SECURITY IS COMMUNITY

LESSONS FROM THE PANIC BUTTON EXPERIENCE

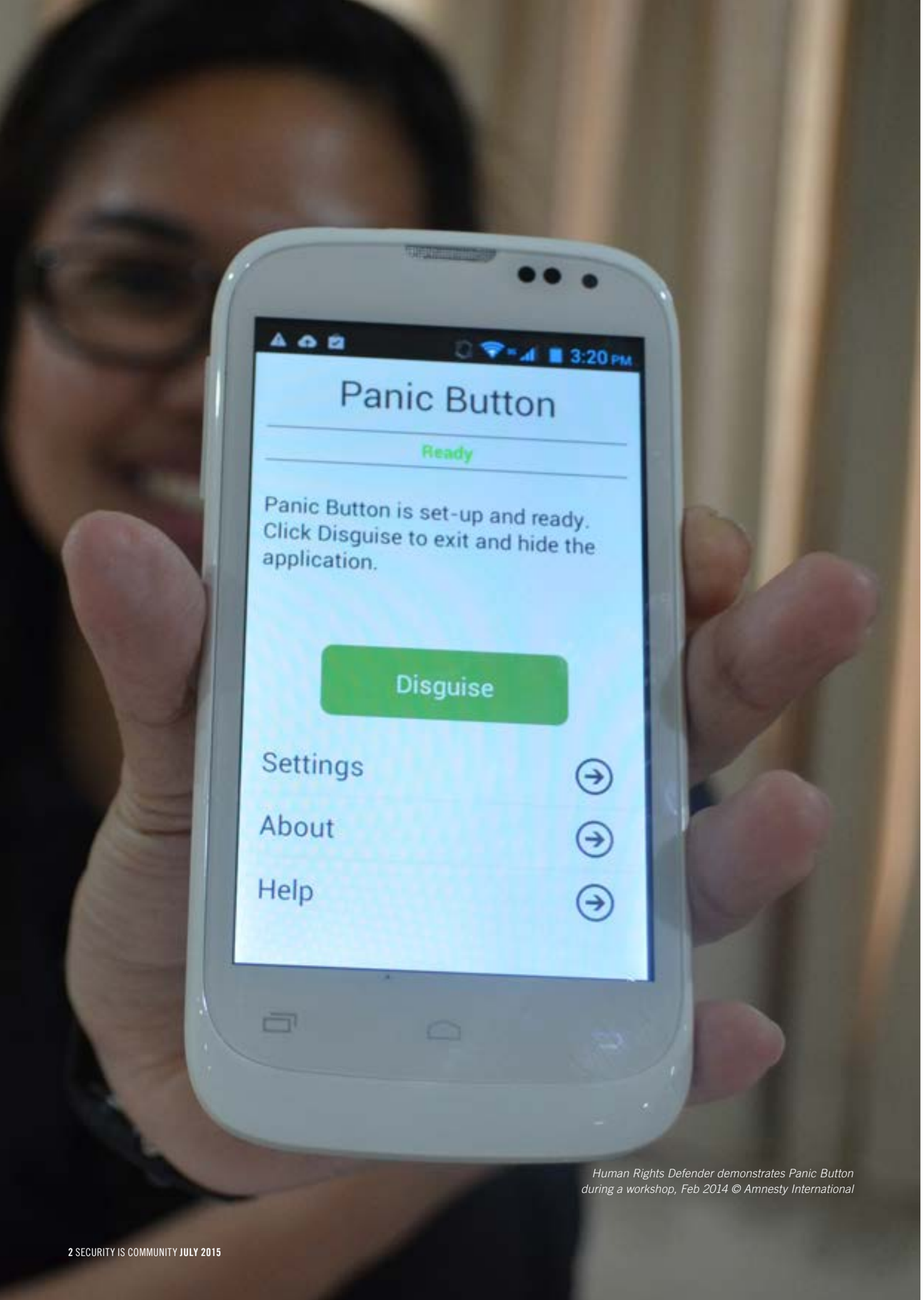
PANIC BUTTON

iilab

the engine room

FRONT LINE DEFENDERS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL



Human Rights Defender demonstrates Panic Button during a workshop, Feb 2014 © Amnesty International

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Originally situated within the Security with Human Rights Campaign at Amnesty International (AI), the Panic Button project was born out of a desire to creatively engage with technologists to positively impact on situations of enforced disappearances and unlawful detention.

