

# **The Group of Friends**

*Protecting Humanitarian  
Personnel*

One of the highlights of the recent GISF Conference in London, was a special session on the work of the Group of Friends for the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel.

## **What is the Declaration for the Protection of Humanitarian Personnel?**

- A political declaration endorsed by UN Member States
- It reaffirms obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL)
- It seeks to strengthen protection for humanitarian and UN personnel
- It is a response to rising attacks against aid workers, obstruction of access, and impunity for perpetrators

## Why is the Declaration important?

- Humanitarians have faced increasing violence and access constraints
- Attacks have become normalised in many operating environments
- Political leadership is essential to shape safer operating conditions
- It provides a platform for collective state action

***"This is more than a statistical spike – it is the normalisation of violence against our community. Each attack on a colleague is an attack on all of us. Enough."***

- Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (OCHA)

## Who are the Group of Friends?

The Group of Friends is new coalition of UN Member States supporting the declaration, chaired by the UK and Australia, with a wider network of state sponsors including Jordan, Switzerland, Indonesia, Sierra Leone, Japan, Brazil and Colombia.

With a secretariat based within the Red Cross in Geneva, the Group of Friends works closely with UNOCHA and other humanitarian partners and practitioners. The purpose is to focus on translating commitments into action, and positioning member states as active stakeholders in the protection of humanitarians.

## The Four Pillars

The aims of the group, referred to as their 4 pillars are:



**Adherence:** Respect for International Humanitarian Law as the bedrock



**Access:** Ensuring Safe, Rapid and unhindered humanitarian access



**Alignment:** Equal protection for international, national and local staff



**Accountability:** Justice and consequences for violations

## GISF Conference 2026 – Why this stood out

- This is a rare example of sustained high-level political engagement on the topic - with funding, a secretariat, and a clear intent to move from policy to practise
- There is a stated recognition of operational realities for humanitarians in the field, and the challenges of effecting change
- A clear commitment to consult Humanitarian Security Risk Management practitioners, to understand how they can deliver impact
- There are already clear signs of a shift from rhetoric towards implementation

## Why this matters for organisations

- It does not remove risk, but it will help shape the risk environment
- It supports negotiation, access and advocacy efforts
- It reinforces inclusive duty of care for all humanitarian personnel (national, regional and international)
- It signals growing political ownership of humanitarian protection
- Potential to lead to improved budget availability from institutional donors for security risk management

## What can we expect next?

- Continued advocacy to expand state endorsement
- Development of practical implementation mechanisms
- Closer engagement with security risk management professionals
- Greater emphasis on accountability and reporting
- Further events to garner input from practitioners

As a company founded by humanitarians and committed to supporting the safety, security and wellbeing of humanitarians worldwide, ILS aligns with the aims and work of the Group of Friends, both in principle, and in practice.

👉 Let's talk. If you or your organisation are looking to review or bolster duty of care for your staff, or engage with humanitarian-focused security training programmes, we'd love to hear from you.