



ASIA PACIFIC FORUM
ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS IN OUR REGION

Media Handbook for National Human Rights Institutions

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Media Handbook for National Human Rights Institutions

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Introduction for users

Strong and inclusive communities are built on the foundations of human rights: dignity, fairness and respect for people, no matter their age, gender or background. However, for this to happen, it is essential that people understand what “human rights” are and how they apply to daily life.

The media¹ is a critical tool in shaping public opinion and setting a social, political and economic agenda. While the rapid growth of social media provides new ways for people and organizations to connect directly with each other and share information, the reality is that most people continue to seek news and opinions from traditional media sources.

The media – management, editors and journalists – decide what constitutes “news”. They filter and frame the issues and provide the context for people to understand the events that are reported. While the media might not tell us what to think, they play a very significant role in telling us what to think about.

Human rights issues have become increasingly newsworthy. The media “have become interested not only in violations of human rights, but in the institutional apparatus that has been designed to promote and protect human rights”.²

Accurate, informed and sustained media coverage of human rights – for example, on issues related to the rights of people with disabilities, gender-based violence or the treatment of refugees – can help shape community attitudes and contribute to genuine changes in law, policy and practice.

On the other hand, some media reporting can perpetuate stereotypes that further entrench social disadvantage and discrimination in a community.

National human rights institutions (NHRIs) have a responsibility to “capitalize on and make use of new information and communication technologies, as well as the media”,³ to build public awareness of the human rights issues facing their communities.

To perform this role effectively, NHRIs need to understand how the media operates, the different audiences they reach, the limited knowledge some journalists may have about human rights, the multiple pressures they can face when reporting on certain issues and the constant demand to be the first with “breaking” news.

While NHRIs communicate with the public in a variety of ways – and increasingly through social media – mainstream media outlets continue to be one of the most influential carriers of

1 In this Handbook, the “media” describes the broad range of organizations that collect and publish or broadcast news or news-related programmes to mass audiences. It includes newspapers, television, radio, magazines, journals and news agencies. These can operate online or at the local, provincial, national or international level.

2 International Council on Human Rights Policy; *Journalism, Media and the Challenge of Human Rights Reporting*; 2002; p. 16.

3 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training; article 6.

information generated by NHRIs and “the most powerful gatekeepers between these organizations and the wider public”.⁴

The challenge for NHRIs is two-fold. The first is to present human rights issues in a way that will engage the media and result in accurate and compelling coverage. The second is to work cooperatively with media outlets and individual journalists to promote informed and accurate reporting on human rights.

Why engage with the media?

Building community awareness of and support for human rights is a fundamental first step towards preventing violations and discrimination from occurring.

National and international human rights laws set out clear standards that promote and protect the rights of individuals and place on States the responsibility to uphold these rights.

By educating the community about these standards, and the mechanisms in place to protect their rights, individuals:

- Are better able to assert their own rights

- Are empowered to stand up for the rights of others

- Can hold governments and decision-makers to account for their actions and advocate for changes to laws, policies and practices.

The Principles Relating to the Status of National Institutions (the “Paris Principles”) require NHRIs to “publicize human rights and efforts to combat all forms of discrimination” by “making use of all press organs”.⁵

Working with the media can be a very effective way to reach a large number of people with information about human rights, especially given the financial constraints that many NHRIs face. Not only is media coverage “free”, it is also generally seen as being more reliable than information presented in advertising or promotional campaigns.

NHRIs can use media coverage to pursue a range of interconnected goals, including:

- Exposing systemic discrimination or human rights violations and building community awareness of the issues

- Challenging negative stereotypes that exist within the community, particularly in relation to vulnerable or marginalized groups

- Advocating for changes to laws, policies and practices and explaining why this is necessary

- Encouraging the public to take action on a particular issue or to contribute to the work of the NHRI.

An NHRI – be it new or established – may also seek media coverage to explain its role, functions and priorities to the community. For example, it can describe the type of human

4 International Council on Human Rights Policy; *Journalism, Media and the Challenge of Human Rights Reporting*; 2002; p. 18.

5 Principles Relating to the Status of National Institutions (the “Paris Principles”), 3(g); available at www.asiapacificforum.net/members/international-standards.

rights complaints it is able to receive, how individuals can make a complaint and the process it follows to resolve those complaints.

Regular media coverage can also help strengthen the reputation of the NHRI within the community as an independent, authoritative and trustworthy contributor to public discussions and debate.

While the media plays a central role in reflecting and shaping community values, it is important to recognize that it is only one part of a complex system of social exchange that contributes to social and attitudinal change.

In other words, while the media can raise issues, tell stories and promote public debate, media coverage can only do so much to change the “hearts and minds” of individuals and communities. As such, NHRIs should see media engagement as one part of a broader, integrated human rights education programme.

In addition, NHRIs have a role to monitor and engage with the media as part of their mandate to promote freedom of expression as a fundamental human right.

A strong and independent media – one which is free to question and critique – plays a vital accountability role. Often described as the “fourth estate” (or the fourth branch of government), the media has long been viewed as a key mechanism through which the public can hold their governments to account, including in relation to the promotion and protection of human rights.

However, journalists and media proprietors in the Asia Pacific and other regions can face serious obstacles – including legal restrictions, threats and intimidation – when they seek to report on politically or culturally sensitive issues.

NHRIs must be strong and consistent advocates for freedom of expression.

As part of this role, they can take active steps to engage with media outlets and journalists’ groups in order to understand the obstacles that reporters, bloggers and others can face in exercising their freedom of expression and reporting on issues that are in the public interest.

They can also review the relevant laws and policies that apply to the operation of the media in the country.

Based on their findings, NHRIs can identify and advocate for positive changes that foster the legal, political and social conditions required for independent journalism.

In addition, NHRIs can work closely with media outlets and journalists’ groups to identify practical ways to support accurate and informed reporting on human rights issues, while respecting the independence and professionalism of journalists.

About the Handbook

This Handbook seeks to be a practical resource to support NHRIs to work effectively with the media and promote community awareness of human rights issues.

It features a number of examples of good practice from NHRIs across the Asia Pacific region.

The Handbook includes sections on:

Working effectively with the media and building good relationships with journalists

Using a variety of tools and strategies to engage the media on human rights issues

Planning and implementing media campaigns on human rights issues

Building a presence on social media to inform, engage and mobilize individuals and partner organizations

Supporting journalists in their work to report on human rights issues.

The Handbook introduces and explains a number of key principles that underlie effective media relations and communications practice. It is designed as a general resource for use within NHRIs.

Chapter 1:

Working effectively with the media

In this chapter:

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Understanding how news is selected
- 1.3 Working with different types of media outlets
- 1.4 Preparing and maintaining a contact list
- 1.5 Building good working relationships with journalists
- 1.6 Setting expectations for media engagement
- 1.7 Responding to a crisis
- 1.8 Developing a media policy
- 1.9 Monitoring the media

1.1 Introduction

The Asia Pacific region encompasses a huge diversity of media environments. While some countries in the region rank highly in terms of press freedom, a large number feature at the bottom of the global list.

In some countries, State control of media outlets, legal restrictions on publishers and broadcasters, harassment and intimidation of journalists and limited access to certain websites and social media platforms can severely limit public access to information and diversity of opinion on the issues that matter to people.

Other Asia Pacific countries, however, have seen a rapid growth in the number of news media outlets over the past decade, with democratization allowing a greater range of voices to enter the media marketplace.

Recent advances in technology are also transforming the way in which news is collected and presented, as well as reshaping the relationship between media outlets and their audiences.

While television continues to be a key source of information for many people across the Asia Pacific region, the popularity of online news websites has grown strongly as access to the Internet, computers and handheld devices, such as smartphones, has become more widely available.

One of the results is that the “news cycle” – the speed at which a story and reactions or developments to that story are reported – has become much faster, as people are no longer limited to reading the morning newspaper or watching the evening television news bulletin.

With 24-hour access to online news sources and dedicated news channels on television and radio in many countries, audience demand for up-to-the-minute information is forcing media outlets to compete even more fiercely to be the first with “breaking” stories.

The growing emphasis on immediacy means that television, radio and online news outlets often report on news stories in “real time”. As a result, “with less time and opportunity to explain the background to a news story, reporters tend to describe unfolding events in much the same way as a sports commentator reports a live match”.⁶

New technologies are also fundamentally changing the relationship between news outlets and their audiences, transforming formerly passive recipients of information into active news generators. For example, individuals can email or text photos or videos taken on their smartphones to news outlets, helping to break news stories or report on events before journalists arrive on the scene.

With many media outlets operating on smaller editorial budgets and employing fewer journalists, contributions from “citizen journalists” are a valuable way they can source on-the-ground information and images that they may not have the time or resources to collect themselves. However, it comes with the risk that such information may be inaccurate, incomplete or biased.

In addition, feedback sourced directly from the audience and through monitoring audience behaviour is increasingly being used by media outlets to determine the type of news stories to be covered and the way in which these stories are presented.

Engaging confidently with the media

In order to engage effectively with the media, it is essential that NHRIs understand the different factors shaping the media landscape in their respective countries, as well as the impact this has on how media outlets and individual journalists report human rights issues.

NHRIs can start by undertaking an “audit” of the number and type of media outlets operating in their country. This will include identifying both mainstream media outlets – such as television, newspapers, radio and magazines – at the national, regional and local levels, as well as specialized and community-based media sources.

For example, many countries in the Asia Pacific region have a vibrant and diverse range of media outlets operating in minority languages. These outlets can be crucial partners for NHRIs when communicating with particular community groups that may be vulnerable to discrimination and other violations of their rights.

NHRIs should also audit the social media landscape in their countries to identify the most appropriate platforms for engaging with different groups of people, as well as leading bloggers and other online opinion leaders.

Given the media landscape in most countries will continue to change rapidly in response to myriad social, economic and technological factors, NHRIs should seek to undertake such an audit on a regular basis, possibly every two years.

A comprehensive audit helps NHRIs to better identify and understand those organizations and individuals who make up “the media” in their countries.

It also provides the basis for NHRIs to:

Develop a strategic approach for communicating their issues to the media

6 Owen Spencer Thomas; “What are news values”; available at www.owenspencer-thomas.com/journalism/newsvalues.

Determine how best they can support journalists to undertake accurate and informed reporting on human rights issues.

Most NHRIs have strategies in place for engaging with “traditional” media, such as television, radio and newspapers. These strategies can include, for example, preparing media releases or holding media conferences to release major reports or comment on issues in the public domain.

However, new technologies and a rapidly evolving media landscape mean that NHRIs now have opportunities to engage the traditional media on human rights issues in new ways, as well as communicate directly with the public through a variety of social media platforms.

For example, affordable, accessible and easy-to-use technologies – such as digital cameras, smartphones, video cameras, audio recorders and editing software – provide NHRIs with the tools to prepare broadcast-quality material for journalists to include in their reports or to share through Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other online channels.

This is not to say that NHRIs should see themselves as “content producers” for the media. Indeed, it is critical that NHRIs understand the distinct role played by the media and respect the professionalism and independence of journalists.

However, NHRIs that understand how media outlets work, and the constraints under which many operate, have the opportunity to provide journalists with many of the elements that make up a powerful news story, such as photographs, video footage and audio interviews.

Similarly, if journalists and media outlets face specific challenges in reporting on human rights issues, NHRIs should consider what practical steps they can take to work constructively with media organizations and journalists’ groups to address these concerns.

1.2 Understanding how news is selected

The news media in many countries has a positive record in covering human rights issues, even if they don’t cover all such stories. They are genuinely interested in the stories and information that NHRIs and other human rights organizations have to share.

However, “[o]verriding everything is whether or not a story is news: new, unexpected, affecting current affairs both large and small”.⁷

For NHRIs, understanding what “news” is – those elements that dictate whether a story is splashed across the front page or a minor item buried deep inside the newspaper – is crucial to how effectively they engage the media.

News is selected on a set of assumptions by the news editor about what he or she thinks the audience wants to see, hear or read – and what might draw an audience from a media rival.

Newsrooms are inundated with information from a huge array of sources every minute of the day; emails, Twitter feeds, phone calls, news agency reports. Of course, not all of this can be reported. News editors have to quickly scan and filter this information and then select those stories that they consider will be of greatest interest to the audience.

⁷ International Council on Human Rights Policy; *Journalism, Media and the Challenge of Human Rights Reporting*; 2002; p. 17.

The decision about what goes in the newspaper or the next bulletin – and what gets left out – is based on a broadly agreed set of characteristics called “news values”.⁸

Ten key news values

1. **Impact:** The more people involved in or affected by an event or an issue, the greater its newsworthiness.
2. **Timeliness:** The more recently an event happened, the more newsworthy it will be.
3. **Negativity:** Bad news will generally receive more coverage than good news.
4. **Unexpectedness:** The unusual, unexpected and quirky capture the news media’s attention.
5. **Unambiguous:** Events that are easy to explain will receive greater prominence than complex stories.
6. **Conflict:** Controversy and clashes between different groups or individuals has dramatic impact.
7. **Emotion:** Human interest stories grounded in strong emotions – such as grief, fear or triumph – have broad appeal.
8. **Relevance:** News stories need to resonate with the values, interests and expectations of the audience.
9. **Prominence:** Stories that involve culturally important people or places dominate the news agenda.
10. **Visualness:** Strong images – photos or video – that capture an event or help explain an issue increase the newsworthiness of a story.

Many studies of news production show that most of these factors are consistently applied across a range of print, broadcast and online news organizations worldwide.

News values guide what is selected as news and the prominence given to a particular story. In general, stories that are based on “events” are more newsworthy than those based on “issues”. This poses an immediate challenge to NHRIs in their goal to generate media interest in human rights-related stories.

In practice, there is no checklist in a newsroom that news editors or journalists use to determine whether or not a story has the necessary news values to engage their audience. Instead, they rely on their professional experience and intuition to make that decision on-the-spot.

