



Case Study

HUMAN RIGHTS

Using Satellite Data and Tools for Humanitarian Decision-Making



Introduction

Satellite imagery was first used in a human rights context during the Yugoslav Wars, where it led investigators to mass graves, and was first used as evidence during the related International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia trials. It was subsequently pioneered by the Satellite Sentinel Project (on Sudan), and it was quietly adopted by the likes of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Catalyzed by the increased democratization of satellite imagery and data, coupled with the popularization of open-source investigations and methods, human rights investigations have been fundamentally transformed by organizations that deploy satellite imagery and analysis in different and often novel ways.

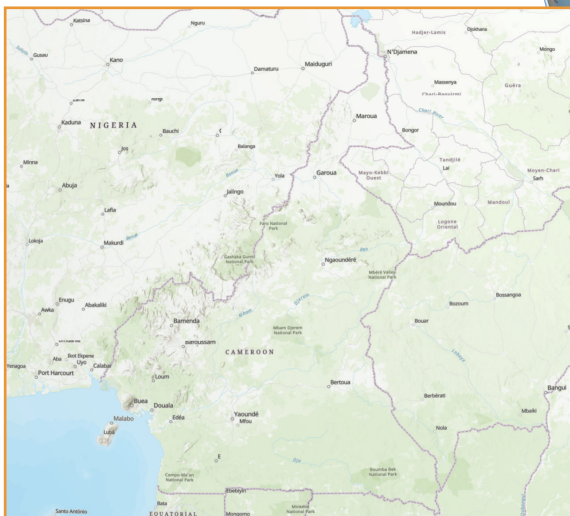
The human rights applications of satellite data are vast, varying greatly over scale, resources, context, capacity and more. At present, projects and organizations exist that use satellite data to effectively cover numerous serious human rights situations and issues worldwide, often operating through the lenses of justice and accountability, journalism, and advocacy. To effectively illustrate this variety, this case study includes two separate project examples - one a project of limited means working on an obscure conflict, the other well-resourced on a situation of global importance and interest.

Case A

Cameroon

Focused, Limited and Local Investigations into Individual Actions or Incidents.

In February 2021, an attack in the isolated area of the North-West region of Cameroon left 21 civilians dead. Investigators used satellite imagery to geolocate the incident and identify mass graves, contributing to reports accusing the government of Cameroon as responsible.

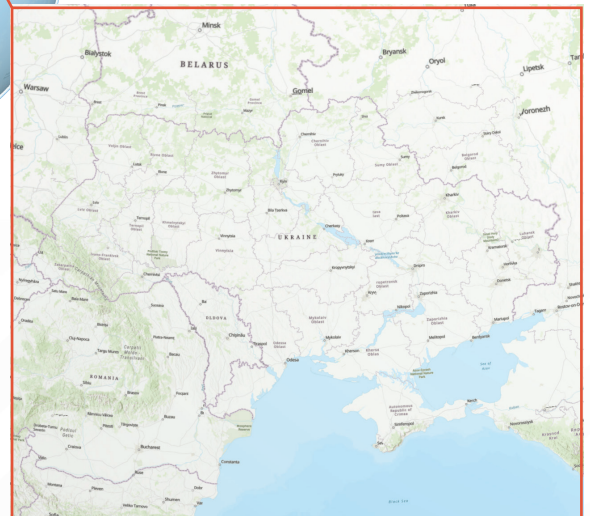


Case B

Ukraine

Large Investigations Covering Significant, Complex and / or Long-Term Incidents.

In 2022, the City of Mariupol was effectively destroyed during a months-long siege. Popular investigations used satellite imagery and geospatial analysis to identify human rights abuse and illustrate the situation.

