



SYRIAN ARCHIVE

TAGGING GUIDE

The Al-Ghouta Chemical Attack Dataset



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Introduction to the Tagging Guide

This *Tagging Guide* was created by Syrian Archive to pilot our efforts to review and improve our existing dataset of open source documentation of chemical weapons use in Syria since 2011. The drafting and implementation of this detailed *Tagging Guide* was done to expand the potential uses for and analytical value of this dataset of verified documentation.

This was achieved through a “tagging” process by which each observation (i.e., open source material) was evaluated for certain characteristics of legal or otherwise contextually important significance. These characteristics were identified through consultation with experts, researchers, and legal professionals as well as in-depth desk research on the Syrian conflict and other conflicts characterised by the weaponisation of toxic chemicals. Each individual “tag” is meticulously defined to help illuminate these identified, significant characteristics. The tagging provides database users with the ability to filter the collected open source materials for key information and the opportunity for additional layers to pattern and trend analysis.

As a pilot project *Tagging Guide*, this document reflects our team’s initial effort towards a revised dataset, which we implemented in a first instance review of the materials collected for their relevance to the 21 August 2013 sarin gas attack. Adjustments to the following tag definitions and corresponding dataset structure may be made prior to our subsequent review and re-tagging of the entire Chemical Weapons Dataset.

Limited to a single incident, this pilot project *Tagging Guide* includes material-specific tags only, called internally “observation tags.” Observation tags are for tagging the content directly (e.g., What is both significant and plainly observable in this content? What exactly does the footage show you?). This might include characteristics, behaviours, the presence (or absence) of something, or other clearly visible information. The Chemical Weapons Dataset as a whole will include two levels of tagging: these observation tags and additional incident tags. Incident tags are analytical “sums,” findings of fact, or categorisations of information based on observation tagging and analysis of the observations as a whole (e.g., geolocated locations, verified timing information, indicators of a targeted attack, or indicators of a peaceful protest).

This public version of the *Tagging Guide* excludes any confidential or internal tags as well as step-by-step instructions on navigating our worksheets and other, similarly administrative details. In making these revisions to the internal document, our hope is to present to the public a *Tagging Guide* that is both plainly informative for database users and useful for other researchers pursuing similar analysis.



Questions and Feedback

Syrian Archive strives for methodological transparency and aims to meaningfully contribute our learning and experience to the open source community of practice. If you have any questions or suggestions for how we can do this better, please engage with us. You can reach us at info@syrianarchive.org.



Tags and Definitions

Casualties information?

Definition	<p>Whether someone who appears to be injured or deceased is directly documented in the observation.</p> <p>Also whether the collected information contains any claims about casualties (even if no direct documentation).</p>
Purpose(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To assist users at a later point in finding information about casualties. 2. To preliminarily identify the possible presence of this key feature or key type of information in the observations. 3. To flag notable elements that require further investigation and analysis.
Assumption(s)	<p>Both claims about and direct documentation of casualties are important to track.</p> <p>Nexus between the fatality/injury and the incident under examination will require additional assessment, at a later time.</p>
Tag option(s)	<p>Select the most appropriate response: YES, NO or UNKNOWN.</p>
Methodology	<p>If any injured or deceased people – or at least one person who appears to be suffering from injury and/or is otherwise nonresponsive – are visible in the observation, select YES for this tag. If the observation otherwise reports any casualties information (whether it can be verified or not), check this tag.</p> <p>YES should be selected for this tag irrespective of any recognisable affiliations for the casualties: a researcher should check this tag for both armed group and civilian casualties information.</p>

Chemical indicator(s)?

