

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT
SOCIETIES

REGIONAL OFFICE

in

Panama

Security phase is **Multiple Phases** (see 3.2 for more information)

SECURITY WELCOME BRIEF

The information contained in this document is confidential and privileged against disclosure except for the purposes of IFRC and PNS use.

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2 INTRODUCTION

This Security Welcome Brief is not intended to replace the full IFRC Security plans which should also be read by RC personnel entering the country. This Brief is designed to be able to give the reader the most important elements from the five other IFRC Security Plans in a concise manner and should be an aide memoire to complement the full security documentation.

The purpose of these Security Regulations is to provide a security framework for RC personnel under IFRC security management responsibility, to operate within Republic of Panama.

3 SECURITY MANAGEMENT

Security incidents can occur anywhere and at any time. Therefore, visitors must never let down their guard, and must always keep a high security awareness both individually and collectively. All visitors are responsible for their own security and must take all possible measures to minimize or avoid potential risks. Always share security information with your colleagues and IFRC Office.

3.1 Main Identified Security Threats in Republic of Panama – (from Security Regulations)

Main Security Categories	Specific threat, description & recommendations
Crime	<p>The main risks to RC personnel in Panama are theft of articles inside automobile, Road Accidents, credit card theft, to a somewhat lesser extent, personnel are also exposed to: Pickpockets; Purse Snatching; Home Robberies, finally, RC personnel are also exposed to: Express kidnappings; Kidnappings / Abductions; Gang Violence. Murders, with the resultant (residual) risk currently assessed as low</p> <p>KIDNAPPING</p> <p>The majority of kidnappers target local businesspeople, though anyone perceived to be wealthy is vulnerable; there have been some external incidents of frequent business travellers being kidnapped. Kidnaps also take place in areas bordering Colombia, especially Darién province.</p> <p>A practice referred to as ‘express kidnapping’ has become more common in Panama City, Colón and other larger cities in recent years. There have also been instances of express kidnapping while victims are withdrawing money from an ATM. It is recommended to use only ATMs inside secure facilities (e.g., hotel lobbies, banks, and shopping centres) and avoid machines that are directly accessible from the street.</p> <p>TERRORISM</p> <p>Terrorism poses a low risk, except in areas near the border with Colombia, where guerrilla incursions are common.</p>

<p>1. Natural Hazards</p>	<p>Panama is historically prone to earthquakes. Occasional flooding and landslides occur in rural areas and some city streets become temporarily impassable due to flooding during the rainy season (normally April to December). Tropical storms can cause fallen trees, landslides, power outages, and even fatalities.</p> <p>Please always remain calm and seek safe shelter. Always visualize the exit routes from your hotel and if you are not there, look for a safe place. During a hurricane remain indoors – away from windows, skylights, and glass doors – and remain in the strongest part of the building.</p> <p>In flood-prone areas do not use the cellar or basement since these areas can be extremely dangerous due to existing flooding. If the building you are in starts to break up or fall apart, then the only option is to protect yourself with a mattress, rugs, blankets, or tarpaulin, and to hold on to any strong fixtures (such as water pipes), or get under a strong, heavy table or bed.</p>
<p>2. Health Hazards</p>	<p>COVID-19 Restrictions -</p> <p>Inbound – traveller must consult MOH website to verify countries with restrictions as per resolution 2294 MINSA. the country's ports of entry are opened to international travellers and all arriving passengers are still subject to enhanced health screenings at all airports. All persons entering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a negative COVID-19 antigen or PCR test in English or Spanish taken at most 72 hours before arrival; or a COVID-19 vaccination certificate showing that they were fully vaccinated at least 14 days before arrival. - This does not apply to passengers younger than 5 years accompanied by their parents or legal guardians who are fully vaccinated or have a negative antigen or PCR test. <p>A completed "Electronic Health Affidavit" must be presented upon arrival. The form can be obtained at https://viajes.panamadigital.gob.pa/</p> <p>Outbound - There are no known restrictions on outbound travel. (Until further notice)</p> <p>COVID -19: PROTECTION MEASURES:</p> <p>Please adhere to and follow BCP plans in place for country, please strictly follow Bio Safety and personal Hygiene procedures. If travelling to Panama, please contact priority departure, Administration department to provide updated travel restrictions or requirements.</p> <p>Panama also is home to a number of vectors borne diseases such as: Malaria, Yellow Fever, Dengue, Chikungunya and Leishmaniasis. Of these only Dengue is present in the capital city of Panama. Insect repellent and long sleeves are recommended.</p>
<p>3. Civil Unrest</p>	<p>Frequently the University of Panama area is the starting point of many public protests in Panama City which can become a violence situation. Porras Park, National Assembly, Presidential Compound, and Martires Avenue are popular sites of public disagreements. Even though protests are not usually anti-foreign, passers-by are exposed to potentially violent marchers who have become combative with Panamanian Security forces.</p>

