization's values and advocacy scope. Creating a safe space for open dialogue allows Survivors to express their views without fear of judgment, while empathetic listening helps acknowledge the trauma behind their opinions. It's beneficial to educate Survivors on the broader implications of certain stances, like the support for criminal investigations or the death penalty for ISIS perpetrators. In cases where Survivors' views are publicly expressed and diverge significantly from C4JR and/or members, it's crucial to handle these situations privately to avoid public confrontation and the perception of silencing or shaming. Offering alternative platforms where Survivors can express themselves freely—such as closed forums or support groups—can ensure their voices are heard without compromising the organization's public stance. Ultimately, it is the right of Survivors to freely express their views, with the understanding they may differ from others and that this is understandable.

Regular reflection on engagement policies and their flexibility in accommodating diverse survivor experiences is also vital. Consulting with mental health professionals can provide further support to Survivors, helping moderate extreme views influenced by trauma. This approach not only respects the autonomy of Survivors but also maintains the integrity of C4JR and/or its members, striking a delicate balance between individual expression and collective advocacy goals.

Facilitating an interview or consultation

Sometimes, C4JR or NGOs are not only asked to link journalists with Survivors but also to facilitate the interview / consultation. In such case, the process should be carefully planned and organized, and take into account all the needs of Survivors. In addition to following the steps outlined in this toolkit (gathering information from the requester, evaluating readiness of Survivors, and obtaining informed consent), below are additional factors to consider.

Before the interview/consultation:

Consult the Survivors on their preference (time, place, details of the participants). Ensure the consultation can be conducted in a safe and confidential environment. If relevant, ensure all costs related to the participation of Survivors are covered. If relevant, address any potential security issues including facilitating checkpoint access and entry into specific governorates / KRI / federal Iraq. Understand the time Survivors need and ensure sufficient time is available to share information, while also understanding whether some Survivors might need to leave early due to family obligations or to avoid scrutiny from their community or family.

During the day of the interview/consultation:

Obtain informed consent based on this toolkit. Remind Survivors that their participation is voluntary and they can revoke their consent at anytime.

When possible, ensure appropriate mental health professionals are available to support Survivors before, during and/or after the consultation. If preferred by the survivor they can attend the consultation or be available on call or after the consultation.

Do not take or publish pictures of the interview / consultation and request that other Survivors not take or publish photos of participants without obtaining informed consent. *See Annex E, Consent to Use Identifying Images.*

After the interview/consultation:

Thank the survivor for their participation and request their feedback about the interview or consultation.

If relevant, follow up with survivor to share published articles, reports, video interviews as agreed to during the informed consent process.

Intervening when ethical issues arise

If C4JR and its member organizations observe unethical practices by the media, NGOs, or other actors, it is important to intervene and **speak up**. There are many situations where an advocate for Survivors observes photographs taken without consent during emotionally fraught moments, inappropriate questions, or safety and confidentiality being undermined.

As advocates, it is important to check with the survivor to see if they are comfortable with what is happening, ask for a break to have a private discussion, or publicly request that someone stop violating the rights of Survivors.

If such observations are made, whether during the event or later through published interviews or social media posts, C4JR and its members can play a crucial role in addressing these issues. If the capacity and resources of an NGO allow, they are advised to inquire with the potential transgressor, engage with the Survivors, and educate others about these unethical practices.

Gathering feedback

After participating in interviews or events, actively seek feedback from Survivors on their experiences, highlighting both successes and challenges, including any unforeseen situations. Use this feedback to continually adapt and improve the Toolkit and support services, ensuring they effectively meet the changing needs and preferences of Survivors.

Completing feedback forms:

C4JR and its members are encouraged to complete the Event Feedback Form with Survivors (refer to Annex E) and among C4JR members (refer to Annex F) following events facilitated by C4JR. This form is designed to document both positive experiences and areas needing improvement, including any ethical concerns or violations.

It is important to note that completing the form is anonymous and optional, Survivors should not feel burdened with completing the form. Survivors' names will not appear on the form, nor will their feedback be shared in a manner that could identify them.

