open briefing
the civil society intelligence agency

Annual report | 2016-17

Redacted for public release

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Security risk management activities

During the five years after we launched Open Briefing in 2011, our team concentrated firstly on scrutinising the actions of governments and militaries and generating alternative, sustainable security policies, and secondly on using our experience in intelligence and research to help other progressive organisations do the same.

However, on several occasions over the last couple of years, our team of former intelligence, military, law enforcement and government professionals has been asked to assist NGOs working in challenging environments with risk assessments and security advice.

This work led us to identify an urgent need to take the best practice from the humanitarian aid sector and adapt and develop it for the rest of the NGO world in order to help keep human rights defenders, peacebuilders, environmental activists, researchers, campaigners, independent journalists and others safe and secure within an increasingly restricted civic space.

Over 2016, we worked hard to develop and formalise this work, and in October 2016 we launched a range of new security, training and equipment services to complement our existing intelligence work. We now support human rights defenders and other progressive civil society organisations across the four key areas shown over the page.

"Open Briefing's risk assessment process greatly informed our deliberations about our next steps. We were impressed with their critical, cost-effective and bespoke service."

Adrian Arena, International Human Rights Programme Director, Oak Foundation

Intelligence and research:

- Open source intelligence support
- Bespoke intelligence briefings
- Country profiles and context assessments

Cybersecurity:

- Cybersecurity audits
- Cybersecurity training
- Resources and signposting

Medical and trauma:

- First aid training
- Individual and team first aid kits
- Medical and crisis response insurance

Safety, security and risk:

- Security management system audits
- Security plans
- Risk assessments
- Hostile environment awareness training
- GPS trackers and SOS devices
- Body armour packages
- Building ballistic and blast protection
- Emergency response teams
- Security advisers
- Counter-surveillance audits
- Counter- and anti-surveillance training
- Sat phones and communications advice

Each of these new services has taken a considerable investment of time and resources to research, develop, launch and promote. Although this is only a relatively recent expansion of our activities, we have already:

Reviewed and developed a security plan for █████████████ on behalf of its at-risk Liberian partner, the ████████████████████████████████████. Also provided them with pro bono advice regarding incident reporting, GPS trackers, physical security and medical evacuation.

Provided pro bono advice on security audits and security risk management to the ██████████ █████████████████████.

In advanced discussions with the ████████████████████████████████ and █████████ to carry out cybersecurity audits and with the ███████████████████████████████ to provide a security plan for its new Iraq programme and security training for its field staff.

Received enquiries from human rights defenders, aid agencies and other NGOs across Europe and North America, including ████████, ████████, ██████████████, ████████, ████████ ████████████████████, ███████████, █████████████████████████████, █████████████████████, ████████████████████████████, █████████████████████████████ ██████████████████, ████████████████████████, ███████████████████████ and ███████████████, which demonstrates a clear interest in and need for our work in this area.

Undertaken a rapid risk assessment for an at-risk local staff member for the child rights programme of ████████████ in Ethiopia, including hibernation, relocation and evacuation advice.

Completed an in-depth risk assessment for a team from the illegal wildlife trade programme of ██ ████████████ that is supporting anti-poaching and wildlife conservation projects in southern Africa. We also provided the team with first aid training, an emergency response team and a full evacuation and extraction plan for Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and supplied them with GPS trackers, first aid kits, water filters, a handheld GPS navigation device, Blood Care Foundation memberships and a sat phone, with hostile environment awareness training to follow.

> **"We felt like we had a guardian angel looking after us during our field visit."** ████████████, Environment Programme Director, ████████████

Developed a range of brand new training courses specifically for NGOs. Our flagship course is the five-day **hostile environment awareness training** (HEAT/HEFAT) residential course. This course is ideal for humanitarian aid workers and freelance journalists working in challenging environments, but is also designed for human rights defenders, environmental activists and researchers working in countries with repressive or authoritarian regimes. We have also developed three different **cybersecurity courses** for human rights groups at risk of cyber intrusion or sabotage. We have developed a one-day **counter- and anti-surveillance course,** which is essential for human rights defenders and others working in complex environments or under repressive regimes, particularly those working with informants, whistleblowers and others at risk. Finally, we offer one-day basic and five-day advanced **first aid courses** for those working in hostile or remote environments where the risk of serious injury is elevated and medical evacuation could take significant time to enact.

