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**WEAPONS OF WAR, TOOLS OF PEACE
SYMPOSIUM, SERIES II
LIFELINE MEDIA: PROTECTING
CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT**

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ACRONYMS

BASICS	Basic Support for Institutionalizing Child Survival
BBC	British Broadcasting Service
CNN	Cable Network News
GMU	George Mason University
GWU	George Washington University
ICHR	International Center for Humanitarian Reporting
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NPR	National Public Radio
NSC	National Security Council
PSA	Public Service Announcement
Q/A	Questions/Answers
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VOA	Voice of America

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The International Center for Humanitarian Reporting (ICHR) is a non-profit organization established to increase public awareness of humanitarian issues by encouraging better and more consistent media coverage worldwide. The ICHR defines humanitarian as anything affecting the human condition, including relief and development assistance, human rights, conflict prevention and resolution, the environment, health issues, and education.

The ICHR recognizes both the role and responsibility of the press to highlight or otherwise cover international humanitarian issues. ICHR programs aim to facilitate more consistent, quality coverage by encouraging communication and collaborative action.

Workshop Purpose and Objectives

The “Weapons of War, Tools of Peace” symposium series, hosted by ICHR, brought together editors, journalists, policy-makers, policy analysts, donors, human rights advocates and members of aid agencies, the private sector, the military, and others who have an impact on humanitarian crises and conflicts.

The series is designed to facilitate communication, recognize and reconcile different points of view, and explore possibilities for collaborative action. The first in the series, “The Media, Military, and Private Sector in Conflicts and Humanitarian Crises” took place in Geneva, Switzerland, in December 1995. BASICS supported the conference and sent two staff to that meeting. This year BASICS sent three staff and supported the conference as well.

The symposium was held over the course of three days. Internationally known journalists and humanitarian workers shared the panels and made presentations. There was a great deal of audience participation and Q/A. Day One on the symposium concentrated on the possibility of extending the media’s responsibilities in conflict areas. Day Two evaluated whether reporters are to blame for knee-jerk policy making. On Day Three, follow-up workshops were held to share thoughts on specific topics. Copies of the agenda are in Appendix B.

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WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

Day One: Has the time come to extend the media's responsibilities in conflict areas?

Presentation Preventive Journalism On the Ground: A Valid Role for the Media?

Johannes Botes, GMU Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Journalism and Conflict Resolution (summary)

- Journalists are involved in all social conflicts, whether reporting on the city council or in times of international conflict, such as war.
- Conflict is seen as a journalistic commodity and the aim is to get the commodity first.
- All journalism is a form of social intervention.
- Traditionally journalists have been seen as chroniclers of conflict, but is this concept outmoded?
- Should journalists instead pose possible outcomes, affect the relationship of parties, or perhaps change the dynamic of the conflict?
- Journalism places issues on the international agenda and can often result in bringing parties to the table.
- To the five journalistic Ws and H, an S (for solutions) and a C (for common ground) should be added; good journalists already report on options and solutions.
- Journalists have little idea of how to help society work through conflicts; in the course of doing their jobs they are go-betweens, quasi-mediators—they are in fact in the business of conflict analysis.
- There is much public discontent with journalism:
 - Current journalistic frames are inadequate.
 - Frames of social conflict do not contribute to resolution because they highlight the dramatic, rather than the underlying causes, and ignore the process of conflict resolution.

Hannes Siebert, South Africa Media Peace Center

The Common Ground Approach to TV and Radio Current Affairs (summary)

- Prepared a series of video programs by recording opposing parties who would not speak to each other because of history of apartheid and then shared the videos with the other parties to underscore the points of view; also asked newspapers to participate in a common edition on examining issues, thus breaking a deadlock on the matter. People were able to find common concerns and beliefs even though they opposed one another; thus, the media provided the seeds for reconciliation.
- Defined conflict in a way it had not been done before.
- Demonstrated the innovative use of media to bring formerly opposed professionals together by working together and sharing opinions.

- This method of reporting on the heart of the people and the stories behind the position is an innovative use of conflict reconciliation the media may want to explore.
- Several interesting points for journalists to ponder:
 - What journalists do not say about a conflict is as important as what is reported.
 - In some conflict situations journalists fear reporting the truth, i.e. the killings after a long awaited election in South Africa, that may effect resolution to a conflict.

Nik Gowing, BBC World TV

Media Partiality in Conflict Reporting: A Case to Answer? (summary)

- Can the media be impartial? Probably not, and this is a secret shame that undermines journalistic integrity and distorts reporting.
- New technologies make it easier to “get it first” but this does not mean the reporting is accurate; news can now be sent out covertly because of new technologies (small cameras, satellite dishes).
- Ill-informed journalists are likely to report simplistically, emotionally, and under time pressure.
- Many governments are skeptical of journalists; they see a gap between on-the-ground information and their own sources of information.
- Corporate and global ownership of the media industry may affect journalistic impartiality.