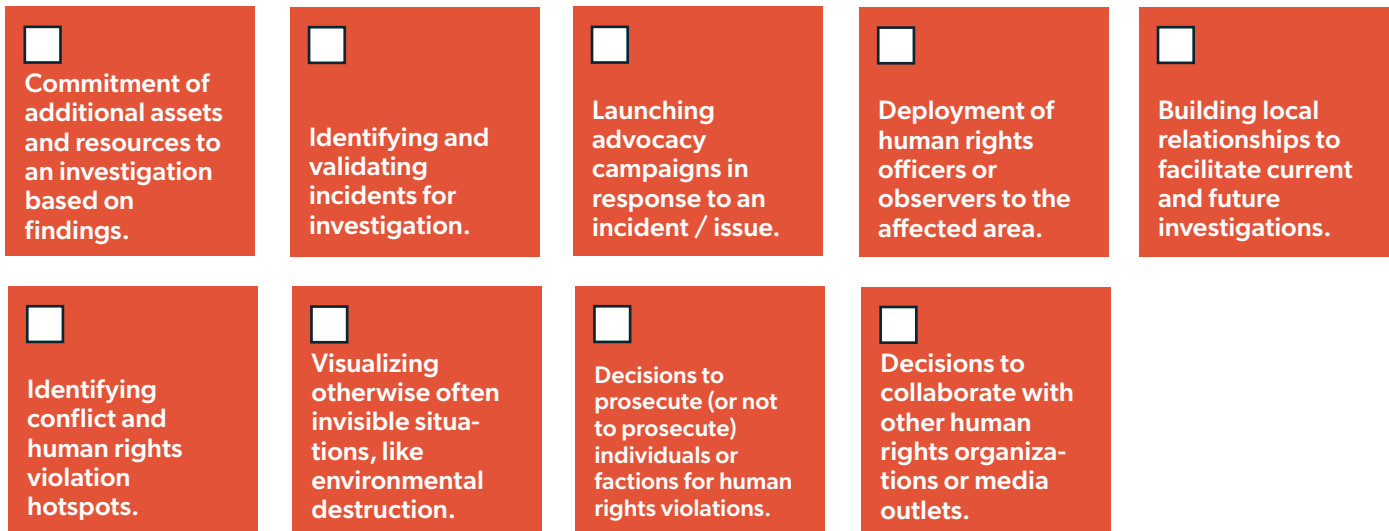




What decisions could satellite data support?

Satellite data and tools offer unique, vital insights in human rights investigations. They are increasingly a routine part of investigations by numerous human rights organizations and investigative journalism outlets, from the most humble to the most powerful. These tools make meaningful and, at times, transformative contributions to the human rights field, advancing human rights by facilitating monitoring, advocacy, accountability, and the prevention of violations. It is the cutting edge.

Satellite data can support numerous decision types:



Are there any precedents for this use case? Relevant resources we could use?

As demonstrated below, satellite imagery and data is used across a myriad of specific applications and contexts in the human rights field. It has become increasingly mainstream, riding a wave of popularity through high-profile investigations. There are numerous precedents for this specific use-case, spanning time and space.

Including the use cases listed below, three core examples include:

- Conflict and War Crimes: [Sudan – RSF Targets Civilians, Human Rights Watch](#)
- Journalism: [Mapping the Las Vegas Massacre, NYT](#)
- Accountability and Justice: [How Bellingcat Collects, Verifies and Archives Digital Evidence of War Crimes in Ukraine, Reuters Institute, Oxford](#)

Conflict & War Crimes

Documenting incidents, attacks, and impacts

Journalism

Advancing investigative journalism including into major events

Accountability & Justice	Capturing and developing robust evidence for courts and transitional justice mechanisms	
Environmental Justice	Identifying and monitoring illegal mining, deforestation and pollution	
Humanitarian Access	Verifying access, blockages, assistance needs, and assessing risk to humanitarians	
Refugee Rights	Identifying and predicting refugee flows and assessing camp conditions	
Indigenous Rights	Evidence of land claims and resource exploitation	
Disaster Response	Rapid assessment of humanitarian needs	
Transparency	Investigating issues objectively to support accountability	

What are the ethical and risk considerations of introducing the use of satellite data?

