

ims

INTERNATIONAL
MEDIA SUPPORT

Voices of war:
**Conflict and the
role of the media**

REPORT

For International Media Support

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Andrew Puddephatt
April 2006

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Introduction

Mass media often plays a key role in today's conflict. Basically, their role can take two different and opposed forms. Either the media takes an active part in the conflict and has responsibility for increased violence, or stays independent and out of the conflict, thereby contributing to the resolution of conflict and alleviation of violence.

Which role the media takes in a given conflict, and in the phases before and after, depends on a complex set of factors, including the relationship the media has to actors in the conflict and the independence the media has to the power holders in society.

It is exactly this complex situation that International Media Support (IMS) is trying to deal with. IMS do this through rapid and short-term interventions in areas affected by violent conflict to promote and strengthen press freedoms and to improve the working conditions of local media practitioners and institutions. A basic assumption for this work is that a strong independent media contributes to the retention or creation of peace and stability in conflict affected and threatened areas.

The complex nature of media support in conflict areas calls for a constant development and testing of methods and approaches. For this reason, since its foundation in 2001, IMS has put great emphasis on the sharing and discussion of how to develop ways of best supporting media in conflict. Regular conferences with organisations directly involved in this work, or in other ways related to the field, are one way of doing this.

Along these lines IMS organised a Conference in Copenhagen on 26 and 27 November 2004 with the purpose of discussing the relationship between media development, peacekeeping and humanitarian aid. The event brought together more than 50 journalists and representatives from media organisations, humanitarian organisations and military forces. The Conference built upon the discussions hosted by UNESCO in Belgrade on 'Support to Media in Violent Conflict and Countries in Transition' in May 2004 and the concluding Belgrade Declaration.

The discussions and recommendations coming out from the Conference held in Copenhagen have served as a basic input to this publication. Still, the publication should not be read as a conference-report, but as a document which, to a certain degree, seeks to distil the IMS experience in supporting media in conflict.

Part one sets out IMS' understanding of modern conflict and the role the media can play in either exacerbating or alleviating violence. Part Two examines the role of different actors and summarises the recommendations IMS suggests each actor consider. We do so not in an arrogant spirit where we claim special knowledge of these problems and all of our recommendations are based upon discussions with the actors themselves. What IMS has done is to try to bring together the collective wisdom of those in the international community who have been working to support the media in conflict.

Part One

Conflict, the modern world and the media

Conflict is one of the defining features of the modern world. Since the end of the Cold War there have been countless conflicts that have involved the deaths of millions of people and the suffering and displacement of millions more. It is impossible to accurately quantify human suffering due to conflict. To take one indicator – it has been suggested that, in the last ten years, over two million children have died in conflicts, more than one million have been orphaned and more than six million have been disabled or seriously injured¹.

One striking factor is the growth in the number of conflicts which have fundamentally corroded the ability of the state to care for its citizens. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has analysed 59 'major' armed conflicts occurring since the end of the Cold War. In this case 'major' means that they involved in excess of 1,000 battle-related deaths in one year. Of these, the majority were intra-state². As a result of these prolonged conflicts many states have effectively collapsed or are very fragile. There is no rule of law, public services and facilities have been wrecked or plundered, and populations displaced. Such conflicts exacerbate poverty, bring massive human suffering, destroy the environment, displace substantial numbers of people and create enormous problems for the international community.

Very few of these conflicts have attracted serious concern from the international community, although those that have attracted international attention have had a significant impact. The genocide in Rwanda (itself a part of an internal conflict) and the wars in the Balkans that marked the break up of Yugoslavia have led to much debate about the powers and responsibilities of the international community, as well as triggered serious rifts inside the United Nations, making the effective work of that organisation more difficult. In both of these conflicts the media played a pernicious role – directly inciting genocide in the case of some Rwandan media (and organising it in the case of Radio Mille Collines) while acting as a vehicle for virulent nationalism in former Yugoslavia. This is not just a modern phenomenon – both the Nazis and the Soviet Union used the media to create a hegemonic climate in which they could more easily exercise power. However, policy makers have been slow to understand the importance of media in shaping modern conflict or how, with proper support, it can help create the conditions for peace.

Despite the amount of violent conflict in the world there is still little common understanding of how modern internal conflicts are triggered. Although there is growing concern among the developed democracies about the problem of failed or fragile states, and the way that conflict areas nurture crime, terrorism, disease and other threats to human security, no-one has mapped the key indicators that signal the onset of violence. Wars between states can be explained in geo-political terms – as a contest for natural resources, a means of resolving disputes over territorial boundaries and so on. However, internal conflicts are little understood. We still do not know how the instability or ethnic tension that marks many societies can suddenly escalate into organised violence.

- 1 <http://www.soschildrensvillages.org.uk/sos-children-charity/child-soldiers.htm>
- 2 <http://editors.sipri.se/pubs/yb04/SIPRIYearbook2004mini.pdf>

Perhaps one explanation for this lack of understanding is the relatively inconsistent approach to media coverage of conflicts around the world. It is obvious that the political significance of some conflicts affects the response of the most powerful governments and this in turn affects the media's coverage of conflict. However, it is also the case that the extent to which the media assigns priority to covering one conflict rather than another in turn shapes the response of the international community. The common factor appears to be that the media pays close attention to the concerns of their domestic audience – which in the case of the most powerful international media tends to be the peoples of North America and Europe – who need a point of identification in the conflict for their attention to be engaged.

One consequence is that while some conflicts have acquired global attention through exposure in the media, others have failed to receive significant attention through neglect. Many of the African conflicts of recent times in which millions have died – whether it is the wars in the Congo since 1997, the renewed civil war in Angola, the inter-related conflicts in Sierra Leone, Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia – have passed almost without notice under the international radar. The wars in the North and South Caucasus are in a similar category; hundreds of thousands of dead, dwarfing for example the deaths in the second intifada between the Palestinians and Israelis, but with little expressed international concern either from governments or civil society.

The media's role in this is central and will be examined in more detail in Part Two.

Of course conflicts do not fall into neat typological categories. Conventionally, it used to be thought that wars between states have a beginning, when war is declared, a middle when organised fighting takes place, and an end, when either one side secures victory and imposes its settlement or peace is negotiated. Modern conflicts, including those between states as well as those internal to states, often follow a different pattern. Violence can be spasmodic and appear almost random – it breaks out, subsides and breaks out again. The presence of international peacekeepers can prevent organised violence, but the potential for violence remains ever present.

Underneath the shifting occurrence of organised violence we see the emergence of what has been called "institutionalised war economies"³. These are self-sustaining conflicts where "peace" is hard to determine and where there are significant vested interests (even at state level) in continuing the conflict. Among the characteristics are the following:

3 *New and Old Wars* Mary Kaldor Polity 2001

4 *Coltan is the colloquial African name for (columbite-tantalite), a metallic ore comprising Niobium and Tantalum. Tantalum is used primarily for the production of capacitors, which are vital components in electronic devices, ranging widely from mobile phones to laptop computers. The upsurge in tech products over the past decade has resulted in extraordinary demands and price increases for the mineral. These price increases have contributed to tension in the producing countries, particularly between Congo and Rwanda (Wikipedia Encyclopedia - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coltan>).*

- Violence is committed by paramilitary groups and non-state actors, either solely or in conflict with state forces (sometimes state forces also "appear" as paramilitaries for purposes of looting etc);
- Conflict is sustained by an informal war economy based on looting, hostage taking, protection rackets, smuggling, seizure of primary commodities – coltan⁴, timber, diamonds, oil and so forth;
- Terror and destabilisation is a predominant tactic, attacks on civilians become the military strategy, and gross and mass violations of human rights are common;
- State authority is weak, collapsed or failing; organised crime and terrorist networks flourish; and there aren't stable or enduring political institutions
- Media is under physical threat or mobilised for partisan purposes; all media are vulnerable but local media more so; conditions for a stable media environment (rule of law, legal structures, etc) probably do not exist;

- Conflict areas are characterised by human insecurity; violence can erupt or die down rapidly, but threats of violence/ intimidation may be ever present and the "pre/during/post conflict" typology does not apply. Instead violence flows in different waves of intensity and can disappear or re-appear dramatically.

Understanding this picture is important for anyone who wishes to build peace. It is not enough to focus on the actions of the combatants. Unless the underlying war economy is understood – and challenged – then 'peace' will be merely a temporary cessation of violence. Any strategy to tackle the underlying causes must also recognise how the media are an integral part of the strategy of combatants, with acts designed to intimidate and terrify or appeal to the wider international community. Control over local media is an important objective of all parties in conflict. Building an independent pluralist media must therefore be an objective of the peacemakers.