Identified the need to **expand our medical and trauma services** to include remote medical support and sexual assault awareness training and **expand our safety, security and risk services** to include online risk assessment and security plan templates.

Open Briefing expects that the judicious use of our services will ensure more effective and confident human rights defenders and help create a more robust civil society within an increasingly restricted civic space. We firmly believe in the benefits of training and providing NGOs with advice and support so that they can undertake as much security risk management in-house as possible. We also believe that those who have served in the intelligence community, armed forces, law enforcement or government have valuable skills, and many wish to apply them to achieving positive change alongside colleagues from the humanitarian, human rights, peacebuilding and environmental fields. We believe that through using these skills to support the creation of a stronger civil society, we will together be able to better protect vulnerable communities and a fragile environment, expose corruption and develop and advocate for sustainable peace and security policies.

> **"The instructor was great, and adapted the course to our level of competence and interest. I really enjoyed the hands-on practice during the scenarios. Recommended!"** NGO client feedback on our one-day essential first aid course

Policy and research activities

The protection of human rights defenders, aid workers, freelance journalists and civilians working under repressive regimes and in war zones and other challenging and potentially-dangerous situations is an immediate and essential need; however, Open Briefing believes that there also needs to be a fundamental shift away from war being perceived and used as a valid extension of politics if our efforts on the ground are to be more than just a sticking plaster. Therefore, Open Briefing has continued to challenge militarism and promote sustainable security policies through our policy and research work over the last 12 months.

During 2016-17, we have focused our activities on sustainable security and its antithesis, 'remote warfare', including:

In May 2016, we published an **in-depth assessment of the United Kingdom's remote warfare against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.** This was the culmination of our series of monthly briefings that tracked and analysed the military operations of the United Kingdom and the wider US-led coalition and analysed the military and political developments behind them. In particular, we monitored the unreported use of UK special forces on the ground and estimated the number of civilian casualties caused by British and US airstrikes. This work was funded by the Network for Social Change.

In June 2016, we launched a new series of **weekly briefings on political and security developments around the world.** In these popular briefings, our volunteer researchers track the trends and under-reported developments that could lead to conflict or serious unrest and are of particular interest to civil society. In doing so, we seek to explain to readers what is happening, why it is significant and what is likely to happen next (our *What? So what? Now what?* protocol).

"Open Briefing has proved hugely useful to Crisis Action and our partners time and again. Their high-quality analysis helps us focus our energies on where we can have the greatest impact for the protection of civilians in conflict. The value of that contribution cannot be over-estimated."

Nick Martlew, UK director, Crisis Action

In June 2016, two weeks before the referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union, we published a well-received **briefing paper that challenged the view of some influential pro-Brexit commentators that Britain's security was better met by its membership of NATO rather than the European Union.** In reality, we argued, the United Kingdom's membership of the EU gives it diplomatic leverage and law enforcement mechanisms that it would not have outside the union as well as military cooperation beyond that possible within NATO. While the nuclear-backed NATO remains somewhat of a 'solution looking for a problem', we argued that the EU takes a broader approach to security than NATO's militaristic focus and it is therefore better-suited to the interconnected security challenges of the 21st century.

We continued our **monthly briefings that tracked and assessed developments in special forces, mercenaries, armed drones and killer robots, cyber warfare and mass surveillance** - together known as 'remote warfare'. This culminated in November 2016 when we published our in-depth *Remote Warfare Digest.* A key theme of this briefing paper was the adoption of remote warfare by state and non-state actors beyond the United States and its Western allies – demonstrating that our governments have 'let the genie out of the bottle' with their actions. This work was funded by the Remote Control Project.

Over the 12 months, we also published a number of accessible **articles on geopolitics in Asia and the Middle East.** This included several items on Iran and China, in particular. We also published an article on how best to respond to the threat from hostile civilian drones in the United Kingdom, which followed on from our groundbreaking January 2016 report that brought the issue into the public and political eye.