There are many ethical and risk considerations in using satellite data and tools for human rights investigations. The below prompts might be useful:

- Is the source of the imagery important?
- Is how you access the imagery important?
- How are you going to use the data?
- Does your data need to be secured? How will you secure it?
- Could access to this data and analyses of this data put individuals and communities at risk?
- Could this data and analyses influence dynamics on the ground?
- If operationalized in the field, what risks could it pose to teams and communities on the ground, and how current does a product need to be to be safe & useful and not potentially misleading and dangerous?
- Could the possession of such documents be perceived as evidence of spying or espionage by on-the-ground actors?

Categories of Risk Examples:

- Privacy and Data Protection
- Risk of Misinterpretation or Misuse
- Bias, Equity and Selectivity
- Increased Risk to Vulnerable Populations
- Political Manipulation and Propaganda
- Cultural Sensitivity and Local Context
- Overreliance and Neglect of Ground Data
- Consent, Agency and Representation
- Accountability and Transparency in Satellite Data Use



Case A: Cameroon

The Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon is very poorly known, and Cameroon rarely has high quality, publicly available satellite imagery. It is not uncommon to be working with data that is more than 5 years old. To perform these investigations, it is not possible to be picky about the source. This can produce a difficult ethical dilemma.

The conflict is highly localized, often varying from settlement to settlement, and is punctuated by sharp outbreaks of lethal violence. This means that the specific victims, perpetrators and witnesses are likely to be known within the local community. It is vital to not disclose those that have provided evidence – like videos – and those affected by and implicated in the violence, as this could place them at great risk of harm.

Relatedly, the time frame is important. Releasing details of where refugees have fled or the suspected location of an armed group could again lead to lethal harm. Such information should be shared – if at all – only with explicitly trusted organizations and bodies. The question of when to release information and who to is difficult to answer in any context.

Applying the **do-no-harm** humanitarian principle means that we must proactively limit the risk our investigations and work presents to any individual or organization both inside Cameroon and outside. Again, this might mean redacting certain details and limiting sharing only to trusted partners.

The **Humanitarian Charter established by the Sphere Standards** is a throughline throughout these investigations.

Case B: Ukraine

The provenance of imagery matters here for several ethical reasons. Here are three relevant examples:

Firstly, accessing and using imagery or other geospatial products from the same state that is actively and likely committing crimes against humanity in the area you are considering is almost certainly unethical. What if it was the only imagery available?

Secondly, accessing and using imagery or other geospatial products from a company that has perhaps restricted access over certain areas of a conflict zone either independently or at the whim of another institution or agency is also ethically and operationally problematic.

Thirdly, it is hard to know whether the geospatial data or imagery has been edited or altered in ways to protect the interests of that state or other states with interests.



These are important considerations that have become increasingly relevant in response to recent conflicts. In cases like this, where imagery and geospatial data is available from a range of providers and humanitarian partners, it is unethical to source it from the country in question. The golden thread of do-no-harm remains in place here, but it is easier to collaborate and communicate with other partners to understand what that means, collectively, in this conflict – and address it.

An increasingly urgent, significant challenge is the impact that political instability and shifts can have on major digital human rights investigations and projects. The very high-profile Conflict Observatory, a project documenting Russian war crimes in Ukraine, was supported by the US State Department, National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, and academia. It involved massive collaboration, pioneering and effort between numerous partners to build a class-leading platform and body of evidence. Following the US Presidential transition in 2025, the project was taken entirely offline and remains inaccessible, raising difficult questions about the reliability of government partners and the perils of dependency upon them, suggesting that independent approaches - even though often less well-resourced and funded - may offer more resilience in the long-term.