Media and the international community

Probably the most important event in terms of the way conflicts were perceived as priorities by the international community followed the first Gulf conflict when the Kurdish community of northern Iraq rebelled and were attacked by Saddam Hussein's state. As refugees flooded to the border they received blanket and distressing coverage in the international news media. NGOs and civil society called for intervention in the face of apparent indifference by the western governments who had led the prosecution of the war. Having ejected the Iraqis from Kuwait, the dominant coalition members, particularly the United States, Britain and France, had no desire to intervene further in the affairs of Iraq⁵. The displacement of the Kurds was an internal issue for Iraq and the refugee problem was for Turkey to deal with. Under the classic Westphalian principle of state sovereignty there was no mandate for other governments to intervene.

However, the power of the media coverage (and the concern it aroused in public opinion) proved stronger than the will of governments. As international competition between increasingly globalised news corporations grew more intense so the international media began to hunt in packs, seeking the next exclusive. The volume of their coverage, aided and abetted by NGOs concerned to avoid an overwhelming humanitarian crisis, forced western governments into a significant U-turn. The sovereignty of Iraq was breached, intervention took place to provide security for the Kurds, leading eventually to the imposition of no-fly zones that removed the Iraqi air force from the region, and finally to significant autonomy for the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq.

From this event sprang the subsequent debate about the limits of state sovereignty. Pressure on western governments to intervene to protect people from gross human rights violations increased. Contrary to those who see imperialist motives at every step, the fact is that western governments have generally only intervened after long and public media campaigns urging them to do so. Where the media spotlight has been absent (as it was in Rwanda for example), they have undergone extraordinary contortions to avoid taking action.

Of course there may be powerful geopolitical motives for governments intervening when and where they have – Iraq being an obvious example. However, it cannot be denied that the role of the international media has been crucial in shaping the policy response of those governments. Inevitably this raises the question of the responsibility of the international media in such circumstances. The nature of this responsibility came to the fore during the conflict in Bosnia when many journalists found their traditional

⁵ John Major, the British Conservative Prime Minister was quoted as saying "I do not recall asking the Kurds to mount this particular insurrection".

“objectivity” tested to the limit. As a consequence some felt that it would be irresponsible of them not to use the influence they might possess to secure a particular outcome for the war – especially given the atrocities they were witnessing, which for many European journalists were painful reminders of the continents past⁶. Christiane Amanpour, reporting for CNN on the Bosnian conflict said that it was “the war of our generation: this was our Vietnam”⁷.

This understandable response had the consequence of making the international media an actor in the conflict. When the UK based Independent Television News (ITN) reported the existence of the Serb detention camps at Omarska and Trnopolie it helped build support for UN Resolution 770, which allowed for “all necessary measures” in the delivery of humanitarian aid. Coverage of the mortar bomb attack on Sarajevo market in February 1994 was instrumental in securing NATO’s ultimatum to stop the bombardment of the city. Martin Bell, the BBC correspondent, spoke of a journalism of “attachment”⁸ and went on to say that journalists “were drawn into this war as something other than witnesses and chroniclers of it. We were also participants”⁹.

The international media can also complicate attempts to resolve conflicts as their actions can engender resentment among local people at the editorial priorities of the media organisations. Modern communities are very sophisticated in their understanding of the media and its potential power. People often find it difficult to understand why they are the intense focus of media attention one day but then disappear of the media horizon the next. While it is understandable that editors and producers must constantly seek new ways to engage their own domestic audiences, their behaviour can give rise to all kinds of resentment, suspicion and conspiracy theories.

The local media and internal conflict

The Balkan conflicts demonstrated the growing recognition of the importance of local media coverage in shaping and developing the conflict on the ground. This has been best documented in Mark Thompson’s groundbreaking account of the role of the local media in former Yugoslavia, *Forging War*, which documents how the media aided and abetted the destruction of Yugoslavia, the rise to power of extreme nationalism and the forging of a conflict between groups of people who had lived together peacefully all their lives¹⁰. It was a frightening example of how a society can disintegrate, how fear can be exploited by the power of a media in the hands of those unscrupulous enough to wield it as a weapon. War was neither inevitable nor the only means of resolving the conflicts that lay behind the break-up of Yugoslavia, and the local media played an important role in preparing the ground for war, by ensuring public opinion was mobilised behind the different participants. Media campaigns between rival media outlets prefigured the war itself. As regional communist leaderships mutated into nationalists they saw, true to their communist heritage, the various media as important instruments of policy and were prepared to use them.

The intervention of the Western media simply provided another arena for the conflict to be enacted. With coverage guaranteed the so-called war (in reality usually waged by attacks upon unarmed civilians) was conducted with an eye permanently upon how it was portrayed in the media. All the participants in the struggle became adept at using the media to generate the political conditions for victory. Publicised attacks on civilians and the purpose of terrorising those who the combatants wished to target next accelerated the move towards so-called “ethnic cleansing”. Those media who tried to stay

6 *Forging War, the media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina* Mark Thompson ARTICLE 19 and University of Luton 1999

7 *ibid*

8 *The Guardian* 11 July 1996

9 Quoted in *Forging War* above

10 Cited above

outside of this ethnic polarisation were either marginalised and retreated into self-censorship (like the federal state's news agency Tanjung) or were subject to tremendous pressure to conform. Few media outlets held out and those that did struggled to maintain an independent perspective.

What the wars in former Yugoslavia showed is that the battle for hearts and minds is as important as the battle for territory. The media arena is often where that battle is conducted. The media itself becomes a rallying point for all the combatants – and every combatant aspires to control its own media. In the case of Zimbabwe the state media are a direct instrument of government control, constantly attacking members of the opposition as stooges of the British government and accusing them of launching anthrax attacks against Zimbabwean government officials¹¹. The few independent newspapers left have a circulation of around 200,000 in the major cities with the result that the constant attacks on opposition figures creates an atmosphere of violent intimidation.

One of the underestimated complications of the Middle East conflict between Palestinians and Israelis is the inflammatory media on both sides. Following the deaths of Israeli soldiers and settlers in the Gaza Strip in May 2004, hawkish commentator Nadia Matar of the Settler radio Arutz-7 called on 13 May for large-scale military action against "the Arab Nazi murderers". "We should have erased the whole Arab village from which the Nazi murderers who carried out this massacre had come," she said. Israelis meanwhile can listen to a steady output of anti-Semitism from the official state media of surrounding Arab countries while digesting a claim by Saudi de facto ruler, Crown Prince Abdallah Bin-Abd-al-Aziz, who stated at a gathering of Saudi university professors that "Zionists" were to blame for an attack on the offices of a petrochemical company in the Red Sea port of Yanbu, killing six Westerners and a Saudi citizen. The official Saudi news agency SPA carried a report with the following headline: "Crown prince says Zionism is behind terrorist actions in the kingdom." "It became clear to us now that Zionism is behind terrorist actions in the kingdom. I can say that I am 95 per cent sure of that", the agency quoted the crown prince as saying. His remarks were also broadcast on Saudi TV Channel 1. In this climate politicians seeking to secure a peace agreement will always struggle to be heard over popular anxiety and hatred incited by this kind of coverage.

This is perhaps not surprising – after all partisanship at least guarantees some kind of survival in a war zone. A non-partisan newspaper, like the Standard Times in Sierra Leone, can face problems sufficient to daunt any journalist or editor, however dedicated. The Standard Times offices were destroyed during the war and all its equipment destroyed. The collapse of the internal transport system meant that the paper could not be delivered to many areas and circulation fell from over 10,000 to around 2,000 or lower¹². At such levels advertising income is sparse and sales income too low to be sufficient. In circumstances like these the temptation to become partisan and secure the sponsorship of one of the political actors can be very strong. This is not just for financial reasons – no warlord killed as many journalists as Foday Sankoh, the late rebel leader in Sierra Leone. Newspapers like the Standard Times, which hold out for editorial independence are rare indeed.

The role of the media in conflict resolution

The growing recognition of the crucial role the media can play in helping provoke conflict has led many to examine how the media can play a constructive role in resolving conflict. This created considerable controversy –

¹¹ *Media Under Siege Media Monitoring project Zimbabwe December 2003*

¹² *Media conflict prevention and reconstruction UNESCO June 2004*

should journalism stay detached, even from horrific events unfolding around them, or should it take up the stance suggested by Martin Bell and become attached to a cause – even that of peace.