Advocacy and raising awareness about ethical engagement

The C4JR Working Group and its members are encouraged to leverage their resources to disseminate crucial messages regarding ethical engagement with Survivors and the documentation of their stories in media, commemorations, and public events.

Below are potential strategies for disseminating this information, utilizing available resources, and encouraging active participation from members and Survivors to ensure widespread awareness and prioritization of survivor-centered approaches.

Awareness campaign

Develop a targeted awareness campaign named “Engage Ethically” centered around the Toolkit’s contents and Survivors’ key recommendations. Craft messaging that is clear, compelling, and accessible, avoiding technical language or jargon.

The campaign could strategically target international organizations, both intergovernmental and non-governmental, as well as survivor networks with the goal of encouraging these entities to support, endorse, and widely disseminate the Toolkit.

It could recommend that these organizations integrate the Toolkit’s guidelines into their policy frameworks, making them a prerequisite for grantees to secure funding. Additionally, the campaign could advocate for the funding of structures and personnel dedicated to ethical engagement and suggest that NGOs working with Survivors include them as part of their staff. The campaign could also push for dedicated funding to support activities that enhance ethical engagement with Survivors.

Suggested topics

While numerous topics could be covered, focusing on key areas is recommended.

Suggestions include:

Importance of informed consent

Do no harm approach

Survivor-centric approach

Avoiding stigma and upholding dignity

Engaging Survivors in the framing of their own stories

Risk-benefit analysis for survivor participation

Ethical treatment of Survivors in specific contexts, including returning from captivity, reburial of relatives, and commemoration events

Communication methods

Below are some suggested methods of communication.

In-person visits: organize meetings with media organizations in the Kurdistan region and/or federal Iraq to advocate for ethical treatment of Survivors. Present C4JR's policy and approach, and discuss future engagement protocols.

Video messages: create video messages featuring Survivors discussing their expectations and preferences for their treatment during commemorative events. Share these videos through social media platforms and the C4JR website.

Tagging networks: utilize C4JR's social media platforms to share targeted messaging and tag relevant stakeholders:

Iraqi and international media actors

Key Iraqi government agencies and international consulates working in Iraq

UN agencies

General Directorate for Survivors' Affairs

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Other relevant C4JR stakeholders as deemed necessary

Publish posters at public events

See Annex I, Tips for NGOs about Survivors' Rights, Annex J, Message from NGOs to Survivors, and Annex K, Informed Consent for the Media Engaging with Survivors.

These include suggested content for posters to display clearly at public events to reinforce the importance of informed consent.

Additional posters can be developed depending on priorities identified by the Survivors' Council and the C4JR Working Group.

Annexes

Annex A: Survivor Participation Request Form

Annex B: Preparedness Checklist

Annex C: Trauma Informed Engagement Checklist

Annex D: Informed Consent Checklist

Annex E: Consent for Use of Images and Identifying Information

Annex F: Consent for Participation in Events Including Media Engagements

Annex G: Event Feedback Form (Survivors)

Annex H: Event Feedback Form (C4JR / members)

Annex I: Tips for NGOs about Survivors' Rights

Annex J: Message from NGOs to Survivors

Annex K: Informed Consent for the Media Engaging with Survivors

Download the annexes in PDF (A4) here: www.c4jr.org/toolkit2024

Annex A: Survivor Participation Request Form

This form is designed to collect information from organizations or individuals seeking the participation of Survivors in various engagements such as interviews, panel discussions, and public events. The primary purpose of this form is to provide Survivors with sufficient information to make informed decisions about their involvement. Please fill out this form as with as much information as possible to facilitate a transparent and respectful process to request participation of Survivors.

Date of request: _____

Requestor information

Individual's full name: _____

Gender: _____

Name of agency or organization (if applicable): _____

Professional background (select most relevant)

____ Journalist

____ Reporter

____ Documentary filmmaker

____ NGO

____ UN

____ Government

____ Other

Location of individual (country where you are based): _____

Phone contact: _____ Email contact: _____

Purpose and context of the engagement

This section gathers additional information about why you are requesting to meet with Survivors and the type of engagement.

