



**IMS report of the
2nd Copenhagen Conference on Emergency Assistance to Media
6-7 October 2002.**

INTRODUCTION

More than 50 journalists and representatives from the world's media organisations met for the 2nd Conference on *International Media Emergency Assistance* in Copenhagen, Denmark, 6-7 October 2002. The conference was called by International Media Support, IMS.

This report reflects the key points of two days of discussion between the world's key actors in the field. Far from all of the many organisations working in this field were there – but many of the most influential were. The occasion for the gathering was the examination of the first year of IMS's work. Since its launching in September 2001 IMS has made more than 20 interventions in 14 conflict-torn countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

IMS is a Danish-based media organization with an international board and annual conferences to serve as meetings for an international advisory council. The 1st conference in January 2001 confirmed that there is indeed a niche for IMS, filling an assistance gap between media monitoring and media development in conflict and pre-conflict areas.

The 2nd gathering confirmed the mandate to IMS given by the launching conference: There is a need, not only for flexible and swift action, but indeed also for a collaborative, holistic and strategic approach to emergency assistance. The participants went far beyond the mere examination of IMS' work so far. They shared mutual experiences and discussed common dilemmas. Many speakers and participants stressed the importance of this gathering of media organisations dealing with conflict issues. As Aidan White, Secretary General of IFJ, put it: We have different interests and philosophies, but share the same objectives.

The following report contains extracts from the discussions raised from the one focal question: How can we extend and improve the support to media in conflict areas? The format of the report is an edition of keynotes made by the speakers and the participants rather than minutes.

The report is divided under the following headlines:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WORKING SHORT-TERM – THINKING LONG-TERM

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA ON THE GROUND

CHALLENGING THE ROLE AND THE CONTENT OF THE MEDIA

PROTECTING MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

WORKING WITH THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

WORK SHORT-TERM, THINK LONG-TERM – It is in this collaborative and strategic context IMS plays a significant role, the conference acknowledged. IMS has no vested interest to pursue, but has a clear mission of filling in the assistance gap in emergency media aid. IMS is in a position of bringing in key actors, being aware of its own limitations as well as the possibilities of its mandate. IMS has its own funding, can enter fast and – with the strategic and collaborative approach – leave a footprint on the ground for others to follow and provide basis for the next possible step. IMS has by its statutes to work short-term, but must think in the long-term.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA ON THE GROUND – Of special importance is the interaction between local and international media. The conference highlighted the necessity of local involvement and ownership of the media projects. Today the problem is firstly that the international media organisations and donors intervene in such overwhelming numbers. Secondly, they are often reluctant to work with the media at hand because of the media's unacceptable quality standard, partisanship or ties to the state.

CHALLENGING THE ROLE AND THE CONTENT OF THE MEDIA – Working with the media on the ground is also working with the content and the role of the media. It was stressed during the conference that emergency assistance is not only brought into play when the bullets start to fly. Rapid response is required equally in pre-conflict situations and when entering a post-conflict scenario, where a main objective is promoting the media' role in promoting dialogue, tolerance and understanding of the other side.

PROTECTING MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS – The same applies for work with media on the ground, the protection of media and journalists at risk and those who are victims of suppression and violence. The conference noted that promoting safety for journalist and media staff is an ongoing challenge, but the tricky question is how to support the individual medium at risk, the conference noted.

WORKING WITH THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA – In addition the conference showed that the role of the international media has not sufficiently been addressed in the interventions of the international media organisations in general and of IMS in particular. IMS should not refrain from an active dialogue with the international media concerning the ways in which they cover a conflict. The role of the international media has been an issue throughout the Nineties, but after September 11 2001 even more so. Likewise IMS should engage in a dialogue with the donors on the message they sent to the recipients through their working methods in conflict zones.

WORKING SHORT-TERM, THINKING LONG-TERM

Need for a strategic approach

The presentations at the conference confirmed that the scenarios of conflict can vary greatly from country to country, from situation to situation. Accordingly the interventions will, in different degrees, target the various aspects of possible support: the media landscapes and the market, the government and the legal framework, the culture of the conflict as well as the state of conflict.