There are also numerous risks to consider:

- Privacy and Security Risks to Vulnerable Populations
- Risk of Misinterpretation or Incorrect Analysis
- Unintentional Bias or Selectivity
- Increased Risk of Retaliation or Violence
- Politicization and Misuse of Imagery
- Ethical Risks of "Distant" or Remote Analysis
- Consent & Community Agency

In summary, good practices to address these risks include:

- Always undertake a formal ethical & risk assessment before releasing satellite-based analyses publicly.
- Clearly communicate the limitations and capabilities of satellite imagery.
- Prioritize local collaboration and "ground truth" satellite data with direct eyewitness accounts or local reporting.
- Proactively consider consent as a feature of investigations, not a bug.
- Consistently adhere to established ethical and methodological frameworks ([Berkeley Protocol](#), [Amnesty guidelines](#), [Signal Code](#)).
- Proactively educate stakeholders about what satellite imagery can and cannot reliably document.

Case A: Cameroon

- Reputational – as the only game in town working on a very complex, online conflict, there is a very fine line of legitimacy and reputation both from civil society, partners, and the international community. One error could likely destroy everything.
- Safety, Local – the database has privileged access to information that could put victims and vulnerable people at risk. Our risk may also threaten the safety and security of on-the-ground partners.
- Safety, Team – working intimately with traumatic, graphic material can be damaging to mental health. Communicating online about the work and conflict may expose individuals to doxing or other online harm.

Case B: Ukraine

- Reputational – high-profile conflict and high-profile partners create a razor edge of risk and reward.
- High profile nature of the conflict may expose the project to the interests of malign actors like country-linked hackers or diplomats.
- Potential (but not a given) reduced risk to life of collaborators, witnesses, civilians, and perpetrators.
- Risk of digital and physical harm to team.

What data could support these decisions? What are “must have” requirements for the data and use case?

Conditions are a critical initial factor to consider before initiating the geospatial components of an investigation. This is especially significant when latency - like how long it takes to access the satellite imagery post-event and post-capture - is the priority, such as with a serious and rapidly-evolving event.

Conditions	Best Satellite Data	Providers
Clear skies	Optical	Maxar, Planet, Airbus
Cloudy	Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)	Sentinel-1, ICEYE
Night	Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)	Sentinel-1, ICEYE

Human Rights Issue

Conflict documentation	Optical high-resolution imagery	Maxar, Planet, Airbus
Forced displacement, refugee crisis	Optical imagery, SAR for cloudy/night context	Planet, Sentinel-1
Mass graves, mass killings	High-resolution multi-spectral and optical imagery	Maxar, ICEYE, Capella Space
Environmental rights	Medium-resolution multispectral and optical imagery	Sentinel-2, Landsat, Planet
Infrastructure attacks	High-resolution optical, SAR for weather / cloud cover	Maxar, Planet, ICEYE, Capella
Fires, village burnings	Thermal Infrared (MODIS/VIIRS), optical	NASA MODIS, Planet, Maxar, VIIRS



You can also consider frequency, timeliness, and cost. For example, commercial providers often offer daily imagery, however, high resolution data and tasking can be cost prohibitive. In-kind high-resolution imagery is accessible through Google Earth but often not recent enough to be useful for human rights. For some cases, purchasing imagery is worth it to acquire high-quality detailed evidence. Public sources like Sentinel and Landsat are ideal for budget-constrained investigations or large-scale documentation.

Type	Example	Max Resolution	Cost
Commercial Optical	Maxar, Planet, Airbus	0.3m max	High
Commercial SAR	ICEYE, Maxar	<1m	High
Commercial Partner Optical	Planet	3.7m	Free
Commercial SAR	ICEYE, Maxar	≥0.15m	Free
Public Optical	ESA Sentinel - 2	10m	Free
Public Optical	NASA Landsat	30m	Free

■ Do any existing solutions meet our requirements?

■ If not, what gaps exist regarding data access and analysis to support our use case?