Definition	<p>Whether the observation documents information that may be indicative of the presence of toxic chemicals.</p>
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Purpose(s)	To gather footage showing visible impact(s) that may be attributable to chemical attacks.
Assumption(s)	Some indicators of toxic chemicals can be visually identified – at least preliminarily – by non-expert review of open-source materials.
Tag option(s)	Select all that apply: FOAMING MOUTH; DISCOLOURED SKIN; CONVULSION; PINPOINT PUPILS; ITCHING OR BURNING SKIN; WASHING SKIN, BODIES, CLOTHES; HALLUCINATION; OXYGEN TREATMENT; BREATHING ISSUES; DEAD PLANT(S) NEAR IMPACT SITE; DEAD ANIMAL(S) NEAR IMPACT SITE; COLOURED GAS OR DUST; OTHER; NOT APPLICABLE
Methodology	<p>The purpose of this tag is to track the most plainly identifiable and visible indicators of chemical weapons. When approaching this tag, remember to exercise appropriate discretion. Do not tag something if you think it <i>might</i> be correct. If unsure, flag your question in NOTES. Reviewers will assess your decision.</p> <p>FOAMING MOUTH - The observation shows at least one person with a foaming substance in or near their mouth. Any amount of foam at all (large or little) should prompt this tag.</p> <p>DISCOLOURED SKIN - The observation shows at least one person with notably discoloured skin (red, blue, or yellow) and does not have clear signs of editing/colour correction.</p> <p>CONVULSION - The observation shows at least one person who appears to be experiencing uncontrollable body movements. These could be large and violent or small and nevertheless involuntary movements.</p> <p>PINPOINT PUPILS - The observation shows at least one person with notably miniscule pupils, to the point that they have almost disappeared.</p> <p>ITCHING OR BURNING SKIN - The observation shows at least one person who is behaving as if they are experiencing discomfort due to burning or itching skin. They might be scratching, exclaiming in pain, or otherwise behaving in a way that demonstrates they are trying to abate this type of symptom.</p> <p>WASHING SKIN, BODIES, CLOTHES - The observation shows at least one person who is trying to use liquid of some kind (likely water) to wash people or clothes.</p>



HALLUCINATION - The observation shows at least one person who appears to be suffering from seeing or experiencing things that are not present in reality. They might be speaking to themselves, unresponsive to the people around them, or watching or otherwise interacting with something that isn't there.

OXYGEN TREATMENT - The observation shows at least one person who is receiving medical assistance to breathe. This could be by any means, including face mask, intubation, or mouth-to-mouth.

BREATHING ISSUES - The observation shows at least one person who appears to be experiencing difficulty breathing. This may include, for example, gasping and/or coughing.

DEAD PLANT(S) NEAR IMPACT SITE - The observation shows at least one notable or apparently unexplainable patch of dead flora near to a chemical impact site.

DEAD ANIMAL(S) NEAR IMPACT SITE - The observation shows at least one notable or apparently unexplainable dead animal near to a chemical impact site.

COLOURED GAS OR DUST - The observation shows gas or dust that may be characterised as having an abnormal colour. The dust need not be airborne; it might be residue near an impact site.

OTHER - If the observation contains other visual information that appears to indicate the presence or use of toxic chemicals, select this tag and note the indicator(s) in the NOTES.

NOT APPLICABLE - Your default tag, if none of the above key location(s) are shown in the observation.

Chemical munition remnant shown?

Definition	Whether the observation depicts what appears to be or what is claimed to be a chemical munition remnant.
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Purpose(s)	To gather footage of chemical weapons remnants to assist in the identification of weapons systems and munitions for identifying circumstantial indicators of alleged perpetrators or for later impact assessment.
Assumption(s)	Remnants of chemical munitions will be identifiable or labelled as such within the observation.
Tag option(s)	Select one: YES, NO, UNKNOWN
Methodology	<p>YES - The observation contains what appears to be or is otherwise claimed to be a chemical munition remnant.</p> <p>NO - The observation does not contain what appears to be or is otherwise claimed to be a chemical munition remnant.</p> <p>UNKNOWN - Available information is unclear; it is unknown or can not be determined whether the observation contains remnants of chemical munition remnants. This is a "maybe" answer that could be selected if there are remnants shown but whether they are chemical is unclear or not specifically claimed.</p>

Description

Definition	A one sentence summary of what the observation plainly documents.
Purpose(s)	To briefly describe the most notable and plainly observable characteristics of the observations in a way that does not assert prejudicial conclusions or bias.
Assumption(s)	Each observation contains information that can be plainly described in such a way that does not put forward biased information or misinformation.
Tag option(s)	Unique fill
Methodology	<p>Researchers should not add a "title" for the observations – only descriptions.</p> <p>Each description should be one short sentence describing the most prominent characteristic(s) of the observation, written in line with the Mnemonic Style Guide, and beginning with: "Documentation of ..." (if describing visuals) or "Documentation about..." (if text-only).</p>
Example(s)	A video walkthrough of what appears to be a hospital filled with chemical attack victims would be described as: "Documentation of a medical centre treating dozens of apparent victims of toxic chemicals."