If there is no media market, the new independent media may end up finding themselves dependent on the international support – collapsing after the withdrawal of the support.

If there is no strong state, it can't provide legal and structural framework needed for the development or even survival of the media.

If the people still hate each other after cease-fire, and the environment is dominated by fear and suspicion, a certain type of approach for conflict-resolution and dialogue with the audience is required.

If the media are highly partisan, there is no reason to support the individual media. In some cases the state media's role in conflict resolution may be supported.

If there is no history of independent media, no culture for free expression and respect of law, or no tradition for interaction between the government and the civil society, various interventions are required.

The complexity of the situation calls for a strategic approach taking into account all the factors. However, it is utterly important that the strategy calculates with *specific and realistic goals* based on a reliable assessment.

Conflict situations call for collaboration rather than competition. We saw a worst-case scenario of competition in the Balkans, where billions of dollars were wasted on competing human rights and media projects. In Afghanistan, on the other hand, we saw the benefit of the collaborative approach, where the international media organisations all brought in different skills to be utilised through collaboration and sharing of information and experience.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA ON THE GROUND

Hard to think long-term in a cross-fire

Reyhana Masters-Smith of MISA Zimbabwe stressed that in the outbreak of a conflict it is difficult to think strategically and proactively for the involved local media organisations, it was stressed by. The media response to the repression in Zimbabwe has been ineffective because they react in an ad hoc manner. The reactions have not been collective, sustained or systematic, but rather individualistic and immediate. In addition, the media organisations' attention has been diverted from the big issues "because we are busy putting out the small bush fires that the government has lit" without having the opportunity to be proactively engaged in any meaningful way. This situation calls for a strategic approach in the international media support.

Work with partisan media

The international media organisations have to ensure local representation in the projects, even if the media is not perfect, even if they are biased, Aiden White of IFJ stressed. And of course

they are, because they are in a conflict. The point was made that we can't expect the media to be outside the conflict, not to involve themselves or to be independent of their own ideas and strives for solutions.

The Palestinian journalist Khaled Abu Aker of amin.org stressed that the state of professionalism depends on the media the journalists work for: The journalists working for Palestinian media see themselves as part of the struggle, and their coverage is focussing on the Israeli doings, ignoring the analysis. The Palestinian journalists working for the international media agencies cover the stories more balanced and take the point of the other side into account. For Khaled Abu Aker there is no doubt about the importance of promoting professional standards. This promotion is also an investment in the future of an independent Palestinian state, which must be covered by a professional, balanced watchdog. However, it can't be simplified to a choice between being professional or Palestinian: "Can you be balanced when you are occupied and denied access to sources and movement?" asked Khaled Abu Aker.

The Denmark-based Israeli correspondent Yigal Romm presented the dilemma as follows: We are not objective, we are not subjective, we are Israeli – also when we criticise the government. A point was made by Andrew Puddephatt, Article 19: It is difficult to be a professional journalist if the opposing side does not want you to be professional. However, professionalism is still possible; it is not a productive avenue to suspend the professional criteria in a conflict situation.

Work with a partisan audience

Another determining factor for a medium's coverage is its audience. Addressing an Israeli and a Palestinian audience implies not only different language, e.g. words for soldiers or suicide bombers, but also different angles and agendas. An example of setting editorial priorities based on the audience could be seen in the media's marking of two anniversaries in September: Israeli media chose to mark the 30-year anniversary of the massacre at the Munich Olympic Games. The 20-year anniversary of the Sabra and Shatila massacre was left to the Palestinian media to mark. However, stressed Yigal Romm, the danger for the media is to be dragged into the audience's politicising of the events and thus add to the polarisation of the community.