The obvious problem with such an approach is that it might involve taking sides in a conflict – after all, conflicts require a solution that addresses the underlying problems and this means assessing the weight of the different claims in a conflict and seeking to resolve them. Peace is something more than the absence of war. The dangers of journalists taking sides in a conflict are obvious – professional independence is impossible to maintain, access to the other sides' combatants will disappear and journalists will become even more of a target than they already are.

One limitation of the discussion about peace journalism is that it speaks to only part of the reality of the modern media, where the media is an actor in its own right. Part of the problem with the debate about "peace journalism" is confusion about the different roles the media fulfils. The media is a place in which journalists convey ideas, information and stories to the listener, viewer or reader – in this way they represent a version of reality. It is sometimes said that the journalist acts as a vehicle, which conveys the different views, outlooks and perspectives experienced in a society. In this capacity there is fierce resistance to any attempt to encroach on the independence of the journalist carrying out this function, or any attempt to impose an ideological purpose upon them, however worthy. The media understood in this way is a structure that carries the debates of a society.

However, in addition to the representation of the groups they are reporting on – in this case parties to the conflict – journalists also present their own views and interests. In this respect the media itself becomes an actor in the conflict, for example when it takes an editorial position or when the media focus on certain issues or aspects of the conflict leads to the exclusion of others. The idea that the journalist sits outside of the events they are covering, whatever their perspective on "peace journalism" is misleading. The media, in this sense, are themselves actors or agents in the conflict and their behaviour will have an effect on the way the conflict develops.

To use more abstract terms the media constitute a space in which the conflicts of a society can be articulated and are inevitably themselves actors in that conflict. Moreover the combatants in a conflict will usually relate to each other either on the battlefield or through the way they are represented in the media (and this latter, as is evident in many recent conflicts, may often be more important to them than the battlefield). To use sociological terms, the media is both structure and agency. The idea therefore that they can be simple instruments of any point of view – state or non-state – is profoundly misleading and policy towards the media in conflict has to take on board the sense in which they play both interweaving roles.

Policy makers therefore need to focus on the media's role in constituting the public sphere of society – how that can be fostered and nurtured in such a way as to allow non-violent resolution of conflict. By public sphere it is meant that range of communication outlets and media which enable a society to view the representations of itself. To function properly a public sphere must have free flowing access to information and enable the views of ordinary citizens to be heard. In the words of Jurgen Habermas it is "a discursive arena that is home to citizen debate, deliberation, agreement and action"¹³.

Nor should it be assumed that conflict itself is wrong or can be avoided in any society. The clash of interests, needs and desires balanced against the

13 Villa, Dana R. "Postmodernism and the Public Sphere." *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (September 1992),

allocation of scarce resources means that conflict itself is inevitable in a society. Conflict is, after all, an extreme form of communication. Where the media can play a vital role in allowing a peace process to develop is by enabling the underlying conflicts in a society to be expressed and argued through a non-violent manner. This requires the creation of a suitable media space in which this can happen.

The key question for policy makers and media alike is how to create a media framework and practice that can sustain such a public sphere in a conflict area. Over time the public sphere has been constituted through a range of institutions which changed through time. Media, such as newspapers, were part of this process from the eighteenth century onwards, but by the end of the twentieth century we have 'mass societies' constituted by mass media, principally broadcast media (more radio than television internationally, but supplemented by newspapers, cinema, internet and mobile phones – the increasingly converged world of modern communications). This is a complex situation that requires a careful and measured policy response.

A number of organisations have begun to consider how to create a situation in a conflict and post conflict environment that allows the media to play a constructive part in tackling conflict, taking account of its true role. It has been increasingly recognised that an effective media is an essential part of preventing violent conflict from breaking out, as well as being an important element in its resolution. There are an increasing number of attempts to produce a more comprehensive and coherent policy approach to this problem.

On the 5 and 6 October 2003, IMS convened a roundtable in Copenhagen to examine conflict reporting. It acknowledged that there was no consensus on the best approach to conflict reporting among media professionals. The roundtable considered how conflict reporting impacted on war and how such reporting could be improved. The focus was on recent conflicts and participants sought to explore the distinction between peace journalism and conflict sensitive journalism through analysing specific interventions on conflict reporting¹⁴.

Some participants suggested that the best approach might be to examine what the professional responsibilities of journalists should be in a conflict area. This would include avoiding portraying conflicts as a zero-sum game contested by two combatants, but rather disaggregating the various interests that clash. It also would involve seeking to humanise both parties – making it clear that sometimes (though not always) there are no simple villains and victims. Such journalism would try to look behind the positions that combatants take and identify their interests, which may create more common ground than is apparent. This kind of peace journalism would also seek to place the immediate fighting in a more long-term context and would highlight the profound long-term consequences of violence¹⁵.

In recent years there has been a profusion of projects and initiatives designed to support and promote peace journalism of one kind or another. Most focus on professional training initiatives to promote better coverage of diversity issues¹⁶ or more actively encourage reporting on peace initiatives¹⁷. The Canadian based Institute for Media Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS) suggests five kinds of peace intervention, including training, promoting positive images and providing fictional storylines that have a positive peace message¹⁸.

Some of these approaches are little more than applying the best techniques of professional journalism to the reporting of conflict. However, the very term

14 <http://www.i-m-s.dk/?ID=139&SMID=139>

15 *Peace Journalism — How To Do It*, Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick

16 For example New York University's media and conflict activities http://www.nyu.edu/cwppm/media_conflict or the work of

17 E.g. the work of the Media Diversity Institute <http://www.media-diversity.org/>

18 <http://www.impacs.org/>

“peace journalism” causes many journalists real concern. They worry that “peace journalism” implies that journalists are no longer covering stories, but becoming part of them. They argue that society needs information, and the exchange of ideas and opinions in the public sphere, and the media must be free to play the role it chooses in fulfilling that obligation. Arguing that the media promotes peace suggests to them the sense of an ideologically committed journalism reminiscent of the old Soviet Union (which was always keen to promote “peace” on its own understanding of the term)¹⁹.

Some media organisations have argued that the very practice of good professional journalism is itself a form of conflict resolution – or at least is something that has strong parallels to conflict resolution. For example, Johannes Botes, a journalism and conflict resolution trainer, identified a number of crossover points between the work of journalists and the work of conflict resolution experts. Both give combatants a voice. Both approach a conflict with an open mind and the ability to summarise vague aspirations in more concrete terms. Both spend time analysing the conflict and try to understand motives and possible outcomes. Both try and give objective views of the causes of the conflict²⁰.

What few would deny is that in any conflict there are certain parameters on which all can agree. In conflict the provision of reliable information is crucial and is often difficult to provide. Even the international media can find themselves at the mercy of rumour and propaganda and the situation can be even worse for the local media. In the corresponding information vacuum, combatants will use information to cause the maximum confusion and to dehumanise their opponents. The media will become specific targets.

The provision of accurate information about a conflict is therefore a priority for all agencies and developing and maintaining a culture of professional journalism is important. Learning how to provide basic humanitarian information is vital. A range of NGOs and institutions concentrate on improving these basic skills in conflict areas, from the BBC World Service Trust (which also provides programme content) to the Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR)²¹.

Even if the media is physically secure from attack, it is likely to have to deal with some kind of censorship – and the temptation for self-censorship in many circumstances will be strong. Moreover, conflict is very disruptive of the normal market conditions in which the media operate. Newspapers, in particular, will face serious production and distribution problems. In these circumstances the local media will need external support from the international community if they are to play a constructive role in conflict.

Despite the volume of evidence that suggests that the media play an important role in the coverage of conflict, media planning by the international community is still haphazard. For example, nothing in the Dayton accords dealt with the importance of the media or placed any requirements upon parties to the agreement to respect the independence of the media. Such provisions as there were, were inserted at the subsequent Bonn conference. In general it is still the case that while many governments recognise the importance of the media in a conflict and support media projects, there is very little coordination between governments.

Historically there has been an undercurrent of tension between those who see an unfettered media market (based on the US model) as the best guarantor of democracy and human rights, and those who take the more “European” view that some degree of regulation and structure is necessary to foster a climate where peace and reconciliation are possible. More recently – in Iraq for example – that tension appears to have been resolved in favour of the mixed model with a regulatory element.

19 *An antidote to Hate Speech: Journalism pure and simple* Ronald Koven, World Press Freedom Committee, in *Media conflict prevention and reconstruction*, UNESCO June 2004.

20 Quoted by *Conciliation Resources*; http://www.c-r.org/pubs/occ_papers/af_media/intro.shtml

21 *Reporting for change: a handbook for local journalists in crisis areas* IWPR 2004

Part Two

Introduction

In this section the role of different actors is considered and recommendations advanced as to how they can contribute to the protection of freedom of expression and a climate that nourishes an independent media.