Graphic?

Definition	Whether the observation includes graphic and potentially distressing information.
Purpose(s)	1. To ensure that a researcher or reviewer is more likely to be prepared for viewing content which might be distressing. 2. To enable teams to delegate content review based on personal risk.
Assumption(s)	Specific warnings before viewing potentially distressing or disturbing information can help to mitigate risk of traumatization and trauma responses.
Tag option(s)	Select all that apply: NOT GRAPHIC, CHILDREN, PHYSICAL HARM, VIOLENT SOUNDS, SGBV, TORTURE, EMOTIONAL DISTRESS, HUMAN REMAINS, BLOOD, ATTACK AFTERMATH, GRAPHIC - OTHER
Methodology	The purpose of this tag is not to track information, but to give a heads up to other researchers and subsequent reviewers. Simply select all tag options that apply from your perspective.

Key location(s) shown?

Definition	Whether any of these locations of particular note for chemical attacks analysis are visually documented in the observation.
Purpose(s)	To identify observations that visually depict certain locations that can be particularly noteworthy, valuable, or important when investigating chemical attacks.
Assumption(s)	These locations can be identified and categorised relatively easily, either by visual assessment or once they are geolocated.
Tag option(s)	Select all that apply: CHEMICAL IMPACT SITE, GRAVESITE, MORTUARY, MEDICAL FACILITY, MILITARY SITE, NOT APPLICABLE
Methodology	CHEMICAL IMPACT SITE - The observation shows a location of direct impact by chemical munition(s). GRAVESITE - The observation shows a gravesite. This can be any location where bodies are buried. This would include both mass gravesites and individual gravesites in cemeteries, for example.



	<p>MORTUARY - The observation shows bodies collected in one room or space awaiting autopsy or burial. Generally this is near to a medical facility or hospital. For example, the bodies may be tagged with identification information, stored in body bags, stored in fridges, or – in emergency situations – stored under blankets or more haphazardly.</p> <p>MEDICAL FACILITY - The observation shows a location equipped for the purpose of providing medical treatment.</p> <p>MILITARY SITE - The observation shows a site that is under the clear control of a military faction. This would include, for example, a checkpoint or a base.</p> <p>NOT APPLICABLE - Your default tag, if none of the above key location(s) are shown in the observation.</p>
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Manufacturer markings shown?

Definition	Whether the observation appears to show manufacturer markings on a munition remnant, such as serial numbers.
Purpose(s)	To gather footage of chemical weapons identifiers to assist in identification of weapons systems and munitions, for identifying circumstantial indicators of alleged perpetrators, for later impact assessment.
Assumption(s)	Identifiers on chemical munition remnants will be identifiable and legible.
Tag option(s)	Select one: YES, NO, UNKNOWN
Methodology	<p>YES - The observation contains observable munition remnants with clear markings. It is not necessary that these be confirmed as chemical remnants, specifically.</p> <p>NO - The observation does not contain munition remnants or does contain munition remnants but does not show any markings on the remnants.</p> <p>UNKNOWN - Available information is unclear. This is a "maybe" answer. There could be markings on remnants but they may appear like smudges.</p>



Military, security, or armed forces shown?

Definition	Whether military, security, or armed forces are directly seen in the observation.
Purpose(s)	1. To assist users at a later point in finding potentially relevant observations related to documentation of military, security, and/or otherwise armed groups. 2. To preliminarily identify the possible presence of these key features or key types of information in the observations. 3. To flag notable elements that require further investigation and analysis.
Assumption(s)	Documentation of key types of information are valuable to flag – preliminarily – insofar as they may lead to verifiable findings of fact.
Tag option(s)	Select the most appropriate response: YES, NO or UNKNOWN.
Methodology	If any military, security, or armed forces are visible in the observation, select YES.

Munitions, delivery system shown?