⁸ The most well-known list of news values was proposed by Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge in 1965. In their publication, *The Structure of Foreign News*, Galtung and Ruge set out 12 selection criteria used by news editors and journalists to determine the relative newsworthiness of a particular news item.

Understanding news values helps NHRIs to better frame their work – for example, releasing a report, launching a campaign or announcing a new inquiry – as stories that will interest editors and journalists and result in more prominent coverage of their issues.

In June 2012, the **New Zealand Human Rights Commission** released *Caring Counts*, a report that highlighted unequal pay rates for workers in the aged care sector. The report was prepared by Dr Judy McGregor, the then Equal Employment Opportunity Commissioner. As part of research for the report, Dr McGregor spent a week working “undercover” in an aged care facility to understand the physically and emotionally demanding work done by carers. When the report was released, journalists commonly focused on her first-hand experience as a carer because it helped personalize the issues and was a unique approach for the NHRI to take in conducting its research. The extensive media coverage that followed the release of the report helped generate broad public awareness and support for the Commission’s recommendations on pay equity for workers in the aged care sector.

1.3 Working with different types of media outlets

A common trap when people talk about “the media” is to imagine that it operates as a single entity and follows a single agenda.

While most media outlets, especially commercial media outlets, are based on the basic goal of increasing audience numbers, the manner in which they seek to do this varies significantly. Further, the range of media outlets is enormous, as are the type of issues they cover, the way stories are covered and the different audiences they reach.

To engage effectively with the media, NHRIs first need to have a clear picture of the media outlets operating across the country at the national, regional and local level. In many instances, NHRIs can buy or source online a consolidated directory of media outlets.

However, with the media landscape changing all the time and some online services not listed, NHRIs should consider developing and maintaining their own personalized directory of key outlets, including:

- “Traditional media”, such as television, newspaper, radio, news agencies and magazines

- “New media” outlets, such as online journals, blogs and discussion forums

- Major media outlets operating in minority languages

- Relevant professional associations, civil society organizations and partner agencies that distribute periodicals and newsletters or are active on social media.

It is crucial that NHRIs are familiar with the various media outlets with which they will be engaging, including the different audiences they reach and how they have covered human rights issues in the past.

This “auditing” exercise helps NHRIs to identify those media outlets they might approach with story ideas, as well as how to best respond to requests for information or interviews from different outlets, especially those that may be unsympathetic to human rights issues.

NHRIs also need to understand the requirements of journalists from different types of media outlets. For example, a radio journalist, a print journalist and a television journalist all need quite different elements to file a story with their respective news editors.

As far as possible, NHRIs should seek to ensure that journalists covering their issues are able to source the elements necessary to compile strong and compelling news stories. Sometimes NHRIs will be able to provide these elements and sometimes they might need to refer a journalist to another organization.

What do journalists need?

One common thing that all journalists require – no matter what type of media outlet they work for – is information that clearly sets out the key elements of the story. This will often be presented in the form of a media release.

However, if a story is evolving rapidly or if the NHRI cannot comment about the issue in detail, providing a journalist with a simple list of facts or dot points will generally be enough.

Journalists also need people who can talk clearly and knowledgeably about the issue at hand, either to quote in a story or to provide additional background information. These spokespeople will sometimes be referred to as “talent”.

NHRIs are often contacted by journalists who ask to speak with a person who has experienced discrimination or a human rights violation. NHRIs need to think carefully about such requests and ensure that any interview does not expose that person to additional harm, such as embarrassment, humiliation or potential victimisation. If such an interview does go ahead, the NHRI should offer the person support and advice at each stage of the process.

Television

Information needs for news bulletins: Strong photographs or video footage; concise news “grab” delivered on camera from the NHRI spokesperson (a “grab” is a recorded statement that sets out the problem, solution or position in one or two short sentences)

Information needs for current affairs or talk shows: Strong photographs or video footage; experts and others who can talk confidently, persuasively or personally on the issue

Radio

Information needs for news bulletins: Concise news grab from the NHRI spokesperson (may be recorded in person or by phone); audio recorded at an event, such as a protest or rally (known as “actuality”)

Information needs for current affairs or talk shows: Experts and individuals who can talk confidently, persuasively or personally on the issue

Newspapers

Information needs for news stories: Strong photographs; quotes from the NHRI spokesperson (these could be taken from the NHRI media release or, preferably, from a “one-on-one” interview with the journalist); additional background information or statistics

Information needs for feature stories/columnists: Substantial background information, either written or from an interview; contact details for other individuals or organizations to interview

News agencies

Information needs for news stories: Quotes from the NHRI spokesperson; additional background information or statistics

Bloggers

Information needs for news stories: Background information, either written or from an interview; photographs or video footage; other multimedia content

Magazines

Information needs for feature articles: Tailored background information; quotes from the spokesperson (often involving a lengthy interview); strong photographs; contact details for other individuals or organizations to interview

1.4 Preparing and maintaining a media contact list

To engage effectively with the media, NHRI Members and staff should be enthusiastic media consumers.

It is important to read different newspapers and magazines, listen to a range of radio programmes, watch various television news bulletins, review online news sources and Twitter feeds and subscribe to the newsletters and social media channels of partner organizations and key government and civil society agencies.

Understanding how different media outlets report and present different stories helps you identify which media outlets and which reporters are most likely to cover human rights-related stories and how they might approach these stories.

Most media outlets – television, newspapers and news agencies, in particular – assign a reporter to cover stories related to a specific subject area. This is known as the reporter’s “round”.

NHRIs need to know which journalists cover those rounds that are most relevant to their work. They should take steps to get to know these journalists and build good working relationships with them.

Some relevant human rights “rounds”	
Social affairs	Workplace
Politics	Education
Legal/Courts	Women
Children/Youth affairs	Health
Indigenous affairs	Environment

Once you know which media outlets and which reporters you want to reach, you can start to create a media contact list.

A media contact list includes:

Contact names of reporters, editors or producers

Contact information, such as phone number, email address, Twitter account

Working details, such as which stories they cover, their preferred way to receive information (e.g. email, Twitter) and so on

Deadlines for filing stories.

If you are not sure where to start, call the media outlet and ask to speak to their news desk. The news editor will be able to direct you to the right journalist for each round. Phone numbers for each media outlet should be easily available online.

A contact list takes time to put together but it is an essential tool for NHRI staff working with the media. It should also be constantly checked and updated. Journalists are regularly transferred to cover different rounds or move between organizations.

In addition to identifying reporters assigned to specific rounds, NHRIs should ensure that their media contact list includes: prominent columnists and commentators; key freelance journalists; producers for radio and television current affairs/talk shows; leading bloggers; and communications staff working with key government, civil society and partner organizations.

1.5 Building good working relationships with journalists

All good working relationships are built on respect: respect for the job that a person has to do and respect for their professionalism. The same rule applies to the relationships that NHRI staff should develop with journalists, news editors and other media professionals.

Good working relationships with journalists are essential for building strong and sustained coverage of the NHRI and the issues that it seeks to promote.

Think like a journalist

A journalist's job is to file the strongest news story possible. NHRIs have the raw materials that journalists need to do their job well; newsworthy events, expert testimonials, human interest stories and strong views on issues that matter to the community. NHRIs that can "frame" their work in a newsworthy way and provide journalists with the information they need, in the form they need it, are more likely to become a reliable resource.

Respect journalists' professionalism

Journalists value their independence and professionalism. It is critical to respect that. Do not expect a journalist to simply reprint your press releases or cover every event that you hold. There may be more pressing stories breaking that day. If a journalist does not report a particular story or event, be patient and let him or her know about future stories.

Meet journalists' deadlines

Make sure you know the deadlines for each journalist with whom you work. Journalists live by them. The newspaper has to go to the printer and the news bulletin has to go to air. These times are not flexible. You have to meet their deadlines to be included in a story.

Never lie to a journalist

Never lie to or intentionally mislead a journalist. Not only is it unethical, it means that your credibility, and that of the NHRI, will be irreparably damaged when the journalist finds out. Trust and integrity are critical to your relationships with journalists and for securing fair and informed coverage of your issues.

Never make up an answer

If you do not know the answer to a journalist's question, never make one up. You will most likely say something you regret. If you don't know the answer, say so and promise to get back to the journalist before his or her deadline.

Never presume a journalist knows what you are talking about

The language of human rights is full of all kinds of acronyms, jargon and legalese. Do not use this language with journalists. Make sure you can put your story into language and ideas that journalists and the "person in the street" will understand. If you can't then it is unlikely that a news story will follow.

Always return a journalist's phone call

Make sure you take and return phone calls from journalists. If you regularly miss their calls, they will stop calling. Even if you can't help them with a particular story or talk on a specific issue, be a resource. Put them in touch with partner organizations that might be able to comment. Journalists will appreciate the help.

Be accessible

If a journalist is unable to reach you for comment, he or she will quickly move on to other sources. Make sure journalists how to contact you during the day and after hours. Give them your direct line, mobile phone number and email address.

In addition to developing strong personal relationships with journalists, NHRIs can demonstrate their institutional support for the work and rights of journalists by being consistent advocates for freedom of expression in their country. As part of their regular programme of work, NHRIs can monitor laws, policies and practices – including threats and acts of intimidation – that undermine the ability of journalists and other media professionals to report independently on issues of public interest. They can also develop and champion recommendations, to government and private bodies alike, that promote freedom of expression and the right to information.

1.6 Setting expectations for media engagement

Before developing a media and communication strategy for your NHRI, it is important to have reasonable expectations about what is – and what isn't – possible to achieve. This will help you set realistic goals.

The mass media of any country has enormous cultural significance and plays a central role in reflecting and shaping community values. However, despite its enormous reach, the media makes up just one part of a complex system of social exchange that contributes to social and attitudinal change.

The media is also marketplace of competing ideas. Every day there are a huge number of organizations and interest groups trying to capture the media's attention and "sell" a message or a story to the public. Some messages will be in opposition to human rights values or principles.

In turn, media consumers will generally look for and select only those news stories that are of interest to them. People are also increasingly sceptical about the news media and do not always take everything at face value. In other words, the media can only do so much to influence the "hearts and minds" of a community.

In this context, building community awareness of human rights issues and changing attitudes takes time and sustained coverage across multiple media outlets.

What you can expect to achieve

- Set a news agenda
- Inform people about pressing human rights issues
- Get people thinking
- Stimulate debate
- Influence decision-makers

What you can't expect to achieve

- Create unanimous support for your agenda
- Produce social change without supporting laws and policies
- Communicate all your messages to all your target groups

There may be times when it is not appropriate for your NHRI to speak publicly on an issue. For example, there may be legal reasons – court proceedings may be underway or a report may be before the parliament – or it may be more effective to work towards a certain outcome through confidential negotiations with another party.

It is important for NHRIs to remember that the decision about whether or not to engage with the media on a particular issue is theirs to make. Weighing up the advantages against the possible consequences will help determine the best course of action.

1.7 Responding to a crisis

There may be times when the NHRI becomes the centre of a major story, for all the wrong reasons.

The manner and the speed with which the NHRI responds to the crisis can help limit the potential damage to its reputation and to its relationships with key stakeholders.

Some crisis situations can happen quickly and unexpectedly. Others may be anticipated in advance. While the circumstances and nature of the crisis will vary, it is essential to have a clearly defined process in place to assess and respond to the issues at hand.

The following checklist provides a process for managing the situation and responding to the media.

Crisis management checklist

1. Identify potential issues

Conduct a regular risk management review of project-related and operational issues.

Identify potential issues that could become “bad news” stories.

Put in place steps to minimize the risk of a crisis occurring and develop a strategy to manage any crisis that may occur.

Never underestimate the problem; failing to understand the level of criticism or concern in the community and among stakeholders can make matters worse. It can also take much longer to rebuild trust and confidence in the NHRI.

2. Establish a crisis management team

If a crisis does occur, establish a small team – including key NHRI Members, management and senior staff – with responsibility for planning and implementing the response.

Hold meetings at regular intervals throughout the crisis period.

Collect and review all relevant information related to the issue.

Analyse how the media is reporting the issue and whether the media coverage includes inaccuracies.

Assess community and stakeholder responses, including discussion of the issue on social media.

Develop a set of key messages/talking points to be used in media interviews (and on social media, if appropriate).

Identify who will be the contact person for all media requests and inform all NHRI staff accordingly.

3. Select and prepare your spokesperson

Select a senior NHRI representative – for example, the Chairperson or Executive Officer – to be the spokesperson throughout the crisis.

Ensure the spokesperson is properly briefed. He or she should also be confident, articulate and empathetic.

Anticipate likely questions, including challenging questions, and do practice interviews.

Consider your partner organizations; depending on the circumstances, they could make a statement of support.

4. Be available to the media

If you are still sourcing information about the issue, or if the information is confidential, provide journalists with a “holding statement” which puts the story in context.

Issue a media release, hold a media conference and give one-on-one interviews, as required.

Be honest; never lie, make up an answer or say “no comment”.

Stay calm at all times; do not get angry or defensive with a journalist.

Ensure that the NHRI spokesperson is available for interviews throughout the crisis period.

Keep a record of all media calls, what was requested and what actions were taken.

Apologise swiftly and sincerely if there is a genuine mistake and explain what the NHRI is doing to rectify the situation.

5. Provide clear internal communications

Make sure all NHRI staff know what is happening and what you are doing to respond to the issue.

Provide staff with a common response and set of actions to take if they are contacted directly by a journalist.

Keep all staff properly briefed throughout the crisis period.

6. Review your crisis management approach

Review all media coverage of the issue, as well as social media discussion, at the end of the crisis period.

Assess community and stakeholder perceptions of the NHRI.

Identify what went wrong and why.

Identify steps that could be taken to prevent problems from arising in the future.

Develop a follow-up strategy to rebuild relationships with key stakeholders.

1.8 Developing a media policy

Every NHRI will have contact with the media. Many engage with the media on a daily basis. It is therefore crucial that NHRIs develop a media policy to guide these interactions.

A media policy sets out how the NHRI will communicate with the media. It should reflect the aims, objectives and vision of the NHRI.