<p>4. Road/Water/Air Safety</p>	<p>Driving culture in Panama has declined over the last 10 years and the quality of drivers is poor around 40% of the time. Accidents are on the rise nationwide due to this fact. Delegates can drive in Panama but only from the Metropolitan Area West up to the border with Costa Rica and only up to Chepo on the Eastern side, Colon is also allowed. For Official missions’ local drivers are to be used.</p> <p>Vehicle accidents are on the rise and have doubled since 2021.</p> <p>Boat travel for official business is to be coordinated through the line management, private trips in boats are with authorized carriers and with all marine safety equipment. Life Vests are mandatory.</p>
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3.2 Security phase

All RC Personnel must know the current security phase classification and its implication on the way of working and living in their area of operation or area that will be visited. For complete information please see Stay Safe for Managers (Page 42) “Operational security phases”

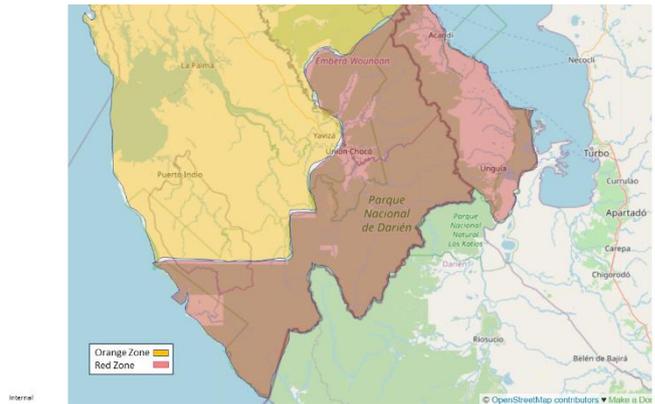
All RC personnel are to comply with any restrictions put in place by the Senior Manager in accordance with the current situation and designated phase level.

The current overall **Security phase** in Republic of Panama is **Multiple Phases**

If Multiple Phases please indicate which geographical areas are in which phase and where IFRC has presence.

White phase	<p>Areas at White Phase (No major security concerns)</p> <p>In General, 95 % of the country with certain exceptions are white phase with general security rated good</p>	<p>IFRC Presence</p> <p>Yes</p>
Yellow phase	<p>Areas at Yellow Phase (Some security concerns, heightened security awareness initiated)</p> <p>Certain areas are out of bounds without the authorization of the Head of Region and Regional Security Unit. The Area East of Tocumen airport through Chepo is considered “Yellow” all the way up to the “Bayano” Bridge. On the Caribbean side Colon is a high crime area .</p>	<p>IFRC Presence</p> <p>Yes</p>
Orange phase	<p>Areas at Orange Phase (Access to beneficiaries limited, risk to RCRC personnel severe, tight security management needed)</p> <p>Eastern Panama province starting at the “Bayano “bridge trough the Darien Province up to Yaviza</p>	<p>IFRC Presence</p> <p>Yes</p>
Red phase	<p>Areas that are Red Phase (Conditions do not allow work, risk to RCRC personnel extreme)</p> <p>Darien Province from Yaviza 80 kms to the Colombian border areas, Guna Yala north to south along border area with Colombia up to Cabo Tiburon</p>	<p>IFRC Presence</p> <p>No</p>

*Darien’s region has its own welcome brief document and the IFRC presence is extremely limited (two delegates in specific missions)



4 IN-COUNTRY SITUATION

The Republic of Panama is located in the centre of Western Hemisphere, on the following geographical coordinates: 7°12'07" and 9°38'46" Of North Latitude and 77°09'24" and 83°03'07" of West Longitude.

It limits to the North with the Caribbean Sea, to the East with the Republic of Colombia, to the South with the Pacific Ocean and to the West with Costa Rica.

The IFRC has permanent presence in Panama since 1996 when the Regional Delegation moved from Guatemala to Panama. There is a status agreement between IFRC and the Gov. of Panama that extends semi diplomatic courtesy to expat staff duly registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Political situation: The country is a democratic republic in which the president acts as both head of state and head of government. The executive branch consists of a president and a vice president, while the legislative branch, a unicameral National Assembly is a 71-member body. The Political environment is stable.