Media attention over the last 12 months remained focused on the Middle East and North Africa, including the operations against Islamic State in Iraq, Syria and Libya as well as the conflict in Yemen. Meanwhile, **the United States and other European and international powers are quietly carrying out remote warfare in the form of drone operations and special forces deployments in support of Nigerian and regional coalition efforts against the militant group Boko Haram.** To address the lack of public information on these operations, we launched a six-month project with the Remote Control Project in March 2017 to monitor the conflict and communicate our assessment to interested NGOs and concerned citizens.

Organisational developments

To coincide with the considerable expansion of our activities, we launched a completely-redesigned and rebuilt website in November 2016. Rather than hire an external web design company, our executive director built the new website over an exhausting two months in order to make considerable cost savings. The new site better showcases our full range of activities, and includes more information for grantmakers and better systems for making online donations and subscribing to our mailing lists. Our publications are also easier to access and browse. Both the desktop and mobile versions of the website are much easier to read and navigate around, and they include significant performance and security upgrades.

We worked hard to get the 'boring but necessary' things right this year, including arranging full insurance coverage, registering for VAT, establishing new monthly accountancy procedures, agreeing memorandums of understanding with partners, registering as a data controller with the UK Information Commissioner's Office, expanding our advisory board and all the other things that become necessary as an organisation matures.