Some existing, valuable and accessible products include:

- **Google Earth Pro** – provides global historic imagery and several basic geospatial tools that can help your investigations.
- **Google Streetview** – provides street-level photography often over a range of dates, but is limited only to the specific countries it covers.
- **Google My Maps** – is an excellent tool for investigation that facilitates real-time collaboration using maps and imagery.
- **Bing Maps** – is an alternate source of satellite imagery.
- **Satellites.Pro** – is an alternate source of satellite imagery.
- **Apple Maps** – is an alternate source of satellite imagery.



- **NASA FIRMS** – the NASA Fire Information for Research Management System provides global coverage of fires / hotspots that it has detected via satellite. Major human rights incidents – like the burning of a village, or an explosion at an oil refinery – can be readily identified and cross-referenced by appropriately using this tool.
- **Planet Labs** offers high-frequency, high-resolution imagery at 50cm via SkySat, but imagery shared as standard with human rights organizations is only 3.7m resolution via a different satellite constellation.

These basic resources provide the initial framework to identify zones of interest and locations disclosed by informants, the press, and collaborators. These resources require minimal training or geospatial understanding, meaning that anybody with a stable internet connection can contribute towards a case. Google Earth Pro (Desktop preferred) offers an easy introduction to GIS software with high-quality service-based imagery. There are many easily accessible, quality training resources available on YouTube for using this software and there are numerous further useful sources of satellite imagery – many are free or mostly free. These include NASA's **Earth Explorer** and **Worldview**, and the EU's **Copernicus Data (Sentinel) Browser**. Commercial imagery is also available.

Disruptors in the field like SkyFi (optical), UP42, Skywatch and Umbra (SAR / InSAR) are making satellite tasking and data access from commercial satellites far easier than ever before. In this sector, **Caribou Digital's GeoEvidence Explorer and GeoPlatform Finder** offer highly intuitive ways to identify and access data for your use case.

Case A: **Cameroon**

The quality and quantity of imagery of Central Africa is often poor and limited, making even basic work hard. Commercial high resolution, high frequency imagery offers the most viable investigation route, but it is usually only available if organizations have existing relationships as a beneficent with providers, or if providers offer free imagery. Purchasing imagery has been found to be cost prohibitive – with the uncertain quality and accuracy of imagery matching the very limited budget typical of these project types.

Case B: **Ukraine**

This high-priority situation of great international defense interest and concern generated a huge geo-spatial response. High-quality imagery was ubiquitous, provided by commercial imagery providers like Maxar. Access to this imagery facilitated dozens of high-profile human rights investigations by international bodies, the media, and human rights organizations.

What types of skills and expertise are needed? Based on our internal capacity and bandwidth, can our team take on this work? What kinds of partnerships do we need?

All of these elements can vary wildly between organization and investigation. Among other challenges, groups may seek to mislead investigations using satellite imagery. Though often intended to challenge impunity, the value and accuracy of satellite imagery can sometimes be deliberately obfuscated by armed groups on the ground. This could include hiding evidence before a satellite orbits overhead and reducing the visual profile of their activities from above. It is important that analysts are able to identify these challenges where possible, a task made easier by collaboration with local experts and community members.



Case A: **Cameroon**

This context is highly local, with very little access to high-quality data or software. Working with local collaborators, aid organizations, and other civil society organizations, we work with familiar, easily accessible file types and data formats like KML and shapefiles. This data is the most accessible – but we often just provide a finished product because our partners often do not have the geospatial expertise or capacity to work with it. In the opposite direction, we apply their vital, on-the-ground data collection efforts to geospatial products and investigations, working together. This then furthers the work of accountability and advocacy while also supporting local partners as finished products to inform their work. An example of a similar investigation using very limited resources would be: **Burning of Mamfe District Hospital, Manyu (Cameroon)** Cameroon Database of Atrocities.