4.1 People & Society

Population figures : 4,352,193 (approx.).

Ethnic Groups: According to recent estimates, some 70% of the inhabitants are mestizo; 14% are native American (Ngabe Bugle -, Kuna, Embera, , among others); 10% are white (mostly Europeans); and 6% are Amerindian.

Languages: The official language in is Spanish. However, many Panamanians speak English

Religions: There is absolute freedom of worship in Panama. The majority of Panamanians are Roman Catholics. But, due to the great diversity of the country, there are numerous churches, temples, and synagogues.

5 VISITOR INFORMATION

5.1 IFRC office addresses

Americas Regional Office

Address: Panama City, Ancon Parrish, Clayton, City of Knowledge, Jacinto Palacios Cobos street, Building No. 221.

Phone Contact Number: (507)317-3050. PO Box 0819-0113 El Dorado area, Panama, Republic of Panama

Humanitarian Hub / Regional Logistics Unit

Address: Panama Pacifico area. Building No. 380.

Phone contact number: (507) 316-1001

5.2 Contacts

The **Head of Region, Martha Keays** has the ultimate responsibility for security in the Republic of Panama. However, for security concerns it is also possible to contact Regional Security Coordinator Jorge Zequeira, (+507) 6949-5546 (WhatsApp), (+507) 6674-1584, (+507) 6382-635 (24 hours in case of emergency), jorge.zequeira@ifrc.org, security.america@ifrc.org, there are also two Regional Security Officers available at +507 6526 3165 and +507 6526 2895

Administration, Nadine Chavarría (507) 6672 -1581, nadine.chavarria@ifrc.org, (24 hours in case of emergency)

5.3 No go Zones / Curfew

Avoid the University of Panama area. Panama City has specific areas that are no go zones: Marañón, Santa Ana, Chorrillo, Outskirts of the city should be avoided as they are high crime areas.

The Security Coordinator and the Administration have recommended that the following areas are out of bounds without the authorization of RD/ Security: Colon and Darien. These zones have high crime rates, especially at night. The following bars/ nightclubs are also out of bounds: La Gloria, Capri in Río Abajo, La Gruta Azul, Bomboneros y La Mayor. In many cases, there are no signs that indicates the names of sites out of limits.

5.4 Host National Society

National HQ is located on Calle Jorge B Aleman, Albrook, Edificio 453, Ancon, Ciudad de Panama/ 507 315-1388- 507 315 1421, The Panama Red Cross has 26 chapters nationwide, is well recognized and respected, has multiple programmes with IFRC and provides support to Federation activities in country.

5.5 International Vaccination Certificates

Although there are no mandatory vaccines for entry into the country, the Yellow and Typhoid Fever, Hepatitis A and B, and Tetanus are recommended. However, before the ticket is issued, verify the vaccination requirements with the airline and administration.

5.6 Health Situation / Infrastructure

Panama has a very good private health sector. The public health system is good but saturated.

It is advised to take the necessary measures to protect yourself against diseases transmitted by mosquitoes such as dengue and others.

In jungle areas, Malaria is a risk throughout the year. People should have special care about it, in places such as: the forested area of Bocas del Toro, the Darien province and Guna Yala indigenous territory. For information and recommendations, see the OPS website, and/or the Ministry of Health website.

In Panama, the level of HIV / AIDS infection is considered high in certain vulnerable zones of the population. Therefore, we recommend to travellers being careful with activities related to the transmission of body fluids.

It is recommended that, **in rural areas**, boil all drinking water or drink bottled water due to the risk of disease, and take precautions in order to not to eat in unhealthy places when kept out of urban areas.

5.7 Passport & Visa

It is the travellers' responsibility to verify if a visa is required for their nationalities.

All visitors must ensure that their passport is valid, with at least 6 months prior to their expiration date. Also, try to carry your Federation ID and your invitation letter which indicates the reason for your visit to Panama. Before the issuance of your air ticket, verify if your nationality requires that you perform visa procedures to enter to Panama.

5.8 Airport

You will arrive at Tocumen International Airport in Panama, which is the main entrance and exit gate for tourists to Panama, and it is considered the strategic point of America for its number and variety of connections. A person will be waiting for you with a sign with your name. IFRC has two hired companies for transport of staff and visitors, Fabio Transport and Miguel Transport, pickups and departures are organized by Administration: Penelope Perez +507 6677 8677. There is no departure tax

5.9 Climate

Panama has a tropical climate, and the temperature is usually uniform throughout the year. The average temperature is 30 degrees Celsius during the day and 28 degrees Celsius at night.

