

PREMIUM

News

Scandal-hit charities can learn from an unlikely source: the private security sector

MATTHEW CAWTHORNE

1 MARCH 2018 • 4:41PM



Residents in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, which was struck by an earthquake in 2010 CREDIT: ALEJANDRO CEGARRA/BLOOMBERG

Hardly a day seems to go by without [fresh revelations of bad behaviour by aid workers](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/02/27/exclusive-bbcs-official-aid-charity-sacked-six-staff-sexual/). Very little seems to be happening to fix it, other than the threat of cutting off funding. This might win a few votes in the current climate of austerity at home, but if major charities lose their ability to deliver aid to victims in crisis zones, who will really lose out?

Tattooed and heavily-muscled ex-military Brexit voters, by popular stereotype the vast majority of the expatriates working on the armed private security “circuit”, as we call it, might not be the most obvious source of inspiration to policy makers groping for a coherent response to the Oxfam scandal. But having spent nine years managing security operations in Iraq, I know we have a lot in common.

Indeed, the communities in which private security people work are also those which need vital support from NGOs, including charities. We share their separation from home and, like them, immerse ourselves in local social and moral codes. For a very few, there may also be confusion over jurisdiction (foreign legal systems don't always match our morality), risking dislocation from conventional value sets.

The Circuit underwent its own crisis following September 2007, when private security contractors employed by US firm Blackwater shot and killed 17 civilians, wounding a further 20, in Baghdad's Nisoor Square. Subsequently a number of measures were taken to fix the sector.

Oxfam calls for victims to come forward

It started in September 2008 with the Montreux Document, a commitment by signature countries (“We’ve got to do something!”); followed in 2010 by the International Code of Conduct, in which participating security companies made a commitment to a set of principles (“This is what we’ve got to do!”); itself followed in 2012 by PSC.1, a management standard (“This is how we’re going to do it!”). And in 2015 an international standard, ISO 18788, prescribing largely the same measures as PSC.1, was released.

In response the Circuit has changed radically, from sacked nightclub bouncers who in 2007 would leap at the chance of becoming gunslingers in the Wild East to today's highly qualified driving instructors, paramedics and health and safety specialists with whom I have been proud to work. Delivering aid in the same environments, the international charity sector badly needs to clean itself up. So let's apply to charities some of the lessons identified by security companies.

Is there an equivalent, for instance, to the [Security Industry Authority](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/10172298/One-surveillance-camera-for-every-11-people-in-Britain-says-CCTV-survey.html)? This is the UK's statutory regulatory body, the costs of which are offset by membership fees charged to security consultants. Or does the charities sector have an equivalent to the Security in Complex Environments Group (SCEG)? This body comprises membership from industry and government and is the ideal forum for exchanging ideas that turn policy into practical effect on the ground. With suitable support from charities, the SCEG could transform itself into a highly effective body covering a full range of functions across all areas of intervention in austere environments.

ISO 18788's specifications, especially those on the recruiting and vetting of international and host nation staff, should be examined for relevance and applied where appropriate. Finally, agencies working in crisis zones simply must not provide to new employers whitewashed records of employment on employees sacked for raping children. Passing serious problems on to future employers is morally weak and criminally negligent.

The Circuit has made giant strides in the last 10 years. Let's not waste the lessons when another sector needs them so badly.

[Matthew Cawthorne](mailto:matthew@cawthornes.com) ([http://mailto:matthew@cawthornes.com](mailto:matthew@cawthornes.com)) *is an independent consultant specialising in fragile and austere environments*

Contact us

[About us](https://corporate.telegraph.co.uk/) (<https://corporate.telegraph.co.uk/>)

Rewards

[Archive](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/archive/) (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/archive/>)

[Reader Prints](http://telegraph.newsprints.co.uk/) (<http://telegraph.newsprints.co.uk/>)

Branded Content

Syndication

Guidelines

Privacy

Terms and Conditions

© Telegraph Media Group Limited 2018