Fiona Lloyd, freelance media trainer of South Africa, stressed the necessity of changing perspectives for the audience. An experience from Indonesia showed that projects facilitating cooperation between journalists from both sides could lead to a more correct coverage, because the journalists would use each other as background sources or even a sort of foreign correspondents or for checking and cross-checking information.

Work with state media

Many international media organisations and donors are reluctant to support or even work with state media. However, as Kwame Karikari of MFWA pointed out, not all state media are part of an ongoing conflict, and some of them may be the best instruments for impact because they reach the population.

In the case of Afghanistan the international media organisations had only the state radio to work with as a starting point, stressed Bent Noerby Bonde of BMC. There was no organised civil society, no private sector nor private media. The government was, however, equally reluctant to the implications of media freedom and editorial independence and had yet to experience the force of public service programs – such as the supported programme *Good Morning Afghanistan*.

Work with rural and local media

It is of utter importance to work with the local media outside the capitals, stressed Kwame Karikari. In the case of Sierra Leone a local radio played an important role during the war in sustaining some sort of stability in the worst affected area. However, such local media rarely catch the attention of the international media organisations. The international media organisations have to find ways to address also the low-intensive conflict areas, added Jens Lohmann of Danish PEN. In many of the Latin American countries, human rights and press freedom may be severely suppressed in provinces and rural areas, as it is the case of upcountry Brazil.

Supporting individual media

Media organisations are generally reluctant to support one individual medium in favour of another. The tricky question, as pointed out during the conference, is: Who to help? However, in a conflict situation it makes sense to help a closed down paper get back to business or to get a radio station back on the air.

Kwame Karikari of MFWA also calls for support to selected media as examples to follow, exposing best practise in conflict coverage. In Sierra Leone MFWA and IMS cooperate with the Canadian based CFJE, which has selected five of the most promising newspapers for substantial support. Likewise he calls for establishment of radio centres of excellency in rural areas, which could have a spreading effect on the booming radio media.

There was another case involving a re-launching of a newspaper in Tjadtikistan. The newspaper had previously been a self-sustained, highly independent and very powerful newspaper, but its journalists were forced in exile because of death threats. The IMS' approach is to support a re-launch for a period of 6 months, but as a regional project involving journalists from other countries in Central Asia – as a symbol for others to follow.

Conflicts expose amateurism

The media's weak professional foundation was exposed in Nepal when the conflict between the government and the Maoist movement escalated, explained Kanak Mani Dixit of CIJ/Himal Media. Following the democratisation in 1990 the general picture of the Nepalese media was that they did quite well in terms of professionalism; there was a variety of media, the papers earned money and the journalists were trained. However, the upcoming conflict between the government and the Maoist movement proved differently.

The actual coverage of the conflict is dominated by news without context and analysis. In the beginning of the conflict many media were taken on guided tours into the Maoist areas, ending with a glorification of the Maoists – exposing an absolute lack of professional criticism. After a state of emergency was declared, most media turned on a plate, now imaging the Maoists as mere devils. Very few media covering the government's and the Maoists' operations researched the consequences for civilians in the rural areas. When investigative articles on this eventually appear – actually supported by IMS – other media are reluctant to print them and rarely follow up on their revelations. Most of the editors and journalists excuse themselves with the state of emergency, which actually has resulted in imprisonment of many journalists and the killing of one in police custody. However, it is mostly the Maoist media that was affected by the emergency.

But why has the media been so unprofessional in times of conflict, asked Kanak Mani Dixit – and offered an answer: The editors themselves are from the autocrat period and are not likely to let the journalists cover the conflict impartially – thus the media will not develop professionally until a new generation of broadminded journalists are trained. He also warned against too high expectations of what the international media organisation can do: The change must come from within.

Find new ways to sustain the media

Media in developing countries have often relied on the generosity of benefactors for their existence, stressed Reyhana Masters-Smith of MISA. She called for training in financial management, distribution and marketing to ensure that they thrive not only generosity and idealism.