Panel Discussion and Q/A from Audience

- The corporate commercialization of media has led to an abundance of trash news and a simplistic, lowest common denominator approach (Simpson trial, tabloid TV, etc.).
- The fragmentation of the international news agenda following the end of the Cold War makes it more difficult to put international news on; by actual count there is less international reporting now.
- Where is the better international reporting coming from and what are some emerging trends?
 - PSAs are a way to get international information across; Europe is ahead of the US on this; NGOs should pool resources for English language PSAs, thus multiplying their use.
 - National Public Radio is the best in the international reporting area because it is free of commercial constraints; its reporting is funding-driven, thus they can devote resources to it; the UN is entering the area of funding of news reporting.
 - Reporting by fiat, because the owner of the media outlet wants to cover a story, often results in extensive coverage (examples such as Turner, Bloomberg Business News are expanding in international areas).
- NGOs must produce completely accurate information because journalists do not have time to find this (i.e. the message can be influenced by the data); but, if material is not accurate, the media will not trust the NGO in the future.

- The current journalistic system provides incentives NOT to cover foreign stories; should journalists advocate to their editors more coverage of international news? Is this a realistic thing to do? By not advocating coverage, journalists may in fact be doing harm to the victims of humanitarian crises, since having no coverage would take it off the international agenda.
- How can the demand for international news be improved? Energize the grassroots: Use 800 telephone numbers, e-mails to media headquarters, letters to the editors (editors think the American public does not want international news).

Creative Ways to Use Media to Reach Civilians in Conflict

K. Shirazzudin Siddiqui, BBC Afghanistan

Addressing Conflict Issues Through Radio Drama (summary)

- Radio dramas on conflict resolution set in two Afghan villages were funded from many sources; they were built on oral tradition of the people and received phenomenal positive response. They also covered : health, war, sports, and sanitation. A comic book format was used to retell the drama stories and thus reinforced the messages.

Greg Pirio, VOA

Building Partnerships for Peace in Angola (summary)

- Suggested we need to watch our language when reporting; use of terms “warlord,” “tribe,” etc. would be offensive if applied to other situations (Northern Ireland “tribal warfare”? and so on). They may also stereotype African conflicts and reduce the situations to simple concepts, when they are more complex in reality.
- In Angola, Carnegie Foundation of NY supported (with USAID) conflict resolution reporting to Angola that funded 15 journalists to work with VOA to beam stories into the country.
- Established a board/resource group of prominent outsiders to periodically review the independence of the agency and its reporting.

Urs Boegli, ICRC

Warping and Hype: Story of an At Times Difficult Relationship (summary)

- Since World War II, civilians have often become the targets in wars, which in turn has constantly changed the proper response to conflicts.
- The media response has been either too much information (hyping) or too little (warping), both of which hurts the victims of these conflicts.
- The ICRC is faced with a new mode of communication—intelligent, circumstantially appropriate—in order to deal with belligerent leaders. Many leaders involved in wars today do not respect international laws of war and violence, yet these leaders must be dealt with in order to save the civilians whose lives may be at risk.

- The role of the ICRC is to save lives. ICRC must learn to communicate with unpredictable leaders who have CNN and BBC savvy. The ICRC's ability to communicate effectively with these leaders will have a direct effect on the life or death of civilians in the conflict areas.

David Lord, Conciliation Resources
Community Radio in Sierra Leone (summary)

- Developed a family reunification program with VOA, also in cooperation with NGOs and Harvard University School of Public Health.
- Use of commercial enterprise (KISS FM, the most popular music station) to facilitate conflict resolution.

Day Two: Knee-jerk policy-making: Are reporters to blame?

Panel Discussion

Colin Scott and Larry Minear, Brown University
The News Media and Humanitarian Action (summary)

- Media can influence policy but it is more linked to providing humanitarian aid as opposed to military aid; NGOs should view media as a partner, rather than as a way to obtain publicity to raise funds.
- Recommendations for humanitarian organizations:
 - Improve media relations.
 - View media as a partner for education on humanitarian issues.
 - Partner with media to bring in information for better decision-making in humanitarian crises.

Edward Girardet, Crosslines Global Report, and Nick Cater, Words and Pictures
Reporting Low-level Conflict in Irian Jaya (summary)

- Described how he covered a low-level conflict between indigenous people and a mining company that was violating human rights; no media was covering the issue. The private sector made it very difficult to find out anything about the situation—the mining company controlled access and information. Is privatization of conflict a trend of the future?