Between November 2011 and January 2012 hundreds of designers, technologists and human rights activists were invited to submit their ideas about how technology could be used to help protect individuals at risk as part of an open innovation challenge AI ran in collaboration with design agency openIDEO[1]. This was the first time AI publically opened up its work to the input and ideas of the technology and design communities to seek new and creative solutions to human rights challenges.

The open innovation challenge, which reaped 360 strong and creative concepts, set AI on the course to design and develop a smartphone alert app for human rights defenders (HRDs) - the Panic Button App[2]. The app aims to quickly and discretely alert an HRD's network of an impending or occurring physical security threat when activated. Following two years of design, development and testing involving more than 150 human rights activists, 25 developers and a strong community of partners and advisers, a beta version of the app for Android was launched on the Google playstore in June 2014[3]. It has since been downloaded and tested by 5,000 users in countries across the world.

From the outset the project was about much more than developing an app. At its centre, the Panic Button project aimed to develop a model for strong peer-to-peer response mechanisms between HRDs and their networks. It did this by collaborating with HRDs to understand and build upon their existing practise and by designing a flexible security framework that would help them prepare for and manage physical security threats. This framework is called the PACT (Prepare-Act) and it was piloted - along with the app - with 120 HRDs from 3 regions (Africa, Asia and Latin America) in a series of workshops and a testing period between March and December 2014.

This evaluation report reflects on the learnings of the Panic Button project since its inception in 2011, documenting AI's methodology and approach and presenting feedback from those it aimed to support. The report is primarily based on qualitative insights gained from 39 HRDs who participated in the pilot workshops and the feedback and testimony they provided in a series of surveys about how they had used the app during the testing period[4]. In addition, we draw on key insights provided by partners and the feedback of beta testers globally who reported technical bugs to us following the public beta release on the Google playstore in June 2014.

While the data in this report is not statistically representative of the participants who took part in the global pilot, it gives insight into how the HRDs who took part feel about the overall Panic Button project. Throughout the report, suggestions and comments from the pilot participants are incorporated. The evaluation assesses many aspects of the project – from the usability and utility of the app itself to the effectiveness of the PACT framework. We hope that this evaluation will provide useful insights for NGOs and civil society, funders and technology developers interested in how technology can be used to support HRD protection.

The strongly positive response from HRDs who responded to the surveys is notable in light of the technical barriers faced during the pilot. A major technical bug was brought to the attention of AI following the beta release on Google playstore in June 2014. This was the 'false alert' problem whereby the app began to send alert messages without the user having proactively activated the alert. The false alert bug was both frustrating and confusing for users and in some cases actively contributed to fear, as their contacts believed something had happened to them. While the team worked hard to identify the cause of the problem, this was a major and unanticipated technical challenge and its resolution was delayed due to resource and capacity constraints. After putting more resources towards the resolution of the problem, the current version has significantly diminished the problem, emphasizing the importance of sustained technology support to address unforeseen issues and provide improvements long after a technology project is first launched.

Despite this major technical hurdle, every respondent who completed the final survey said they would use Panic Button in the future if the technical problems were fixed[5]. HRDs continued to reiterate its relevancy as a tool in their security plans, even as they noted its limitations. In two cases, for example, HRDs reported that they had faced a threat but were unable to use the Panic Button because of lack of phone signal. Other reported limitations included not having enough time to activate the device and not being able to use the app because their phones ran out of credit. HRDs noted that they often felt at higher risk when working in rural and isolated communities and that poor telecommunication infrastructure represented a challenge to their security. Despite these limitations, respondents emphasized that the app could support them in their work by helping them be more prepared for risks and making them feel confident that their networks would respond rapidly should something happen to them.

"The Panic Button is a fundamental strategy for alerting but also for devising a security plan and articulating this with our contacts so that the plan is strategic and coordinated…The workshop has forced us to sit down and work out what would we do and how to be able to guarantee a greater level of security for women human rights defenders."