Case B: **Ukraine**

This situation is high-profile and the subject of great international interest and concern, meaning that leading human rights organizations and earth observation agencies / companies are in the process of responding. Through collaborating with fellow cutting-edge organizations, we can provide more advanced data and analysis to support their work and vice versa – ideally across a constellation of journalism, advocacy, and accountability. This can facilitate excellent shared geospatial products for others to refer to or to provide timely, much-needed analysis. This can include AI/ML methods, imagery that we (or our partners) may have privileged access to, and ground truthing. We can collaborate more technically when working on major situations with more data available and geospatially-advanced partners, and can set more complex and ambitious investigation objectives.

Two examples of an investigation along these lines would be:

Map Lab: Mapping Gaza's Destruction Bloomberg / Dr. Jamon Van Den Hoek

A City Devastated (Mariupol) Human Rights Watch / SITU / Truth Hounds

How much time do you need to gather data? For analysis?

A 'rapid response' to an atrocity would likely involve quickly investigating an individual act – say a single massacre, village burning, or airstrike. Speed is an important consideration for awareness-raising and advocacy as close to the 'moment' as possible. The end product might be an alert to the international community and high-profile media coverage.

This is different from a longer-term investigation of atrocities during a phase of a conflict or over a wide area. This approach is usually typified by more advanced and developed techniques, a closer adherence to guidelines on digital evidence, and collaboration both between technical / investigative organizations and partners on the ground. The end product might be a comprehensive report on a situation submitted to international legal bodies.

They both have the same root and borrow from each other, but they remain different in approach and end product. There are competing priorities and significant new atrocities occurring around the world all the time. An unfortunate reality is that complex, time-consuming analyses might be overtaken by the need for a rapid response to bigger issues. Media coverage is important for organizations and projects old and young, big and small, because it can build their legitimacy, help gather support and awareness for / of their cause and highlight their expertise. This is very important for securing funding, partnerships, and future resources for the project. In this sense, for better or worse – and in terms of news cycles – speed is crucial and time is money.



Case A: Cameroon

In the Central African Human Rights EO world, the challenge is that while you might be the only organization working on a situation – and you are the only organization with information about important atrocities – the conflict is rarely, if ever, covered in the international press. In the absence of news coverage, advocacy can thus often be behind the scenes, working in diplomatic backchannels. This also makes funding either hard to come by or non-existent.

With this heightened responsibility of leadership in a context comes a clear need for fast-turnaround assessments to facilitate immediate confirmation and advocacy around an event – and to ideally inform international accountability mechanisms. With good imagery and great fortune, it is possible to issue a flash report detailing an atrocity with geospatial products within 24 hours of it occurring – even in remote Central Africa. Yet it usually takes much longer, especially working with volunteer teams, with investigations taking upwards of two months. The longer it takes, the less value it has in advocacy and raising awareness, beyond specialist groups. But if done well, it retains its value for accountability. These timelines are almost entirely contingent on the availability of good, timely geospatial data – which is rare.

Case B: Ukraine

With so many organizations competing for coverage, importance, and influence during major incidents, the need for speed is matched by a need for complexity, technical prowess, and uniqueness. Being fast and novel is usually the only way to be cutting-edge and exciting enough to make the news. This pushes us to produce advanced work at pace, something best achieved with partners. Time is everything, but in a different way – it is harder to get your work noticed, but there is greater opportunity to do so because the conflict is already a major focus of the international media. In this case, investigations placed in the media can become an interest of organizations or agencies – the parallel development of interactive dashboards and tools is a way to root investigations in human rights as opposed to media.

In short, the question often isn't how much time you need, but how much time you have.

■ Is commercial imagery or tasking needed? What are our alternatives?

Yes... but?

Case A: Cameroon

Traditional, publicly available imagery sources rarely update and are often too low quality to be used effectively. Companies offering high frequency orbit offer access and capability that otherwise would not be possible. Traditionally purchasing imagery commercially is economically unviable.

Case B: Ukraine

Exceptionally high-quality commercial data was made available during the peak of this crisis through public-private partnerships, relationships, and acquisition. It played a key role in a groundbreaking, broad human rights investigation response by numerous organizations, entities and individuals. Note that many major human rights organizations have existing relationships with commercial providers like Planet, including HRW and Bellingcat.