The main advantage of a media policy is that it helps ensure that each and every media enquiry is addressed consistently and professionally.

It also reduces the likelihood that NHRI staff may unintentionally provide comments or information to journalists that should only come from an approved spokesperson.

The NHRI media policy should clearly identify the:

- Initial contact person for journalists seeking information and comment
- Spokespeople who can provide formal comment and interviews
- Process for responding to phone calls or emails from journalists.

Following is a sample media policy⁹ that can be adapted for use by NHRIs.

Key elements of a media policy

Purpose

This policy outlines how the NHRI will work with the media. It applies to all staff at all times. It is designed to ensure that, as an organization, our interaction with the media is professional and consistent and that all statements we make are considered and appropriate.

For the purposes of this policy, “media contact” includes among other things: providing information via media releases, Letters to the Editor, Opinion Editorials and contributions to journals and online forums; responding to media enquiries over the phone and via email; providing interviews or briefings to journalists; contributing to talkback radio; addressing seminars or conferences where journalists are present; and holding media conferences and other media-related activities.

Contents

The media policy clearly defines:

- Who has responsibility for public comment on behalf of the NHRI
- The steps necessary before other staff can speak on behalf of the NHRI
- The responsibility of all staff to consider any potentially positive or negative media implications of their work
- The procedure that staff will follow to respond to enquiries from the media.

9 This sample media policy builds on resources developed previously by the Australian Human Rights Commission and Sane Australia.

Guiding principles

The NHRI recognizes the vital role that the media can play to build community awareness of human rights issues, influence social and attitudinal change and counter negative stereotypes directed against different groups in our society.

The goal of our media engagement is to promote accurate and informed reporting on the human rights issues that affect individuals and groups within our community, especially marginalized groups.

We will advocate respect for national and international human rights laws and standards through the media. We will also be a strong and consistent defender of freedom of expression and the right to information.

Our interaction with the media

All media enquiries will be addressed promptly. We will provide the media with independent and accurate information.

Journalists are to be treated respectfully and courteously by all staff at all times.

Every conversation with a journalist should be considered “on the record”. The information provided by NHRI staff and representatives will be truthful and accurate. It will not be based on speculation or personal opinion.

All media enquiries, and the response provided by the NHRI, will be logged by the Public Affairs Unit.

Authorized spokespeople

Public comment to the media will only be made by *<insert roles/titles; for example, Chairperson, NHRI Members, Executive Director>*.

In certain circumstances, a staff member with specific expertise may be authorized to speak on behalf of the NHRI on that particular subject.

All contact with the media must be coordinated through the Public Affairs Unit to ensure that a consistent approach is followed at all times.

Responsibilities of staff members

If a journalist contacts a staff member of the NHRI, that staff member should note the request and assure the journalist that a member of the Public Affairs Unit will return his or her call as soon as possible. Staff members are under no obligation to answer a question simply because it has been put to them by a journalist.

NHRI staff should advise the Public Affairs Unit of all reports, discussion papers and current issues likely to be of media interest or the subject of public comment from the NHRI. They should ensure that all relevant information provided to the Public Affairs Unit is accurate.

Initiating media contact

Contact with the media, including the preparation and distribution of media releases and other written materials, will be coordinated through the Public Affairs Unit.

The Public Affairs Unit will provide support and briefings to NHRI Members and staff who are required to deal directly with the media or give interviews to journalists.

Public comments made by staff in a personal capacity

Staff members of the NHRI may be invited to participate in public discussions in a private capacity. These public discussions may be reported by the media.

Before participating in any public discussion, including online discussions, staff members must discuss the request and receive approval from the NHRI *<insert role/title; for example, Executive Director or another appropriate individual or committee>*.

To ensure that the reputation and independence of the NHRI is not compromised, staff members must ensure that:

There is no real or perceived conflict of interest in participating in the discussion or expressing their personal views

It is clear that any public comment made is done so in a private capacity and not on behalf of the NHRI

Their public comments cannot be seen to compromise their ability to carry out their duties with the NHRI in an unbiased and independent manner.

1.9 Monitoring the media

Media monitoring involves keeping track of all relevant news stories that mention the NHRI, its spokespeople or key human rights topics across newspapers, television, radio, news agencies, magazines and industry journals.

Social media monitoring tools can also track “word of mouth” mentions of the NHRI and the issues it promotes across Facebook, Twitter, blogs, message boards and other online forums.

Monitoring the media is a vital part of the media engagement cycle. The benefits of media monitoring for NHRIs include:

Tracking and measuring the effectiveness of NHRI efforts to engage the media on key issues or raise awareness about a specific campaign or inquiry

Identifying the strengths and weakness of communication strategies by determining if the NHRI’s key messages are clear, confused or at odds with community views

Knowing what government, opinion leaders, business, civil society and others are saying about human rights issues and determining what response the NHRI should make

Using the information gathered to refine advocacy efforts, by identifying what needs to happen next and what messages need to be developed or refined.

The **Human Rights Commission of Malaysia**, through its Public Relations Division, constantly monitors local, regional and international news concerning the Commission and key human rights issues. Daily news updates are provided to the Commission's Members and staff on issues relevant to the Commission and regional and international human rights bodies, as well as on key human rights issues. The secretariat of the Public Relations Division will also alert the Commission's Members if there is a specific issue of immediate concern to the Commission and identify whether or how the Commission should publicly respond.

Paid media monitoring services can track all mentions of the NHRI, a spokesperson or nominated key issues across all forms of media. While NHRIs may consider such services to be too costly, the staff time involved in monitoring mainstream media coverage and social media may be an inefficient use of internal resources.

The benefits of paid media monitoring include:

- Expert assistance with refining search terms to ensure relevant coverage
- Regular email alerts and instant notification of breaking stories
- The ability to create information-rich reports and charts.

If a paid media monitoring services are not affordable or available, it is important to review all major newspapers daily and print out or cut out relevant articles, noting the name, date and page of the publication. Put the articles in a file folder organized by issue or chronologically.

Google Alerts is a simple and free media monitoring tool. Google Alerts are email updates of the latest relevant Google search results of online news sources, based on selected search terms. Users can nominate words or phrases to be monitored and the frequency that email alerts are provided. Google Alerts can even track mentions on leading blogs and Internet sites.

While Google Alerts is a useful tool for NHRIs and other human rights organizations, it does not provide a comprehensive media monitoring solution by itself.

Once you have established a media monitoring program, whether paid or free, it is important to create process for distributing media clippings – or even a summary of key headlines – to NHRI Members and the management team on a daily basis.

Media monitoring principles

- Monitor all news stories, Letters to the Editor and Opinion Editorials on a daily basis.
- Set up separate Google Alerts for your NHRI, your NHRI Members or spokespeople and key human rights issues. Make sure to include common misspellings for all search terms.
- Keep refining your search terms to ensure the coverage received is relevant to your NHRI. (i.e. not too broad and not too specific).
- Be aware that links to online news articles can expire or become inaccessible due to “paywalls”.

Chapter 2: Engaging with the media: Tools and strategies

In this chapter:

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Writing and distributing media releases
- 2.3 Holding media conferences
- 2.4 Pitching a story
- 2.5 Having media-ready talent and stories
- 2.6 Giving media interviews
- 2.7 Writing for newspapers and journals
- 2.8 Preparing for radio and television talk shows
- 2.9 Producing content for the media

2.1 Introduction

Human rights issues can be complicated to explain. The language of human rights – legal, technical and full of acronyms – can also be a barrier to clear communication.

This can pose challenges to getting good media coverage, as journalists generally prefer to report on issues or events that are “black and white”.

NHRIs have a responsibility to translate and present their work and issues in ways that journalists and the public can understand and relate to on a personal level.

Use plain language: Avoid jargon and speak simply. Use words and ideas that resonate with the target audience and accord with their values. For example, “human rights” can be expressed as “respect”; “equality” as “fairness”; and “humane treatment” as “dignity”.

Tell stories: Give a human dimension to the issues. Share the experiences of individuals, families and communities. Help people connect to the issue on an emotional level and put themselves in the shoes of another.

Use images: Have photographs and videos that bring the issues to life and help people to see things differently. A striking image can stay with people for a long time.

Prepare infographics:¹⁰ Presenting data using attention-grabbing images can be a powerful way to communicate ideas around fairness, especially in relation to issues involving economic, social and cultural rights.

Offer solutions: It is essential that NHRIs expose human rights violations and systemic discrimination. It is equally important that they present and advocate for sensible and credible solutions to those problems.

Encourage people to act: If there is something people can do to promote or protect human rights, ask them to do it. Find simple ways to connect people to the NHRI, to partner organizations or to events taking place within their local communities.

In a crowded media space, repetition is the key to ensuring that a message is heard and, ultimately, acted upon.

Media engagement to promote human rights awareness cannot be a one-off event. It requires consistent promotion, across multiple media outlets, over a sustained period of time.

2.2 Writing and distributing media releases

A media release – also known as a “press release” or “news release” – remains one of the most effective ways of providing information to journalists about an upcoming event or a newsworthy issue.

A media release should clearly outline the “who”, “what”, “when”, “where”, “why” and “how” of a story.

Hundreds of media releases will land a journalist’s desk every day so it is crucial to make sure that yours is written in a way that quickly grabs his or her attention. In other words, make it newsworthy.

Your media release should be arranged so that the most important information is at the start, followed by supporting information or quotes.

There is no guarantee that a journalist will read your release from start to finish – so communicate the key points quickly.

Media releases follow a standard format, outlined below.¹¹

10 See “Creating Effective Infographics”, a fact sheet prepared by Resource Media; available at www.resource-media.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Infographic-tip-sheet-Resource-Media1.pdf.

11 The following template is included in “How to: Write a killer press release”, developed by Friends of the Earth; available at www.foe.co.uk/resource/how_tos/cyw_64_press_release.pdf.

Media Release

NHRI logo

For immediate release: [date]

(If you want the media to use the story as soon as they receive it)

or

Embargoed for: [time/date]

(This is a good way of giving journalists time to prepare and to ensure they don't use it until a specified time)

Headline

(Start with a snappy headline, but not too clever)

Paragraph 1

Summarize the story - who, what, where, when and why. All key information needs to be in this paragraph.

Paragraph 2

Put in more details to flesh out the story you have outlined in the first paragraph.

Paragraph 3

"Include quotes from you or someone relevant to the story."

Don't try to cram too many points into one quote; each quote should make one point.

Paragraph 4

Provide additional, relevant information.

Ends

Notes for the Editor

Outline what you have to offer: pictures, video, interviewees

Provide background information in case they run a longer story

Contact

Make sure you supply numbers where you can be reached at all times.

Name: Person one

Mobile:

Office:

Name: Person two

Mobile:

Office:

Remember to use:

Facts or statistics, to support your main point.

Short sentences and paragraphs, and aim to keep the media release to one page.

Plain language, to communicate the issue in a way people can easily understand.

Make it stand out

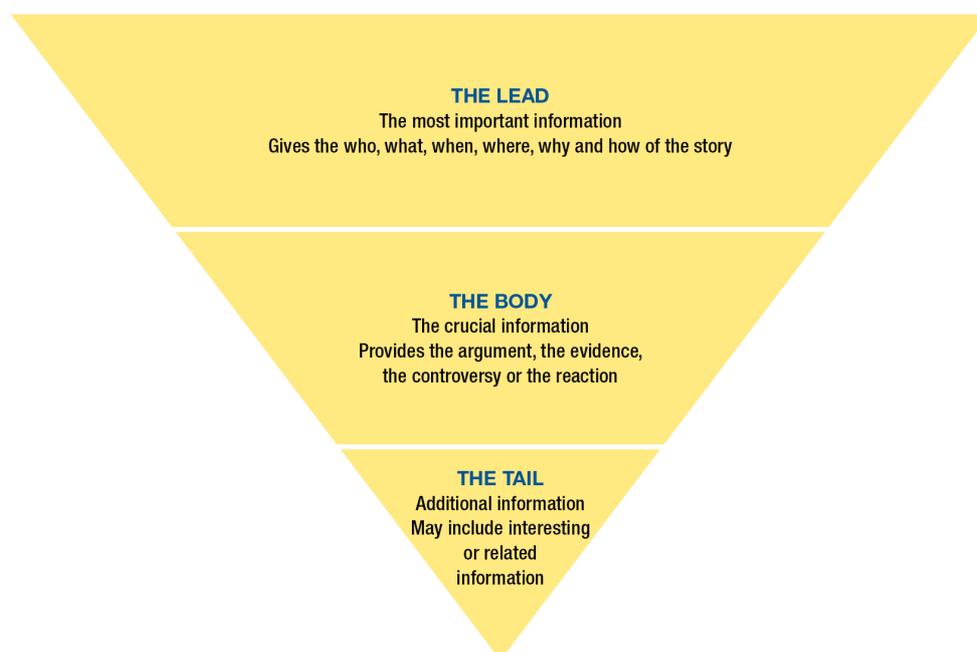
Think of ways to help your media release stand out from the others. Provide journalists with other elements that can help them prepare a strong story, such as links to high-resolution **photographs**, relevant **video or multimedia resources** or **research reports** on the NHRI’s website or social media channels.

The inverted pyramid

Journalists are taught to write stories using the “inverted pyramid” model. This approach places the most important information – the “lead” – at the start of the story, with information following in descending order of importance.

This means that readers can leave the story at any point and take away the key points, even if they don’t have all the details. It also allows sub-editors to edit the story if there are space restrictions in the printed version of the newspaper.

Information in media releases should also be organized according to the same principles.



Distributing your release

Media releases can be emailed or “tweeted” to journalists, using the details in your media contact list.

Depending on the importance of the story, you can call a journalist to see if he or she has received your release. Journalists are often busy and have deadlines to meet so it is important to make your call brief and to the point.

If you do contact the journalist, don’t try to argue the newsworthiness of the story over the phone – that should have been done in the media release.