Human Rights Defender, Mexico

[1] OpenIDEO and Amnesty International Open Innovation Challenge, How can technology help people working to uphold human rights in the face of unlawful detention?, online at: https://openideo.com/challenge/amnesty/brief

[2] The project was funded with a $120,000 grant from the Ford Foundation followed by a £100,000 from the Google Global Impact Award. The Amnesty Swedish Fund and Amnesty Switzerland also contributed £25,000 to the project's global pilot.

[3] Panic Button App (Beta), Google Playstore, online at: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.iilab.pb&hl=en

[4] All surveys were conducted using Survey Monkey. There were three surveys in total over the testing period, in English and Spanish. Only 39 people out of a total pilot group of 120 answered at least one of the surveys.

[5] 23 participants responded to the final survey in December 2014. This represents 15% of the total participants who took part in the pilot.

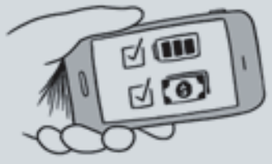
HOW IT WORKS

1

TAKE TIME to set-up Panic Button somewhere safe and quiet.

2

Create a plan with your contacts so that they are PREPARED to ACT



3

CHECK you are ready and that your mobile phone has credit and battery

4

ACTIVATE Panic Button in an emergency by rapidly pressing the phone's power button

5

Panic Button ALERTS your chosen contacts that you are in trouble and sends a map link to your location

6

Your network will continue to receive updates of your location helping them to COORDINATE and RESPOND FAST

(Left) *A human rights defender from El Salvador creates a visual map of the risks she faces during a Panic Button workshop, April 2014 (© Amnesty International)*

"In the dry run, a lawyer who was in my list called me up just few minutes after the button was triggered, my wife provided me with the map of my exact location. So this would be very helpful in real life. If only all HRDs in Basilan were equipped with the system, I could have responded to friends and relatives who just went missing many years ago."

Human Rights Defender, Philippines

Feedback from participants revealed that the greatest contribution that the Panic Button project had made to their security was the PACT framework and security methodology.

According to those who responded to the surveys, creating a PACT has made them, and those close to them, more aware of security concerns, frequently monitoring each other's security, improving communication and enhancing current security protocols. The PACT framework was integrated into HRD networks' security protocols in a number of countries. A participant from the HRDs Network in Uganda commented that "Panic Button reinforced the already existing individual and organizational security mechanisms" and that the PACT "has formed a big part of our security management trainings". In Honduras, a women human rights defenders network reported that it has integrated the PACT into security protocols at the national level.

A further key learning has been the value of integrating technology within traditional human rights protection approaches. From the beginning of the project, AI were aware that involving HRDs in the design process would be key to ensuring that the app would work for its users. For this reason we engaged in a co-design process where we involved HRDs in designing the project and invested time and resources in testing and feedback throughout. This was a mutual learning process for both AI and the HRDs we worked with, helping everyone gain greater understanding of how technology interacts with security, both supporting HRD protection and also presenting new threats. Several of the participants reported that they have previously found technology alienating, reserved for those with a technology skillset or background. The Panic Button project has helped HRDs to recognize the importance of technology and to take ownership in the development of technologies that can support their own security and protection.

Overall, the varied feedback from our users affirms that the greatest value of the Panic Button project lies in the real-world relationships between HRDs and their trusted contacts, and the ways that these can be strengthened for emergency response when an HRD faces a situation of risk. In this way, the Panic Button project represents a technology-based strategy for planning, mitigation and response to physical attacks on HRDs and not simply a mobile alert tool. As one participant put it, "Security is community. Having a PACT gives you a sense of security."

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OPEN SOURCE

Panic Button was developed using Open Source licenses, allowing anyone to freely access, use, modify, and share the application technology for any purpose.

This choice has also enabled the building of strong partnerships with other organisations which have adopted these principles.

It has also allowed several technology partners to work in turns on the software development and contributes to the aim of developing a technology community that will continue to improve Panic Button.