Type of event:

____ Interview with print journalist

____ Interview with TV reporter

____ Documentary film

____ Public event

____ Panel discussion

____ Academic research

____ Investigation / inquiry into human rights violations

____ Other (specify): _____

Topics to be covered

- Abduction and crimes committed in captivity
- Criminal justice and accountability
- Reparations
- Current situation and needs of Survivors and /or their community
- Other

Request details

- Number of Survivors requested: _____
- Preferred gender(s) of Survivors: _____
- Preferred format of the consultation: individual consultation / group consultation

Topics or focus of the interview or event (check all that apply):

- Abduction and crimes committed in captivity
- Criminal justice and accountability
- Reparations
- Current situation and needs of Survivors and /or their community
- Other (specify): _____

Reason(s) for requesting survivor participation (i.e. why is survivor's participation essential):

Gender of survivor(s) requested

- Male
- Female
- Both
- Either

Who else have you, or do you plan to interview or include as part of this story or event (if relevant check all that apply):

- NGOs
- Justice actors (lawyers, judges)
- Mental health experts
- Experts on conflict related sexual violence and/or violence against women and girls
- Other (specify): _____

Logistics and support

This section requests information about what support will be provided to cover any expenses Survivors might incur.

Dates of interview or event (if known): _____

Proposed interview or event location: _____

What support will be covered (check all that apply if relevant)

Travel costs

Meals

Accommodation

Interpretation services

Mental health professional

Accompaniment (selected by survivor such as NGO, another survivor, relative, friend)

Payment for service (excluding media actors such as journalists and reporters)

None

Other

Ethics and survivor engagement

Have you worked with Survivors before:

[Yes/No]

Have you read any ethical guidelines for engaging with Survivors? (Check all that apply)

Reporting on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Dart Center

Murad Code

Silence and Omissions: A Media Guide for Covering Gender-Based Violence, Rutgers University

Internal Guidelines on Ethical Engagement with Survivors of SGBV, Coalition for Just Reparations

Other

None

If you are unfamiliar with the above guidelines, are you interested in learning more about C4JR's guidance on ethical engagement with Survivors?

[Yes/No]

Describe your informed consent practice and what topics you will discuss with Survivors before proceeding:

Describe what you identify as the potential benefits and risks for Survivors who agree to participate in your request:

Disclosing identity and options for anonymity

Can the survivor remain anonymous?

[Yes/No]

If the survivor wishes to remain anonymous, do you agree not to show the survivor's face, real name, tattoos, or other identifying marks:

[Yes/No]

Do you agree not reveal unique information about the survivor's case that could identify them?

[Yes/No]

Survivor's role and input

Can the survivor contribute to decisions about what information to include and what story to tell?

[Yes/No]

Can the survivor preview content before publication?

[Yes/No]

If the survivor considers some of the content to be unethical or dangerous, are you able to make changes?

[Yes/No]

Will you provide the survivor or the NGO with the content you developed after it is published?

[Yes/No/Not applicable]

Outcome of request (to be completed by C4JR/NGO member focal point)

___ Request denied. Briefly state why the request was not pursued.

___ Request taken to Survivors.

Annex B - Preparedness Checklist

Preparedness Checklist

This checklist can guide C4JR to determine whether to approach a survivor for possible engagement. This checklist should be considered before approaching the person or obtaining informed consent. It can also be useful during the consent process to evaluate whether the survivor appears ready and prepared to engage with the media or others to talk about traumatic events. These are suggestions, as NGOs may not have this information before contacting the survivor, however if the NGO later determines the survivor may not be ready it would be useful to have an open and frank discussion with the survivor.

This check list can be administered by a trained mental health professional or by a worker who received trainings on trauma and trauma informed interviewing and have access to consultation with mental health professionals, if any organization at C4JR doesn't have such expertise, it's advised to seek support from other organizations.