2.3 Holding media conferences

A media conference is often held to announce a major story, such as the release of a report, the launch of a major inquiry or findings from new research. Alternatively, NHRIs may hold a media conference to provide their perspective on a human rights issue that is the subject of significant public debate.

A media conference is an efficient and effective way to communicate directly with a large number of journalists. For example, it is far more time-effective than saying the same thing during 20 or more separate interviews on the one topic.

Generally, a media conference will involve one or two speakers – three at the most. Each speaker should have something newsworthy to say and their prepared comments should complement and reinforce each other, not duplicate them.

Make the formal presentations as brief as possible; no more than 10 or 15 minutes. That includes all speakers. Each speaker should present for a maximum of three to five minutes. After all, the main purpose of a media conference is for journalists to ask questions, not listen to a lecture.

You should have a moderator to start proceedings, introduce the speakers and run the question-and-answer session. If problems arise during the media conference, or if it is running overtime, the moderator should step in and conclude the media conference in a professional manner.

A successful media conference requires good preparation and good management. Here are some ideas to keep in mind.

Choose an appropriate venue: Select a venue that is convenient for journalists to get to. This could include the NHRI office or a venue that reflects the focus of your story or announcement, such as a hospital or a school. Always have a back-up plan if you choose an outdoor venue.

Have the right facilities: Most media conferences are held indoors. The room should not be too large – lots of empty chairs can create a bad impression – but make sure there is sufficient space for television cameras and lights. It should also be quiet so television and radio journalists can record the speakers. Make sure the room has plenty of electrical outlets.

Time the event to suit journalists: Journalists have busy daily schedules so time your media conference with their deadlines in mind. The best time to hold a media conference is generally in the morning, around 10am or 11am. This gives journalists plenty of time to collect any other interviews or information they need to prepare their stories. Be aware of any competing events, announcements or holidays that may prevent journalists from attending.

Notify journalists in advance: Distribute a media alert/advisory note several days in advance of the media conference, if circumstances allow. Include the date, time and location of the media conference, as well as an overview of the story and the key presenters – but don't give too much away.

Contact media outlets to gauge their interest: Don't assume that news editors and journalists know about your media conference simply because you sent a media alert. They can be easily overlooked in the daily rush of a newsroom. On the morning of the event, contact the news desk of each media outlet and ask if they have the details of the media conference in their "diary". If not, send the information immediately.

Prepare a good media kit: Have a media kit to provide to journalists who attend. Your kit could include a copy of the media release, any prepared speeches to be given, case studies, statistics and, if available, a USB drive with high-quality photos and videos. The aim is to provide journalists with extra information and resources about the key issues. Make sure you have plenty of media kits in case more journalists show up than expected.

Have a sign-in sheet at the door: A sign-in sheet helps you track which journalists attended the media conference and the media outlets they represent. You can then chart the coverage you receive in each of those media outlets and add the journalists to your media contact list.

Ask for help on the day: There is a lot to organize on the morning of a media conference. You may need help from other staff members to set up the room, hand out media kits, manage the sign-in sheet, seat guests and handle last minute arrangements. If the media conference is about to begin and there are empty chairs in the room, ask NHRI staff members to join the audience.

Make time for interviews: Some journalists will want to arrange a one-on-one interview with your spokesperson. Allow time for this at the end of the media conference. Have a quiet space available where these interviews can be conducted.

Follow up with journalists: Thank journalists for attending and see if they require any additional information. You may also want to email the media release or media kit materials to journalists who were unable to attend.

Make it visual

Television news stories are built around strong images. Similarly, newspaper articles will run closer to the front page if they are accompanied by a great photo. Think about how you can organize your media conference so there is a range of photo opportunities that promote your key message and your NHRI.

Display posters or banners with your NHRI name and logo.

Use charts, maps, photos, artwork or other visual elements to reinforce your message.

Include music, singing, dances or other performances, if appropriate.

Seat speakers close together and seat the audience close to the speakers so it looks like a “full house”.

Prepare spokespeople well

Despite the many benefits, a media conference can also magnify the threats inherent in any interview situation. For instance, an incautious comment by a speaker can be picked up by journalists and become “the story” that all journalists focus on. In a single one-on-one interview, the same mistake would be unlikely to have the same impact.

What if nobody shows up?

Media conferences require a bit of luck. It is not uncommon that a major news story will break on the morning of your media conference, meaning that journalists are unable to attend your media conference. No amount of planning can prevent this from happening. Follow up with invited journalists, or their news editors, on the day and send them the media release and media kit materials. This will give your story a chance to get some coverage.

Staging media events

In addition to media conferences, NHRIs can generate news by holding “media events”.

Media events are generally less structured than media conferences and contain a strong degree of staging; drama, colour, action and surprise. They usually feature more photo opportunities that aim to reinforce the NHRI’s key message.

Media events can include things such as a rally, a march, a vigil or some other symbolic activity, such as planting a “field of hands” to demonstrate the extent of community support on a particular issue.

They could be held at a school, a hospital, a park, a beach or any other location that is suited to the issue being promoted and helps communicate the NHRI’s message.

Successful media events are, above all, entertaining.¹² However, it is critical to strike a balance between making the media event visually interesting and also ensuring that a clear human rights message is communicated. If the event is all “image” and no substance, the risk is that it will come across as little more than a publicity stunt.

2.4 Pitching a story

There will be times when you have an idea for a news story that you would like to “pitch” to a particular newspaper, magazine, radio programme or television programme.

You don’t need a media release to pitch a story. But you do need a good idea.

It’s important to recognize that editors, journalists and producers are busy. They don’t have time for long phone calls or emails. You have short amount of time to grab their interest and “sell” your idea. It will be one of many that they receive every day.

Here are some ideas for to help plan for a successful pitch.

Know the media outlet: Read the newspaper that you want your story to appear in or listen to the radio programme that you want to be on. What sort of stories do they cover? Who is their audience? How will your story appeal to that group of people?

Have an engaging story: Just because something is interesting to you, it won’t necessarily be interesting to others. Think like a journalist and develop an idea that has lots of newsworthy elements or “hooks”. Above all, your story has to be current.

12 Jason Salzman; *Making the News: A Guide for Nonprofits and Activists*; 1998.

Know who to approach: Make sure you contact the person who can make the story happen. It's often best to speak to a journalist you have worked with on previous stories. If you are approaching a media outlet for the first time, contact the news editor of the newspaper or magazine, or the producer for the radio or television programme.

Keep your pitch brief: You must be able to explain the story quickly and clearly. Write down all the key elements in bullet form.

Anticipate questions: What questions is the journalist likely to have? What will he or she need to know before saying yes to the story? Address these questions in your pitch.

Who to contact

The editor makes the final decision about what stories will go on the television bulletin or in the newspaper, magazine or online publication. Larger newspapers also have “section editors” and a “features editor”.

Journalists, especially senior journalists or journalists on a specific “round”, often have a large say in the stories that they cover.

The producer decides on the types of stories and the “talent” that will be included on television or radio current affairs or talk shows.

If you need telephone or email contact details, contact the media outlet's switchboard.

Call or email?

There are advantages with pitching a story over the phone. You have a chance to talk directly with the journalist and gauge his or her initial response. If you already have a working relationship with the journalist, or if the story relates to something happening very soon, then it makes sense to call.

Most journalists, however, prefer to be contacted by email. They are busy, they are working to deadlines and your phone call can be an unwanted interruption in their day.

Pitching a story via email gives the journalist the chance to consider the idea when he or she has the time to do so. If the journalist likes it – and journalists are always looking for a good story – he or she will respond.

The challenge is to “sell” your idea quickly and clearly. Long-winded emails are a turn-off. Be succinct and try and keep your email to around 200-250 words. Keep the pitch focused on the audience and the newsworthy elements of the story.

If you haven't heard back from the journalist within a week, send a polite follow-up email. Forward your initial email and let the journalist know that you are inquiring as to whether he or she is interested in your idea.

Don't be discouraged if you don't hear back. Journalists aren't being rude when they ignore you; most will receive dozens of pitches every day, along with hundreds of emails. Keep thinking like a journalist and pitching story ideas. You will get the results over time.

2.5 Having media-ready talent and stories

Journalists need people who can talk clearly and knowledgeably about human rights issues in a way that brings their stories to life. These spokespeople – often described as “talent” – are regularly called upon to provide expert insights, background information and quotes.

In addition, journalists often request case studies that they can include in their stories to show the real life dimensions and consequences of different human rights issues.

NHRIs can be asked to provide a spokesperson or a case study for a news story at any time. Preparation is the key to being able to respond promptly to these requests and meeting tight deadlines. Good preparation also allows you to take control of the situation, giving your key messages the best possible chance to be featured prominently in the story.

Start by creating a “story bank” of case studies and people that can speak to the media on the issues that are important to the NHRI (e.g. gender equality, rights of people with disabilities). You can also include spokespeople from partner organizations, especially if your organizations share similar goals for building community awareness on a particular issue.

Your “story bank” (for internal use only) could include the following information:

- Name of spokesperson and organization (if relevant)
- Contact details (i.e. mobile phone number, email address)
- Location
- Availability (i.e. days and hours of availability for interviews)
- Area of human rights expertise (e.g. rights of women and girls; rights of children)
- Case study summary (no more than 50-100 words describing their human rights story/position)
- Previous media experience (include dates and links to articles, if possible).

This information should be updated on a regular basis.

In addition to developing a collection of case studies on different priority human rights issues, it is a good idea to maintain a collection of high resolution images, videos, up-to-date statistics and other material that can be provided to journalists for use in their stories.

Journalists work to tight deadlines and usually do not have the time to thoroughly research a story. The more information and materials you can provide at short notice, the more likely it is that your nominated spokesperson or resources will be featured in the story.

NHRIs that respond promptly and professionally to media requests quickly become a trusted resource for journalists and they will seek comment from the NHRI on a regular basis.

Checklist for responding to media enquires

1. **Get the key details.** Ask journalist’s name, title and media organization and take his or her phone contact number and email address.
2. **Find out what information is required and why.** Make sure to ask: What is the story? What is the “angle” or focus of the story? Who else is being interviewed? Will

the interview be live or pre-recorded? How much time will it take? Where will it be held? What sort of questions does he or she want to ask?

3. **Promise to call back within an agreed time.** Find out the journalist's deadline and when he or she needs to do the interview. Even if you are not able to contact the NHRI's spokesperson, or if the spokesperson is not available to do the interview, call back within the agreed time to explain the situation.
4. **Research the journalist or media outlet.** It is crucial to be familiar with the different media outlets that contact you, their audience and their style of reporting. This background information helps you to determine how best to prepare for an interview and, in some cases, whether or not it is in your NHRI's best interest to proceed with an interview.
5. **Talk with the NHRI spokesperson** to see if they are willing and available to do the interview.
6. **Organize a time for the NHRI spokesperson to talk with the journalist, if he or she is willing and available.** Do not pass on the contact details of the spokespeople to a journalist. It is important that you remain the contact point at all times.
7. **Provide the spokesperson with an "interview brief".** The brief (see page below) should set out essential information about the interview, the NHRI's key messages and any other relevant details. Be available to answer any questions or provide your spokesperson with support, should it be required.
8. If it is not possible or appropriate to attend the media interview, **be available at the time the interview is taking place** to provide support or assistance if any issues arise.
9. **Follow up with the journalist and provide relevant background material.**
10. **Never say "no comment" if the NHRI spokesperson is unable to do the interview.** Explain why you are unable to provide comment at this time, find out if the story can be delayed or a written statement provided. If so, make arrangements to get back to the journalist.

Preparing an interview brief

An interview brief provides your key spokespeople with the background information they need to prepare effectively for an interview.

An interview brief should include the following information.

KEY INFORMATION

Logistics

Interview date:

Interview time:

Interview location: *Address, phone (phone number), online (Skype ID)*

Interview details

Media outlet: *Name*

Type: *Radio / TV / print / online*

Interviewer: *Name*

Contact details: *Phone number, email address*

Format: *Live / pre-recorded*

Expected publishing/broadcast date/time:

Subject and angle:

Anticipated questions

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Key messages

1. Key message:
Proof:
2. Key message:
Proof:
3. Key message:
Proof:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (Useful but not essential)

About [interviewer name]

Include short background information about the interviewer, style of reporting, tone of articles

Recent stories

Include a list of recent stories, date published, headline, brief summary or link to article

About [outlet name]

Brief overview of the media outlet

2.6 Giving media interviews

As an authority on human rights issues in your country, journalists will want to include your NHRI's views in their news stories. Of course, you don't have to accept every invitation for an interview or to provide a comment.

Weigh up the advantages and disadvantages and only agree to an interview if you think it is in the best interest of the NHRI. Journalists are happy for you to consider their request and "get back to them" – but it is important to do so in a timely way.

Preparation is the key to a good interview. Make sure that the NHRI spokesperson has an interview brief (see page 35) with all the information that he or she needs to communicate your key messages and deal with any difficult questions.

Before the interview

Be clear that you know exactly what the journalist wants to talk about and the sort of questions he or she will want to ask – this will help you prepare effectively and avoid nasty surprises.

Find out what form the interview will take. Is it a short "grab" for a news story? Is it for a longer current affairs programme? If it is for television or radio, will the interview be "live" or "pre-recorded"?

Understand the media outlet doing the interview and how they might approach this topic.

Keep your information simple. Depending on the length of the interview, prepare two or three key points or phrases to use in your interview.

Know your topic. Be able to use statistics, personal stories and other information that will support your key points.

Do a practice interview and include some difficult questions.

During the interview

Speak in a natural voice and remain calm at all times. Don't get angry or defensive. If you do, this will most likely be the quote or "grab" that is used.

Be concise. You are more likely to be included in the story if you can give the journalist a strong "ten-second grab".

Return frequently to the key points you want to make.

Where possible, use word pictures or powerful anecdotes to reinforce your key points. Don't use jargon or complicated language.

Your answers count, not the question. Don't feel compelled to answer every question. "Reframe" the question so you can make your key points again.