(Above) *A Technology and Human Rights design workshop takes place in Kenya, Nov 2012 (© Amnesty International)*

(Right) *A Panic Button design exercise takes place with human rights defenders in Kenya, Nov 2012 (© Amnesty International)*

AI has benefitted immensely from working alongside partner organizations who contributed diverse expertise to the design and delivery of the project and who will continue to play an even greater role moving forward.

The engine room, which investigates and supports the effective use of technology by civil society, brought both strategic insights and practical advice during every phase in the project's implementation. Frontline Defenders, an international organization working to protect HRDs at risk, provided input into the development of the app and training methodology and provided a further feedback loop with HRDs they support and train. Finally, iilab (information innovation lab), a small technology social enterprise, played the pivotal role in moving the project to its beta launch and providing the technology management expertise that helped bring together the various dimensions of the project.

For the future of the project, working with partners that see the value in open and user centric methodologies will continue to be key. For instance, one of the avenues to explore is growing the community of open source contributors who will focus their talent and resources to improve Panic Button as a technology base that is capable of serving different needs. Our intention is to create a 'modular' codebase so that Panic Button can easily be repurposed and packaged by others.

This evaluation of the Panic Button project charts the development of the project from its inception, initial assumptions made, the development of the mobile app and PACT framework, partnerships with HRD networks and other organizations and the learnings that reshaped the project. We believe the evaluation provides rich insights about:

- the importance of networking and information sharing in creating robust peer-to-peer and network security mechanisms;
- the role of participatory training methodologies to assist in practical and contextually relevant security planning;
- observations about both the role played by, and limitations of, technology as a tool for HRD protection.
- AI's strengths in relation to this project and the challenges we faced.

We hope that this evaluation will help others who are interested in using technology to support HRDs to develop and implement genuinely impactful projects.

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LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PANIC BUTTON PROJECT:

- There is tremendous value in employing user-led and co-design methodologies when developing technology-based approaches to security and protection within the human rights field. This includes ensuring that there are enough time and resources to work with user communities in a concerted and sustainable manner.
- It is important to focus beyond tools on creating technology-enabled strategies. Great efforts must be taken when designing a technology project to facilitate the necessary behavioural change that will support effective use of a tool.
- Relying on mobile (and in particular smartphone) technology will limit the utility of the app for many HRDs who do not have the financial resources to access smartphones and/or live in areas where connectivity and coverage issues render mobile phones ineffective.
- Ensuring that a technology project is well supported with adequate technical and financial resources over time is essential to ensure a high quality and reliable product, and quick response time when something goes wrong. This is even more crucial when developing a tool on which people's physical and emotional security depends.
- Building technology is hard and even careful planning cannot prevent technical challenges from arising. NGOs play a vital role in bridging software developers and user communities, however they generally lack expertise in product development. It is recommended that NGOs invest in a long-term partnership with an organization with technical expertise and together share ownership of delivery, recognizing that partners with diverse expertise create a stronger end product.
- Mobile technology has inherent security risks, particularly to HRDs and others who may be targeted and monitored by the state. Engaging experts to understand the threat model for your target users is important, as is communicating the risks clearly so that users can take an informed decision before using the technology.

"As we head to the 2016 elections back here in Uganda, the Panic Button will be a key tool to secure pro- democracy activists and journalists."