Timeframe

___ Was the person recently released from captivity?

___ Was the person recently victim of traumatic crimes or events? (Recent acts of sexual violence, recent return of the body of a family member, recent return to the areas of origin.)

Goals and expectations

___ Are the individual's goals and expectations from sharing their story clear and realistic?

Previous experiences with media or documentation

___ Has the individual had previous positive experiences with media or documentation that could influence their readiness?

Previous psychosocial support

___ Has the individual previously received psychological or other psychosocial support?

___ What was the nature and effectiveness of this support?

Current challenges and daily functioning

- ___ How are the individual's daily functioning impacted by their past experiences?
- ___ Does the survivor have strong social connections and support?

Emotional distress or impaired functioning

- ___ Is there a high level of emotional distress or impaired functioning that might require therapeutic intervention before engagement?

Red flags

- ___ Are there signs of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, being at high risk, derealization, or flashbacks?
- ___ Is there an inability to take care of oneself or others?
- ___ Is there a significant impact on the individual's functionality in areas like work, social roles, self-hygiene, social connections, and religious or spiritual practices?

External risks

- ___ Is the person at risk of stigma, psychological or physical violence, or femicide if identified by her family or community (threats by family or community members, victim of GBV, including domestic violence etc)

Current coping strategies and support structure

- ___ Does the individual have effective coping strategies and a strong support structure in place?
- ___ What resources are available to help the individual manage their condition?

Medical and therapeutic considerations

- ___ Are there any medical constraints or recommendations from healthcare providers that need consideration before the individual engages with media or documentation?

Annex C: Trauma Informed Engagement Checklist

Confidentiality

Do's (✓)

Conduct interviews in a private and pleasant setting, consider anything that might trigger trauma.

Give Survivors the opportunity to be either interviewed alone or with a supportive person and check their preferences.

Give the survivor time to ask questions. Offer options to decline to answer questions or skip questions the survivor does not feel comfortable responding to.

Consider safety and security of data. Ensure data is stored in a secure place where unauthorized persons don't have access to.

Don'ts (✗)

Don't interview Survivors when others are around or can overhear.

Explain the role of all people who are present at the interview.

Don't discuss Survivors' stories in public places.

Don't assume Survivors want family members (or that minors want caregivers) present

Don't assume Survivors automatically give consent or they don't change their mind.

Don't leave data unprotected.



The illustration uses hand gestures to highlight the Do's and Don'ts of ethical engagement from the checklist.

Annex D: Informed Consent Checklist

This checklist is designed for C4JR and its members advising Survivors on engaging with the media. It helps ensure that Survivors provide informed consent – a clear and voluntary agreement to participate, fully understanding the framing, risks, and benefits, and other implications.

Confirming capacity to consent

___ Verify the survivor’s capacity to consent, considering their age and mental state. For minors (under 18-years old), ensure legal guardians’ consent, and the minor’s assent. For adults with mental health issues or developmental delays, provide necessary support to facilitate understanding.

Voluntary participation

___ Confirm that participation is entirely voluntary and without any coercion from journalists, media representatives, NGO workers, family, or community members.

___ Emphasize that declining participation will not result in any negative consequences from the NGO or other involved parties.

Understanding the process

___ Ensure the survivor fully understands and agrees to the scope of the interview, the topics to be discussed, and how their information will be used and shared.

___ Discuss the interview setting and who will be present, ensuring comfort and privacy.

Awareness of the story’s purpose and framing

___ Clarify the media’s intent with the story, the narrative angle, and if it will involve recounting potentially distressing experiences.

___ Ensure the survivor is comfortable with the content and purpose of their participation.

Benefits

___ Discuss potential benefits such as raising awareness, humanitarian support, or contributing to justice and reparations efforts.

___ Clearly state which of these benefits are realistic and likely achievable through their participation.

Risks

- ___ Outline potential risks including emotional distress, re-traumatization, stigmatization, retaliation, or regret over public exposure.
- ___ Discuss risks of online abuse and potential repeated media exposure.

Anonymity and personal boundaries

- ___ Confirm if the survivor prefers to remain anonymous and discuss measures to maintain anonymity.
- ___ Ensure clear boundaries are set regarding personal information and visual identifiers.