If you don't know the answer, or don't think you are the right person to answer a particular question, say so ("That is really a question for "X". What I think is important here is ...").

Don't rush to fill silence. Some journalists use this as a technique to lure an interviewee in to making unguarded comments.

During the television interview

Visual cues make up a large part of communication. Be relaxed and be yourself. Don't try to be someone you're not.

Choose clothing carefully. Avoid solid white or black clothing and anything with close stripes. Avoid flashy jewellery which can catch studio lights. Dress professionally; grey, blue and brown clothes often look best.

Look at the interviewer, not the camera.

Avoid distracting gestures or mannerisms.

Sit straight – but not stiff – and lean slightly forward in the chair. Do not swivel in the chair.

If standing, place more weight on one foot. This will help stop you from swaying.

You are always “on”. Be careful about what you say, even if you think you are not being recorded.

After the interview

Watch or listen to the story. This will help you prepare for the next interview.

Monitor any feedback or community/stakeholder reaction to the story.

Make a log of all media requests and completed interviews. This will help you see where your media coverage is strong and where any “gaps” exist.

If there is an error in the story, contact the journalist and point out the mistake. He or she may be able to update the story or issue a correction. Only go to the journalist's editor as a last resort, such as when there is a major error which the journalist refuses to acknowledge.

2.7 Writing for newspapers and journals

Letters to the Editor

A Letter to the Editor is one of the simplest ways to communicate an opinion to the general public. It is one of the most widely-read parts of a newspaper and provides a genuine forum for community discussion and debate.

Of course, having a Letter to the Editor published in a leading newspaper can be very competitive. Only a handful of letters on any one topic will be published on the same day. It therefore needs to be simple, clear and compelling.

Your Letter to the Editor should be no longer than what the newspaper intends to publish. A much longer letter is likely to be overlooked or could be edited to the correct length. As a result, an important part of your argument could be lost.

When writing a Letter to the Editor, you should:

Be concise. Focus your letter around one key point and limit your letter to around 250 words. Make sure you refer to the NHRI in your letter.

Refer to other stories, letters and opinion pieces run by the newspaper. Write your letter as soon as possible after these other stories were run; no more than a day or two later. Being current increases your chances of being published.

Include contact information. Your letter must include the name of the contributor (generally the NHRI Chairperson, Member or Executive Director), along with the name and contact details of the NHRI. This ensures that the editor can contact you if he or she has any questions.

Opinion editorials

Another way that NHRIs can present an argument on a particular human rights issue is by writing an Opinion Editorial (or “Op Ed” piece).

Leading newspapers will generally feature up to three or four Op Ed pieces each day. These are generally written by experts on a particular subject, rather than a journalist, and address issues that are the subject of public debate.

Public commentators, community leaders and government decision-makers often look closely at the Op Ed pages of newspapers. This makes an Op Ed piece a very useful tool that NHRIs can use to advocate respect for national or international human rights standards or promote concrete recommendations to improve a particular situation.

Before you submit an Op Ed piece for consideration, you should:

Obtain guidelines. Talk to the editor of the Op Ed page and find out what they will and won't accept. In general, pieces should be around 700 to 800 words long.

Discuss your idea. Ask the editor if he or she is interested in publishing the type of piece you are proposing. There is no point doing a lot of work if your Op Ed won't be run. The editor might also suggest some ideas that could be included to increase the chances of your piece being published.

Give your article a human face. Don't prepare an article that is dry and legalistic. Tell a story, include an anecdote or describe what the issue means in the lives of people or communities. Give readers a reason to care about the issue.

Most newspapers require that your Op Ed piece is an “exclusive”. In other words, you can submit it to one newspaper only. If the first newspaper you approach decides not to print it, you are free to submit it to another newspaper for publication.

Writing for journals

Civil society organizations, professional associations, unions, legal bodies and other groups often publish journals or newsletters for their members, stakeholders and affiliates.

Preparing an article for inclusion in these journals provides the NHRI with an opportunity to tailor its messages to a particular audience in a way that is impossible to do through mainstream media outlets.

It also allows the NHRI to begin a dialogue with this audience and invite comments and feedback on the issue.

In many cases, NHRIs will be invited by a group to prepare an article on a topical issue for its journal or newsletter. In other cases, the NHRI may approach the group directly to propose a piece; for example, to promote awareness of a research project or inquiry being run by the NHRI.

When preparing an article for an online or printed journal, you should:

Research the publication. Find out who reads it, what topics have been covered in previous issues, how they have been covered and who has written them.

Talk with the editor. Understand what issues the audience would like to see discussed, as well as any requirements about the length, style and tone of the article.

Be relevant. Ensure that your article addresses the questions or concerns that readers may hold.

Tips for clear writing

Write for your reader: Think about your audience. What do they know and what would they be interested to know? Tell them something new or interesting and do so in an engaging way.

Be concise: Don't use too many words. Longer is not better; it's just longer. Review what you write and then see if there are words, sentences or even whole paragraphs that can be removed without losing the meaning.

Use short sentences: Readers can get lost with long sentences, especially when they include multiple ideas. If your sentence is too long – for example, 30 words is too long – then cut it in half.

Lose the jargon: The language of human rights is full of jargon and legalese. This can be a major barrier to effective communication. Ask a trusted colleague or friend to read what you've written and ask if there are words, phrases or concepts that are hard to understand.

Use simple language: Large words can sound impressive but are they really necessary? Your goal is to communicate an idea or pose a question. Use language that is clear and uncomplicated.

2.8 Preparing for radio and television talk shows

Radio and television current affairs and talk shows can provide a powerful platform to communicate your NHRI's messages to a large audience.

These programmes need people who can talk in a confident, articulate and persuasive manner about different issues. Having good spokespeople who can appear on radio and television talk shows can help build the community profile of the NHRI.

Many talk shows, however, are based on conflict or aggressive questioning. If this is handled poorly, it can undermine the reputation of the spokesperson and the NHRI.

Ten tips for performing well

1. **Expect confrontation:** Some talk shows are all about creating debate and arguments. Expect disagreement and have strategies to deflect or diffuse it.

2. **Be prepared:** Familiarize yourself with the show and the way in which the presenter engages with his or her guests. Understand the audience that will be watching or listening. Have two or three key points you wish to make.
3. **Be informed:** Be aware of other relevant stories in the news that are related to the points or issues you want to discuss.
4. **Be confident:** Speak clearly, naturally and enthusiastically. Listen carefully to each question.
5. **Be brief:** Get to the point quickly and stay “on message”. Describe the big picture. Don’t try to educate people about every detail of the issue.
6. **Relate to the audience:** Make references that show you understand the issues facing the people who are watching or listening.
7. **Humour goes a long way:** Where appropriate, use humour to personalize your message or diffuse a tense situation.
8. **Be honest:** if you can’t answer a question, don’t be afraid to say so.
9. **Assume that cameras and microphones are “on” at all times.** There is no such thing as an “off-air comment”.
10. **Practice deflecting tough questions.** Anticipate the difficult questions that you are likely to be asked. Do practice interviews so that you feel confident to deal with them when they arise.

Other tips for giving good interviews are available on page 37.

Types of interviews

Radio interviews can either be broadcast live-to-air or be pre-recorded and broadcast at a later time. They may be recorded in person, at the radio studio or over the phone.

Interviews for a television talk show are more likely to be filmed in the studio and broadcast live-to-air. However, there are situations where they may be pre-recorded or filmed from another location. Some interviews are also recorded over Skype.

One-on-one interviews: This is the most common type of interview and involves a spokesperson being interviewed directly by a journalist. It is crucial to stay focused on what the interviewer is saying at all times. On television, maintain eye contact with the interviewer at all times.

Panel discussions: Be engaging and offer your expertise. It is also important to be respectful and contrast your views with those of fellow panellists. Bring up an issue or perspective that hasn’t been raised by others.

Talkback programmes: Radio talkback shows are very popular and provide an opportunity to respond to questions posed by the audience, which are submitted by phone, email or text message. Respond to questions as if you were in that person’s house; use the person’s name, be respectful, have a conversational tone and speak in plain language.

Making your points

Here are some techniques to help keep the interview focussed on the key messages you want to communicate:

Bridging: Listen for the larger issue behind the question. Make the connection to your issue and turn the question to your points (i.e. “I think what you are really asking is...”).

Headlining: Start with your key point and then explain it (i.e. “What I really want to make clear is that ...”)

Enumerate your points: Explain a complicated message by making it difficult for the journalist to edit or separate your points (i.e. “There are three core issues at the heart of the debate about gender equality: 1)... 2)... 3)...”).

Know when to stop: Journalists often use silence to try and draw unintended remarks from an interviewee. Don't keep talking after you have finished making your point.

2.9 Producing content for the media

A common challenge that all NHRIs face is to ensure that the human rights issues they seek to raise are reported accurately. Another challenge is to ensure that these issues receive consistent media coverage.

To achieve these goals, a number of NHRIs have established cooperative relationships with media outlets – television and radio outlets, in particular – to prepare, record and broadcast human rights “spots” and programmes and promote community awareness about the role of the NHRI.

This approach ensures that NHRIs have a regular place in the media to talk about human rights issues, to invite community feedback and to describe the practical steps that people can take to uphold their own rights and protect the rights of others.

Many NHRIs report that these initiatives are very effective in reaching out to different groups in the community, such as older people and people living in areas where, because of limited staff and financial resources, the NHRI might not be able to visit regularly.

Delivering information by radio and television is also an effective and accessible way to overcome barriers around literacy.

The **Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission** prepares short information “spots” and longer programmes on human rights issues for broadcast on radio and television. The programmes address a range of issues – for example on the rights of women, children or people with disabilities – and may include interviews with Commission Members or staff, representatives of civil society groups and victims or relatives. They also include case studies that depict the reality of human rights violations in the country. The Commission has established partnerships with many television and radio stations across Afghanistan, which broadcast the Commission’s programmes free of charge. The Commission says that television and radio is a valuable way of communicating human rights information to men, women and children in a country where there are high rates of illiteracy.

Tips for developing human rights spots for radio and television

Have one key message.

Grab people's attention immediately.

Repeat the main message as many times as possible.

Ask people to do something (e.g. visit a website or call a phone number).

Use language that is appropriate for the audience.

Have a presenter who is credible and respected by the audience.

Use a positive, rather than a negative, appeal.

Emphasize the solution as well as the problem.

Developing “media ready” content for journalists

It is imperative that NHRIs are aware of the changing media environment in their respective countries and the opportunities this provides to develop “media ready” content for news outlets, which are increasingly operating on smaller editorial budgets.

Affordable, accessible and easy-to-use technologies – such as digital cameras, smart phones, video cameras, audio recorders and editing software – allow NHRIs to prepare broadcast-quality material for journalists to include in their reports, such as:

Video footage of a particular event or its aftermath

Video or audio interviews with human rights victims, experts or NHRI spokespeople

High-resolution images of people or events.

This approach also provides NHRIs with a degree of editorial input that can further promote and protect human rights; for example, by ensuring that images taken of people who have experienced human rights violations are edited or shot in a way that protects their privacy and does not expose them to retaliation or further discrimination.

While some journalists and editors will accept and use this material, others may be wary of accepting pre-packaged resources from NHRIs or other human rights groups. They may have justifiable concerns that the material provided is “biased” towards the NHRI's advocacy or interests.

To address these concerns, the NHRI should be “transparent about its aims, about the provenance of the material it is distributing and about the standards it uses in its own information-gathering.”¹³

13 Carroll Bogert, Human Rights Watch; *Whose News? The Changing Media Landscape and NGOs*; January 2011; p. 7.

Chapter 3:

Media advocacy

In this chapter:

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Setting goals and objectives
- 3.3 Identifying target audiences
- 3.4 Developing the right messages
- 3.5 Selecting the right messengers
- 3.6 Selecting the right media
- 3.7 Developing campaign resources
- 3.8 Launching the campaign
- 3.9 Monitoring your coverage
- 3.10 Monitoring and evaluating the campaign

3.1 Introduction

NHRIs play a critical role in identifying the “gap” between the human rights standards that governments have agreed to uphold and the human rights reality that different groups of people, especially marginalized groups, can experience.

Just as importantly, if not more so, NHRIs can use their unique position as independent and credible human rights experts to advocate for changes in laws, policies and practices that will have genuine and lasting impact on the lives of vulnerable individuals and groups.

Bringing about positive change on complex issues, such as tackling violence against women or improving access to education for children with disabilities, takes time and effort. It requires sustained and concerted advocacy.

Developing a campaign strategy to guide the media advocacy of the NHRI is essential.

A campaign strategy provides the roadmap that sets out where you are now and where you would like to go. It explains the environment you have to navigate and identifies organizations and individuals who can help you reach your end goal. A campaign strategy can be simple or complex, based on the issue at hand and the advocacy goal of the NHRI.

The Democracy Centre¹⁴ has developed a useful set of questions¹⁴ to guide the preparation of a campaign strategy:

¹⁴ Jim Schultz; *The Democracy Owners' Manual: A Practical Guide to Changing the World*; 2002; available at <http://democracyctr.org/citizenadvocacy/thinking-strategically/>.

- What do we want? (goals and objectives)
- Who can give it to us? (audiences)
- What do they need to hear? (messages)
- Who do they need to hear it from? (messengers)
- How do we get them to hear it? (delivery)
- What have we got? (resources and strengths)
- What do we need to develop? (challenges and gaps)
- How do we begin? (first steps)
- How will we know if it's working or not working? (evaluation)

The answers to these questions will determine the shape, structure and complexity of your campaign strategy.

Make your strategy real

NHRIs commonly advocate on behalf of marginalized people who do not have a voice in the mainstream media or public debate.

To be effective and credible advocates, NHRIs should take steps to ensure that individuals from the group on whose behalf they are advocating have input into the development of the campaign strategy.

This could mean including those individuals on a campaign steering committee or establishing a feedback group that can provide comments and additional ideas on the proposed strategy.

