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Engaging the Media and Building Media Relations

Journalism plays a significant role in shaping the court of public opinion. The various media set out to capture audience attention, inform, entertain, and ultimately act as leaders of public opinion.

In regards to trafficking, the media can serve as mass communication vehicles, navigating their audiences through the complexities of the key trafficking issues, whilst educating those potentially at risk. Their reports and publications also serve as an important resource for mobilizing, prompting and inspiring key partners, as stories on trafficking and particular organizations can reach a potential donor even before a proposal does.

The ILO's 1996 and 1997 major reports on child labor, the Global March in 1998, and the adoption of Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor all received tremendous media coverage, lending the ILO more public exposure than any other issue with which it is associated.

The TICW project team can build upon this foundation and enhance media exposure at local, national and transnational levels on trafficking and related issues.

Although, initially, our main Phase II communication aim is the delivery of our message to the grassroots community, the importance of delivering our message via news media at national and transnational (international) levels should not be underestimated. It serves to reinforce the importance of the project to our partners, primarily the senior government representatives whom we must influence to ensure effective mainstreaming. In other words, although we want to work hard at the local level in order to get our message across, we don't want to disappear from the main stage. Governments are dealing with many developmental issues. Trafficking is but one of them. And out of *their* sight is out of *their* mind.

Thus ALL media are important entry points for TICW Phase II.

The following provides some simple, basic steps to follow when engaging the media:

BUILDING A MEDIA CONTACT LIST:

Be prepared, as forearmed is forewarned. Build a comprehensive media contact list, including large and small, prominent and obscure outlets read by members of the target audience. Be sure to include local and regional media in addition to national targets:¹

- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Television
- Radio
- Wire services

¹ MRCentral.com

- Newsletters
- Trade Journals
- Internet Sources

Generate a media contact list with names of individual contacts. Media directories can provide the names, addresses, and phone numbers of the people who will be receiving your releases. A good place to start is the government's public relations department, which should have a comprehensive list of national and international resident correspondents. National and international press/media clubs will hold similar membership lists. But reporters and correspondents come and go. It may be wise to personally call and confirm the contact information. Perhaps as part of a reciprocal agreement, you can approach another UN agency or NGO for a copy of their media database. Contacting the press office at foreign embassies in your capital can result in another source of names.

Update media contact lists at least twice a year, adding email addresses and fax numbers where possible. It's best to find out which delivery method is preferred at each outlet.

Be efficient. Do not include media outlets that will not be interested in trafficking and the ILO project. Customize and update the list frequently, weeding out contacts and keeping as up to date as possible.

Be Timely! News reporters/editors deal in NEWS – as in NEW information. Don't wait a day or two after the event to send out a news release. That's the best way to get no coverage. Inform your media contacts in advance where possible, on the day at latest.

WORKING WITH REPORTERS:

As news reporters are conduits to a mass audience, staff interaction with reporters is critical. Build personal relationships with journalists where possible; journalists are always on the hunt for new angles and information, and will gain more knowledge and interest of your key issues if you know them personally. Still, always remember, and assume, you are probably On The Record! (also see: **Guidelines for Giving Interviews** below)

Remember that journalists:²

- Want a "scoop" or trend
- Face pressured deadlines
- Are extremely selective, as they are exposed to more information than they seek
- Remember negative experiences

Familiarize yourself with key media sources; whenever possible, review reporters' publications or watch/listen to their news before you meet with them; demonstrate a familiarity with, or curiosity about, their publication or format.³

Be Available. Keep in mind that journalists face round-the-clock deadlines. Give a phone number where you can be reached after hours and remain available to your media sources.

Speak on-the-record. As mentioned, always assume that everything you say is on the record. If you don't want to see it in print or hear it on the air, don't say it. Be honest and up front. If confidentiality requires you to refrain from discussing an issue, then explain why. Simply responding, "no comment" is a red flag signal to many reporters and may put them on the defensive.

Don't over-elaborate: Just make the point in plain, simple language. Use a real-life example if necessary. But don't dilute your main point.

Never Lie; Never Exaggerate: You are above this. You are an international civil servant carrying out your duties on behalf of a United Nations specialized agency. You are an honest

² MDK Consultants

³ MRCentral.com

person who's doing his/her best to make the world and your community a better place. You don't need to make things up.

Stick to your area of expertise: Not only is this common sense, it is an ILO and UN System-wide directive. Don't offer your personal opinions. In the end, it is no more important than anyone else's, and could reflect negatively on the project, the ILO and the UN.

Never be afraid to say "I don't know": Only speak about that which you DO know. If you don't know, fair enough. Tell the reporter you don't know but that you can find out who does know the answer, and/or you can get back to him/her later. Make sure you keep the promise to call back, even if only to say you still haven't found out.

Feel Free To Ask Questions: The more you know about the reporter and his/her organization and the reason for the timing of the interview, the better you can tailor your answers.

Return Calls/Emails: Common courtesy aside, neglecting to return calls/emails appears dismissive at least, and evasive at worst. If you can't call back, make sure someone else from your office can and does. Again, if you don't know the answer, say so and offer to redirect to someone who can help. You can always refer media calls to the Communications Officer at TICW in Bangkok. But it will help you build a relationship with that individual if you personally try to help. Remember: this is a golden opportunity to get our message across to a wider audience, so why send the reporter somewhere else?

Finally, Use Common Sense: All the lengthy reports and directives in the world are no substitution for your own common sense. If the reporter is hostile, or clearly leading you into political or controversial areas that you are uncomfortable with, redirect him/her to the Communications Officer at TICW in Bangkok.