Rights during engagement

- ___ Affirm the survivor's right to set boundaries on topics, take breaks, decline questions, or end the interview at any point.
- ___ Confirm that the survivor understands they can retract their participation at any time before publication.

Handling survivor's information

- ___ Explain how the survivor's information will be collected, used, stored, and protected, emphasizing confidentiality and security.

Post-interview process

- ___ Inform the survivor if they will have the opportunity to review the content before publication and request changes or withdraw consent.

Questions and clarifications

- ___ Provide opportunities for the survivor to ask questions and receive clear answers before giving consent.

Closing note

Prioritize the survivor's physical and emotional safety, autonomy, and well-being in all media engagements, treating their needs and concerns with utmost sensitivity and care.

Annex E: Consent for Use of Images and Identifying Information

Purpose

The images and other identifying information collected during public events such as workshops, trainings, panel discussions or other public events where Survivors as well as other participants might be documented and publicly exposed. This includes the potential use in reports, social media posts, newsletters, and other promotional or public materials.

Description of material to be used

The material may include photographs, video footage, and/or other multimedia content that captures your participation in the event. It may also include your name, your affiliation with our organization, and other identifying details you agree to provide.

Voluntary participation

Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to be photographed or to have your personal information used without any consequence to your involvement in the current or future events hosted by our organization.

Risks and benefits

There are risks associated with participating in this media documentation, primarily related to privacy and personal comfort. These include [describe risks specific to the event.] Once images and information are posted on the internet, they become permanently accessible, even if removed from the original posting location, as others may share or copy them.

You should consider what are the long-term implications of having your images and information permanently available online, and how that could affect changes in your life in the future.

The benefit of your consent includes enhancing the reach and effectiveness of our program's impact through visual and narrative storytelling.

Right to withdraw consent

You may withdraw your consent at any time. To withdraw, please contact us

through the information below. Withdrawal of consent will not affect any materials already published but will prevent any future use of your images or information. You may request at any time that we remove your image or other identifying information from our online sources (original source).

Duration of use

Your images and information will be used for a duration of time that we can explain to you unless you withdraw your consent earlier.

Storage and security of images and information

All materials will be stored securely and will be accessible only to authorized staff. We are committed to protecting your privacy. We will request that staff remove images from personal phones or other devices.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns about how your images and information will be used, please do not hesitate to contact us at:

Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Agreement

I have read the above information and understand the purposes and conditions under which my images and identifying information will be used. I am aware of the permanent nature of internet postings and the potential long-term visibility of my images and information. By checking the boxes below, I agree to the use of the items I have consented to share as described.

Please check each box to indicate your consent to the use of the following types of media:

Photographs

Video footage

Other (explain)

Please check each box to indicate your consent to the use of the following personal information:

Name

Any identifiable information (city, age, gender, other unique details)

Affiliation with the organization

Please check each box to indicate where you consent to the sharing of your images and personal information:

NGO website

Social media platforms (such as Instagram, Facebook, X (Twitter), or others)

Printed reports

Newsletters

Reports to the donors

Other (explain)

Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____



The illustration emphasizes the genuine importance of seeking, discussing, and honoring informed consent.

Annex F: Consent for Participation in Events Including Media Engagements

This consent form seeks permission for Survivors' participation in various public engagements such as workshops, conferences, focus groups, documentaries, TV and radio shows, newspaper articles, and other public events facilitated by our organization. This is a template and should be adjusted to fit the specific context and event. It should also be used in conjunction with the Consent to Use Images or Other Identifying Information in Annex E if relevant.

General Informed Consent Form for Participation in Events, Including Media Engagements (SAMPLE)

Purpose

The purpose of this consent form is to ensure that you are fully informed about the nature of your participation in [Event Name/Type], and to seek your consent to participate. *[Discuss the purpose of the event with survivor].*

During the event, you will be asked to *[describe the activities participants will engage in, such as discussions, workshops, focus groups, etc.]*.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this event is completely voluntary. You have the right to decline participation or withdraw at any time without any consequences to your current or future involvement with our organization.