However, in many conflict areas the problem of media's survival is much deeper than the question of training, pointed out Mahgoub Mohammed Salih, editor of the Sudanese Al Ayam. In a conflict zone as Sudan, the financial weakness is caused by the very conflict:

- Investors do not want to invest in media business when the media can be closed down any minute.
- When there is no freedom of speech, no one cares to read the papers anyway.
- The media may be in conflict with each other and are subsequently unable to cooperate in solving very basic common problems such as distribution and import of paper.
- Adding development problems such as illiteracy and lack of purchase power, the future for sustainable African media looks bad, stressed Mahgoub Mohammed Salih.

He called for regional networking and the development of a Pan African media organisation. On the other hand, in a poor country as Sudan, the media have to be very unconventional to combat these problems. An example was the Sudanese paper Al Ayam Daily, which went out of its way to reach new audiences, making readers clubs amongst illiterate refugees and training correspondents of the displaced in the camps and urban areas. The purpose was not only to involve them in the peace process, but actually also to create new readership.

CHALLENGING THE ROLE AND THE CONTENT OF THE MEDIA

Promote creative conflicts to combat apathy

In Central Asia apathy of both the journalists and the audience is a part of the conflict scenario, pointed out Ivan Sigal of Internews/Central Asia. The media organisations have to address this problem in order to involve the media in playing a constructive role in the escalating conflicts in particular and in their coverage of the society in general.

In this sense it is important to distinguish between violent and creative conflicts. Some conflicts are genuine local conflicts initiating a change in the country, others are genuine conflicting interests. They will lead to development, but it presumes a popular participation and an engaged media coverage. And how to create such creative conflicts, strengthening political participation, asked Ivan Sigal.

Media's dilemma in the peace process

A major dilemma of the media in a peace process is to be both supportive and critical to the peace talk: on the one hand the media have to support the peace process, and on the other hand they distrust the two main parties in the peace talks. What should be the balance between transparency and confidentiality of the peace process, was the opening question of Sunanda D. Waduge, FMM, in his presentation of the media's present role in Sri Lanka.

There is a lack of transparency and accountability surrounding the peace talks. The Norwegian mediators and the government of Sri Lanka decide what the public should and should not know. On account of this situation, rumours and misinformation are rife.

However, noted Ahmed Abdisalam Adan of HornAfrik Media, the press has the potential of playing a key role by confronting both sides of the table with questions on what they will give in the negotiations and what they will stand up for.

In the case of Somalia, a peace conference in Djibouti was covered through satellite transmission. This not only made the peace process more transparent, Ahmed Abdisalam Adan argued, it also made the different warlords accountable for their role in the process, knowing their own community was listening. As a result they had to compromise in front of everyone.

Impediments for the media's constrictive role in a peace process are, as in Sri Lanka, that the mainstream media are market driven, subject to political control, covert censorship and ethnic biases, explained Sunanda D. Waduge. The coverage suffers from a lack of multi-ethnic perspective and diversity in mainstream media offices.

New operational news values on conflict

In a conflict situation, the media needs to introduce new forums for dialogue with the civil society and further to redefine what news there is in such a situation. The single events must necessarily be viewed within the larger frame of things, stressed the South African freelancer Fiona Lloyd, and the traditional emphasis on being first and fast does not allow digging into the problems. If the media does not report the bigger picture, it thereby deprives the readers and listeners of the information needed to understand the conflict and to take a constructive part in its solution. Thus a progress towards a conflict resolution is severely hindered. It doesn't necessarily take a highly educated journalist to report the context and analysis of the bigger picture. Lesser- trained journalists can also report on civil society groups with contextual insight.

As an operational approach, Kwame Karikari suggested, the media support should assist the premature media in linking up with the civil society in order to make them conscious of their own role in the society – apart from the one of selling papers.

Another problem in conflict coverage is that easy news and shoestring journalism only report the loudest voices. The media in conflict areas must give a voice to the listeners' and readers' agenda, stressed Fiona Lloyd. Editors and journalists need to be trained in professional dialogue with the low voices of the societies. This is not an exclusive conflict approach, but in a conflict situation the public journalism approach to the readers and their agenda is very useful.