However, commercial imagery for human rights is usually at the behest of the provider, and this, as recently proven, is a serious risk. The provider could substantially increase the cost of the imagery. The provider could turn off access to imagery over a certain area at any time, or could be pressured to do so by a state. The provider could turn off access to imagery for a specific organization, or could be pressured to do so. The provider could restrict access under pressure from a state directly involved in a situation of concern. The provider could be manipulated to support the goals of a nation-state or other entity. Examples of these have occurred very recently in the contexts of Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine.

With this in mind, it is wise to consider earth observation more closely. Will new satellites, constellations and capabilities come online from the likes of NASA and the ESA? Will new open-source data - and potentially an independent humanitarian satellite - come online? Are there compelling new technologies that could support your work?

What are your needs for analysis like cloud computing, internet bandwidth, team time, other expertise, in-country partner?

In the human rights field, it can be difficult (if not impossible) to address all of these issues perfectly, cohesively and simultaneously as independents. It is necessary too to consider what in-kind resources and benefits may be available.

For Most / Most Likely

- Guides from fellow organizations and specialists
- Webinars
- Open Source Software – QGIS +
- YouTube Training and Online Courses
- Networks like Bellingcat
- Volunteers

Rarely / Needed

- Imagery donations & collaboration
- Geospatial Support for larger-scale problems like conflict analytics beyond organization and team
- Advanced Technical Education
- Software Licenses – ArcGIS +
- Professional / Academic Courses

Key Questions to Consider:

1. How Complex are your Analysis Needs?
2. Required Skills and Expertise?
3. Where Can Volunteers Help?



Complexity Level	Analysis Type	Recommended Approach
Basic	Visual analysis, simple annotations, mapping, change detection	In-house or volunteers
Moderate	Detailed change detection, displacement tracking, multispectral imagery interpretation	In-house (trained GIS analysts or partners)
Advanced	SAR interpretation, environmental modeling, large-scale analyses	Partners or specialized in-house expertise

Analysis Type	Resources Recommended	Skills Needed	Earth Science Expert Needed?	Volunteer Contribution
Visual mapping, annotation	In-house or volunteers	Basic GIS skills (Google Earth Pro, QGIS)	No	Yes
Simple change detection	In-house or volunteers	Moderate GIS skills	No	Yes (Supporting)
Complex displacement monitoring	In-house trained analyst or partner	Moderate/Advanced GIS Skills	No	Yes (Initial mapping)
SAR & radar data analysis	Partner or specialized in-house analyst	Advanced SAR interpretation, remote sensing expertise	Yes	No
Multispectral (environmental)	Partner or advanced analyst	Remote sensing/multispectral image analysis	Yes	Limited (Basic annotation only)
Flood or environmental modeling	Specialized partner (academia, UNOSAT, NASA)	Advanced environmental modeling and Earth science expertise	Yes	No



■ How should we communicate about risks and uncertainty and how to apply data?

By proactively managing expectations and clearly communicating the capabilities and limitations of satellite imagery analysis, human rights organizations build trust, credibility, and ethical clarity, ensuring stakeholders have realistic expectations and maintain confidence in satellite-supported human rights investigations.

Key ways to communicate certainty and uncertainty:

- Always clarify upfront what satellite imagery can realistically provide.
 - Possibilities (what satellites typically can show)
 - Limitations (what satellites cannot typically show)
- Identify and maintain standard communication practices.
- Clearly communicate timelines and latency.
- Be transparent about ethical considerations & risks.
- Clearly explain what analysis techniques you use.

■ Are there elements of our approach that should be shared? (e.g., lessons learned, data, tools)

The contemporary digital human rights investigation field was effectively founded on the open-source exploitation of satellite imagery, and it continues to operate as such. Many tools are open-access and are shared freely, and training is available on YouTube from anywhere. There is a very low barrier for entry, and this is matched by a usually collaborative field. In this spirit, sharing lessons learned and more should ideally be considered a constitutional part of any organization or investigation.