Definition	Whether munitions and/or delivery systems are directly seen in the observation.
Purpose(s)	1. To assist users at a later point in finding potentially relevant observations related to munitions or weapons analysis. 2. To preliminarily identify the possible presence of these key features or key types of information in the observations. 3. To flag notable elements that require further investigation and analysis.
Assumption(s)	Documentation of key types of information are valuable to flag – preliminarily – insofar as they may lead to verifiable findings of fact.
Tag option(s)	Select all that apply: WEAPONS SYSTEM(S), MUNITION(S), AIRCRAFT, WEAPONIZED VEHICLE(S), OTHER, NOT APPLICABLE
Methodology	If none, tag as NOT APPLICABLE. MUNITIONS - Munitions in this context refer to a complete round or unit of ammunition, or remnants of a round or unit of ammunition. This encompasses projectile, free-fall, powered, thrown, or emplaced/fixed munitions. The



	<p>purpose of selecting munitions is not to identify the specific munitions used, but to identify whether any munitions are visible within audio-visual content or whether specific munitions are described within text-based content.</p> <p>WEAPONS SYSTEMS - Weapons systems refer to the device used to fire a munition. The purpose of selecting weapons systems is to identify whether any weapons system used to fire munitions is contained within audio-visual content or described within text-based content.</p> <p>AIRCRAFT - Aircraft includes, but is not limited to, planes, helicopters, drones. Aircraft need not be military: passenger planes should also be tagged. The purpose of this tag is for a researcher to quickly identify whether or not an aircraft is visible within audio-visual content or described within text-based content.</p> <p>WEAPONIZED VEHICLE - Weaponized vehicle in this context refers to any armoured vehicle (tanks, armoured cars, assault guns/armoured self-propelled guns, infantry fighting vehicles and armoured personnel carriers). It also refers to non-armoured vehicles that have been weaponised, such as through the addition of a weapons system or munition. The purpose of this tag is for a researcher to quickly identify whether a weaponized vehicle is visible within audio-visual content or described within text-based content.</p>
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People

Definition	Whether information about or footage of people who appear to fit into any of these categories are documented in the observation.
Purpose(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To assist users at a later point in finding potentially relevant observations related to thematic areas or general types of incidents. 2. To preliminarily identify the possible presence of key features or key types of information in the observations. 3. To flag notable elements that require further investigation and analysis.
Assumption(s)	Claims or other indicia of key types of information are valuable to flag – preliminarily – insofar as they may lead to verifiable findings of fact.



Tag option(s)	Select all that apply: PERSONAL IDENTITY KNOWN, SPECIALLY PROTECTED, NON-COMBATANT(S), PERPETRATOR(S) OR ATTACKER(S), PUBLIC FIGURES, OTHER, NOT APPLICABLE
Methodology	<p>PERSONAL IDENTITY KNOWN - This refers to whether someone is personally identified within audio-visual content or described in text-based content. Whether a person is named – either by legal name or pseudonym (any name identifier suffices for this tag). The identified person might be an alleged perpetrator, an alleged victim, a witness, a spokesperson, a public figure, or other.</p> <p>SPECIALLY PROTECTED - This tag refers to special protections under international humanitarian law. In plain language, specially protected people here refers to and most commonly means: medical personnel, rescue workers, children, women, other humanitarian relief personnel, religious personnel, displaced people, elderly people, and disabled people. This does not mean civilians or civil society, generally. The purpose of this tag is for a researcher to quickly identify whether audio-visual content contains impacts to specially protected people or whether impacted specially protected people are described within text-based content.</p> <p>NON-COMBATANT(S) – Individuals who do not appear to be active members of armed forces. Typically the individual does not wear a uniform, weapons or insignia allowing inferring that the person is a member of an armed group. The purpose of this tag is for a researcher to quickly identify whether audio-visual content where individuals that resemble non-combatants – potentially civilians – are observed.</p> <p>PERPETRATOR(S) OR ATTACKER(S) - Here a perpetrator allegation refers to a claim or apparent direct documentation – in text or audiovisual content – of the individual, people, or group who are alleged to be in some way responsible for an attack or documented harm. Responsibility can include direct perpetration or some other type of liability or complicity such as command responsibility, aiding and abetting, incitement, and conspiracy.</p> <p>PUBLIC FIGURES - A public figure is someone of public notoriety, military or civilian. The purpose of this tag is for a researcher to quickly identify whether audio-visual content contains documentation of a public figure or whether text-</p>



	<p>based documentation describes a public figure, whether or not the record is tied to a specific incident.</p> <p>OTHER - If the observation contains information about other notable categories of people, select this tag and note the category in the NOTES. For example, the tag might not show an attacker but might show a member of another armed group.</p> <p>NOT APPLICABLE - Select this tag by default.</p>
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Priority activity?