In conflict resolution, peace must be brought about from the grass root level, stressed Mahgoub Mohammed Salih: We can bring media to the people and ask how their problems can be solved. His own paper created innovative ways to involve the excluded parties and the grass roots in the peace process. For instance, issues regarding the tribal people who live in urban environment were addressed, as well as the displaced within the refugee camps who are left with no contact to the community.

Working with conflict sensitive journalism

In a conflict-ridden environment, said the Canadian freelancer trainer Ross Howard, the very basic standards of professional or reliable reporting – being accurate, impartial and responsible in terms of doing no harm – contribute to conflict-resolution. This is done by educating the audience, reducing myths, humanising the other side, re-framing the conflict, providing an emotional outlet. This is simply the general implicit value of professional, reliable reporting.

Recognising the value of reliable journalism for conflict resolution is the first step of conflict sensitive reporting. Consciously including it in our work is a second step. However, without a clearly established understanding of professional reporting, there is no point in discussing other roles for journalism, such as contributing to conflict resolution. Without reliable reporting, everything else quickly becomes distorted, and even worse, becomes divisive again.

In the case of Sri Lanka the program for conflict sensitive newsroom management examined and described how conflict resolution can take place, as a process. It emphasised the need for

journalism to seek new voices – including “the other side” of the ethnic divide in Sri Lanka – and to seek new solutions to the crisis. Sri Lankan journalism is similar to that of almost any country in conflict – too self-absorbed and too emotional to see alternative solutions elsewhere.

However, an intervention on conflict-sensitive journalism should not stand alone, Sunanda D. Waduge added, because the local facilitators would then lose credibility. It should be supplemented with freedom of speech initiatives or safety training – with an integrated approach. He also pointed out that it is imperative to follow up the initial training by further activities in conjunction with local partners – otherwise the training in conflict-sensitive journalism drown in numbers of weekend journalism courses.

Working in the grey zone between journalism and advocacy

A third step in conflict sensitive journalism, Ross Howard challenged, is actively to focus on conflict-resolution as a purpose of media. This enters a grey zone, where conflict-conscious journalism becomes peace advocacy, at the sacrifice of professional standards. But if we have professional, reliable standards in journalism, we can, as journalists, safely go at least as far as the grey zone.

If we go beyond the limit, we don't talk about journalism, but media initiatives or editorial campaigns instead – using many of the techniques of journalism but consciously constructing information to alter people's minds in favour of conflict-resolution. For this purpose journalism can be very effective, and such media initiatives do make an impact and help reduce conflict.

Taking a stand for democracy

International media organisations may train the media on the ground to predict upcoming conflicts and to report on the conflicts in a professional manner. Their ability to do so depends on the extent of professionalism in terms of impartial coverage and capacity to analyse and put trends and signals in a greater context.

Further training is the obvious solution, but training alone is not sufficient, stressed Kwame Karikari. It is also a question of taking a clear stand on human rights abuses and social development, he added. Media should not be non-partisan in all issues, but should in particular promote tolerance and democracy.

We do not compromise the professional standards by actively promoting democracy in our reporting, added Ross Howard; we are simply being more honest about the implicit underpinning of our work. Journalist would not be able to carry out their work in a truly undemocratic environment. Good professional journalism is a necessary, although not a sufficient condition for democracy. But without democracy, good professional journalism will not exist for very long.

SUPPORTING PROTECTION OF MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

Cooperate for safety

In Colombia, the journalists and media are heavily affected by escalation of the more than 50 years of armed conflicts. Twelve journalists are murdered every year, at least 60 receive threats and 10 leave the country every year. Altogether, more than 30,000 people are killed every year, mainly civilians, and more than two million are internally displaced. As a result, independent journalism and media are weakened, stressed Marta Ruiz of the Proyecto Antonio Nariño. In Colombia there is no significant journalist organisation that is able to protect or support the threatened journalists. Further, no instructions or courses are offered on how to work in conflict situations. In order to get a good story, journalists are pressed into dangerous situations, or they are subjects to the widespread self-censorship.