Several overarching principles apply to all actors:

- The need for co-ordinated and collaborative intervention strategies
- The need for a policy approach and regulatory framework that guarantees freedom of expression
- Priority being given to the physical security of journalists
- An emphasis on engagement with and support for local media
- The importance for all international actors of an effective information strategy

These principles obviously have to be applied with sensitivity in each set of circumstances and will be developed by each actor according to their own area of competence. However, without them being applied, experience suggests that a media development strategy is unlikely to succeed.

In this section the roles of international actors operating outside and inside the conflict area will be considered with a summary of recommendations at the end of each category. Secondly the role of NGOs concerned with media development and local and international media actors will be considered.

Intervention from outside the conflict area

The International Community

In a growing number of conflicts of recent years the international community – which in this case means states acting in concert through the United Nations or regional bodies such as NATO, the European Union or the African Union, or informal coalitions – has, at some point decided to intervene in a country or countries marked by conflict. This is a comparatively recent development and in itself is a controversial decision as there are very limited grounds in international law for violating the sovereignty of another state (although this discussion is outside the scope of this pamphlet)²².

In some cases this intervention has been tasked through the agency of the United Nations (Cambodia, East Timor, Bosnia), in others it has by-passed the UN in the early stages but the UN has effectively sanctioned the intervention retrospectively (Kosovo, Afghanistan and in earlier times Tanzania's intervention in Uganda) and in some cases the intervention has taken place outside of the UN's authority and its legal status and legitimacy remains unresolved (Iraq).

These different circumstances all pose different challenges. There is, however, a growing realisation that in order to create a stable democratic and peaceful future, close attention needs to be paid to the media environment. This builds upon the long held recognition that freedom of expression, the right to receive and exchange opinions, ideas and information is one of the foundation stones of a democratic society.

²² See *The Responsibility to Protect* a report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty <http://www.iciss.ca/menu-en.asp>

As a consequence of the high status accorded to freedom of expression, it is protected in all significant international and regional human rights treaties. It is guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights²³ and by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights²⁴. It is also protected in various regional treaties - by Article 13 of the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights²⁵, by Article 9 of the African Charter (elaborated by a specific declaration agreed in October 2002)²⁶ and Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights²⁷.

The media has long been regarded as having a particular role to play in guaranteeing the individual right to free expression, as it is through the media that the individual right takes public form. Throughout Eastern Europe under communism, people would exchange ideas and information in the bathroom with the taps running. This had little significant social effect as such information or ideas could never become part of public discourse. For the right to freedom of expression to be meaningful in the democratic sense it needs a means of public discourse, a presence in the public sphere. It is because the media plays this role - providing information about the world, promoting public debate and discussion, and acting as watchdog of the state power - that they are deemed worthy of special protection under international human rights law.

Consequently it is important for the role of the media to be addressed at the earliest stage of intervention. For example, in any peace negotiations the role of the media should form a part of the agreement - all parties should be asked to agree to respect the independence of the media and to refrain from either using media for propaganda purposes or to resist from any attempt to intimidate, threaten or abuse media independence. This may seem obvious, but it is not always done. For example despite the lessons of the conflict in former Yugoslavia and the role the media had taken in fostering this conflict there were no provisions in the Dayton agreement regarding the media. These were inserted later on at the Bonn conference. It is no use adding provisions on the media as an afterthought; they must be included as part of the peace agreement and recognised as an essential element in building a peaceful democratic culture. They need to be binding upon participants in a peace process and enshrined in law and regulation subsequently.

- 23 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>
- 24 *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified 1966, entered into force 1976* http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ccpr.htm
- 25 *American Convention on Human Rights ratified 1969, entered into force 1978* <http://www.world-policy.org/globalrights/treaties/achr.html>
- 26 *African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights, ratified 1982, entered into force 1986* http://www.africa-union.org/Official_documents/Treaties_%20Conventions_%20Protocols/Banjul%20Charter.pdf
- 27 *European Convention on Human Rights, signed 1950* <http://www.hri.org/docs/ECHR50.html#Convention>

A second element of the responsibility of the international community is to communicate effectively the terms of the peace agreement to the local population. This is obviously complicated by the fact that many peace processes are prolonged and may involve compromises that the combatant populations find unacceptable. For that reason there has been a growing pattern of developing peace proposals in complete secret - the Oslo peace accords between Israel and the Palestinians, the peace process in Sri Lanka between the government and the LTTE or Tamil Tigers, the recent process in Sudan and so on. Sometimes the combatants have been isolated from their respective constituents while the agreement has been put in place - for example at Dayton and the failed Israel/Palestinian talks at Camp David and Taba. The motive for this approach is understandable - and it serves the purpose of bypassing those who benefit from the conflict and appealing over their heads to the general population who may wish for peace - then it is worthy of support. However, providing accurate and timely information on the peace process is an essential part of any strategy that seeks to marginalise those committed to furthering violence. Confidentiality can only be a temporary strategy and it is important if it is deemed necessary, civilian populations are clearly informed when decisions are likely to be made and when they will be allowed to know the outcome of those decisions. Secrecy during peace negotiations may also place a higher premium on establishing some kind of truth process subsequent to it.

One obvious approach is to foster cooperation between local media and representatives of the international community to ensure that details of the peace agreement are communicated rapidly before they can be distorted by those wishing to wreck the agreement. An example of such co-operation is that between *Suara Timor Timur* (STT), the only independent newspaper during the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, and the United Nations Mission for East Timor UNAMET. STT worked closely with UNAMET during the UN sponsored referendum to disseminate information to the people of East Timor about the autonomy package being proposed by the UN²⁸.

The early steps of reconstruction will usually follow a well trodden path – first providing security; then establishing new political processes through referendums or consultative mechanisms of some kind, before moving to new political arrangements and elections. Throughout this delicate period the role the local media plays will be vital, so early consideration is required about what kind of media framework should be established.

The building blocs of this have already been set out in the work carried out under the auspices of the Swedish International Development Agency and UNESCO – at a seminar on Waxholm Island in May 2003 and subsequently expressed in the Belgrade Declaration produced by UNESCO during its World press Freedom Day event in May 2004²⁹. The main elements of this approach are a legal policy framework, an independent regulator, a mixed environment of public, private and community broadcasters, support for measures to improve the professional quality, and physical safety of journalists. Wherever possible the international community should work with local media to enable them to provide independent and balanced coverage of these stages. How such work is arranged will depend upon the availability of resources on the ground and how UN Missions are tasked to work with UN agencies. Cooperation is the key rather than rivalry and recent examples of improved cooperation such as that practised by the UN in its work in Iraq, organised through clusters of agencies are worth evaluating.

More controversially there may be circumstances where the existing media is either too partisan or too weak to provide adequate coverage of the political process. In these circumstances the international community has, in the past, established its own media outlets with a mixed record of success. Radio is the principal means of communication for most of the population in conflict areas. The UN currently runs a number of radio stations in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia, some solo and some in co-operation with private initiatives such as the venture with *Hirondelle*. One of the key issues here is the effect on local journalistic capacity of establishing international outlets. The ideal situation is to develop journalist training and professionalism and leave the environment stronger than when you arrive. A particularly difficult issue here is the question of physical assets.

One of its more successful operations was the UN's mission to Cambodia – UNTAC – which established a radio station to provide a popular mix of balanced news and coverage of the May 1993 elections with Cambodian music and culture. It is credited with helping the high turnout (90%) of voters and provided free and equal access to all twenty of Cambodia's political parties. However the UN removed the equipment at the end of the mission for use elsewhere, a decision that caused some bitterness locally and which removed an important asset from the fledging democracy. However, the equipment utilized in a peacekeeping mission is provided by the peacekeeping budget, which in turn comes from assessed contributions by UN member-states. It is not therefore technically the "property" of the UN to turnover as it wishes to whom it wants. Such financial decisions are controlled and monitored by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ),

28 *The East Timor experience*
Salvador J Ximenes
Soares; IMS conference
November 2004
29 UNESCO Belgrade
Declaration

a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly. UN radio equipment, as with vehicles, computers, and all other items used on a mission, are returned to stocks for re-use in the next mission. It is up to the ACABQ to determine if such equipment could be handed over to a new government rather than the mission itself.³⁰ This underlines again the need for careful consideration of how the UN mission in its totality impacts upon people on the ground.