Steve Livingston, GWU/NSC, and John Eriksson, World Bank
Media Policy Decisions in Rwanda (summary)

- Media did NOT have much effect on policy; coverage of Rwanda did not result in much public opinion shift; used media analysis techniques to reach this conclusion.

- News stories focused on humanitarian aid showing the suffering and starvation but little coverage or engagement of public on the issues of the ethnic conflict.
- Only when US troops go in does the media coverage increase.
- But, early on lack of media attention may have been contributor to the disaster.
- Governments are in retreat in many areas of the world: multinational companies are sometimes acting in state functions (a trend seen more and more today) and they frequently use mercenaries; to whom are companies accountable? who is in charge when the government abdicates?

Panel Discussion and Q/A from Audience

- Good factual journalism reinforces the hand of some policy makers within the government; the antidote to bad policy is good journalism.
- Journalism is facing a systemic crisis because of the end of the Cold War; instead of the politics of East/West, the story is good guys/bad guys, but this is a simplistic approach.
- Difficult to interest the US public in foreign stories, big abstract stories; *Time* magazine is now relying only on stringers for foreign reporting.
- How to interest editor in a story? Editors look to engage Americans by approaching international topics with a human interest angle if possible. Unfortunately there is very little abstract analysis done.
- Beware of “compassion fatigue” propagated by NGOs. In reporting be sure to be accurate in the extent of the crisis. Sometimes development stories are simply not sexy—no action—journalists need to expose underlying problem and offer some solutions.
- Privatization is a trend throughout the world (regions, countries without governments). Sometimes multi-national companies are more able to give aid than governments, but at what cost? (removal of resources, “hire and fire”). Armies are also getting privatized; exporting violence for corporate ends.
- Aid agencies are in a difficult situation when multi-national companies are involved. Who is in charge? They could be reporting to a war lord; should agencies stay or leave, leaving innocent victims behind? In some cases, companies get rid of aid agencies and do it themselves.
- Multi-national companies involved in a country under conflict may own the media that journalists write and report for. Will journalist be allowed to tell the truth? Will it be reported if it may harm other corporate interests?
- Call for local capacity building in reporting. Ask the people, the local government what they think and what is their public opinion. Local people are the first response to any conflict before any outside help can get there.

Panel Discussion

Andrei Richter, Center for War, Peace, and The News Media
Media and Policy Decisions in Chechnya (summary)

- The media was able to persuade the public in Russia and in Chechnya of the stupidity of the war, the army, and the government; thus policy was affected and support for the conflict evaporated.

Helen Fein, Institute for the Study of Genocide
Does the Press Recognize Genocide? (summary)

- No, the press does not know how genocide is defined; has a tendency to call killing genocide when it really is not or to ignore it when it is going on. More work has to be done to inform people of the definition for more accurate reporting.

Jennifer Klot
Graca Machel Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children (summary)

- After a long process of political mobilization in the UN, the breakthrough report received little media coverage—was not viewed by the media as “news.”
- Press was most interested in off-the-point issues (i.e., emotionally charged issue of children soldiers; while that is a dramatic image, far more children die every day from preventable childhood diseases).

Panel Discussion and Q/A from Audience

- Inside-out/bottom-up journalism: empower local journalists to report on the story. Stories from the local level and use of home video can present the most accurate story. Often stories are picked up by larger media from the local level.
- Often local people in areas of conflict do not see their story in the news, but once it gets out to the world, it gets back to them that awareness is increasing. This is empowering to local journalists.
- There is a need for good, local reporters. *Crosslines* is developing a database of journalists around the world in developing countries. Often local journalists need training—how to write a well-balanced story in a political situation. Training provides capacity building for journalists in developing countries; however, care must be taken to promote good journalist skills versus advocacy which could bring a journalist closer to danger in his own country.
- Questions from Charlayne Hunter-Gault for the audience to ponder:
 - Can the human race go through a series of transitions in the world and not have the media be affected?
 - Do we need a new definition of news?

- Do we need new models for journalism during this time of transition?
- Where is it best to focus our efforts: managers, gatekeepers, editors—or focus on alternative media?
- Comments from Sheena McDonald:
 - Need for collaboration between journalists and experts in the field that is being reported on. It is crucial to get the story right and increase the credibility of the media with governments and the public.
 - Fear in US of complacency among top American journalists with government officials. They get on the “A” social list and want to stay there—the truth suffers.
 - Responsible journalists have to come to terms with “responsible to whom?”
 - Journalists need to look for better ways to report on root causes of conflicts.