In 2001 six institutions and organisations decided to create a project to promote freedom of expression and improve the situation of journalists in Colombia. Proyecto Antonio Nariño (PAN) works for:

1. Developing and extending the mechanisms of protection of journalists. We support an alert network which is very efficiently working with correspondents in 15 regions of the country. In particular PAN wants to prevent risks and promote safety measures for journalists by exchanging experience with other countries in conflicts.

2. Training of journalists through workshops in different regions. PAN will focus on supporting the local media, which is the most threatened and often most inattentive of their own safety.

Advocate and campaign for safety

A third priority of the Colombian PAN is advocacy. The organisation seeks to create an awareness in the public opinion through a permanent flow of information about the situation and by facilitating a public debate about issues like freedom of expression, the crisis of the media, etc. PAN plans to monitor the coverage in the most important media searching for independent and responsible journalism. Through the mobilisation of public opinion, PAN intends to influence the policy of the government and the coverage of the media.

In Zimbabwe, explained Reyhana Masters-Smith, the media need to initiate a campaign to make the general public understand how their own rights are being violated when the media is attacked. Only support from a strong grassroots movement can really help change legislation and stop the attacks on the media. Another problem a media campaign should address is the mob attacks on the media, often caused by hate speech.

Address impunity

Of special importance is to fight impunity, stressed Marta Ruiz. PAN aims to create an alliance with media organisations and others to fight the impunity which means that 90 % of the killing and 100 % of the cases of threats are never brought to trial. PAN will bring paradigmatic cases to international tribunals. However, as impunity is a major problem not only in Latin America but in many other regions, it is of utmost importance for international media organisations to find ways to address this problem, noted the Danish freelance journalist, Jens Lohmann.

Further development of safety training

In Zimbabwe MISA has additional input for the traditional safety training programmes: The journalists must be trained in law, so they understand the implications of the legislation and, when they are arrested, can negotiate to keep themselves safe, yet still demand their rights. The journalists must also learn ways to assist themselves facing hostile crowds or even mob attacks, suggested Reyhana Masters-Smith.

Safety training has for many years been a flagship of IFJ. In cooperation with IMS the traditional safety training has been developed with modules of conflict understanding and the

media's role in conflict resolution. However, as safety of journalists is a still growing problem there is a need for further collaboration on safety. It is now time for the creation of an IFEX style clearing house on safety programs, suggested Aiden White.

Developing safety training of trainers

The Danish freelance trainer Lars Møller called for a development of a *training of trainers* component in the safety training. As the current safety courses are very expensive – often lead by highly paid military professionals – they are reserved for the very few attending the one and only course in the region. However, the need for safety training is much bigger.

However, if we anchor the safety training in a local training institution, training local or regional trainers, the impact of the training may match the need. In Nepal IMS and IFJ in cooperation with Nepal Press Institute and the Centre for Investigative Journalism have conducted safety training of *trainers* appointed by NPI. As a result, safety training is now being developed as part of NPI's course program reaching out to the entire country, including the worst affected conflict areas.

Lars Møller also suggested the development of regional safety training units, which would be able to train local journalists and trainers and to a high degree adjust the training programs to the local needs.

Programme Coordinator Elisabeth Witchel of the Committee to Protect Journalists stressed, that CPJ would be part of a dialogue on such development, since the safety training is both expensive and not always adequate in situations where the journalists are not finding themselves in a cross-fire.

Lyudmila Bourenkova, Programme Coordinator of Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, called for a safety manual for journalists dealing with all aspects of safety such as arms, violence, legal aspects and emergency help.

Developing safe havens

In Zimbabwe MISA has experienced the need to develop safe havens and escape ways for the journalists. Although alerts are sent and acted upon in terms of protest letters, there is still little follow-up assistance, stressed Reyhana Masters-Smith.