5.10 Accommodation

Approved hotels in Panama City are Holiday Inn (City of Knowledge), Wyndham Panama Albrook Mall Hotel, Crowne Plaza, Holiday Inn Panama, and the Miramar Intercontinental. (Please consider that IFRC staff coming to Panama for a mission can only stay in accommodations approved by IFRC security. Please prior to making a hotel reservation, confirm with Administration and security that the hotel has security approval.

5.11 Food /Drinks

Due to the international influence and the presence of many foreigners in the country, in Panama we can find all kinds of food; the health ministry has active control over hygiene at restaurants, sidewalk vendors and food expenditure outlets, it is recommended to eat only at well-established vendors, avoid eating food from mobile street vendors. Tap water is safe to drink, but bottled water is recommended if you are a visitor.

5.12 Banking and Currency

The use of ATMs is very common in Panama. Personnel should use within commercial spaces or banks, and avoid using them in malls, dark or remote areas. Always be alert to your surroundings when you must utilize them because express kidnappings to obtain cash through their use are occurring in Panama.

The Republic of Panama is a dollarized country. Therefore, the paper currency used as an exchange of legal currency is the US dollar. The Republic of Panama has its own metallic currency, for decimal transactions that are equivalent in size and value to those of the United States of America, called "Balboa". In case that you require to exchange your local currency money to US dollars, you can do it at the airport.

5.13 Transport

To move from one place to another, urban buses (Diablos Rojos, Verdes and Metro Bus) should not be used by expat staff. The use of yellow cabs is not recommended, but if absolutely necessary, we recommend the use of well identified taxis, with the license plate numbers printed on the doors. For a safe and effective trip, the following measures must be taken agree with the cost of the taxi BEFORE boarding, to avoid extra or inflated charges; do not allow taxi drivers to stop and pick up additional fares while they are transporting you. We recommend the use of the mobile application and UBER service, always checking the license plate and the names of the drivers before using it and send the information to a friend. On the other hand, we do not recommend renting vehicles in Panama, due to the dangerous driving conditions. If you are involved in a traffic accident, Panamanian regulations prohibit both parties from moving their vehicles until traffic police arrive and document the scene, especially if the accident is significant and there are serious injuries and / or death. If so, notify the Security Coordinator or Administration Services immediately. If the traffic accident is not serious at all, both parties can directly complete the insurance documentation and process it at the insurance company for settlement. IF the vehicle belongs to the Federation (Fleet Vehicle), you MUST call the Fleet Manager or the focal point of the fleet (remember to report a security incident). Generally, you should receive hotel and transportation information for your transfer before arriving, but in case you do not have this information, you have the following alternatives: Communicate by telephone or WhatsApp to the following mobile numbers assigned to the administration department (507) 6672-1581, (507) 6677-8677. Contact the following recognized taxi services from the airport: Fabio Transport (507)266-1356 (507) 6615-4571 Supplier of transport services or trips to the airport. Highly reliable.

The use of the safety belt is mandatory as well, speed limits must be adhered to.

For full regulations on Field movement see "TRAVEL / MOVEMENT CONTROL (ANNEX A)" of Security Regulations.

Boat trips in your private time are on your own responsibility.

6 COMMUNICATIONS

-Minimize the number of devices you bring on mission and avoid carrying sensitive data with you.

-Ensure that your devices have secure passwords, and your anti-virus software is updated.

-Avoid using public Wi-Fi networks at airports, transportation hubs, or restaurants.

6.1 List of useful telephone numbers:

- Police: 104 / 911
- Ambulance: 911
- Fire service: 103/911
- Panamanian Red Cross Ambulance: +507 315-1389
- Civil Protection: **316-0080**
- Clayton Police Station: **317-9290**
- SEMM, Servicios de emergencias médicas móviles (ambulance, private service). Phone contact number: 366-0100. <https://www.semmpanama.com/>,
- EMI, Ambulance service. 236-6060 y el 236-5050. www.grupoemi.com
- Grupo Vive Ambulancias: +507 279-3100.

7 GENERAL CONDUCT

7.1 Local Customs/Traditional Law

To act in a respectable manner within the given environment, RC personnel must understand and respect the local culture and traditions. It is their duty to be informed about the political, social, religious and cultural environment and to respect the society/culture in which he/she lives and works. Adaptation requires cultural awareness, understanding and respect for local sensitivities and is key in determining the way the IFRC is perceived, i.e., our institutional image.