Day Three

Workshops How to Change the News Agenda: Challenging the Perception of Editors.

Conclusions/suggestions from the working group:

- Educate the next generation on international relations at the middle to high school level. Something as simple as a journalist or humanitarian aid worker visiting a school with footage and a story from a developing country will pique the natural curiosity of young people. With such a large percentage of the younger generation on the Internet the concept of the global village should be expanded to include interest in areas of conflict and development.
- Journalists need to believe in their story and continue to push the story with their editors. Always, a good story is a good story and editors will see that, so journalists must write compelling, strong, truthful stories.
- Journalists/humanitarian organizations should work from the regional level. Sometimes it is much easier to get news into other (non-US) international presses and then the story will get further disseminated from there. One idea to be explored further is to have *Crosslines* serve as a humanitarian pooling point where journalists could submit their stories and *Crosslines* could assist in regional dissemination.
- Journalists need to develop contacts within aid agencies. Developing relationships with reliable sources that can give good information on crises is useful.
- Aid agencies should be open to sending young, willing reporters out to the field to cover their stories. Allow interested aid workers a crack at writing a story.
- Journalists can try to sell the economics of international news to gatekeepers. With the use of the latest satellites and small hand held cameras it is more cost efficient to report overseas than ever before.
- Look for links in domestic humanitarian issue that are reported to international ones.
- Look at alternative ways to disseminate a story. Books are a more in-depth, yet highly successful mechanism.

SYMPOSIUM CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

What does all this mean for BASICS and what are the opportunities for placing child survival on the media agenda?

- Sheena McDonald's show (BBC) is looking for experts in a number of subjects and she extended an invitation to those passing through London to contact her.
- ICHR is planning to offer a fellowship program for editors who make decisions on what runs in the media in order to place international news on the agenda; it is looking for broad humanitarian issues to focus on. Laurie Norris will set this up. ICHR is looking for funding; this might be something BASICS could consider supporting.
- There are many opportunities for behavior change through radio in partnership with BBC, VOA, and others; BASICS should become more active in this area.
- We need to explore new ways to reach the public (PSAs, collaborating with other NGOs, working with local journalists, allow experts a chance at writing a story from the field, etc.).
- We could look into funding for support of reporting on NPR on child survival.
- *Crosslines* is exploring ways in which it could serve as a pooling point for humanitarian news stories and disseminate stories to regional international media.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT LIST

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APPENDIX B
CONFERENCE AGENDA

8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Christian Science Monitor
 One Norway Street, Boston

Theme
 Has the time come to
 extend the media's
 responsibilities in
 conflict areas?

Moderator

Sheena McDonald
 Presenter, Channel 4 (UK),
 BBC.

Panelists

John Buckley
 Supervising Producer,
 Monitor Radio

H. Jack Geiger, M.D.
 Immediate Past President,
 Physicians for Human
 Rights.

Arthur Kent
 Fast Forward Films, Ltd.,
 London.

Anne Nelson
 Columbia University;
 former Executive Director,
 Committee to Protect
 Journalists.

Philip van Niekerk
Weekly Mail and Guardian,
 South Africa.

8:00 a.m. Registration

9:00 a.m. Welcome

9:20 a.m.

Kemal Kurspahic, former Editor, *Oslobodjenje* (Sarajevo), "The pressures facing journalists trying to build peace in war zones."

9:45 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. Presentations

Preventive journalism on the ground: a valid role for the media?

Johannes Botes, George Mason University Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution: "Journalism and conflict resolution."

Hannes Siebert, Director, Media Peace Centre, South Africa: "The common ground approach to TV and radio current affairs."

Nik Gowing, Main Programme Presenter, BBC World TV: "Media partiality in conflict reporting: a case to answer?"

11:00 a.m. Break

11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Panel / Plenary Session

1:00 p.m. - 2:15 p.m. Lunch

Carol Bellamy, Executive Director, UNICEF

2:30 p.m. - 3:35 p.m. Presentations

Creative use of media to reach civilians in conflict.

K. Shirazuddin Siddiqui, BBC Afghanistan: "Addressing conflict issues through radio drama."

Veran Matic, Editor-in-Chief, Radio B92, Belgrade.

Greg Pirio, Head of Development, Voice of America: "Building partnerships for peace in Angola."

3:35 p.m. Break

4:00 p.m. - 4:40 p.m. Presentations

Urs Boegli, Head of Communications, ICRC: "Warping and hype: story of an at times difficult relationship."

David Lord, Director, Conciliation Resources, London: Community radio in Sierra Leone.

4:40 p.m. Plenary Session

5:15 p.m. End of session

5:30 p.m. USA for UNHCR Reception at the Colonnade Hotel