A safe haven initiative must not only support the journalists to leave the country if necessary, but also support them in the country they flee to – with a job, capacity building, etc. – with legal rights if they report out of the new country. Finally there is a need for counselling and support for the family – both if they stay behind and if they join the journalist.

IMS has engaged in developing a mechanism whereby exiled journalists can continue to work as journalists. It has proven to be a need around the world, that often exiled journalists walk from organisation to organisation in search of something to do, pointed out Jesper Højbjerg of IMS. In Ghana IMS is now assisting Liberian exiled journalists in collaboration with MFWA, but there is a need for addressing this issue on a much higher level – together with IFJ and WAN.

Let the peace process start with the exiled journalists, Kwame Karikari suggested, so they become a potential resource for the process rather than a source of problems when they return after the cease-fire.

Developing media defence

Arbitrary arrests of journalists are undermining the media in different ways.

- The costs of freeing journalists are financially crippling to organisations that are already struggling in an economy that is rapidly deteriorating.

- News organisations spend their time, energy and resources in trying to deal with the arrests and charges instead of carrying out their duty of informing the public.
- The journalists become the news instead of reporting the news.
- There is a long-term psychological effect on the newsroom and journalists will subconsciously start censoring their stories.

In the case of Zimbabwe there have been 12 arrests and 16 charges in the last 3 months, all against the private and independent media. MISA has responded – with the assistance of organisations such as the IMS – by setting up the Media Defence Fund to assist the media with legal fees, legal assistance and legal advice. During just the few months that it has operated, the Media Defence Fund has been overwhelmed with requests and it has responded rapidly and efficiently but it has also noticed the gaps.

MISA has discovered a need for training lawyers in the area of media as well as a need for research and comparative analysis of various laws. A website would be an important and effective tool, for example, where at the click of a button a user could access information and judgements on media law in the region. Ghana has, for example, recently struck down its criminal defamation law, yet this landmark judgement was not highlighted within Africa.

Bringing evidence on crimes against humanity

The conference paid particular attention to the rights and duties of journalists covering crimes against humanity. The ICC proceedings have raised the specific question: Should journalists be forced to witness in the court if their testimony is the only way to get a mass murderer convicted?

On the one hand, argued Alan Davis of IWPR, when a journalist witnesses war crime it is his duty and role as reporter to bear witness to the world. On the other hand, argued Aiden White, will the price be that the journalist loses the little protection he or she has by being a “neutral observer” in a conflict? The decision will not only affect the security of the journalist but also the coverage of the conflict. We talk of the journalist’s right to say no, not his moral obligation.

WORKING WITH THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

Partisanship of the international media

The role of the international media in conflicts has been an issue throughout the Nineties, but after September 11, 2001, even more so. The impact of 9/11 should not be underestimated, stressed Aiden White and pointed at two distinct changes: Firstly there is a move away from the centrality of civil liberties and fundamental rights which appeared to give an ethical and humanitarian edge to policy a few years ago. The action of Western governments to introduce new rules and laws diminishing fundamental rights point to the emergence of a new policy agenda, driven by the so-called war on terrorism.

Secondly there is a movement to undue influence in the work of media by democratic governments anxious to win public support for new foreign policy strategies. The pressure on US media after September 11 is already well documented and there have been similar pressure on media elsewhere – and as a result we see more self-censorship.

However, also outright partisanship of American media was observed by the conference. Otherwise professional US media have been elaborating on how “we can kill Saddam Hussein”, noted Khaled Abu Aker, stressing the importance of being aware of the dilemmas trying to do our best, rather than being part of a propaganda machine. Another case brought by Aiden White was CNN’s coverage of the war on Iraq as a reality before the bilateral and multilateral approaches for a peaceful solution are exhausted. And on the other hand CNN is transmitting a

debate on bias in the media's coverage of Iraq, noted Algirdas Lipstas of Open Society Institute.