Potential Risks: There may be some risks associated with your participation, including [discuss with survivor any potential risks, such as emotional distress, physical discomfort, etc.]. We will take all necessary precautions to minimize these risks.

Benefits: Your participation may contribute to [discuss with survivor the benefits to them and/or the broader community]. You may also gain [describe any personal benefits, such as new knowledge, skills, etc.].

Confidentiality: We are committed to maintaining your privacy. [Explain what information can be kept confidential, for example in a private meeting, and what information will be made public based on the Survivors' preference and the type of event]. Your identity will not be disclosed without your explicit

consent [in a public event explain whether and how to manage concerns about keeping certain information private, for example if questioned during a panel discussion].

Compensation

You will / will not receive [describe any compensation, such as travel reimbursements, stipends, or none if applicable] for their time and effort.

Right to withdraw consent

You may change your mind and withdraw your consent at any time. To withdraw, please contact us through the information below. Withdrawal of consent will not affect access to current or future services provided by our organization.

Storage and security of information

All materials related to your participation will be stored securely and will be accessible only to authorized staff. We are committed to protecting your privacy. We will request that staff remove images from personal phones or other devices.

Contact information:

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation or how your information will be used, please do not hesitate to contact us at:

Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Agreement:

I have read the above information and understand the purposes and conditions under which my participation and any related identifying information will be used. I am aware of the potential long-term consequences of my participation. By signing below, I agree to participate in the event as described.

Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____

Annex G: Event Feedback Form (Survivors)

This form should be filled out in person or remotely depending on the resources available and the preferences of the survivor. Given the sensitivity and confidentiality considerations involved, it is advisable to have a neutral party or a designated individual who didn't directly assist in preparing the survivor to complete the feedback form. This approach helps mitigate potential conflicts of interest and ensures that the feedback process remains impartial and confidential. Additionally, this designated person can act as a supportive and trustworthy liaison for Survivors, facilitating open and honest communication while upholding their rights and privacy.

Script to survivor

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences with us. Your feedback is invaluable in helping us improve our practices and better support Survivors like yourself.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and your responses will be kept anonymous to ensure your privacy and confidentiality. We will securely store the feedback within C4JR and utilize it to advocate for improvements in how the media and NGOs engage with Survivors.

I will be asking you a series of open-ended questions to gather your insights. We estimate that this process will take approximately 15-30 minutes, depending on the depth of your feedback. Do you have any questions, and would you like to participate?

Event details

Date:

Location:

Type of event (e.g., media interview, conference):

Feedback

What aspects of the event did you find most helpful or supportive in your engagement with the media and NGO representatives?

Were there any difficulties or areas where you felt uncomfortable during the event, either in your interactions with the media or NGO representatives?

Did you feel well-prepared and supported by C4JR or its member organizations before and during your participation in the event?

Did you notice any actions or behaviors during the event that made you feel uneasy or concerned about the ethical treatment of Survivors? If so, please provide details.

Do you have any suggestions for how future events can better support Survivors and ensure their experiences are respected and valued by the media and NGOs?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this feedback form. Your input is greatly appreciated.



The illustration, inspired by a survivor's drawing, shows a bird transitioning from captivity to freedom, soaring to join its flock.

Annex H: Event Feedback Form (C4JR / members)

This form should be filled out by any advocate that is part of C4JR or its members who attends events with Survivors and has firsthand, in-person knowledge of the interview or public event. Once this form is completed, the person can share it with the C4JR working group.

Event details

Date:

Location:

Type of event (e.g., media interview, conference):

C4JR NGO member:

Person completing form:

Feedback (please explain your answers with details)

Did you notice any unethical practices during the event?

Did you feel equipped to address these practices as an advocate?

Did the survivor get the support she needed and what else would have been helpful?

Were there any surprises that were not anticipated during the event?

In your view, did the event go well for the survivor?

What recommendations do you have to improve the C4JR' support for Survivors at future events?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this feedback form. Your input is greatly appreciated.

