



NGO Media Outreach: Using the Media as an Advocacy Tool

Produced by the Coalition for the International Criminal Court, September 2003

I. Harnessing the Power of the Media

A. The Importance of the Media to the Work of NGOs

- Mass media are channels, such as newspapers, magazines, radio or television, used to communicate information to large groups of people.
- By regularly conveying information to important audiences, from the general public to government and international decision makers, the media plays a large role in shaping public debate.
- The media are among the most important allies to the NGO community. Establishing good relationships with journalists is an integral part of any effective media outreach campaign.
- Some ways in which the media can be of importance to NGOs include writing articles that:
 - create an environment of political pressure
 - convey general information, serving as a public education tool
 - counter popular misconceptions
 - comment on an issue, providing an alternative viewpoint

B. How to Establish Media Contacts

- While journalists face tight deadlines each day, they will make time to talk to you if you can prove that you are a valuable source of information. In order to establish yourself as a valuable contact to a journalist, you must first do some work in preparation.
- A good first step is to make a list of the newspaper, radio and/or television media outlets with which you would like to establish a relationship. These are your target media contacts.

- Research what kind of stories your target media contacts cover. To do this, read, listen to or watch the reporting that your target media contacts produce. You can also use Internet search engines to review past coverage. Pay close attention and try to identify one or two journalists who regularly write stories relevant to the subject matter of your media outreach campaign.
- Once you've done this basic homework, call your target media contacts. Be prepared to introduce yourself and your organization, and to position yourself as a resource to that journalist. Be succinct; chances are you will only have one or two minutes of the journalist's time.
- Direct journalists to web sites and other resources that provide background information relevant to your issue. The CICC has an online press room at www.iccnw.org/pressroom.html with numerous fact sheets and press releases.
- Keep a comprehensive database of journalist contacts once you've established them. Notes you'll want to include are: full name, media outlet, journalist title, telephone and fax numbers, email address, city, country and any special information the journalist has provided you.
- Respect that journalists are constantly bombarded with communications materials. Even if a news item seems important to you, it may not be considered newsworthy by your target media outlet. To avoid frustrating your journalist contacts, contact them only in regards to your most urgent communications.
- Respect journalists' deadlines. If your target journalist is working under deadline between 2 and 3 o'clock every day, try not to call during that time. And if a journalist has requested specific information by a set deadline, make sure you send the requested materials well in advance of that time.
- Understand the responsibilities of journalism. Ethics, credibility and impartiality are the three keys to responsible journalism. Most journalists are obligated to include perspectives from varied credible sources for every story they produce. It is their job to search through opinions surrounding an issue to get to the facts. You can become an asset to journalists by supplying names and sources that can verify facts and provide credible testimony.
- The following is a checklist of necessary steps to establish strong media contacts:

Checklist for Establishing Good Media Contacts

- ✓ Identify your audience. Are you targeting the general public? Policy makers? A local audience? A national audience? An international audience? An issue-friendly audience? An issue-hostile audience?
- ✓ Research media outlets that cater to your audience. Make sure that the media outlet you want to contact is relevant to your target audience.
- ✓ Research who the appropriate journalist contact(s) will be. Take a look on the web site of your target media outlet and find out if they have already written about your issue. If so, which journalist(s) have written the article(s)? Make a note of these individuals. If you cannot find any information about your issue, try to find the name of an editor who would be responsible for any reporting on your issue.
- ✓ Contact the media outlet. Use public information to contact your target media outlet. Ask to speak either with any journalists you have identified who have already written on your issue, or ask to speak to an assignment editor who can help direct your call.
- ✓ Be polite. Journalists may sound rushed on the phone; it is probably because they are on a tight deadline. Be courteous; ask if the journalist or editor has a couple of minutes to talk about your issue.
- ✓ Explain the purpose of your call. You will only have one or two minutes to make your pitch, so be prepared to concisely state who you are, which organization you work with and why you are interested in being in contact with the journalist at hand.
- ✓ Take notes. Be prepared to jot down some notes on the basis of your phone conversation. Chances are, after a few of these calls you may forget who said what. Keep your notes organized in a file so that you can refer back to your new media contacts when you need them later.
- ✓ Lay the foundations for future contact with the journalist. Ask if the journalist would be interested in receiving information from your organization in the future. If so, do they have a preferred method of contact between email, telephone and fax? Is there any particular aspect of your organization's work that they are most interested in? And, if the journalist isn't the right person to contact regarding your issues, is there someone else at that media outlet who you might contact?
- ✓ Follow up. If the journalist has given you his/her email address, fax number or mailing address, send him/her a quick note of thanks. Use this information to include some basic information about your organization to remind the journalist who you are.