Definition	Whether the observation provides information about one or more identified, priority activities.
Purpose(s)	<p>1. To assist users at a later point in finding potentially relevant observations for certain thematic areas or topics.</p> <p>2. To preliminarily identify the possible presence of key features or key types of information in the observations.</p> <p>3. To flag notable elements that require further investigation and analysis.</p>
Assumption(s)	Claims or other indicia of key types of information are valuable to flag – preliminarily – insofar as they may lead to verifiable findings of fact.
Tag option(s)	Select all that apply: TORTURE OR MISTREATMENT, COMBATANT MOVEMENTS, COMBATANT FIGHTING, ARRESTS, CIVIL UNREST, SGBV, OUTRAGE ON PERSONAL DIGNITY, ENVIRONMENTAL HARMS, MIGRATION, EXECUTIONS, ACTIVE MEDICAL CARE, INFLAMMATORY OR HATE SPEECH, ATTACK MOMENT, MUNITION LAUNCH
Methodology	<p>TORTURE OR MISTREATMENT - Refers to claims or observable signs of torture and other severe mistreatment. Visible signs can include restraints on human remains and bruising or other sorts of injuries, especially if they appear to have been inflicted to induce pain.</p> <p>COMBATANT MOVEMENTS - Refers to whether combatant movement is observed in audio-visual content or described in text-based content, regardless of whether or not these movements can be directly tied to a specific incident,</p>



event, activity or attack. Combatants are in some way – officially or directly – involved in fighting activity.

COMBATANT FIGHTING - Refers to instances where armed combatants appear to be fighting with each other.

ARRESTS - Refers to whether individuals can be observed being arrested in audio visual content or whether text-based content describes an individual or individuals being arrested.

CIVIL UNREST - Refers to claims or documentation of a situation arising from an act of civil disobedience (such as a demonstration, riot, strike, or unlawful assembly). This can be in audio-visual documentation or text-based documentation.

SGBV - Refers to claims of sexual or gender based violence in audio visual or text-based documentation. Sexual violence involves singular, multiple, continuous, or intermittent acts which, in context, are perceived by the victim, the perpetrator, and/or their respective communities as sexual in nature. Acts are also sexually violent if they violate a person's sexual autonomy or sexual integrity. Gender-based violence is violence or aggression directed at a person because of their gender or perceived gender and/or violent acts or behaviours that disproportionately affect people of a certain gender identity. Examples include: gender-based hate speech, rape, genital mutilation, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, forced abortions, total abortion bans, forced witnessing, forced nudity, sex trafficking, domestic violence, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, sexually-oriented hate speech, and child pornography.

OUTRAGE ON PERSONAL DIGNITY – Refers to acts of humiliation, degradation or other violations of a person's dignity which are not sexual in nature (e.g., forcing to sing another country's anthem, stamping or spitting on one country's flag, attempts to humiliate someone).

ENVIRONMENTAL HARMS - Refers here to any acts that are intended to or that may be expected to result in negative, harming impact(s) on the natural world, including wildlife, especially if they risk lasting harm to people and communities.



MIGRATION - Refers to claims of migration or visible signs of migration. This can include forced displacement within the territory of a State, forced transfers/deportation across recognised State borders, evacuations, humanitarian corridors or other documentation of people on the move.

EXECUTIONS - Execution here encompasses any type of targeted killing of an individual, which can include either extrajudicial or sentenced killings. The purpose of this tag is specifically for audio-visual content in which an execution is observed or in text-based content in which an execution is described.