Strong partisanship was observed in the Russian media's coverage of the conflict in Chechnya. Martin Breum of IMS noted that the Russian media are probably the single most influential factor influencing the Chechnyan conflict. Meanwhile the Russian authorities deny Russian journalists visa for entering Chechnya – with reference to the anti-terror campaign, Lyudmila Bourenkova of CJES remarked.

International media's responsibility in the peace process

The international media cover conflicts all over the world, but when the peace process begins they tend to lose interest. This problem was raised in the case of Sudan, Somalia and Sri Lanka. Also in the coverage of the peace process the international media's news value is increasingly dependent on the ripples of an event, elaborated Sunanda D. Waduge. Recognising the weakness of the local media and the strong powers of the international media, the international news agencies should critically examine the process, expose its lacunae and help the stakeholders better to understand each other's realities, he argued.

Unlike the local media the international media has unfettered access to both the stakeholders as well as other key opinion makers. Using this access, they have to ask questions and probe deeper into issues which are of importance to the process.

Ross Howard noted that the international media have plenty of war correspondents – but no peace correspondents, who actively report the developments that could bring about conflict resolution. Professional journalists spend all their lives reporting on conflict but never study conflict resolution and certainly not the possibility of consciously including conflict resolution within their framing of stories.

Need for international networking and advocacy

If the international media organisations engage in the peace process, the collaboration with local media is vital, stressed Ahmed Abdisalam Adan, because they are the only ones having an insight of the conflict. However, in the case of Somalia in the mid-Nineties it was not only a disadvantage for the Somali media to be left out of the international attention, he noted. The Somali had to find their own ways in founding the media after decades of repression and conflicts. Refugees returned home, some of them starting private media. The Somali media, however, need international and regional networking not only to develop further, but also need the international community to pressure the warlords for press freedom. Likewise are the international media organisations needed for a dialogue on press freedom with the former rebels in Sudan, Somalia and Sri Lanka.

Kwame Karikari argued that the media organisations should develop and establish regional conventions not only for press freedom, but also for the protection of journalists. But how do we get rebels to respect them, he asked and suggested the international media organisations to make loud noises, because even murderers are afraid of noise from the media. He also suggested the international media organisations to organise very quick summits when new crisis occur, as was the case on the Ivory Coast. He envisioned a consultative meeting of the players in the region plus representatives of media in that particular conflict zone in order to find out what is going on and to develop an approach for intervention.

In post-war Angola an international delegation of media and human rights organisations have agreed to assess the needs here and now – in collaboration with the local stakeholders – but with a long-term-perspective, explained Namibia based Luckson Alfred Chipare of MISA.

International media's responsibility in the Zimbabwean conflict

The most internationally covered event in Zimbabwe is the veteran's occupations and attacks on the white farmers. But this is a very simplified presentation of the conflict, stressed Reyhana Masters-Smith: By this coverage the international media has played right into the hands of the Mugabe government by portraying it as a black and white affair. Even the local media have reported on this crucial concern in the same vein. The land issue has polarised Zimbabwe; any criticism was branded as being against land reform. In between the real issues have been lost – as well as the bigger picture. When we look at strategies to preserve the freedom and integrity of the press the international media organisations should go beyond just the immediate needs of the media. To counteract the negative impacts of state control the media need a genuine support to take up the role of addressing the real issues in an in-depth and engaging manner.

Role of donors

It is necessary for IMS and the international media organisations to engage in a dialogue with the donors on the limited funding of media support in conflict zones. Even governmental agencies as European Council and OSCE are competing with the NGOs for funding of media projects. One way to change this is collaboration: Speaking with one voice.

The conference also suggested IMS to engage in a dialogue on the message the donors sent to the recipients through the extravagant way they enter and work in conflict zones.

A distortion of the national agenda is a special problem that occurs when donors and international NGOs enter a country with each their own agenda. Many of the best journalists end up working as information officers for donors and NGOs, only brain draining the media but also shaping the media content in their own favour. Another result is that no one is left to work with politics and legislation in the country.