By contrast, and learning from its mistake, radio UNTAET in East Timor was turned over to the new government to become the basis for a new national radio³¹, perhaps because the UN was the transitional administration. Nevertheless the most desirable and sustainable course of action is to support local media to provide the coverage necessary. If the international community establishes its own media the overwhelming majority of employees should be local and it should be used to build capacity among local journalists.

Finally, steps have to be taken to provide physical protection for journalists, to understand that the work they undertake is of public interest. This also means thoroughly investigating attacks upon journalists, ending any sense of impunity. It must be made clear that the protection of freedom of expression requires attention to be paid to the security of journalists.

Suggested aims and objectives for the international community

- Ensuring guarantees for media freedom are part of any peace agreement – and that there are provisions which specify that parties to the agreement agree to respect independent media and forego intimidation or harassment of any kind; to respect the safety of journalist while they are doing their job; and so forth;
- Establishing mechanisms to enable local media to report accurately on the terms of a peace agreement (e.g. cooperation between STT and UNAMET during East Timor conflict);
- Establishing an outline media plan that sets the framework for subsequent media assistance taking into account the local circumstances;
- Establishing the right framework from the beginning. Key elements will include regulator, public broadcaster, fair system for allocation of private licenses, secure form of independent income (e.g. mobile phone licenses as in Iraq);
- Trying to assist others to develop local media if the existing outlets are inadequate;
- Ensuring that there is a high degree of local involvement in whatever framework arrangements are put in hand;
- Considering how information can be got to remote or isolated areas that may be cut off from urban based media;
- Putting pressure on local administrations to respect the independence of the media and offer support in drawing up policies to that end;
- Conducting proper market research to assess the size and scope of the media market to ensure that any investment decisions play close attention to the problems of sustainability once peace has been stabilised and the aid caravan has moved on;
- Taking steps to guarantee, wherever possible, the physical safety of journalists and put in hand effective measures to investigate attacks upon them.

30 I am indebted to Margaret Noviki, former spokesperson for UN Mission in Liberia UNMIL, for clarification on this point

31 How the UN communicates in post-conflict turmoil Susan Manuel UN Department of Public Information in Media conflict prevention and reconstruction UNESCO 2004

Donors

Among the most important contributors to resolving conflict and post conflict problems are the international donors. In recent years donors have become more aware of the need to support media as part of a strategy to bring peace. What is noticeable is the absence of any overall coherent strategy for media development, although the recent example of the 'Partnership for Media and

Conflict Prevention in West Africa' is an exception³². This may reflect the fact that for most donor governments and agencies, the initial priority is on what seem to be more urgent tasks – stabilising an insecure environment, physical reconstruction, dealing with displaced persons, tackling the immediate economic collapse engendered by war. Most general media development work is funded by donors either because it is seen as part of democracy building or as part of their overall development programmes – which for government donors is structured around achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It is therefore valued for its contribution to eliminating structural poverty³³ or other development concerns and is viewed instrumentally (in general) for the contribution it can make to achieving specific goals. The more diffuse and hard to measure sense in which it contributes towards sustaining democracy and human rights are less of an objective for many governments.

Some of this is inevitable. Governmental donors have an eye on their domestic constituencies and like to have measurable outputs they can audit which show they are using taxpayers' money effectively. Media development rarely fits this objective. It takes longer than the electoral cycle to show results and even then the results can be somewhat intangible. It may be that the best that can be hoped for is that media development is recognised as a secondary objective that supports the more dramatic primary goals.

Donors have followed different strategies. In some cases they have funded direct programming by international stations, often with mixed results and generating some unease among professional journalists. Funding has also been provided to directly establish media locally (such as the UN's radio station in Cambodia) again with mixed results. Millions of dollars have been spent in trying to develop local media in Africa and the Balkans. In so far as any lessons are concerned the most successful initiatives seem to often be the ones that have been implemented by those who utilise local staff as much as possible and which create conditions for their own sustainability. Alternatively where there is an internationally run station – such as UNMIL's radio in Liberia – training is provided to local staff and as the station does not compete for commercial income it theoretically will not affect the financial sustainability of other local stations.

However, donors have continued to sustain media in circumstances where it is not economically viable. For many this is a questionable long-term strategy, although in the interests of democracy it may be necessary for a period if the alternative is a media dominated by the combatants which churns out propaganda or hate speech. The attraction of directly funding or supporting local media is that terms can be set which ensure neutral objective journalism that seeks to diffuse conflict and it counteracts the subsidies being paid by warlords to their own media.

However, the output that most satisfies donors may not be the output that secures the most domestic legitimacy and therefore contributes to creating and sustaining peace. The media is an open-ended profession – anyone with the will and resource can join. Unless the market sets a limit on the range of media that is available in the long run people will be drawn into what is an attractive field, particularly if subsidies are on offer. Moreover it is possible to have too much media for there to be coherent public space for debate. A fractured media environment is one where people can simply choose to listen to the news that reflects their own points of view rather than one which challenges preconceptions. Too much diversity will not necessarily help resolve a conflict. Nevertheless, it has to be recognised that in the short term some direct support for independent media may be an inescapable part of securing and sustaining peace.

³² IMS web-site

³³ *Media Programmes lack vision* Lena Johansson, Head of Division for Culture and Media, Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency SIDA in *Media Conflict prevention and reconstruction* UNESCO 2004

Where donors can make a cost effective difference is by supporting infrastructure projects that benefit a wide range of media – such as media centres for journalists, or printing presses or distribution networks that can be shared. Even in such circumstances it is important that such initiatives are themselves sustainable. For example the World Association of Newspapers (WAN), UNESCO, USAID and the Canadian Development agency (CIDA) took an initiative to establish a printing consortium to support establishing a daily newspaper in East Timor – Timor Post. Although successful at first it collapsed following an investment of US\$ 200,000 reportedly because of lack of training or preparation for those running the consortium. This highlighted the need to provide business management training, as well as technical training.

Private donors do not have the same restrictions as government donors. Some like the Open Society Institute both through its Network Media Programme and national and regional foundations have provided significant financial support for media in post conflict areas. This support has focused on structural issues such as media law reform, as well as direct media support for training and capacity building and as it is a consistent and coherent approach it has often achieved more than the larger diffuse governmental donors.

Suggested aims and objectives for the donors

- Recognise the importance of media development both instrumentally and for the way it builds democracy and human rights;
- Try to agree a strategy with other donors that is based on a realistic assessment of the local media situation and what is needed to secure a pluralist and independent media;
- Recognise that support for the media is a necessary element of supporting civil society as a whole;
- Consider carefully whether to provide direct support for media in conflict areas and, if so, make clear the time limits and extent of such support;
- Be prepared to support media infrastructure projects e.g. shared printing press or distribution networks while ensuring that the requisite technical and management training is available to help people run such operations;
- Do not think that one size fits all;
- Encourage international media actors to nurture local talent and form effective partnerships with local media;
- Consider establishing low interest loan funds as an alternative to direct financial investment.

International intervention inside the conflict area

Peacekeepers

Although peacekeeping is carried out by regular military units, the roles and responsibilities of peacekeepers are very different from those of troops undertaking classic military operations. The focus is on implementing a peace agreement and providing security while the situation between combatants is stabilised. It is also likely to provide support for humanitarian relief operations. This requires what is sometimes described as a “soft” approach rather than the “hard” approach of fighting. This is a cultural challenge for some troops as the normal military instincts of soldiers to apply maximum force have to be contained. In addition, peacekeepers usually have rules of engagement that are very different from the rules of war. One political constraint upon peacekeepers is a prohibition against taking sides, which has caused considerable stress to troops in a number of the more bloody conflicts of recent years.

Peacekeeping operations depend crucially upon relationships with people on the ground. If local people fail to understand the reason for the international presence, if they resent it or even see it as foreign occupation, then serious problems will be posed to the credibility and viability of the peacekeeping operations. For this reason the attitude of the local media, who will often be more trusted than the international media, is crucial and peacekeepers will need to have clear strategies to deal with this. It may be that peacekeepers feel more comfortable dealing with familiar media outlets from the larger western media corporations – particularly when senior officers have their eyes on the domestic public opinion of the donor countries. This is understandable, but equal priority needs to be given to developing relations with the local media.

Most successful peacekeeping operations are likely to include a wide variety of reconstruction and peacebuilding activities and may extend to supporting humanitarian relief operations, or protecting those who do; assisting those displaced by conflict; monitoring any ceasefire arrangements and supervising the demobilisation and disarmament of combatants, through to the monitoring of elections. In the modern era the tasks of peacekeepers have even reached as far as shoring up failing or fragile states, developing democratic institutions, and taking responsibility for entire peoples. One obvious objective of security – but which is sometimes overlooked, is for peacekeepers to provide physical security for media infrastructure or institutions. If this is wrecked – by combatants or criminals – then the process of re-establishing a secure media environment will be that much harder.