Panamanians are friendly by nature, handshakes and hugs are common shows of friendship, depending on the area natives will shout at each other in a non-violent way, at any time you will come across vernacular celebrations be they religious or regional.

Panamanians are keen to the RC/RC movement as the NS has a good reputation and image and are eager to help if you identify yourself.

7.2 Personal Documents

At all times, IFRC staff must carry their IFRC ID card and

- Photocopy of passport and visa
- International Drivers licence (if driving)
- (Consult the documents if travelling to Darien)
- IFRC ID or NS ID

All IFRC personnel must be identifiable whilst on mission.

All personnel must use the IFRC vest and ID while on official business and meetings.

7.3 Cameras

Never take pictures of military, police, or security personnel. Always ask before taking pictures of people or places, even for professional purposes, if in doubt - Do Not Take pictures and put away your camera. Ensure you have guardians permission before taking pictures of children and adolescents.

8 MEDICAL EMERGENCY

In all cases of medical emergency contact:

Staff Health: Dr. Henry Lau, 507- 6480- 9929; Security Officers: 507 6333-0676- 507 6526-2895; Security Coordinator: 507-6949-5546.

It is also possible to contact the Senior Health Officer (Tel. +41 (0)22 730 4417, Mob. +41 (0)79 217 3319), directly.

In case of Emergency Evacuation please refer to **Medical Evacuation Procedures**.

8.1 Hospitals

In case of severe illness or injury, IFRC recommends the following Hospitals / Doctors:

Rally Laboratory

Phone Contact Number: (El Dorado): 260-9761

Phone Contact Number: (El Cangrejo): 264-4342

Phone Contact Number: (España Ave): 261-2103

Paitilla Medical Center

Address: Avenida Balboa y calle 53, Panamá

Phone Contact Number: 265-8800

Phone Contact Number: (Emergencies): 265-8888

Phone Contact Number: (Admission): 265-8891

Phone Contact Number: (Oncological Centre): 265-8844

Phone Contact Number: (Rx): 265-8866

Phone Contact Number: (Lab): 265-8883

San Fernando Hospital

Address: España, Panamá

Phone Contact Number:: 3056300

Santa Fe Hospital

Address: Transísmica Ave. Simón Bolívar and Frangipani Ave.

Phone Contact Number: 227-4733

Punta Pacífica Hospital (John Hopkins)

Address: Blvd. Punta Pacífica.

Phone Contact Number: 204 8000

National Hospital

Address: Cuba Ave & 38 east street, Panamá City

Phone Contact Number: 207-8100 /

(Emergencies): 207-8110

8.2 PEP Kits

The ARO have two PEP Kits that are located in the safe in the office of the Regional Security Coordinator on the 4th Floor of the Building 221 at City of Knowledge. For access: Security Coordinator Jorge Zequeira: 507-6949-5546. Additional PEP kit is available with Regional Staff Health.; Dr. Henry Lau, 507- 6480-9929

9 CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

See also IFRC Critical Incident Management Plan

In the event of a Critical Incident (an incident that threatens or has impacted on the safety/security of IFRC personnel, assets or operations to the extent that there is significant disruption or incapacity to operate) the Critical Incident Management Plan (CIMP) will be put into effect.

At the field level any RC personnel involved in a critical incident will have the responsibility to provide a first response to an imminent or actual critical incident:

- a) Ensure the wellbeing of those directly affected by the critical incident – self included.
- b) Prevent further harm to others.
- c) Ensure as far as possible, programme continuity.
- d) Limit damage to IFRC assets and reputation.
- e) As soon as safely possible contact **Regional Security Coordinator Jorge Zequeira M +507 6949 5546 | +507 6674 1584 | +507 6747 3149 | +507 6382 6355 | WhatsApp +507 6949 5546** , and report the incident

- √ **Who** exactly is involved (both IFRC staff and others)? Get full names and spelling if needed.
- √ **What** happened? Details of any injuries, particularly of IFRC staff.
- √ **Where** did it happen?
- √ **When** did it happen? When was the exact time of the incident.
- √ **Which** IFRC staff are accounted/unaccounted for?
- √ **What** is being done as a follow up in the field at this time – is any assistance required?
- √ **Who knows?** Who is aware of the incident? Staff, Families, Media?
- √ **Why** did it happen? Perhaps this is not known, but it's good to ask if the cause is clear.
- √ **Contact.** Agree on a time to speak again (preferably within the next 30 min) and tell them to keep their phone ON (ringer/alerts on).
- √ Any other information.