II. Planning a Successful Media Outreach Campaign

A. Identify Your Media Outreach Strategy & Goals

When planning a media outreach campaign, it is essential to develop a clear and specific messaging and outreach strategy. This will lay the foundations for what you will say and to whom.

Some considerations to keep in mind in planning a communications campaign include whether your core messages are proactive: introducing a subject or story idea to the news media for the first time; or whether your core messages are reactive: responding to previous news coverage.

In the context of media coverage of the ICC, examples of proactive media outreach include:

- A call for governments to take action, such as:
 - a call to ratify or accede to the Rome Statute, or
 - a call for governments to begin the process of implementing the crimes defined in the Rome Statute into national law
- A call for governments to *resist* taking action, such as:
 - a call for the Security Council to resist automatic renewal of Resolution 1422, which requests immunity for peacekeepers of non-States Parties for a one year period
 - a call for governments to resist signing U.S.-requested bilateral immunity agreements
- Awareness-raising around key dates and events

Examples of reactive media outreach include:

- A press release condemning a government action that undermines the authority of the ICC, such as the passage of the American Servicemembers Protection Act, which laid the groundwork for the withdrawal of U.S. military assistance from States Parties that did not sign bilateral immunity agreements
- A letter to the editor of a newspaper highlighting a popular misconception or factual error cited in earlier reporting by that newspaper.

B. Creating a Core Message

When planning a media strategy, it is important to develop a clear and specific message. The message should be developed to include:

- The situation the campaign is addressing
- The solution the group proposes
- The action that the public can take to help solve the problem

The campaign's message and its three parts (problem, solution, action) should be featured in every article, interview and conversation conducted during the course of the campaign. The core message should also reflect the overall mandate of your organization, and reflect your organization's central mission and goals.

When planning a media strategy, it is important to identify your target audience. Usually the target audience is made up of people who are not already supporters or who do not know about the campaign issue. Identifying these people will make a campaign more successful. If the message that the organization send out reflects the interests, values, and experiences of their target audiences, the audiences are more likely to pay attention. It is important to keep in mind who your audience is when crafting your core message.

C. Framing the Message

- Talking Points:

Talking points summarize your media campaign's central message in three or four sentences, offering a clear summary of all the points the group will present throughout the campaign. Everyone who speaks during the campaign should be well versed in and able to address the talking points. This summary should include the basic persuasive argument and statistics or facts to support the message.

- Sound Bites:

Sound bites are shorter than talking points and encapsulate the message in words and symbols that will grab the audience's attention. Sound bites are useful for print interviews, but are especially important for broadcast media.

D. Timing the Message

As we now know, journalists are very busy and must manage multiple tasks in order to perform their job well. To get an edge above all of the other communications competing for journalists' attention, you must time your media outreach campaign well. Here are a few timing issues to consider:

➤ **Relate Your Story to Breaking News or Current Events**

Make your story relevant to journalists by tying in your story to breaking news or current events. Show the media that your issue is current and relates to today's news discussions and you'll have a much better chance of convincing journalists that your story is newsworthy.

➤ **Use a Special Occasion / Key Date**

Identify key dates on which your issue will take on special meaning and work on raising of the significance of that date. For example, a well-organized calendar of events can help you and journalists determine when to focus attention on your story.

➤ **Avoid Busy News Days**

To the best of your ability, avoid unnecessary news competition by steering clear of busy news days. Try not to disrupt your media contacts on days when you know there is a big story breaking that they will cover.

➤ **Meeting Editorial Deadlines**

Last, but certainly not least, remember to work within editorial deadlines. Deadlines vary greatly depending on the journalist and his or her medium of communications. Be sure to provide journalists sufficient "lead time" in order to prepare for an publish a story in a timely manner.

III. Delivering Your Campaign to the Media

Whether your message will be delivered in a press release, an interview, a press briefing, an opinion piece, or through any other channel of communications, you will need to prepare its delivery.