ACTIVE MEDICAL CARE - Refers to claims of medical treatment, observable medical treatment or signs of medical treatment happening at the time of documentation. Any indications of ongoing and/or currently active medical care. The purpose of this tag is to identify documentation of medical care that is likely temporally and geographically significant to an attack, event, or other incident that resulted in physical harm.

INFLAMMATORY OR HATE SPEECH - Refers to any speech or writing that constitutes a direct attack on people based on their protected characteristics (definition used by Meta). A direct attack via speech might involve violent or dehumanising speech, harmful stereotypes, statements of inferiority, expressions of contempt, disgust or dismissal, cursing, and/or calls for exclusion or segregation.

ATTACK MOMENT - Refers to content that captures an attack in progress.

MUNITION LAUNCH - Refers to content that depicts the moment a munition is fired, dropped, placed, or otherwise launched for its intended use.

Protected object impacted?

Definition	Whether the observation appears to document impact to a plainly civilian or specially protected object under international humanitarian law.
Purpose(s)	To identify and track reported impacts to objects or locations that are legally afforded special protection under the laws of armed conflict.
Assumption(s)	1. Civilian or specially protected objects may be relatively easily identified.



	2. Identifying locations and sites that on their face appear to fit this category is valuable, irrespective of any indicators that the site had for any reason lost its protected status.
Tag option(s)	Select all that apply: MEDICAL FACILITY, MEDICAL VEHICLE, SCHOOL, MARKET, BAKERY, RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE, HISTORIC MONUMENT, GENEVA CONVENTION EMBLEM, HOME(S), BUSINESS(ES), OTHER
Methodology	Impact can include multiple types and various degrees of impact. This tag should be checked for information concerning both destructive/explosive impact and documentation showing people sheltering at the location. This tag should still be checked even if military or other armed group presence is documented at the site.

Statements included?

Definition	Whether the observation includes some type of personal or representative statement.
Purpose(s)	1. To assist users at a later point in finding potentially relevant testimonial or public communication information. 2. To preliminarily identify the possible presence of these key features or key types of information in the observations. 3. To flag notable elements that require further investigation and analysis.
Assumption(s)	Content that includes certain types of statements can be important to flag for further examination and analysis.
Tag option(s)	Select the most appropriate option: EYEWITNESS STATEMENT(S), COMBATANT STATEMENT(S), VICTIM STATEMENT(S), OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION(S), MEDICAL PERSONNEL STATEMENT(S), EMERGENCY RESPONDER STATEMENT(S), HUMANITARIAN AID WORKER STATEMENT(S), NARRATION, OTHER, NOT APPLICABLE
Methodology	EYEWITNESS STATEMENTS - Eyewitnesses were present for the event, attack, activity, or incident they describe in their statements. The purpose of this tag is to identify this special category of testimonial information. This can refer to both audio-visual content as well as text-based content.



COMBATANT STATEMENTS - Combatants are in some way – officially or directly – involved in fighting activity. This should include any members of armed forces or security forces such as police. The purpose of this tag is to identify this special category of testimonial information. This can refer to both audio-visual content as well as text-based content.

VICTIM STATEMENTS - Victims were directly harmed in some way such that they experienced loss – physically, materially, or of close relations – as a result of an event, attack, activity, or incident. The purpose of this tag is to identify this special category of testimonial information. This can refer to both audio-visual content as well as text-based content.

OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS - This refers to public speeches or official communications put out for the public by spokespeople from or other representatives of involved or affected groups. This may take the form of written text-based documentation or audio-visual documentation.

MEDICAL PERSONNEL STATEMENT(S) - This refers to statements by people clearly functioning in some medical capacity including nurses, doctors, EMTs, etc.

EMERGENCY RESPONDER STATEMENT(S) - This refers to statements by people performing humanitarian response functions in an emergency situation. This could include EMTs, but also individuals performing excavations from rubble.

HUMANITARIAN AID WORKER STATEMENT(S) - This refers to statements by people functioning in an official, humanitarian capacity. This might be people overseeing a camp or responsible for distributing food. They should be linked to an organisation with a humanitarian mandate.

NARRATION - This refers to statements by unseen individual(s) in the background of filming, likely by the filmer.

OTHER - If the observation includes some other type of statement.

NOT APPLICABLE - Select this tag by default.