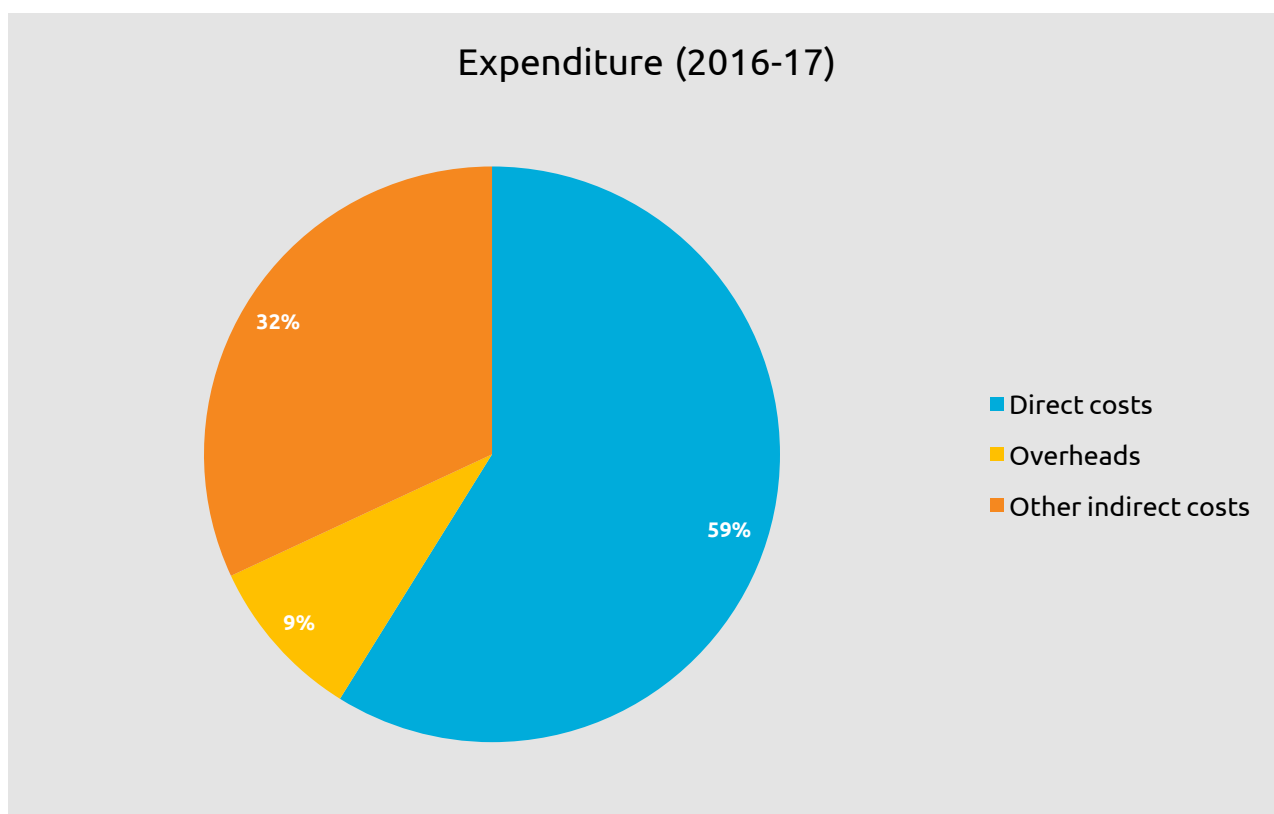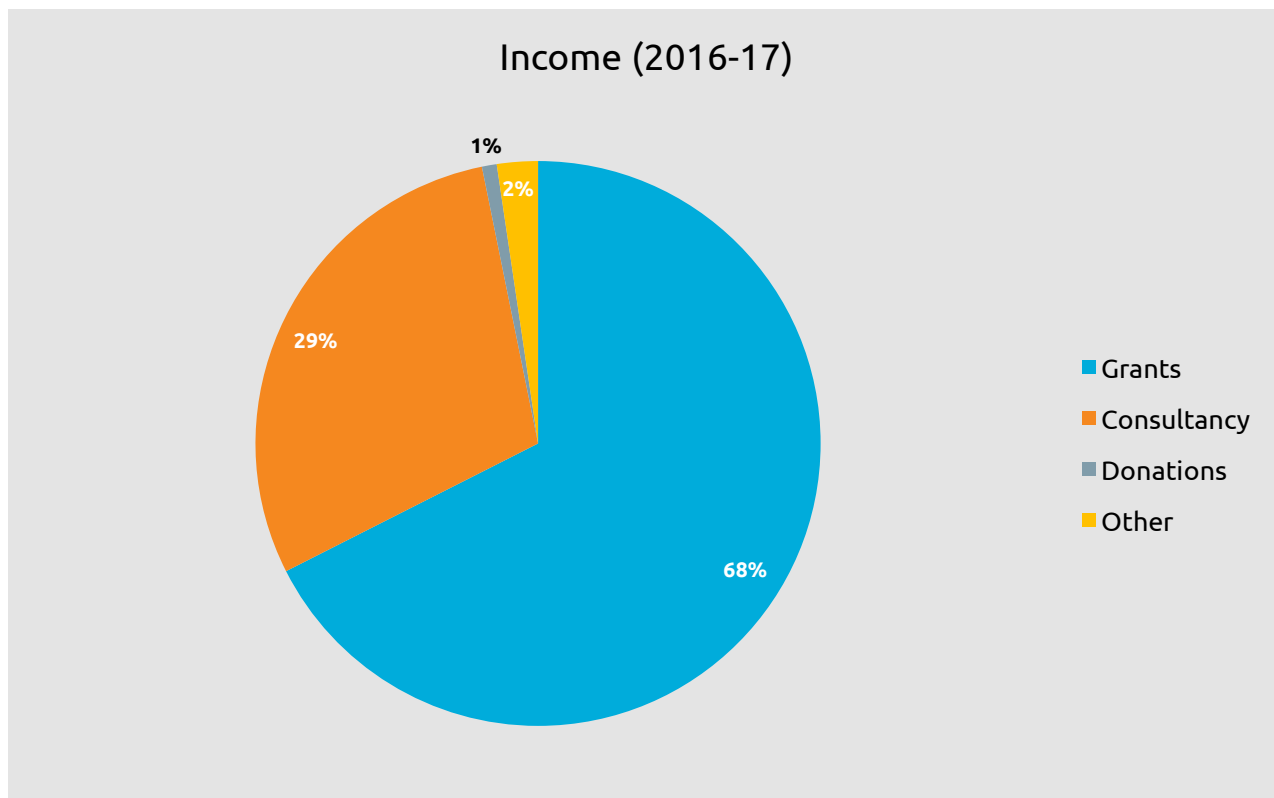Other notable organisational developments over the last 12 months include:

- recruiting three more **security risk management consultants;**
- becoming a signatory of the **Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief;**
- joining the **Humanitarian Practice Network,** the **International NGO Safety and Security Association** (INSSA), **BOND,** the **Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action** (ALNAP), the **UK Cyber Security Forum** and the **Charities Security Forum;**
- becoming a certified member of **Social Enterprise UK;**
- joining the UK government's **Disability Confident** scheme, and being awarded a Level 1 certificate;
- signing the **Armed Forces Covenant,** and being awarded a bronze award under the UK Ministry of Defence's Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS);
- becoming a signatory of the **Charter for employers who are positive about mental health;** and
- being accepted as a member of **TrustLaw,** an initiative of the Thomson Reuters Foundation that connects NGOs with free legal assistance.

During this time, we also decided to acknowledge and build upon our location in West Cornwall. We stopped using a London postal address and phone number, and moved to a co-working office space in Penzance. We have created new links with a number of like-minded partners in the southwest, including our training partners, Survival Wisdom and In Safe Hands, and equipment specialists such as Karrimor SF and Brigantes Consulting. And we have been featured several times in the local newspaper, *The Cornishman*, and the glossy westcountry magazine *Manor*. At the same time, we have expanded our international team, which now includes 23 volunteers and consultants. We have also increased the number of subscribers to our email bulletin, social networks and podcast to over 3,500 people from around the world.

Undertaking such a diverse range of new activities in such a short amount of time has required a considerable degree of internal organisational focus. We are proud that during this time we have managed to maintain the level of external activity that we have – particularly given the size of our budget and the fact that we only have one full-time member of staff. We have expanded our work over the last 12 months with the help of core grants from **Oak Foundation,** the **Polden-Puckham Charitable Foundation** and the **Philamonic Trust,** and project grants from the **Remote Control Project** and **Network for Social Change.** We greatly appreciate the financial and moral support that our funders and other supporters have given us during this demanding, but exciting, period – we could not have achieved what we have without them.

"If information is power, Open Briefing has the potential to equip campaigners with the information they need to expose wrong-doing and to identify alternative solutions." Gemma Mortensen, chief global officer, Change.org

Financial report

Income (2016-17)

- Grants — 68%
- Consultancy — 29%
- Donations — 1%
- Other — 2%

Expenditure (2016-17)

- Direct costs — 59%
- Overheads — 9%
- Other indirect costs — 32%

The considerable expansion of our activities this year has required a significant investment of time and resources. This is reflected in the relatively large proportion of indirect costs shown in the chart above.

	Total
INCOME	
Earned income	
Consultancy	
Equipment	2,414.26
Intelligence	5,385.00
Security	15,388.00
Training	9,045.00
Total Consultancy	**32,232.26**
Publications	288.44
Total Earned income	**32,520.70**
Unearned income	
Bank interest	18.19
Donations	939.54
Grants	
Core grants	75,000.00
Total Grants	**75,000.00**
VAT refunds	2,310.47
Total Unearned income	**78,268.20**
Total Income	**110,788.90**
GROSS PROFIT	**110,788.90**
EXPENSES	
Direct costs	
Cost of NGO support	
Equipment	813.83
Intelligence	8,153.21
Security	14,030.50
Training	2,313.00
Total Cost of NGO support	**25,310.54**
Other direct costs	1,720.01
Staff and consultants	29,309.82
VAT	1,132.16
Total Direct costs	**57,472.53**
Indirect costs	
Overheads	
Bank charges	24.88
Insurance	546.50
Membership fees	654.68
Office costs	452.44
Other indirect costs	860.83
Outreach and marketing	393.08
Staff training	1,301.00
Travel and accommodation	2,910.49
Website	2,092.17
Total Overheads	**9,236.07**
Staff and consultants	30,159.28
VAT	1,132.16
Total Indirect costs	**40,527.51**
Total Expenses	**98,000.04**
NET OPERATING INCOME	**12,788.86**
OTHER EXPENSES	
Reconciliation Discrepancies	2.21
Total Other Expenses	**2.21**
NET OTHER INCOME	**-2.21**
NET INCOME	**£12,786.65**