A. The Press Release / Media Advisory / Press Statement

➤ A press release is a common technique for presenting information to the media. It is often used to break news, spread information, publicize a story, condemn actions and state your organization's mandate.

➤ The central components that every press release must include are:

- Your organization's name and logo
- Contact information of experts for further information
- The date
- A headline that reflects the main message
- A sub-headline that adds a second, forward-looking theme
- A lead paragraph that explains the problem and gives key information
- A background paragraph that gives the context to the problem
- At least one quote from an expert on the subject
- A suggested solution and a call for action

- A brief organizational description (a mini-mission statement at the end of the document)

Press Release Tips

- Timing is everything. Press releases should coincide with the media outlets schedule. Releases should be sent so that they arrive before a paper or station's daily editorial meeting
- Pitch the story. Make use of your media contacts by calling a handful of the most important journalists to let them know about the press release and answer any questions they might have.
- Be selective: The real secret to press releases is using them selectively. If they are sent too often, news organizations may pay less attention.

➤ If there is not enough information to merit composing a complete press release, tools such as a media advisory or press statement can be used. A media advisory can be used to announce a press briefing, or lists experts available for interview on a breaking news topic. A press statement is simply a statement from the executive director or other key organizational spokesperson issued on organizational letterhead.

➤ Additional tools such as fact sheets, time-lines, charts, graphs or other background information is also useful.

B. The Interview

- An interview is a Question-and-Answer session between a journalist and a source. Journalists use interviews to gather information and to hear different points of view. Media interviews provide an opportunity to convey an organizational message, share information and respond to current events

Preparing for a Media Interview

Research: Who will be the interviewer? What is the topic of the interview? Where will it take place? When will the story be used? How long will the interview be? What kind of stories the interviewer has done in the past?

Prepare: What core message do you want to convey through the interview? Write down two or three ways you can express that core message. What new relevant information can you put forward? Think about statistics or other examples to support your core message.

Practice: Prepare ten tough questions. Be ready to answer questions that may be difficult or uncomfortable for you or your organization. Practice what you want to say and how you want to say it. Have a colleague or friend stage a mock interview.

During an Interview

Stay “On Message”

Keep in mind that reporters may have their own agenda. The key to being successful in communications with the media is to satisfy the need for information while using your message to help shape the story. Your message is the main point you want to convey – what you want the audience to remember. Be prepared to have two or three different ways of conveying your message without repeating the same words.

Use “Bridging” to Convey the Message

“Bridging” is a term used to describe how you can build a verbal bridge to deliver your message to the media. Even if the reporter does not ask questions specifically about your key message, you can use “bridging” to create a link to your issue. You can also use “bridging” to avoid answering tough questions.

Delivery

- ✓ Remember the 4 C’s: Conversational, Concise, Clear, Convincing
- ✓ Give good quotes – have sound bites ready
- ✓ Speak clearly
- ✓ Avoid jargon and technical terms
- ✓ Be persuasive
- ✓ Don’t worry about a silent pause
- ✓ Be honest. Don’t exaggerate.
- ✓ If you are unsure of an answer, offer to follow-up with information or tell the audience where they can go to find more information.
- ✓ Build verbal bridges to get you key message across.
- ✓ If you have not said all you want near the close of the interview, look for a way to fit it in.

C. The Press Conference

Press conferences are formal, arranged meetings held with members of the press at which the organizer usually offers a statement and then answers questions from journalists. Press conferences provide an opportunity for direct communication between an individual or group and the media, and can be used to convey a major announcement or breaking news.

A press conference can be successful only if members of the media will report on it. Before a group decides to hold a press conference, its staff should consider whether the subject of the conference important enough to take the reporters away from other tasks. Bear in mind that the press conference is for the benefit of journalists. Limit the number of speakers so that there is sufficient time for journalists to ask questions once the formal presentation has been made. Remember to avoid using jargon; use basic terms that the media and public will understand.

Arranging a Press Conference

At Least One Week Before

- ✓ Reserve a venue
- ✓ Arrange for a podium, chairs, and, possibly, food and drinks for reporters
- ✓ Schedule a time: (This should be based on deadlines of media outlets that will cover the event.)
- ✓ Prepare an announcement of the press conference. Include the briefing topics and speakers, explaining the speakers' expertise on the topic.
- ✓ Send out announcements by fax, mail or hand deliver to: editors, assignment editors, reporters, national wire services, weekly calendars/bulletins, allies and supporters
- ✓ Prepare written material for the conference, including press kits with a briefing agenda, speaker bios and any other relevant documents
- ✓ Prepare an outline of talking points and share them with the speakers. Make sure the speakers understand their talking points so that there is no overlap during the presentation.