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING PRESS RELEASES TO NEWSPAPERS

Newspapers are constantly inundated with newsworthy updates and leads, so succinct, effective press releases remain critical to gaining media coverage.

Accurate, succinct information. Arm the press with newsworthy information that meets the following criteria:

- Timeliness: relevant/impacts readers
- Novelty: unique or interesting story
- Consequence: impact on some/all audience
- Human interest
- Prominence
- Proximity: has an effect on people living in that area

Create a news story. Write a press release like a news story; some print outlets will actually print a release verbatim if it meets this standard. The basic rule is to place the newest and most important information at the top. Don't back into it by talking about background, bureaucracy, etc. Your paragraphs should be only 3 to 6 lines each. Make sure there is a contact name and number for them to call you, including an after hours number for you. No more than 2 pages in length. Editors have too much information thrust at them and often say **your news release has only ten seconds to make an impression**. So never assume they will read the whole thing!

Consider multiple angles to enhance the likelihood that your story will run in print. Think of three to five different angles or spins one can take to trafficking, keeping the target audience in mind. But limit each release to one angle. Keep the message simple and clear.

Answer essential questions: who, what, when, where, and especially WHY the journalists and readers should be concerned with trafficking and the worst forms of child labor.

Effective and engaging writing style: Most news stories run in the **inverted pyramid** format, with all the crucial information (answering the "essential questions" above) included in the first two or three paragraphs. Details and elaboration are included in the final paragraphs. Consider who the release is for (business publications, migration journals, online publications, etc) and learn the style and format of that publication.

Writing should be **clear and succinct**; limit press releases to 2 pages. If you cannot condense critical information into 2 pages, attach a fact sheet.

Language: speak and write in plain simple sentences that the average reader can understand; consider target audience. Always explain data sources and how numbers were derived. Avoid industry jargon, NGO abbreviations, and bureaucratic language. The general public won't understand references like *interventions*, *mainstreaming* and *participatory frameworks*. Keep in mind that you are not writing to ILO "insiders" and verbose language or excessive acronyms can be confusing and shorten readers' interest. This goes for ALL general publications, not just news releases!

Precision vs. Shotgun: the way to increase chances of publication is not by writing press releases more frequently and scattering them through a wide range of media outlets. Improving writing skills, researching the target audience, and targeting the media more precisely are much more effective. The goal is **quality**, not simply quantity.

Be reactive to global news: consider how stories in this region can be linked to global events. For instance, a story on human trafficking in Europe might be linked to such activity in the Mekong sub-region; time press releases accordingly.

Accommodate journalistic preferences: always send releases in the form journalists prefer; some prefer email, faxed press releases, or a phone call pitching a potential story idea. Always include at least one well-informed contact person in your organization who will be in town and available for immediate consultation with the press. Never send out a press release with a contact who will be away for the next week.

Send copies of all material to Bangkok: Keep the Communications Officer in Bangkok up to date on everything you are doing media-wise. This includes all interviews you give, any press releases you issue (Communications Officer is willing to proof-read for you), and clippings of any news copy generated with at least an abstract translation – preferably verbatim.

GUIDELINES FOR GIVING INTERVIEWS

Select only newsworthy items; video and radio releases are most effective when they include a real story with a human angle. Self-congratulatory or promotional releases are less likely to be published.

Know your context and audience:
BEFORE agreeing to an interview, be aware of:

- Name of journalist/Name of program
- Date of publication/broadcast
- Theme (is it likely to be sensationalized?)
- Purpose of the interview
- Contents of the program (context, outline, facts)

Choose a qualified spokesperson who is:⁴

- Knowledgeable & prepared

⁴ MDK Consultants, 2003

- Trained
- Credible & convincing
- Confident & natural

Appearance (non-verbal communicators):

- Corporate suit/dress
- Avoid patterns, bright jewelry, props
- Sit up straight, still, and watch you hands
- Look at the journalist, and not at the camera.
- Remain polite

Remember: you are not a victim, you are a guest.

Have highly prepared statements as well as anticipated answers; know ahead of time which key points you will integrate into your answers. When using statistics, put data in perspective; drawing an analogy can be useful.⁵

PRESS BRIEFINGS

These briefings serve as valuable tools for sharing information that is not hard news, such as updates (ie, tripartite negotiations and development, or updates on ILO Conventions).

Provide the press with an opportunity to ask in-depth questions; use it as an investment in the press for future stories.

Make sure information is newsworthy; must be worthwhile and timely.

5 Key Ingredients of Effective Public Relations:

Understand the Press
Create a Style
Be Pro-Active
Be Versatile
Be Accountable

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS ON TRAFFICKING and MEDIA:

Trafficking remains a highly sensitive issue that must be handled with discretion by the media. Women and children in the region are entitled to the same confidentiality rights as those in other countries, especially since many victims of trafficking face danger of being re-trafficked. Their safety and protection should be considered paramount. It is important to keep in mind, however, that many television networks want to air stories with live interviews.

Child labor and issues of abuse and exploitation should be handled with utmost sensitivity. Any photos or materials that may be graphic in nature should be handled with discretion, since what may attract media attention may potentially violate a victim's right to privacy.

This doesn't mean we cannot or should not try to accommodate media requests to make available 'trafficking victims', but we need assurances the victim's dignity will be maintained, perhaps by requiring the TV producers/correspondents and still photographers to agree to mask the faces/identities of those involved.

CONTACT:

Whenever in any doubt contact the Communications Officer for TICW in Bangkok. Tel: 66 2 288 2057 or mobile 66 9 891 5003 anytime. Email: dow@ilo.org

⁵ MDK Consultants, 2003.

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