

## Call for Input to inform the High Commissioner's report to the Human Rights Council on the impact of casualty recording

### Submission by Omeria Community Development Organization and Every Casualty Counts

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Omeria Community Development Organization (OCDO) is a non-profit organisation established in 1991. OCDO monitors, investigates, and documents human rights violations in Puntland and South West Somalia, and advocates for victims. It also provides humanitarian assistance, and promotes peacebuilding, civic education, human rights and the rule of law. For more information, please contact [omaria.org@gmail.com](mailto:omaria.org@gmail.com).

OCDO systematically records information on deaths from violence in Somalia. Information comes mostly from primary sources, including interviews with survivors, relatives of the deceased and other witnesses. Secondary sources such as media reporting are used as supporting material. OCDO uses a confidential form to record details of each incident. We try to include the incident location, time, type of incident, identity of victim (including gender, ethnicity and tribal affiliation), weapon(s) used, and whether the incident was criminally or politically motivated. OCDO shares its casualty data widely, including with the news media and international actors, to help inform the international community about the situation in Somalia.

#### Missing persons

A primary aim of OCDO's casualty recording work is to assist victims' families, including by helping relatives to locate and identify casualties of violent incidents. Due to the level of violence in Somalia, where there can be two or more major incidents per day, families can struggle to get information on the fate of relatives from overwhelmed public services. One such example is the [bombing of Zobe junction, Mogadishu, in 2017, which caused hundreds of deaths and injuries](#). In the immediate aftermath, nearby OCDO staff rushed to the site and began gathering names and details of survivors and missing persons. They also recorded information about bodies they witnessed at the scene. As people arrived to search for relatives, OCDO staff were able to tell them (in some cases) which hospitals the injured had been taken to. OCDO staff visited local hospitals to continue gathering names of the dead and wounded. We printed lists of names of identified persons and pinned these up in the hospitals, together with OCDO's contact details for relatives to call to get information. In this way, we were able to help families find missing loved ones.

OCDO has raised money from the Somali business community and diaspora to help victims of the Zobe bombing and other similar incidents. Based on the casualty information OCDO gathers, we are able to identify the survivors who were most in need, including widows, orphans and children who live in the streets.

## Protection

OCDO's casualty records have been used by UNHCR to identify and act on risks to members of particular tribes and ethnicities. For example, in 2005 OCDO's casualty records revealed increased violence against minority indigenous communities in the Lower Shabelle rural areas. Previously, information from OCDO's casualty records revealed an increased risk to internally displaced Bantu people in specific areas, which led to UNHCR resettling them in new locations.

## Recommendations

### **Support independent casualty recording initiatives, both politically and financially**

State-led casualty recording mechanisms are important, but they are not impartial. Political considerations influence if and how deaths are recorded. When government actors such as police or military forces are implicated in violent deaths, casualty information may be concealed or misrepresented. State-led casualty recording mechanisms also have an incentive to minimise deaths attributable to non-state armed groups or criminal factions, as these may be interpreted as revealing state weaknesses. Alternatively, states may be motivated to inflate deaths attributed to opposition groups in order to provoke public and international backlash. Independent, civil society-led casualty recording initiatives are essential for providing a comprehensive and impartial record of violence.

Casualty recorders are exposed to substantial danger in their work. Casualty recorders who attend the aftermath of violent events, or travel in volatile regions, risk becoming victim of the events they seek to record. OCDO recalls that the organisation's co-founder died on such a mission. Casualty recorders are also subject to threats from both state and non-state actors. Members of OCDO staff have also been arrested because of their work.

The international community can increase the quantity and quality of casualty recording available by providing political and financial support to independent, civil society-led casualty recording initiatives. The international community should also encourage the authorities in violence-affected states such as Somalia to engage constructively with independent casualty recorders.