

Organising Humanitarian Convoys

In the course of humanitarian operations, humanitarian aid agencies may need to organise convoys for the proper delivery of relief items. The need to organise a convoy may be very contextually dependent - in well developed markets with high degrees of road safety and predictability, there may be no reason to use convoys at all. The use of convoys is usually based upon the insecurity of the operating environment, the uncertainty of the road conditions, the absence of persistent communications along the route, the value of the cargo, or any combination therein. General guidelines for organising convoys may be as follows:

Operational Basics

- Though the decision is ultimately up to each humanitarian organisation's management, it is strongly advisable that vehicles should not be part of military convoys, or even civilian humanitarian convoys with armed escorts.
- Radio/telephone/communications contact should be kept between at least the vehicle at the back of the convoy and the leader.
- Where possible, vehicles should carry communications equipment capable of reaching a location or focal point in a different location.
- Planned convoy dates and contents should not be shared widely, or with unauthorised parties.
- Local communities, police, military or governments may have procedures for organising convoys, or for passing through specific areas. Humanitarian organisations should liaise with proper authority figures before moving through unknown areas.
- Humanitarian agencies may choose to operate their own convoys, or collaborate to form joint convoys. If more than one organisation is participating in a convoy, all parties should agree to and understand on rules in advance, and even develop written agreements in necessary.
- Agencies may use commercial vehicles, or they may utilise their own leased/owned vehicles. The policies and rules in place for convoys should reflect the transport arrangement. If commercial transporters are used in a convoy, terms of the convoy may need to be written into transporter contracts.
- The person/team on the receiving end of a convoy should ideally be informed in advance of what the anticipated cargo is, and if possible should receive an advanced copy of the packing list, and receive estimated dates/times of arrival. All cargo should be counted - and if required weighed/measured - at the receiving end to ensure no cargo has gone missing along the way.

In the event of a cross-border operation:

- All customs related documentation should be identified and provided in advance to the driver, convoy leader, and intended recipient.
- A trustworthy person from the organising humanitarian agency should inspect cargo and vehicles both prior to arriving at the border crossing and after goods are cleared to ensure that cargo has not been tampered with and avoid accusation of smuggling.
- If cargo is offloaded and transloaded onto new vehicles, a representative from the organising humanitarian agency should be present to observe the process. Ideally, cargo should be counted after the transloading is complete to ensure that no theft or loss has occurred.
- Organisers should plan for border crossing times.
 - Vehicles may wait for days or even weeks at border crossings in some cases. Drivers must have the ability to eat and sleep safely while still maintaining physical presence

- around cargo vehicles.
- Ideally, vehicles should be able to return safely in daylight hours if rejected at the border.
- Any and all delays or problems associated with customs or border crossing should be communicated to the appointed organising focal point as soon as possible.

Convoy Organisers

It is strongly advised that convoy organisers should:

- Appoint a convoy leader with experience and knowledge of the route.
- Where possible, plan the route carefully in advance with designated stopping places.
- Generate and provide all required documentation, including waybills and packing lists.
- Decide beforehand what procedures to follow if the convoy is obstructed or blocked, and brief all drivers fully before starting movement.
- Identify a security focal point and/or organiser outside the convoy who will be on call during convoy.
- Conduct detailed briefings with transporters/drivers.
- Ensure they have driver names, contact details, and vehicle plate/registration numbers prior to departure.
- Maintain communication with convoy leaders at pre-determined intervals where possible.
- Following each trip, record any security incidents or checkpoints for future planning.
- Develop a repair and recovery plan (spare parts, a chase vehicle, easy access to a recovery vehicle, etc.).
- Recover visibility items once the mission has been completed, especially in cases where commercial vehicles are in use.

Convoy Vehicles

Before a convoy departs, it is strongly advised that vehicles should:

- Be in a good mechanical condition. Organisations and planners should check for significant wear and tear, tyre pressure, etc.
- Travel with a full complement of spare parts (filters, belts, spare tires, motor oil, etc.) wherever possible.
- Where necessary, be well branded with their organisation logos. It is suggested to use at least one of the following items: flags, banners or large stickers.
- Be fully fuelled and ready to depart upon reaching the assembly point.
- It is strongly advised that vehicles have an alternate driver. The driver's alternate should be legally able to drive, and have experience with long-haul trucking.

During a convoy, it is strongly advised vehicles should:

- Obey speed limits, and drive only as fast as conditions permit.
- Obey all local and national rules and regulations.
- Maintain a steady speed.
- Not overtake other vehicles within the convoy.
- If required, use flags to distinguish the first and last vehicle of each section.
- Maintain a constant distance between each other. The recommended distance is 100 meters in day, 50 at night, however distance between vehicles will depend on terrain, the speed required, visibility, and other limiting conditions.
- Not transport any cargo that is not contained on the associated waybills/packing lists, not part of the originally delivery plan, and that is not intended for humanitarian use.

- Where avoidable, not move in convoy before sunrise and/or after sunset.
- Abandon the convoy or leave any truck behind without instruction from the convoy leader or authorised person.
- Not pick up hitch hikers or other persons not originally in the convoy plan. Vehicles should be especially warned against transporting soldiers or non-state armed actors under any circumstances.

In the event a vehicle breaks down while in transit:

- All convoy vehicles must stop. The convoy leader should contact the designated organiser and security focal point.
- Convoys should resume only after it is determined that a repair/recovery effort is underway, or if the security focal point determines that it is safe to leave a vehicle behind.

Convoy Drivers

As a general guide, convoy drivers should:

- Not carry or transport any form of weapons, narcotics, and/or spirits.
- Not depart without the authorisation of the convoy leader and/or authorised convoy organiser.
- Not hand over any fuel or communication equipment, money, or cargo contents to any persons on the road unless they are part of a planned delivery/distribution process.
- Not participate in any inappropriate behaviour (including but not limited to, any form of intoxication, harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power). Appropriate behaviour of convoy personnel should be mandatory.
- Drivers must carry all the necessary legal documentation clearing them to drive in the areas of operation.

Title

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