This model of campaign strategy development reflects the key principles of a human rights-based approach¹⁵, while also ensuring that the campaign messages accurately and powerfully reflect the experiences of individuals from the group.

Give your strategy structure

There is no one “right” way to present your campaign strategy. However, a chart can be a useful tool for providing an overview of the key elements of the campaign.

The Midwest Academy of Management has developed a simple campaign planning grid.¹⁶ It encourages groups to be as specific as possible in identifying their goals and objectives; organizational considerations; constituents, allies and opponents; targets; and tactics.

15 United Nations Development Group; *The Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation: Towards a Common Understanding Among UN Agencies*; 2003.

16 The planning grid is available at <http://mn.gov/mnddc/pipm/curriculumchangechart.html>.

When is a campaign strategy needed?

As part of their regular programme of work, and through the special projects they conduct, NHRIs will collect a broad range of newsworthy information.

Media and campaign strategies can be developed to support initiatives such as:

An analysis of annual complaint data received by the NHRI

The release of the NHRI's annual report, a major research study or a report card on the "state of the nation's human rights"

The NHRI's engagement with, and the reports of, international human rights bodies and processes, such as the Universal Periodic Review of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the special procedures and the human rights treaty bodies

Community awareness projects on specific human rights issues, such as the rights of migrant workers or sexual harassment in the workplace

Celebrations for special days on the human rights calendar, including International Women's Day (8 March), World Press Freedom Day (3 May), International Day of Disabled Persons (9 August) and Human Rights Day (10 December).

A number of NHRIs in the Asia Pacific region have conducted **national inquiries into serious and systemic violations of human rights** occurring in their countries.

These inquiries have collected evidence and personal testimonies on issues such as mental health and human rights; freedom from torture; forcible removal of indigenous children from their families; access to public transport for persons with disabilities; the right to health; and the right to food.

NHRIs that are considering establishing a national inquiry should ensure that a comprehensive media and campaign strategy is developed for all stages of the inquiry process, including the initial consultation phase, holding public hearings, releasing the report, follow-up advocacy efforts and stakeholder engagement.¹⁷

3.2 Setting goals and objectives

A campaign generally aims to achieve **one key goal**. However, the campaign strategy will also set out a range of smaller, discrete steps – known as **objectives** – that need to happen in order to achieve that broader goal.

Choosing the right goal for a campaign takes time and thought. This process is "half policy analysis, half political intuition".¹⁸ A campaign goal should be compelling enough to grab the attention of the community, the media, opinion leaders and decision-makers.

17 More detailed information about engaging the media during and after a national inquiry is available from the *Manual on Conducting a National Inquiry into Systemic Patterns of Human Rights Violation*, published in 2012 by the APF and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law; available at www.asiapacificforum.net/support/resources.

18 Jim Schultz; *The Democracy Owners' Manual: A Practical Guide to Changing the World*; 2002; available at <http://democracyctr.org/citizenadvocacy/thinking-strategically/>.

In addition, the campaign goal should be achievable, taking into consideration the social and political environment within which the NHRI operates, as well as the human and financial resources it can reasonably commit to the campaign.

In general, NHRIs commonly focus on one of the following goals to guide their advocacy efforts:

- Advocating for changes to government laws and policies
- Advocating for changes to the practices of government or private sector organizations
- Encouraging individual or community action on a particular issue.

In some instances, the campaign goal will be an extension of the NHRI's recent work; for example, advocating for the implementation of recommendations made in the report of a national inquiry conducted by the NHRI.

In other instances, a specific event might occur – for example, a police crackdown on a peaceful political protest – which highlights systemic human rights failures that need to be urgently addressed by the relevant decision makers.

In either case, the campaign goal should clearly and simply articulate a solution to address a pressing human rights issue – or one aspect of it, at least.

For example, a campaign goal “to end violence against women” will be too broad to achieve within a campaign timeframe of a year or two. A more focused goal might be to “ensure that safer and more accessible services exist for women who have experienced gender-related violence”.

The campaign goal should be supported by a range of discrete objectives. Campaign objectives “help in the planning and design of activities that will achieve tangible outcomes. They are also essential in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of campaigning work.”¹⁹

Campaign objectives need to be **SMART**:

- S**pecific
- M**easurable
- A**chievable
- R**elevant
- T**ime-bound.

For example, objectives to support the campaign goal of “ensuring safe and accessible services for women who have experienced gender-related violence” might focus on:

- Increasing funding for domestic violence support services
- Increasing the number of domestic violence support services, especially in non-urban centres
- Changes to the policies and practices of police to increase the reporting of assaults against women.

19 IFEX Network; “Developing a Campaign Strategy: Setting Campaign Objectives”; available at www.ifex.org/campaigns/developing_campaign_strategy/index2.php.

Objectives should include measurable, time-bound benchmarks; for example, “securing a 25 per cent increase in funding for domestic violence support services in the next national budget”.

Vague objectives such as “raising community awareness” need to be reframed into measurable ones.

The IFEX Campaign Toolkit²⁰ explains that this can be done “by setting out to receive coverage of your issue through a targeted number of newspaper articles and TV or radio interviews at specific media outlets. Thus, campaigners can infer that through the readership and audience of these newspapers and broadcasters, the public’s awareness of the campaign issue has been raised.”²¹

Specific objectives should also be set for other awareness raising elements of a campaign, such as visits to a campaign website, user activity of social media platforms, subscribers to a campaign e-newsletter and public participation in campaign-related events.

20 The IFEX Campaign Toolkit is available at www.ifex.org/campaign_toolkit/.

21 IFEX Network; “Developing a Campaign Strategy: Setting Campaign Objectives”; available at www.ifex.org/campaigns/developing_campaign_strategy/index2.php.

Raising awareness on the death penalty in Palestine

Public awareness in Palestine about international human rights standards relating to the death penalty is limited. The death penalty remains a controversial issue among Palestinians. It is generally accepted and even encouraged.

In 2009, the **Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR)** began a campaign to encourage public discussion and build community awareness about issues related to the death penalty.

This project, developed in cooperation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the British Government, focused on four key objectives to achieve its goal of reducing the number of death sentences in Palestine:

- Producing a legal baseline study to be used in lobbying for the abolition of the death penalty
- Achieving assurances of fair procedures for death penalty trials in military courts
- Training legal professionals in international standards related to the death penalty
- Raising community awareness through a media campaign, as well as lectures and public meetings on the issue.

The project was strongly supported by Palestinian civil society organizations. Discussion on abolishing the death penalty was also welcomed by participants in the workshops, open days, seminars and a national conference held by the ICHR.

Participants in these events included members of the Palestinian Legislative Council; representatives of official Palestinian institutions and ministries, including the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Higher Judicial Council and the Military Judicial Commission; members of Palestinian political parties; lawyers; NGO representatives; university students; and members of the public.

There was a strong media advocacy component to the campaign, including ICHR-led television talk shows on the issue, radio spots broadcast on local stations, advertising in printed and online newspapers, billboard advertising, banners erected on the streets of courthouses, and the distribution of flyers, sticker and brochures. In addition, the ICHR published regular media statements on issues related to the death penalty.

The ICHR noted that there was a discernible change in attitudes towards the abolition of the death penalty among campaign stakeholders in the West Bank, including greater political will to address the issue. However, this was not reflected in the attitude of the de-facto Authority in the Gaza Strip.

The campaign helped facilitate constructive public debate on this controversial issue, while successful media activities increased the interest of media professionals in reporting on issues related to the death penalty.

The ICHR understands that changing deeply-held social attitudes requires a much longer timeframe. However, the campaign has positioned the ICHR as a key opinion leader on the issue among government institutions, NGOs, other civil society groups and the media, allowing it to build on the progress made so far.

3.3 Identifying target audiences

An effective advocacy campaign is about getting someone to move and do something that they otherwise wouldn't do.²²

Accordingly, your campaign must have a clear focus on what you want to happen – your goals and objectives – and the people who you need to convince in order to make that change happen. You should also identify those individuals or organizations that are opposed to your goals, as they may actively work against your campaign.

A stakeholder analysis is a useful tool to help you map the different groups you need to reach and the reason you need to reach them:

Target: the primary decision-maker or decision-making group that can bring about the change you want to see happen, such as a government minister or a parliamentary committee

Influencers: those people that can help shape the views and attitudes of the target, such as the minister's advisor, opinion leaders, media commentators, business leaders or a politician's electoral constituents

Allies: individuals and groups with whom you can share resources and work in partnership to achieve shared outcomes, such as civil society organizations, community leaders, faith groups, unions and professional associations

Constituents: other individuals or groups you want to support your position, especially those who have a degree of influence over the target

Opponents: those individuals or groups who will actively seek to discredit your position and prevent you from achieving your goals.

NHRIs should understand that certain journalists, commentators and media outlets can be key influencers. Some may be allies and some may be opponents. They should be included in any stakeholder analysis.

Once you have identified the various stakeholders, you can then begin to chart:

The **attitude** of each stakeholder towards your goal and objectives

The **influence** of the stakeholder over your goals and objectives

The **importance** of the goal and objectives for the stakeholder.

As the IFEX Network notes, this form of stakeholder analysis helps you “prioritize who you should target to maximize your resources; plan suitable strategies for each audience; and identify possible risks and ways to manage them”.²³

22 Jim Schultz; *The Democracy Owners' Manual: A Practical Guide to Changing the World*; 2002; available at <http://democracyctr.org/citizenadvocacy/thinking-strategically/>.

23 IFEX Network; “Developing a Campaign Strategy: How to Design a Campaign Strategy”; available at www.ifex.org/campaigns/developing_campaign_strategy/index3.php.

STAKEHOLDER	ATTITUDE of the stakeholder towards the objective	INFLUENCE of the stakeholder over the objective	IMPORTANCE of the objective for the stakeholder
Government (e.g. government minister, parliamentary committee)	3	4	3
Civil society (e.g. specific unions or NGOs)	5	2	5
Business leaders (be specific)	2	3	2
Opinion leaders (be specific)	3	4	2

Different stakeholders can shift their attitudes during the course of a campaign and their level of influence may also change. New stakeholders may also surface that you need to reach. NHRIs need to be able to monitor and respond to changing stakeholder dynamics throughout the campaign.

3.4 Developing the right messages

Effective communication is all about getting the right message to the right group of people. The starting point is the audience, not the message.

Before developing the campaign message, the NHRI first needs to:

- Understand what the target audience knows about the issue
- Appreciate what the target audience feels about the issue
- Engage with the issue from the audience's perspective.

A campaign message must be simple and compelling, providing a concise solution to an urgent human rights issue.

It will make a logical case for change and include a motivation – personal, social, political or economic – to persuade the target audience to actively support the NHRI's goal. Finally, the campaign message should resonate with the values of the audience.

Campaign messages require a degree of testing, as what we might assume about an audience – for example, what they know, how they feel and the values they hold – is not always accurate.

I want to share an experience we've had where we used messages that we thought conveyed broadly shared values but did not. Post 9/11 when the United States allowed torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment by the military and intelligence agents, we used the phrase "torture is unAmerican" or "torture doesn't work" thinking it would resonate with deeply held American values of respect for all human dignity ... A group did focus group testing and found that the moral arguments didn't resonate with moderate Democrats and Republicans – the people we really needed to support us and voice their concerns to elected officials. What they did respond to was an understanding that if the US used torture, we would not get the cooperation of our allies abroad, which is so vital to combating global terrorism. They also responded to the fact that torture policies were implemented by a small group of individuals without the traditional review of American checks and balances (i.e. the courts and legislative branches of government). Ultimately, a strategic communications plan needs to understand the core messages that will resonate with people ... Sometimes we might be using a message that, while not doing any harm, doesn't move us further along in our efforts to engage people in our work.

Holly Ziemer, Center for Victims of Torture²⁴

Once you have developed a strong and compelling message, use it repeatedly with your target audience. Frame all your communications around this message. Repetition is crucial in making sure your message gets heard in a crowded media space and in the midst of people's busy lives.

NHRIs occupy a unique space in public discussion and debate. They are separate from government and from civil society. Their status as independent human rights "watchdogs" can give them a high degree of credibility and trustworthiness among the public. This credibility is an important asset for encouraging audiences to engage with and respond to human rights campaign messages.

Use stories to engage people

People respond to stories, not arguments. Stories help explain an issue in personal and emotional terms, allowing people to put themselves in the shoes of another. Stories build empathy and connection, both to another person and to the issue being described.

Effective campaigns will feature stories from people affected by a particular issue or situation. If the campaign is focused on access to education for children with disabilities then the campaign could feature stories with students, teachers, parents and principals. Each will talk about the issue from a different perspective but each should be framed around the campaign's key message.

Stories also help cut through the media "clutter". Editors and journalists generally give greater weight to stories over arguments. The more emotive they are, the more likely it is that they will be given greater prominence.

²⁴ Entry on the online discussion "Media Tactics for Social Change", coordinated by New Tactics in Human Rights, 16-20 September 2013; available at: <https://www.newtactics.org/conversation/media-tactics-social-change>.

3.5 Selecting the right messengers

Just as important as having the right message is having the right people to deliver the message.

An effective campaign, especially a large-scale one, will feature a diverse range of people who are able to talk to different audiences for different purposes: to inform, to advocate, to persuade, to motivate and to mobilize.

The NHRI should identify and enlist spokespeople – or “messengers” – that different audiences respect and relate to, such as:

- Business leaders
- Religious leaders
- Opinion leaders
- Leading sports figures
- Television or music performers
- Independent experts/academics.

Depending on the human rights focus of the campaign, it is important that individuals affected by the issue are able to share their experiences and perspectives. These personal stories give a human face to the issue and can make the campaign’s key messages more compelling.

The NHRI should also nominate a single spokesperson to represent the organization. In general, having a single NHRI spokesperson is preferable to having many as it helps establish an association among the audience with that particular individual. It also means that journalists know who to approach within the NHRI to discuss about the campaign issue.

Preparing your messengers

Not all of your campaign spokespeople will be confident in front of the media. Furthermore, some, while supportive of the campaign, may need to learn more about the issue being promoted.

