

## **SYMPOSIUM**

### **Meeting the needs of victims in the immediate aftermath and the longer term through International cooperation.**

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France Victimes comprises of 132 victim support associations across France, who provide assistance to anyone who considers themselves a victim of crime. This covers of course, victims of terrorist attacks as well as mass casualty events, after which France Victimes is automatically mobilized by public authorities, mostly by the Ministry of Justice.

As regards international cooperation for victims of terrorism and their immediate and long-term needs following an attack, it is worthwhile mentioning at this juncture, that the majority of terrorist victims will have a similar set of needs, whether they are in their home country or abroad.

They will be 5 needs:

- Need of general assistance, with medical care being a priority;
- Need of information;
- Need of someone to talk to (a sympathetic ear);
- Need of personalized assistance (be it legal information, psychological or social help);
- Need of being recognized as a victim.

But when someone is caught up in a terrorist attack in a foreign country, there is also a specific set of problems that must be taken into consideration:

- The language barrier - it is essential that a professional be on hand to speak to the victim in his or her mother tongue.
- Geographical distance in relation to relatives - it's important that someone inform family as quickly as possible and make travel arrangements, arrange accommodation, and provide financial assistance if required.
- In the case of death - inform next of kin in an adapted context and arrange to have the body repatriated.

In the emergency stage straight after the attack, Embassies and Consulates have a crucial role to play: that of sharing information and keeping everyone updated.

In the longer term, difficulties are enhancing for foreign victims: first and foremost, I think, there is a risk of forgetting foreign victims, which must be absolutely avoided: foreign victims often say that they feel abandoned by their country and also by the State where the terrorist attack took place.

Indeed, the time which is passing after the attack, the geographical distance, the language barrier, the lack of knowledge of the judicial system considerably increase problems of taking care of these foreign victims.

So we can say that the main needs of persons who are victim abroad, are the followings:

- a **need for information**, over time, on the follow-up of the file, the evolution of the procedure;

- results in a **need for translation** of the documents in the file that the victims will not understand;

- a **need for understanding the French system** (compensation, judicial organization etc): after the attacks of Paris in November 2015 and in Nice in 2016, french victim support and victims associations with other institutions had a big work on this issue, in order to provide assistance to the large number of foreign victims;

- a **need for practical help with the official steps**: for instance how to make a complaint when the victim return home?

- a **financial need**, especially to go to the trial: on this point, France still has to work, regarding the question of equality of rights. Take the situations of the attacks on the Bardo Museum in March 2015 and the London Bridge in June 2016, during which French victims died and were injured (physically and psychologically). The trials of these two attacks took place this year, in Tunis and London.

In French law, no system provides for the payment of costs related to the victims' coming to trial abroad: this is possible for a trial in France when the

victim is a civil party (without consideration of his nationality), but not for a trial abroad.

Being able to attend these hearings was essential for some victims and families of victims. The Ministry of Justice, in connection with France Victimes, has set up a derogatory system which consisted in paying for the victims the same expenses as those who would have been taken care of if the trial had taken place in France.

With a view in order to harmonize answers for victims of attacks abroad, it would be fundamental to change things, perhaps even at an European level, so that victims who wish attend the trial that concerns them, should have this possibility without this causing them financial problems.

- a **need for assistance in the foreign country**, when the victim goes to the country where the attack took place: this help will be reassuring for him or her, and it facilitates her contacts with local authorities. It may be his lawyer, for example, or an association. In France we have also in many European countries liaison magistrates: they are French magistrates who are posted in a country during a temporary period, they are working in the French Embassy before coming back to France. That facilitates cooperation between the two countries.

For instance for the two trials mentioned above (Bardo and London Bridge), the liaison magistrates had an essential role for the victims: link with the foreign court, facilitator on the spot with the victims and their families etc.

As a conclusion, a contact with a dedicated person to the victim, who lives in the country where the events took place, and who would maintain this link in the long term, would improve assistance to these victims.

Victims in a foreign country need at least two points of contacts: in their homeland and in the State of the attacks. Otherwise the care, the assistance to the victim will be imperfect.