With that in mind, the below terms detail foundational techniques for the use of satellite imagery in the context of human rights.

Geolocation: the practice of finding the location of an incident anywhere in the world, usually using visual source material including photographs and videos. It is at the heart of almost every digital human rights investigation, facilitating the additional analysis to complete it. There are numerous accessible guides on how to do this, [including this one by M_OSINT](#).

Chronolocation: the practice of identifying the time an incident took place, often using shadows and the weather in the source material. This process requires a close examination of the source material and usually uses the [Suncalc software](#). [This guide by Yuri van der Weide](#) at GJJN is particularly accessible. It can also be performed with satellite imagery more broadly, especially to identify major changes during an incident over time.

Visual Interpretation & Annotation: Manual analysis of satellite images for evidence of: destroyed infrastructure, burned villages, forced displacement, mass graves or burial sites, refugee camp growth and conditions.

Change Detection Analysis: Comparing satellite imagery from before and after an event to detect and quantify changes (including optical and SAR imagery), such as damage assessments, environmental harm, camp growth, detecting fires and burning villages, or industrial activities using thermal imagery (NASA MODIS, VIIRS thermal infrared data via NASA Worldview or FIRMS; visualization through Google Earth Engine or QGIS).



Leveraging AI models to rapidly detect features on larger scales (e.g., damage assessments, settlement mapping). TensorFlow, PyTorch-based machine learning algorithms (typically via partners/academia). Automated detection of burned areas, refugee settlements, and environmental degradation.

Working with volunteers: Mobilizing volunteer mappers to quickly annotate imagery during crises using OSM, or the HOT Tasking Manager and/or MapSwipe.

What was the impact of our decision-making using this data/analysis?

Case A: Cameroon

As evidenced here, satellite imagery and data has been critical for human rights investigations into Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis. Even with humble means, the Database of Atrocities has had a considerable impact.

Reports have been routinely shared with and engaged with by international organizations, legal bodies, governments, diplomats and humanitarians. The Database has directly contributed to key submissions to international legal bodies by major legal organizations, and it has also directly contributed to international legal efforts to target key figures and conflict dynamics. It has routinely collaborated with major news agencies and media outlets. Through this, the database has built a strong reputation of expertise and accuracy on this conflict, and it is often the first port of call for those seeking to work on it. This is the direct impact of satellite imagery and related investigations on the Anglophone Crisis.

The database has built a strong, resilient network of partners within Cameroon and remains engaged in broader discussions of justice and accountability. These relationships have included joint investigations and lending geospatial (and satellite imagery) expertise to support their work. The database also maintains a strong network in the global north, with major human rights organizations and investigative outlets.

The Cameroon Database is proof of concept of what can be done with very limited resources – how to evolve, how to grow, and how to have meaningful impact despite that – and perhaps because of it. It also follows that the Database shows the light that can be shone on forgotten crises and conflicts – where the suffering is no less important for not being known.

Case B: Ukraine

The Russian Invasion of Ukraine was a seminal moment in the use of satellite imagery for human rights investigations. It pioneered private-public partnerships of satellite imagery and showed the art of what is possible to organizations and media outlets – related to the vast public, governmental, and defense interests involved. The satellite-imagery focused collaboration involved in investigations spread far beyond traditional human rights, including environmental destruction, food security, and damage assessments.



In retrospect, would we use satellite data again? What do we want to do differently next time?

It is important to regularly and consistently assess the impact of value of existing satellite data products and analysis in both the context of existing human-rights investigation methods and outputs as well as looking to the future. This could include improving a data acquisition process to provide more recent imagery, more efficiently; developing processes and protocols in advance to respond to specific types of violation; and identifying emerging technologies that could significantly advance technical capabilities, like InSAR.