It is the responsibility of the NHRI to prepare all campaign spokespeople so they can present the campaign message clearly and confidently.

This will include providing background information and “talking points” about the human rights issue being promoted, what the campaign seeks to achieve and what practical things the campaign is asking the community or decision-makers to do.

In addition, the NHRI can organize “practice” interviews for spokespeople, which can be recorded and then reviewed afterwards to identify what was done well and potential areas for improvement.

Journalists will expect your campaign spokespeople to be able to explain the issue in a way that is simple, clear and relevant to the general public. Media stories are built around “talent”, so journalists will come back time and again to interview a person who can present information in a way that is interesting, emotive or personal.

The NHRI should provide additional support to individuals who may be sharing personal stories of human rights violation. Not only will they need advice and assistance to prepare for media interviews, they may also need emotional support (before and after an interview) if the issues they are speaking about are particularly sensitive.

The NHRI has a duty of care to ensure that individuals giving their personal stories are not put in a position where they feel attacked, compromised, exploited or exposed to further danger or victimization.

3.6 Selecting the right media

A campaign succeeds or fails on how well it gets its message out to the audiences that can make a difference.

In developing its campaign strategy, the NHRI should identify which media outlets and social media platforms its audiences use. It is important to be specific in order to target your media advocacy, as time and limited resources mean that NHRIs will not be able to engage deeply with every single media outlet.

For example, rather than saying that a target audience of “business leaders” listens to “morning radio”, identify which radio station/s and which specific programmes or presenters are most popular with this group.

It is important to conduct “media mapping” of national, regional and local mainstream media (television, radio, newspapers, news agencies, magazines, industry journals etc), as well as social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, bloggers, online journals), to identify the most relevant media opportunities.

You should also make a list of individual journalists that have covered the NHRI’s work in the past and the way in which they have reported human rights issues.

This mapping exercise will provide the basis for your **campaign communications plan**, which sets out:

- Which media outlets/journalists you will contact

- When you will contact the media outlets/journalists

- Which stories and campaign spokespeople you will suggest to the different media outlets/journalists

- What outcomes or reporting you expect to achieve.

The communications plan should also provide a detailed description of the campaign’s online activities, including:

- Development of a standalone campaign website or a dedicated section within the NHRI’s website

- Which social media platforms will be used to reach which audiences

- The type of content that will be posted online and the frequency with which it will be posted

- The strategies for promoting online content through different online networks

- The expected level of audience engagement with the campaign’s online content.

Identifying your opponents

The NHRI should prepare a list of media outlets, journalists and commentators who may be hostile to its work and potential opponents of the campaign.

There is often little point engaging these media outlets or journalists on the merits of the campaign's goal and objectives.

Instead, the NHRI should develop a risk management strategy, identifying the likely points of conflict and preparing a clear and simple line of rebuttal to respond to negative reporting.

Both the NHRI and its allies, if appropriate, can be involved in responding to criticism of the campaign and the NHRI.

At all times, the NHRI should assert its independence, its credibility and its mandate to promote and protect human rights, in accordance with national and international human rights standards.

Working with allies to amplify your message

While the NHRI will be responsible for leading the campaign, your allies can be important partners in advocating for your goal and objectives. They can add their voice to yours and amplify your message, extending the reach of your campaign to their members and stakeholders.

This “multiplying effect” can help lift your campaign message above competing voices and campaigns. Further, if enough people and organizations say the same thing in an urgent and compelling way, it can swing or cement public opinion in your favour.

Use your list of allies from the stakeholder analysis to prepare a contact list of partner organizations that can talk to the media knowledgeably and authoritatively on the campaign issue – but make sure you know what they intend to say.

This contact list could include representatives from:

- Non-governmental organizations
- Unions
- Professional associations, such as doctors, lawyers
- Business
- Faith communities.

Keep in regular contact with these groups and build open, positive relationships. It is important that you understand each other's views so that you can anticipate the sort of comments that partner organizations might make to the media.

3.7 Developing campaign resources

Campaigns are all about connecting with people, persuading them to your side and encouraging them to take practical steps that help achieve your goal and objectives.

Accordingly, a good campaign will feature information and resources that explain the issue, encourage people to care about the issue, outline a solution and ask them to be involved and show their support.

Your resources should be relevant to the different audiences that you are seeking to engage. You should also prepare materials specifically for journalists.

Each resource should be framed around your key campaign message.

Some useful campaign resources include:

A standalone campaign website, that houses all campaign-related information and resources

Fact sheets, written in plain language, that explain the human rights issue and how the solution proposed by the NHRI will make a difference in people's lives

Video or audio messages, to engage people with low literacy and which can be used as community service announcements on television or radio

Personal stories (in text, audio and/or video), to give a human face to the issue and explain why change needs to happen

Photos, that help people visualize the issue and which can be shared via social media or used by journalists

Infographics, that visually demonstrate the scale of the problem in ways that people can relate to

Ideas for people to support the campaign, at home, work, school, in their communities or with their social media networks

Posters, stickers, postcards and other campaign "collateral" that people can display and share.

You should prepare a comprehensive **media kit** for the launch of the campaign, which includes a media release, fact sheets and other background information, such as biographies of key campaign spokespeople.

In addition, prepare **Opinion Editorials** and **Letters to the Editor** that can be distributed to newspapers once the campaign has been launched.

In May 2013, the **Australian Human Rights Commission** produced a 30 second Community Service Announcement (CSA) to support its national campaign, *Racism. It Stops With Me*.

The television spot featured a number of leading sports stars, including Adam Goodes, a highly-respected Australian Rules player of Aboriginal descent.

The CSA was launched on the same weekend that Adam Goodes was racially abused by a spectator in a high-profile Australian Rules football match. The incident drew national media coverage and the CSA was featured in news reports, broadcast during television coverage of other Australian Rules matches and played on screens at the grounds where matches were held.

Discussion of racism in sport dominated the news agenda for much of the following week and the CSA was viewed more than 240,000 in the first week after it was launched.

The CSA can be viewed at <http://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/>.

3.8 Launching the campaign

The goal of a campaign launch is to focus national media attention squarely on the human rights issue and your recommendations for action.

While it is likely that there will be many other opportunities to generate media interest in your campaign, the launch is the one time when the NHRI can interest all of the media at the same time in order to achieve maximum coverage.

A launch helps you set the agenda and frame discussion of the human rights issue, emphasizing how your campaign goal and objectives will bring about real and lasting change in people's lives.

As you plan your launch, think about the type of media coverage you would like to see on television and radio, in newspapers and online. This can help you decide on the "when", "where", "what", "who" and "why" of the launch.

When: The timing of a launch is an important factor in gaining media interest. Is there a way to capitalize on other stories currently in the news? Is there a "human rights day" (see next page) that would be appropriate? As with other media conferences and media events, hold the launch in the mid-to-late morning so that journalists have enough time to attend and collect all the information and interviews they need to file a story before their deadlines.

Where: The location of the launch should reflect the theme of the campaign. For instance, if the campaign is focused on access to education, hold the launch in a school or university. Always make sure that the location you choose is easy for the media to get to. If journalists have to travel too far, it is likely that they won't attend.

What: Make the launch as much of an event as possible. Include some short speeches or presentations along with other elements, such as a video presentation, music or a dance performance. You could also feature an art or poster exhibition related to the campaign theme. Make sure that the location is colourful, with campaign materials – such as posters and banners – prominently displayed around the room and behind speakers.

Who: Invite a small number of campaign spokespeople – no more than three – to give short presentations at the launch. If possible, include an individual who can speak from personal experience about the issue; what it means, the impact it has and the importance of bringing about positive change. Invite other campaign spokespeople to attend so that journalists have a range of people they can interview afterwards. Invite campaign allies and other partner organizations to come along. It is important that the room is full of people as this conveys a strong image of “support” for the campaign.

Why: The launch is an opportunity for the NHRI to put forward a compelling case for positive change on a pressing human right issue in front of all the key media outlets in the country. Your campaign message must be at the heart of every presentation. At the end of the launch, it is imperative that each and every journalist is clear about the “problem”, the solution you are advocating and what positive change will mean in the lives of people.

At the end of the formal part of the launch, make sure journalists have an opportunity to do one-on-one interviews with different campaign spokespeople.

If journalists were invited but didn’t attend the launch, call them shortly after it has finished. They could have been unexpectedly delayed or assigned to another story but may still be interested in receiving information about the campaign. Alternatively, they could refer you to another journalist in the newsroom who may be able to file a story on the launch.

Calendar of international human rights days

MONTH	HUMAN RIGHTS DAY	FIND OUT MORE
FEBRUARY	21 February International Mother Language Day	www.unesco.org/new/en/international-mother-language-day/
MARCH	8 March International Women’s Day 21 March International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination	www.un.org/en/events/womensday/ www.un.org/en/events/racialdiscriminationday/
APRIL	7 April World Health Day	www.who.int/entity/campaigns/world-health-day/
MAY	3 May World Press Freedom Day 15 May International Day of Families	www.un.org/en/events/pressfreedomday/ www.un.org/en/events/familyday/

MONTH	HUMAN RIGHTS DAY	FIND OUT MORE
JUNE	4 June International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression	www.un.org/en/events/childvictimday/
	20 June World Refugee Day	www.un.org/en/events/refugeeday/
	26 June International Day in Support of Victims of Torture	www.un.org/en/events/torturevictimsday/
JULY	11 July World Population Day	www.unfpa.org/public/world-population-day
AUGUST	9 August International Day of the World's Indigenous People	www.un.org/en/events/indigenousday/
	12 August International Youth Day	www.un.org/en/events/youthday/
SEPTEMBER	21 September International Day of Peace	www.un.org/en/events/peaceday/
OCTOBER	1 October International Day of Older Persons	www.un.org/en/events/olderpersonsday/
	10 October World Mental Health Day	www.who.int/mental_health/world-mental-health-day/
	17 October International Day for the Eradication of Poverty	www.un.org/en/events/povertyday/
NOVEMBER	16 November International Day for Tolerance	www.un.org/en/events/toleranceday/
	25 November International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women	www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday/
DECEMBER	3 December International Day of Disabled Persons	www.un.org/en/events/disabilitiesday/
	10 December Human Rights Day	www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/
	18 December International Migrants Day	www.un.org/en/events/migrantsday/

3.9 Monitoring your coverage

It is crucial that you monitor how different media outlets report on the campaign, both at the time of the launch and afterwards. It is equally important to monitor the coverage that other groups receive when they talk on the same issue.

Monitoring the media helps the NHRI to:

See how the media covered the story; was it favourable or critical?

Address any inaccuracies; were their errors that should be corrected?

Chart what “allies” and “opponents” have said; how were their views covered?

Listen to community feedback on the issue; are people generally supportive?

Refine the campaign message; was it confused or at odds with community views?

Advance the issue to the next step; what needs to happen next to achieve the campaign goal and objectives?

Monitoring the media can be time-consuming but it is vital part of a dynamic and responsive campaign.

It helps the NHRI to review how effectively it has engaged the news media, identify ways to improve its media engagement strategies and plan how it can continue to build the community support necessary to achieve the campaign goal and objectives.

Responding to criticism

NHRIs should expect that they will face some criticism of, or resistance to, what they say or propose. After all, no social or policy change will ever meet with unanimous support.

It is important to anticipate which groups might be critical and what they might say.

Conflict draws the media’s attention and NHRIs can use this as an opportunity to refute any inaccurate or unfair criticisms that have been made and then draw community attention back to the human rights issue under discussion.

NHRIs should use facts, statistics and stories to restate their key messages and should never attack an “opponent” through the media.

Responding to a “bad news” story

A small proportion of media enquiries will be hostile and these need to be handled carefully to limit the potential damage. In some cases, there may be stories in the media that cast the NHRI or the campaign in a negative light.

Some bad news stories will need crisis management; others will need good liaison with partner organizations. Criticism that remains unanswered can damage the NHRI and stall the campaign’s momentum.

If you are dealing with a “bad news” story, consider the following points:

Don’t underestimate the problem; failing to understand the level of community anger or criticism can make matters worse.

Act quickly; a speedy response and a good statement will help limit the damage and sometimes kill off an inaccurate story altogether.

Never say “no comment”; if there isn't any new information, or if the information is confidential, give a holding statement which puts the story in context.

Be honest and open; it will make matters worse if you attempt to deceive a journalist.

Apologise quickly and sincerely if there is a genuine mistake; and explain what you are doing to put it right.

Brief your spokespeople; make sure that they are available and prepared for any interviews.

Have good internal communications; staff need know how the issue is being handled and the process for dealing with inquiries from journalists.

Consider your partner organizations; depending on the circumstances, they could make a statement of support.

More detailed information about dealing with a crisis situation is available at page 20.

3.10 Monitoring and evaluating the campaign

Monitoring and evaluation is a critical aspect of every successful campaign.

An ongoing process of review helps the NHRI to track the progress being made, identify problems that may have occurred, put in place alternate strategies if needed and, finally, assess the overall impact of the campaign.

The IFEX Network defines monitoring as “a continuous process of gathering and recording internal and external data. Evaluating is a periodic process of reviewing monitoring data and drawing conclusions from it.”²⁵

The campaign goal and SMART objectives (see page 46) should, if framed correctly, provide a clear, measureable framework against which the success of the campaign can be evaluated at its conclusion.

However, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the various elements that make up the campaign – such as media coverage of the campaign launch, engagement with social media and participation in public events – provides valuable information about what is working well and what could be improved during the course of the campaign to increase the likelihood of achieving your goal and objectives

Collect and review data regularly

The methodology for monitoring and evaluation should be developed at the same time that the campaign is being designed. It should set out what information will be collected and how often, as well as the benchmarks or indicators that will be used to measure success.

For example, the following questions provide a lens through which the effectiveness of the campaign launch could be measured:

25 IFEX Network; “Developing a Campaign Strategy: Monitoring and Evaluation”; available at www.ifex.org/campaigns/developing_campaign_strategy/index6.php.