None of this can be achieved without a comprehensive policy that fosters effective communication with local populations. Recent history has been marked by the absence of such policies – although peacekeeping operations in Africa and the Balkans have included a strong element of media development, it has not always been coordinated. Of course peacekeeping operations are not media development operations. However, as the example of the UNMIL mission in Liberia shows, much can be done by creatively interpreting the public information components of peacekeeping missions. In turn it requires recognition by the mission that media development is a priority and allocating as much resources as possible within budgetary constraints. In the case of UNMIL such recognition of the importance of this work led to the creation of a Media Monitoring and Development Unit through which a considerable amount of media training has been carried out³⁴.

What is particularly important for peacekeepers is to distinguish between public diplomacy, the provision of information by the peacekeepers themselves about their own mission and the steps necessary to create a media environment that can support democracy, good governance and human rights³⁵. As Thompson and Price emphasise, failure to distinguish between these types of activity can lead local populations to believe that international attempts to develop independent media are actually propaganda in the interests of the occupiers. Knowledge that all governments try and manipulate the media or even practice "information warfare" leads to further distrust and has implications for the role of peacekeepers. For this reason it is probably useful if the task of fostering a new environment is left to distinct UN or international agencies, with the actual implementation being carried out by respected NGOs or acknowledged independent media experts. Of course peacekeeping missions can react faster because they are on the ground with available resources, but the advantage of utilising them in the longer term has to be balanced against the dangers of confusing the purpose of the mission in the local populations' eyes.

34 See remarks by Margaret Novicki spokesperson for UN Mission in Liberia UNMIL in IMS Conference report January 2005

35 *Intervention, Media and Human Rights* Mark Thompson and Monroe Price, International Institute for Strategic Studies 2003

Another significant dilemma that will confront peacekeepers is how to respond to inflammatory media that may be exciting hatred or conflict. This question has caused some of the fiercest debates between peacekeepers and the free expression community. In recent years there have been attacks upon many TV and radio stations – in Dagestan by the Russians, in the Palestinian territories by the Israelis, on Serbia's RTSTV station by NATO during the Kosovan conflict – all on the grounds that they were inciting hatred. However, such actions are starkly juxtaposed against the stated position of the international community towards Radio Mille Collines (RMC), the Rwandan radio station that took a direct role inciting the genocide in 1994. In that case the US State Department claimed that even jamming RMC would violate international telecommunications law and Rwandan sovereignty.

The international legal situation is complicated. Intervention can be sanctioned on three grounds – if there is a threat to international peace and security; to provide humanitarian assistance and to prevent genocide or the incitement to genocide. If peacekeepers genuinely believe that local media are taking actions which fall under these categories they are entitled to take action to prevent them. There needs to be recognition among the international free expression community that conflict societies are very fragile and the norms which apply in more secure and peaceful environments may not apply in a war zone. A good illustration of the kinds of problems peacekeepers face is the struggle over the future of Srpska Radio-Television (SRT) in Bosnia when NATO troops actually seized a transmitter in support of a Bosnian Serb faction opposed to Radovan Karadzic³⁶.

Finally, some have argued that support for the media in severe conflicts can itself be characterised as humanitarian assistance. It is certainly the case that there will be a need to provide urgent humanitarian information and the peacekeepers may need to take the lead role in providing this if other outlets are not available, although with the same caveat of avoiding such actions being portrayed as foreign propaganda or interference. Whether mandates are likely to be interpreted in such an open manner in the future is questionable. It should, however, at least be considered.

Suggested aims and objectives for peacekeepers

36 See Thomson and Price *op cit*

37 KFOR developed the following strategy: An active public information strategy should:

- a. Always inform in a complete and correct manner
- b. Never tell untruths
- c. Never speculate on happenings and facts
- d. Never criticise or attack other local or international organisations
- e. Give media access to military installations if possible

- Prioritise developing a communications strategy for their own work to ensure that local people understand the peacekeepers' mission³⁷;
- Consider whether it is necessary to protect the media infrastructure and institutions from damage;
- Establish a public communications channel immediately and ensure it has up to date information about what the peacekeepers are doing. It is important that any information provided is timely and accurate, that lies are not disseminated (as they will be uncovered and be fatal to credibility);
- Ensure effective humanitarian information is available;
- Deal with local media from the beginning not just the international media;
- Be aware of the need to protect, wherever possible, the physical safety of journalists;
- Be sensitive to the difference between unprofessional/hostile media (that may incite violence) as opposed to those which are merely critical;
- Only become involved in media development if other international agencies with the experience, legitimacy and credibility are unable to provide this kind of support.

International humanitarian NGOs

It is increasingly recognised that the role of the humanitarian NGO is vital. They are seen by donors as a way of implementing programmes (as an alternative to providing direct support to local political administrations). Their integration within civil society means they are often more trusted than government agencies. Their specialist skills and expertise contrast the more generalist background of many public officials.

NGOs engaged in work in conflict areas need to have an information strategy of their own. Firstly, people in a conflict are very insecure and the arrival of a bewildering array of NGOs, each with their own approach, logo and acronyms can arouse all kinds of concerns and confusion. People will need to understand what the NGO is trying to achieve and what realistic expectations they can have about the help they are likely to get. Following from this understanding the NGO can aim to secure acceptance, trust and then legitimacy for its work – which will help improve the physical security of its staff. Secondly, the NGO will usually want to promote the values and principles for which it stands – based as they usually are on humanitarian law, principles of human rights or international standards of some kind. It is through this activity that it helps address the causes of the very problem it seeks to solve.

The particular role of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) needs to be understood here. The ICRC has come under strong criticism for its policy of confidentiality about the missions it undertakes and has itself apologised for the silence it maintained over the Nazi concentration camps. Nevertheless, the reality is that some regimes would not permit access by the ICRC if they knew that the results of the missions would be publicised. In these circumstances it is surely better for those enduring suffering of any kind that the ICRC is given access to them even if their subsequent representations to the government are kept secret. In a very imperfect world the confidentiality of the ICRC's work is a necessary pre-requisite of its effective operation and should be understood and accepted.

Local media is of vital concern to NGOs seeking to provide humanitarian relief. The only way the affected population can know where it is physically safe, where accommodation or shelter is available, where food and safe drinking water can be found, is through humanitarian information broadcast on locally available media. As part of the very first assessment therefore, the NGOs need to understand the local media environment and the most effective way of transmitting information to local people.

Winning trust has become immensely more complicated in the modern conflict environment. Many of the tasks undertaken by peacekeepers will include humanitarian relief or the kinds of activities undertaken by NGOs. Local people can become understandably confused about the distinction between the NGO and the foreign soldier. Physical insecurity may lead to NGOs accepting or requesting physical protection by peacekeeping troops. Ill judged remarks such as that by US former Secretary of State, Colin Powell, urging that NGOs become “a force multiplier for us... an important part of our combat team” in Iraq has simply compounded the confusion³⁸. The killing of NGO staff in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate that it is easy for NGOs to become identified with an occupying power in the modern environment. This is compounded by the fact that conflict zones are inherently risky. For example, more Red Cross workers were killed in the 1990s than US troops³⁹.

There is no easy answer to this. Even strict neutrality does not always bring legitimacy. The Red Cross have often found that local people do not believe they are genuinely neutral. When terrible atrocities are committed in a conflict

many struggle to understand how someone can stay neutral. It requires a sophisticated approach to explain that neutrality is not indifference, but a means to an end of being able to provide assistance. Even where neutrality is established it does not guarantee against attack - in Haiti combatants regularly attacked hospitals flying the Red Cross flag. The Red Cross dealt with this by using local radio to inform people of the importance of allowing the wounded access to medical care and that the Red Cross flag was a visible sign of the presence of medical facilities⁴⁰.

Suggested aims and objectives for humanitarian NGOs

- NGOs providing services in conflict areas should develop their own information and media strategy, based upon an understanding of the local media environment;
- NGOs should seek to distinguish themselves from the peacekeeping/security forces and their own public diplomacy in order to establish their own independence and legitimacy;
- NGOs providing services should also develop a relationship with local media (not just the international media) as this is often the most effective way of communicating with an endangered population;

International media development NGOs inside the conflict area

There are also a range of NGOs whose work is concerned with helping build a healthy media environment. These range from IMS itself, with its rapid intervention capability, through to capacity building and training organisations and organisations that concentrate on structural stability and reform.