At Least One Day Before

- ✓ Contact the speakers to review the order of presentations and talking points
- ✓ Contact members of the media to remind them of the press conference
- ✓ Arrange materials, including extra copies to send journalists who do not attend
- ✓ Visit the venue for the press conference to make sure details are in order

The Day of the Conference

- ✓ Issue a press release that contains the main message of the press conference
- ✓ Make last-minute calls to assignment desks and editors
- ✓ Check on the venue several hours before the conference starts
- ✓ Make sure the doors are unlocked for reporters and that the room is easy to find
- ✓ Review the order and talking points of the press conference with speakers while they are all together

During the Press Conference

- ✓ Have a sign-up sheet to get the names and addresses of reporters
- ✓ Distribute press kits and your business card
- ✓ Give reporters a written list of participants
- ✓ Make opening remarks, introduce speakers
- ✓ Arrange the necessary one-on-one interviews and follow-up interviews
- ✓ Record the conference so that it can be reviewed later
- ✓ Take pictures for in-house use

Following up

- ✓ Send press kits to reporters who did not attend
- ✓ Call reporters who did not attend but seemed interested
- ✓ Monitor media coverage to see how the press conference was reported
- ✓ Clip newspaper and other coverage of the event

D. Broadcast Media – Radio and Television

While most of the information presented up to this point can be applied to both print and broadcast media, there are some approaches that apply specifically to broadcast media – radio and television.

- Broadcast media are distinct from print formats because they can reach larger and more diverse populations, including those who have low literacy levels or who live in isolated areas.
- Within the realm of broadcast media there are a wide variety of formats which include, news and feature programs, television and radio talk shows, individual radio programs, paid advertising and public service announcements.

Tips for Broadcast Media:

- Bring talking points that you want to be sure to emphasize during the interview.
- Be prepared to state your name, title and the organization you represent.
- Remember that your audience may not be familiar with your issue. Provide basic information to put your comments in context.
- Answer questions on a priority basis starting with the question that you think is most important.
- Present a human picture; tell what has happened to a specific person.
- Provide numbers and statistics that help tell your story.
- For television interviews, avoid wearing clothing with a small pattern like stripes or checkers as it looks fuzzy on the screen. Avoid rocking back and forth or leaning too far back in your chair.
- Speak slowly and clearly. Avoid using unnecessary words, such as “like” or “um”.
- Make short, precise statements. Use your talking points.
- Always be calm and polite, even when challenged.
- Always tell the truth. Lying, even a little bit, damages credibility.

Additional Considerations for Broadcast Media:

- *Consider both national and international broadcast stations.* For example, the radio station “Africa #1” can reach large audiences in multiple countries. These broadcast outlets can play an important role in conveying a region-wide message.
- *Propose specific story ideas.* Most broadcast stations welcome ideas, such as topics for debate and suggested guest speakers. In Benin, for example, the Benin Coalition for the ICC pitched to a story idea to a television network and

appeared in an ICC debate on live television along with member of the government.

- *Research regional radio and television shows to find those that deal with related topics.* If you haven't already, make contact with the producers of those shows and tell them about your organization and the work you do. Build relationships with these journalists so that you can offer them story ideas in the future.

IV. Using Available Resources to Support Your Media Campaign

There are many tools already available to support your organization's media campaign. Consider the following resources:

- The CICC Web site (www.iccnw.org)

On the CICC's web site you can find updated information as well archived information that can be used to support your media campaign. Tools available on the CICC web site include:

- Country information, providing an updated report on the status of individual government support for the ICC
- Information about the ICC, including the status of efforts to build the court and information communicated to the Court
- Publications produced by the CICC, including the quarterly *Monitor* and monthly *ICC Update*
- Resources and tools for NGOs, including information about how to order radio and video public service announcements from the Coalition secretariat, and suggested action items about how to get involved in the Coalition's work
- Statements in support of the ICC made by leading government, NGO and IGO officials
- A comprehensive online pressroom, including press releases and fact sheets produced by the Coalition secretariat and its member organizations.