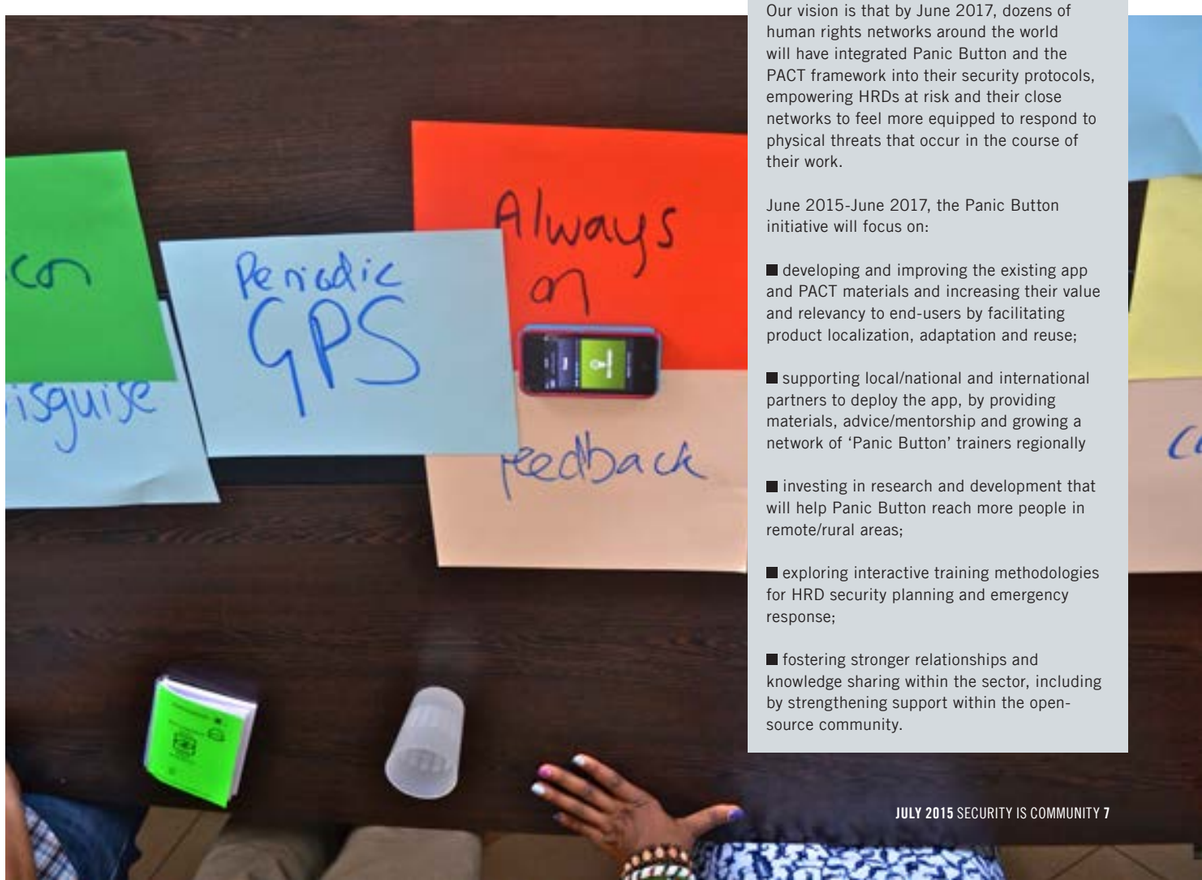
Human Rights Defender, Uganda

WHERE NEXT FOR PANIC BUTTON?

Our vision is that by June 2017, dozens of human rights networks around the world will have integrated Panic Button and the PACT framework into their security protocols, empowering HRDs at risk and their close networks to feel more equipped to respond to physical threats that occur in the course of their work.

June 2015-June 2017, the Panic Button initiative will focus on:

- developing and improving the existing app and PACT materials and increasing their value and relevancy to end-users by facilitating product localization, adaptation and reuse;
- supporting local/national and international partners to deploy the app, by providing materials, advice/mentorship and growing a network of 'Panic Button' trainers regionally
- investing in research and development that will help Panic Button reach more people in remote/rural areas;
- exploring interactive training methodologies for HRD security planning and emergency response;
- fostering stronger relationships and knowledge sharing within the sector, including by strengthening support within the open-source community.



iilab - information innovation lab - is a social enterprise using interdisciplinary thinking and innovative technology to enable individual agency and social care networks.

IILAB.ORG

The engine room is a global team that supports the safe and effective use of data and technology in advocacy.

THEENGINEROOM.ORG

Front Line Defenders is the International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. We work to provide fast and effective action to help protect human rights defenders at risk so they can continue their work as key agents of social change.

FRONTLINEDEFENDERS.ORG

Panic Button is an alert app for Android that aims to assist human rights defenders at risk of enforced disappearance and other kinds of attacks. The Panic Button project is an initiative of Amnesty International in collaboration with key advisors and partners including Front Line Defenders, iilab and the engine room.

PANICBUTTON.IO

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 7 million people who campaign for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

AMNESTY.ORG