One obvious and important task for international NGOs is to work with local partners to monitor attacks upon journalists and the media in general. The International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) is a network of international and local NGOs established for just this purpose. Timely and accurate information that draws the attention of the international media and policy makers to attacks upon journalists is obviously very important.

NGOs are also often the best equipped to be implementers of specific programmes. This is not because NGOs are virtuous as such - they need to be clear what added value they bring. The actual advantage NGOs can bring is a degree of independence from the donor/peacekeepers or international agency. Inevitably these bodies are afflicted by the political interests of the dominant governments, which can be fickle and self-interested (USAID makes it clear in dealings with them that their job is to further the US national interest). Independence allows NGOs to shape and develop programmes that genuinely reflect local needs and local conditions. In turn this means avoiding donor driven imperatives although it would be naïve to think they can be wholly avoided.

NGOs can add the commitment to working with local partners to the virtue of independence. Peace cannot be imposed on people from the outside - there needs to be strong local actors who can shape events. International NGOs therefore have a significant responsibility to work with local NGOs to build their own capacity to act in support of independent media. One of the more successful media development projects are the radio stations run by the Swiss foundation Hironnelle in Central Africa. These stations have won substantial support across the DRC, Rwanda, Burundi and Liberia by using mostly local journalists who are familiar with local conditions. The media

38 *The Guardian* April 2nd 2004

39 *Crimes of War* Edited Gutman and Rieff Norton 1999

40 *Crises and Emergencies* paper given to IMS conference November 2004 Florian Westphal International Committee of the Red Cross ICRC

policy NGO, ARTICLE 19, adopts the same approach in its work on legal reform and advocacy – indeed it will only work in a country if there are local partners it can co-operate with.

NGOs can also bring new and imaginative perspectives to how conflicts are reported and how media development takes place, which would not occur to media professionals. For example it has often been remarked upon that women play a crucial role in conflicts. Women and women's organisations are often the first to spot the warning signs that tension is about to explode into violence. In conflicts themselves they often suffer the worst abuse – torture, killings and mass rapes. Conflicts leave a substantial legacy for women – they often take the lead role in reconstruction given the absence of men of working age (it has been estimated that something like one third of all women in the world are widows). Despite these somewhat obvious facts there is little systematic attempt to understand the role women can play in conflict resolution or ensure that women's voices are heard during any peace and reconciliation process – it is all too easy for armed groups of men to dominate political discourse. NGOs can identify these issues (although all too often they do not) and press for them to be placed on the political agenda.

Finally, it is important for NGOs to be critical of the operations of the peacekeepers and other agencies if they believe that their actions are not in the interests of local people. This can be difficult when the funding is provided by host governments and the security by the peacekeepers. Still, in most circumstances both sides recognise that it is in their long term interests to establish security and democracy and human rights in order to provide the ground for a critical dialogue with those in power.

Suggested aims and objectives for NGOs concerned with media development

- NGOs should seek to distinguish themselves from the peacekeeping/ security forces and their own public diplomacy in order to establish their own independence and legitimacy;
- NGOs providing assistance for media development should develop a relationship with local media (not just the international media) as building capacity in the local media is among the most important tasks;
- NGOs concerned with media development should monitor violations of press freedom and issue alerts as soon as possible;
- International NGOs assisting with media development should prioritise working with local NGOs, journalists and members of civil society and wherever possible employ local staff and focus on building local capacity;
- NGOs should actively promote the participation of women in all aspects of conflict and post conflict work including participation in the media – not just as voices but on the professional and production side;
- NGOs should be vigilant in maintaining their independence from the peacekeepers, as well as from the combatants and be prepared to criticise any party when necessary.

International and local media

The media, whether local or international, will always face a considerable challenge in trying to cover conflict. There will inevitably be commercial pressure to focus on the immediate, most violent or dramatic incidents, at the expense of explaining the background and issues that may underpin the conflict. In order to explain the conflict in terms that are comprehensible, not just to the external audience but those affected by the conflict itself,

the media must have the ability to operate freely and without threat and with the capacity to report on all aspects of the conflict. While policy makers (including combatants) have a role in providing the circumstances in which the media can operate, a high responsibility falls on journalists and editors themselves.

The most pressing problem for the media in a modern conflict is likely to be the danger involved. The US based Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) has estimated that 337 journalists have been killed over the last ten years covering conflicts. Furthermore, CPJ research claims that the majority of journalists killed since 1995 were not killed accidentally in crossfire. Most were killed because of what they had written. "In fact, according to CPJ statistics, only 67 journalists (20 percent) died in crossfire, while 244 (72 percent) were murdered often in reprisal for their reporting"⁴¹. The CPJ report went on to say that they could only find 35 cases where there had been prosecutions for such killings. It seems that journalists are murdered with impunity. In the light of such figures the first priority of any media organisation, as an employer, is to consider the safety of its journalists. This means providing both safety training and lobbying the relevant authorities to be aware of their responsibility to protect journalists and pursue those suspected of killing journalists. It is particularly important for peacekeepers to investigate any allegations that they may have been responsible for the deaths of journalists. If they are seen to get away with killing journalists, other parties will draw the appropriate conclusion.

International media organisations will, of course, have vastly more resources than local media, although market pressure in a globalised media environment means that many media organisations are cutting the number of specialised foreign reporters they employ with two consequences. One is that local journalists (and particularly local technicians) are often employed to cover conflicts without the same protection – or salary – that would be provided to an international employee. Secondly, in a competitive environment, media organisations tend to play safe and stick with the herd so that all the media focus on one conflict at a time. Which conflict is covered bears little relationship to its scale or long-term significance – it tends to reflect those conflicts where domestic audiences have some point of identification.

Where international media do cover a conflict the level of resources they bring tends to overwhelm the local media outlets. In Afghanistan, for example, international media organisations such as the BBC, VOA or Liberty, who previously only used short wave, have now introduced MW transmitters and FM relay stations all over the country so their signals are received everywhere. They now broadcast for 12 or even 24 hours a day and are recruiting local journalists to run these operations. The downside is that they can pay Afghan journalists much more than local stations, which undermines the viability of local media groups. Local journalists develop their skills and competence with local media and then leave for better paid jobs in the international media. This is of course not always a negative process. If the local media are hopelessly partisan and party to the conflict, local people may well prefer to get their news from a trusted international brand (such as the BBC World Service) but in the long run, this preponderance of resources is damaging because developing a viable local independent media is crucial for establishing peace and security. More could therefore be done by the international media to support local media by fostering capacity building partnerships.

41 http://www.cpj.org/killed/Ten_Year_Killed/Intro.html

The international media has also allowed itself to become an actor in a number of the conflicts. This was most noticeable in the Bosnian wars where the volume of coverage for a particular incident was linked to the

subsequent escalation in the scale of intervention. This lesson has not been lost on paramilitary groups who now design much of their activity (as do peacekeepers) to secure favourable coverage. There has been much discussion about the wisdom of reporters being embedded with coalition troops during the second Iraq war of 2003. However, there is little difference between this and journalists going on patrol with the Kosovan Liberation Army where the journalists see what the KLA has arranged for them to see. The same problem arises with videos sent in by paramilitary groups – whether of suicide bombings, the beheading of civilian hostages or so-called “combat” footage. All of this is designed for the greater benefit of the combatants and requires extremely sensitive and thoughtful editorial consideration. In general and where they do not exist, there need to be specific editorial guidelines about how conflicts are covered.

For local media the problems are extremely complex. Local journalists – and their families – are far more exposed to intimidation and violence than international journalists who can move in and out of conflict zones. The media itself is likely to be highly partisan – by choice, funding or as a result of intimidation. The economic situation will be dire and the infrastructure upon which the media depends – reliable power supplies, a transport network, equipment – are likely to have been destroyed or damaged. Donor funding will tend to go to international media organisations or NGOs rather than local media – as donors are often more comfortable with those they know and trust rather than taking risks.

One obvious option is for local media to form partnerships with the international media, sharing and developing programme ideas, access to donor initiatives and so on. While the international organisation is likelier to be stronger in its overall professionalism and technical resources, the local media will have the contacts and knowledge on the ground that the internationals lack. The international broadcast media can also offer rebroadcast arrangements to boost local media.

Local media should also consider how they can co-operate with each other to reduce costs and increase their economic viability. Such measures might include sharing printing facilities for newspapers or developing local production facilities for the broadcast media. Media organisations could also sponsor media centres (with international donor support) to act as centres of excellence and places to share and exchange experience of media development.