Annex I: Tips for NGOs about Survivors' Rights **(sample poster content)**

Your story, your rights

Right to informed consent

Survivors must be fully informed about how their stories and information will be used, and give their explicit consent without any coercion.

Right to anonymity and privacy

Survivors have the option to remain anonymous and set boundaries on personal data shared publicly.

Right to discuss the benefits and risks

Clear communication must be provided about the potential benefits and risks of sharing their experiences.

Right to control the narrative

Survivors should have the power to shape and control the narrative of their own stories, including what details to disclose.

Right to withdraw consent

Survivors can withdraw their consent at any point before publication, without any consequences.

Right to emotional and psychological safety

Ensuring the emotional, physical, and psychological safety of Survivors is paramount during all stages of engagement.

Right to cultural sensitivity

Engagements must respect the cultural and social context of the survivor, acknowledging and adapting to their specific needs.

Right to professional handling of their story

Survivors' stories should be handled with the utmost professionalism and respect, ensuring confidentiality and security of information.

Annex J: Message from NGOs to Survivors (sample poster content)

We respect your rights

You should be fully informed about how your story and information will be used and give explicit consent without any coercion.

Right to informed consent

You can remain anonymous and set boundaries on personal information shared publicly.

Right to anonymity and privacy

Clear communication should be provided to you on the potential benefits and risks of sharing your experience.

Right to discuss the benefits and risks

Clear communication should be provided to you on the potential benefits and risks of sharing your experience.

Right to control the narrative

You should have the power to shape and control the narrative of your own stories, including what details to disclose.

Right to withdraw consent

You can withdraw your consent at any point before publication, without any consequences.

Right to emotional and psychological safety

During all stages of engagement, your emotional, psychological and physical safety should be the priority.

Right to cultural sensitivity

Engagements must respect your culture and the context in which you live in, and should be adapted to your needs.

Right to professional handling of their story

Your story should be handled with the utmost professionalism and respect, ensuring confidentiality and security of your information.

Right to say 'no'

You have the right to refuse to participate in media interviews, engagements, investigations, and any other activity without facing negative consequences.

You matter, your story matter, we believe you.

Annex K: Informed Consent for the Media Engaging with Survivors (sample poster content)

Ensuring Survivors understand and voluntarily agree to participate

Capacity to consent

- ___ Check age and mental state.
- ___ For minors, secure guardian consent.

Voluntary participation

- ___ Confirm no coercion is involved.
- ___ Highlight no penalties for opting out.

Understanding the engagement

- ___ Clearly explain the interview's scope and use of information.
- ___ Discuss who will be present and the setting.

Purpose and framing

- ___ Clarify story intent and possible emotional content.
- ___ Confirm comfort with participation.

Benefits and risks

- ___ Outline realistic benefits and potential risks.
- ___ Discuss possible impacts and media exposure.

Anonymity and boundaries

- ___ Offer options for anonymity.
- ___ Set clear personal data boundaries.

Rights during engagement

- ___ Ensure freedom to modify participation.
- ___ Survivor can stop or withdraw at any time.

After the interview

- ___ Opportunity to review and amend before publication.

Questions?

- ___ Always welcome; clarity is paramount.

Scan to read our publications



Title: Toolkit for Ethical Engagement with Survivors

Publisher: Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights

Place of Publication: Sulaymaniyah, Kurdistan Region - Iraq

Year of Publication: 2025

Author: Sherizaan Minwalla

Co-Author: Yusra Al-Kailani

Contributors: Dr. Bojan Gavrilovic, Delman Kareem, Saber Saeed,

Wansa Shamoon, Zoé Paris, Zozan Mohammed

Design and Layout: Pin Graphic Company

Illustrations: Lare Najmadin

This publication is registered under number 2179 of 2026 with the General Directorate of Public Libraries of Sulaimani.

© 2026 Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights. All rights reserved.

Distributed free of charge. No part of this publication may be reproduced or reused without prior written permission.

www.jiyan.org - pr@jiyan.org



WWW.C4JR.ORG