Another problem that causes great concern is the lack of professionalism among inexperienced local journalists, particularly in an environment where freedom is suddenly provided after years of suppression. Journalists have a role to play in helping transform a violent conflict into the normal processes of peaceful politics. By reporting accurately the activities and opinions of people from different sides to the conflict, journalists can help to break down misleading and potentially dangerous stereotypes. They can look for examples of non-stereotypical behaviour that will help people understand that in every conflict there are a range of different perspectives and beliefs. Journalists are often responsible for developing and enhancing stereotypes and they can make a significant contribution simply by being aware of the dangers of this practice. One option for the local media is to develop an ethical code of practice setting out how conflicts should be covered as part of a general commitment to improving professionalism.

Part of the problem may simply be that in circumstances where there may never have been a free media and where journalism is open to anyone who

wishes to practice it, there may be very little awareness that journalism involves the exercise of responsibility and judgment, as well as the claiming of rights. One characteristic that is often remarked upon by those working in areas emerging from conflict is the frequent irresponsibility of journalists who make wild claims without checking facts, are frequently partisan towards one political faction or ethnic group and are casually defamatory towards others. It is these circumstances that often lead to the dangerous call to re-impose (or impose) censorship. This underlines a need for local media and local journalists to take steps to increase professionalism and establish a system of self-regulation. Obvious steps are the creation of a unified journalist association which can protect the interests of its members and increase professionalism. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) is always willing to help organisations with this task. At the level of the media organisation itself, international organisations like the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) can advise on establishing a trade association that can consider how best to establish a self-regulatory mechanism.

Suggested aims and objectives for international and local media

- The international media should consider developing and sharing editorial guidelines about how to cover conflict, including such issues as embedding reporters in military units;
- Local media need to be able to compete with powerful international players and international media groups need to recognise the importance of nurturing a local market and local media capacity;
- International media groups should consider developing partnerships with local media to help develop and nurture local talent;
- Local media should consider how to foster professional and responsible journalism by developing their own ethical guidelines and codes of conduct;
- Local media should recognise its responsibility for alleviating conflict by reporting accurately the activities and opinions of people from different sides to the conflict;
- Local media should encourage collaboration over the use of expensive resources, such as printing presses, fostering co-production arrangements or rebroadcast arrangements with international media organisations;
- Local journalists should establish a unified journalist association with a two fold task – representing the interests of journalists with employers and other actors, and promoting high professional standards;
- Local media groups should consider how best to establish a mechanism of self-regulation to respond to complaints about misleading reporting or lack of professionalism.

Conclusion

Every conflict is unique. Any general recommendations made in this publication need to take account of the specific circumstances of each conflict. It is clear that the media, and local media in particular, play a central role in resolving conflict or at the very least, moving from a violent to non-violent phase. Consequently the international community, peacekeeping forces, donors, humanitarian organisations and media development agencies must all consider how to interact with the local media community.

This will raise questions of judgement – if media development is an important task, how is responsibility to be shared among the principal actors? How can the international media's resources and professionalism avoid overwhelming what is usually a fragile domestic media community? How can the true nature of a domestic media market be assessed and the right kind of infrastructure and development support be provided? The answers to these questions must be found case by case. This will require sensitivity and awareness on the part of the key actors to the media dimension of conflict. Peacekeepers and international agencies should have their own training programmes to familiarise staff with the lessons learned from past experience.

This is a complex subject with no easy answers. However, much can be done by simple acts of co-ordination and by building effective partnerships between peacekeepers, UN agencies, NGOs and the media, such as the 'Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa'. Many lessons have been learnt over the past fifteen years – our task now is to apply those lessons to avoid the mistakes of the past.

Appendices

List of international resource groups

International Freedom of Expression Exchange – www.ifex.org

IFEX is an international network currently comprised of 65 organisations, based in Toronto, Canada, and managed by Canadian Journalists for Free Expression. IFEX sponsors the Action Alert Network (AAN) in which member organizations report free expression abuses in their geographic region or area of expertise to the Clearing House which, in turn, circulates this information to other members and interested organizations all over the world. IFEX also has an outreach programme that tries to support new freedom of expression organizations in the developing world, Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union.

ARTICLE19 – www.article19.org

Named after Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ARTICLE 19 focuses on projects that oppose censorship by promoting freedom of expression standards and access to official information. It currently has partners in over 30 countries and concentrates particularly on strengthening local capacity to monitor and protest institutional and informal censorship. It has a strong emphasis on developing standards that advance media freedom.

Committee for the Protection of Journalists – www.cpj.org

The Committee to Protect Journalists was founded 1981 by a group of U.S. foreign correspondents concerned at the treatment of their foreign colleagues by authoritarian governments. It now seeks to promote press freedom worldwide by defending the right of journalists to report the news, by publicising abuses against the press and by acting on behalf of imprisoned and threatened journalists.

Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) – www.iwpr.net

The Institute for War and Peace Reporting works with local journalism in areas of conflict. It provides training of reporters, encourages dialogue between journalists and tries to provide reliable information about conflict areas. It runs major programmes in Afghanistan, the Balkans, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Iraq. The Institute maintains offices in Almaty, Baku, Belgrade, Bishkek, The Hague, Kabul, Pristina, Sarajevo, Skopje, Tashkent, Tbilisi and Dushanbe with representatives in Tirana, Vladikavkaz and Yerevan.

Index on Censorship – www.indexonline.org

Index on Censorship is a magazine founded in 1972 by writers, journalists and artists inspired by the British poet Stephen Spender to defend the right of free expression. It documents free expression abuses and reports on censorship issues across the world. It also undertakes media development and training projects, most recently in Africa, Central & Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

International Media Support – www.i-m-s.dk

International Media Support (IMS) was established in 2001 as an initiative of the Danish media community supported by the Danish government. IMS undertakes rapid interventions to promote and strengthen press freedom

and professional journalism and to improve the working conditions of local media practitioners. IMS has undertaken a large number of interventions in conflict areas, always working with local partners and frequently with international NGOs.

Internews – www.internews.org

Internews Network is a US based organisation that tries to improve information access by both fostering and assisting the development of independent media and by promoting open communications policies throughout the world. It is the founding member of Internews International which has members currently work in 47 countries worldwide, spanning Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North America

International Research and Exchanges Board IREX – www.irex.org

IREX is a broad based international organisation, based in Washington DC and founded in 1968, that specialises in education, promoting independent media and internet development in the USA, Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East and Asia. It's work ranges from professional training to legislative reform with the focus upon developing the capacity of independent media to support civil society.

International Federation of Journalists – www.ifj.org

The International Federation of Journalists is the world's largest organisation of journalists. It was established in its present form in 1952. The Federation represents around 500,000 members in more than 100 countries. The IFJ promotes international action to defend press freedom and social justice through strong, free and independent trade unions of journalists. It has recently co-established an International News Safety Fund (INSI) to provide humanitarian aid for journalists in need.

Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontière) – www.rsf.org

Reporters Without Borders is a Paris based international organisation with branches in Germany, Austria, Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland. It issues press releases and public-awareness campaigns on behalf of journalists under attack and provides financial and other types of support to their families. It also campaigns against censorship. In January 2002, it created the Damocles Network to provide victims of abuse with legal services and represent them before the national and international courts.

Stanhope Centre for Communications Policy Research

– <http://www.stanhopecentre.org/>

The Stanhope Centre is a research centre in London that focuses on media law and policy around the world. It has been commissioned by Internews to develop a database of media regulation and reform in the Middle East and Maghreb. It is currently conducting research on media conflict and regulation and their relationship to crisis.

UNESCO Division for Freedom of Expression, Democracy and Peace

– www.unesco.org

UNESCO has taken a lead role in the field of conflict and media within the UN family. UNESCO supports independent media in conflict and post-conflict situations to enable them to gather and disseminate non-partisan information. UNESCO's actions in this area includes the promotion of dialogue among media professionals in zones of conflict and the outside world and provision of advice to the authorities of countries in post-conflict situations in drafting new media legislation that enhances the development of freedom of expression. The organisation has hosted a number of conferences within this area in order to discuss and promote joint policies, including the 2004 Belgrade conference⁴².

⁴² <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/wpfd/2004/>

World Press Freedom Committee - www.wpfc.org

The World Press Freedom Committee is a US based international umbrella representing approximately 45 organisations - ranging from print and broadcast media, through labour and management organisations, to journalists, editors, publishers and owners across the world. It's main activities are advocacy for freedom of expression, complemented by legal assistance grants to journalists and news media, and training programs, seminars and publication of how-to journalistic manuals.

The bibliography for the publication can be found on IMS website
- www.i-m-s.dk

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