How many of our key stakeholders attended? Was this above, below or in line with expectations? If above or below expectations, what are the likely factors?

How many journalists attended? Was this above, below or in line with expectations? If above or below expectations, what are the likely factors?

What media coverage did the campaign launch receive? Was the coverage accurate? Were the campaign messages communicated clearly? Did the story lead the news that day or was it a “second tier” item? How could this be replicated or improved?

What was the response of our target audiences (for example, press releases, social media postings, emails received by the NHRI)?

By collecting and reviewing this type of data in relation to the launch, the NHRI can assess whether the campaign has started “on track” or whether more work is needed to communicate the campaign messages and build awareness among different audiences.

It also provides the NHRI with valuable information and “lessons learned” that can inform future media events that it will stage.

There will be a range of other campaign elements – for example, the effectiveness of social media strategies – that the NHRI will need to monitor and evaluate during the course of the campaign.

This information should be provided on a regular basis to the campaign steering committee so it can assess whether the overall campaign strategy is still appropriate or whether some parts of the strategy need to change.

Campaigns take place in the real world and circumstances can change, often quickly. Regular monitoring and evaluation helps you to chart what is happening and then respond positively and proactively.

Measuring your impact

Once the campaign has concluded, the NHRI should evaluate the progress that has been made towards its goal since the campaign was launched. This should include documenting intended and unintended outcomes, as well as positive and negative changes.²⁶

You may be able to demonstrate that some or all of your SMART objectives have been achieved, such as changes to laws, policies or practices of government. However, other changes may not be immediately clear, such as the impact of those changes to laws, policies or practices in the day-to-day lives of people and communities. More time may need to pass before these impacts can be fully assessed.

Other changes that occurred along the way may have be the result of factors completely separate to the campaign, such as a landmark court decision or a change in government. Be honest in your evaluation about the impact of the campaign and the role of the NHRI and its allies.

26 IFEX Network; “Developing a Campaign Strategy: Monitoring and Evaluation”; available at www.ifex.org/campaigns/developing_campaign_strategy/index6.php.

There are other criteria that the NHRI can use to assess the impact of the campaign, if there is available data to do so. These can include evaluating:

Media response: Review and analyse media coverage of the campaign to assess the amount, accuracy, breadth and nature (positive or negative) of the coverage. Identify new relationships that have been established. Put a dollar figure on how much it would cost to “purchase” the equivalent amount of media coverage based on the advertising rates of those media outlets.

Stakeholder response: Undertake a stakeholder analysis to chart the change in the attitudes and influence of your key stakeholders over the course of the campaign. Identify what role they played in helping to achieve or block positive outcomes and how the NHRI could frame its relationships with them in the future.

Community response: Analyse any available data to determine whether public opinion on the issue has shifted in your favour and identify those factors that may have contributed to this change.

Political response: In addition to obvious changes, such as passing or amending legislation, identify if there has been a shift in attitudes among the Government, parliamentarians or government agencies that may make future progress on the campaign issue more possible.

It is important to share these findings with your campaign allies and stakeholders. Not only does it help strengthen the relationships established during the campaign planning and implementation phases, sharing positive results helps motivate people to continue their efforts to advocate for social change and respect for human rights.

BackMeUp anti-cyberbullying campaign

BackMeUp was an ambitious two-staged campaign conducted by the **Australian Human Rights Commission** between June 2012 and February 2013.

The goal of the campaign was to encourage young people (aged 13-17 years) to support their friends targeted by cyberbullying. Research on bullying has found that bullying incidents usually occur in front of bystanders and that the majority of people feel either powerless to act or actually encourage the bullying.

The campaign was driven through social media and centred on an online video competition. It featured its own website, which was created on Facebook as an “application” (app). This was replicated on another Commission online human rights portal, Something In Common. The campaign also had a Facebook timeline (connected to the Facebook website) and a YouTube channel.

More than 100 films were entered in the BackMeUp competition, gathering over 56,000 YouTube views. Winners of the competition received a week’s training in film-making at the National Institute of Dramatic Arts.

The campaign included the development of a 30-second Community Service Announcement adapted from one of the winning films. It was broadcast on ABC TV, the national public broadcaster, and Foxtel, a pay-TV service.

BackMeUp had two campaign ambassadors, one of whom was a high-profile television presenter with appeal to the youth audience. She had experienced serious bullying when she was growing up and she spoke about her personal experiences as part of the campaign.

The campaign was evaluated via a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, including: a review of project records; emailed interviews and informal discussions with stakeholders; and a review of web analytics. An online survey completed by 99 respondents (87 per cent completion rate) was also distributed via the BackMeUp Facebook timeline. The majority of respondents were young people who had created films for the competition.

The BackMeUp films and campaign information are available at <http://somethingincommon.gov.au/backmeup>.

Chapter 4: Using social media

In this chapter:

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Different types of social media platforms
- 4.3 Strategies to engage different groups of social media users
- 4.4 Developing a social media strategy
- 4.5 Developing a social media policy

4.1 Introduction

The rapid growth of social media in recent years has transformed the nature of human rights advocacy and communication around the world.

Social media is now an essential tool for nearly all human rights organizations, allowing them to connect with people, share information, exchange opinions, mobilize supporters and advocate for change.

The strategic use of social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, has been a common element in recent efforts to bring about genuine legal, social and political change in different parts of the globe. For example, many articles have been written about the central role of social media in the Arab Spring of 2010-11.

New York University Professor of Journalism Clay Shirky argues that there are two key steps necessary for the development of a vibrant civil society and a healthy democratic culture. The first step is access to information and the media is the first step and the second involves active debate and conversation.

Shirky highlights the vital role played by social media in this process. He describes it as a powerful disseminator of information and a facilitator of mass conversation, with the capacity to generate “many to many” communication. Further, social media can be used to organize and coordinate the actions of many.²⁷

Of course, these “many to many” conversations via social media rely on people having access to an Internet where they can freely communicate and share ideas. This is not always this case, as governments can sometimes take steps to block access to certain websites and social media platforms.

Over the past few years, a number of political leaders, including Hilary Clinton, and prominent human rights advocates have highlighted the importance of the “freedom to

²⁷ Clay Shirky; *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*; 2008. See also Sarah Joseph; *Social Media, Political Change, and Human Rights*; 2012; available at <http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/iclr/vol35/iss1/3>.

connect”, which involves promoting freedom of expression, association and assembly in online spheres.

As with their role to promote and protect freedom of expression with regards to the mass media, NHRIs should also consider what contribution they can make the ongoing discussion and debate around human rights and online communication. A number of NHRIs in the Asia Pacific region, such as the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, have begun working in this area.

NHRIs in the Asia Pacific and other regions have also become increasingly active online. Many have embraced Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, podcasts, blogging and other social media tools to engage directly with different groups of people, especially younger people.

They can also use their social media presence to counter prejudice, hate speech, “trolling” and other unsavoury messages that are a regular part of online discourse.²⁸

However, NHRIs can encounter a number of common obstacles when it comes to integrating social media into their communication and outreach activities, such as resourcing, understanding best practice and measuring the effectiveness and impact of their online efforts.

Using social media to promote the work of the NHRI and engage people in a two-way dialogue need not be overwhelming or difficult. With clear objectives developed as part of a broader communications strategy, social media can be an invaluable tool for reaching new audiences and developing active partnerships.

Benefits of social media include:

- Building greater awareness of NHRI activities, campaigns and success stories by linking people through to your website
- Reaching a broader audience, not limited by geography or demographics
- Growing the NHRI’s influence by acquiring new supporters and partners
- Empowering supporters and partners to get involved in human rights related-activities work and promote this among their networks.

4.2 Different types of social media platforms

Before developing a social media strategy for your NHRI, it is important to be familiar with the common social media platforms and how they can be best utilized.

As a general rule, set aside a minimum of two or three hours each week for every social media platform that you use. If your time is limited to three hours or less each week, start with a single platform,.

It is far better to use one or two social media platforms well than to use many of them poorly.

28 For example, the BackMeUp campaign by the Australian Human Rights Commission encourages young people to provide practical support to their friends targeted by cyberbullying; see page 64 of this Handbook.

FACEBOOK

<http://facebook.com/>

Reach: Over 1.1 billion users worldwide.

What it is: The world's largest social networking site, Facebook allows users to build and maintain relationships using tools such as instant messaging and media sharing. Users create profiles to share information through status updates, posts, pictures, videos and links.

Good for: Starting a conversation on topics of shared interest; encouraging feedback on an issue or topic; inviting people to attend events and activities; promoting the work of the NHRI and its partner organizations, including "success stories".

Tips: Set up the NHRI channel as a "Page" rather than a "Profile"; regularly post a mix of content, including links to related website pages (of the NHRI, partner organizations and others), videos, photos, articles and other discussion topics; devote sufficient time to moderate and respond to comments posted by others; use Facebook "Page Insights" to identify which content is popular with followers.

Measures of success: Number of "likes"; number of "people talking about this"; number of tags; number of RSVPs to events; number of "likes" on specific posts; number of sign-ups sourced through Facebook.

Recommended updates: Between three and six posts per week.

TWITTER

<https://twitter.com/>

Reach: Over 500 million users (more than 215 million active) worldwide.

What it is: The world's leading micro-blogging site, Twitter allows users to "tweet" (post) brief messages in 140 characters or less. Twitter is all about starting or joining a conversation.

Good for: Posting updates and links to new and relevant content; broadcasting up-to-the-minute developments during events; connecting with opinion leaders in your areas of interest; responding to breaking news; staying abreast of hot topics and related opinions; growing your supporter base.

Tips: Make your tweets 115 characters or less to leave space for followers to add their own message when "retweeting" (forwarding on) your post; make sure at least half your posts are not self-promotional; retweet interesting or relevant posts of your followers; include "hashtags" in your tweets, use a "URL shortener" for links you include in your tweets.

Measures of success: Number of organization mentions; number of retweets; number of twitter followers over time; pick-up of tweets by influential organizations, opinion leaders or partners.

Recommended updates: At least two tweets per day.

YOUTUBE

<http://www.youtube.com/>

Reach: Over one billion users worldwide (four billion views per day)

What it is: The world's most popular video-sharing site, YouTube allows users to upload, share and view videos. YouTube allows you to post interesting and to-the-point videos on your "channel" and build community awareness on human rights issues.

Good for: Informing supporters and others in the community about specific human rights issues, upcoming events and the work of your NHRI; featuring interviews with key NHRI spokespeople; promoting NHRI campaigns; showcasing videos on human rights-related issues produced by others, including through NHRI-sponsored campaigns or competitions.

Tips: Create "playlists" to feature your most popular content; embed video clips on the NHRI website and promote new clips through Facebook and Twitter; devote sufficient time to respond to comments posted by others; use YouTube's analytics tools to track usage.

Measures of success: Number of "subscribers" to your channel; number of views of particular videos; number of "likes"; quality and quantity of comments.

Update frequency: Post as often as possible; at least once a month.

PINTEREST

<https://www.pinterest.com/>

Reach: Over 70 million users worldwide.

What it is: Pinterest is a social bookmarking site that allows users to save, organize and share links to photos and videos. "Pins" are organized by topics on "boards", which can be then be "repinned" by others.

Good for: Posting anything with a good quality and compelling image; engaging with groups of people across specific areas of interest; encouraging people to visit the NHRI website.

Tips: Only pin your website if it pulls up a good photo; add detailed descriptions, hashtags and website links to your pins; embed inspirational quotes on your images; mix original pinning with repins of images from other NHRIs or partner organizations.

Measures of success: Numbers of "likes"; number of "followers"; number of "repins"; detailed statistics are available through Pinterest Web Analytics.

Update frequency: At least twice a week.

Other popular social media sites that NHRIs may consider using, include:

Google+ (<https://plus.google.com/>): over 340 million users

LinkedIn: (www.linkedin.com/): over 230 million users

Instagram: (www.instagram.com/): over 150 million users

Flickr: (www.flickr.com): over 87 million users.

4.3 Strategies to engage different groups of social media users

How well the NHRI conducts and influences online conversations and empowers its supporters to spread messages about human rights will ultimately determine the success of its social media strategy.

The primary goal of all online activity is to interest, inform and engage people. It should also seek to drive people to more detailed information on the NHRI website.

There are a number of “best practice” principles that can assist you to engage effectively with people using different social media platforms, especially Facebook.

How to “be” on social media

1. **Be authentic:** Bring the story of the NHRI to life in a compelling and personal way. On Facebook, establish who the organization is and what it stands for by using a strong profile picture, cover photo and description tab. Use a conversational tone in all your posts. Talk to your audience like friends.
2. **Be succinct:** On Facebook, keep posts between 100-250 characters (less than three lines of text). This will help you generate more “likes”, comments and shares, compared with posts longer than 250 characters.
3. **Be visual:** Posts on Facebook that include a link to a photo, photo album or video generate more audience engagement than text-only posts. Posts that feature infographics are particularly popular.
4. **Be social and generous:** Encourage people to “like” and “share” the content that you post. In addition, liking, sharing, reposting and commenting on interesting content posted by others helps build good relationships and can encourage new followers.
5. **Be a conversation starter:** Get people talking by inviting them to a “fill in the blank” to a statement. Ask people what issues matter to them. Where appropriate, create fun and engaging conversations and suggest ways for people to get involved in your work or to promote human rights among their networks.
6. **Be timely:** Tie your post to a current event, a human rights “day” or a news story or sporting event that everyone is talking about. Make sure to spread your posts out across the day and the week; don’t post two or three things at the same time. If there is an important event taking place, post or “tweet” news as it happens.
8. **Be a regular poster (but don’t spam):** The more you post, the more often you will appear in the news feeds of your subscribers. However, it is important to strike a balance between being active and being annoying. Try different frequencies to identify what works best.
9. **Be responsive:** Remember that social media is about generating dialogue with your audience; it’s not a monologue. Responding to comments and feedback in a timely way is crucial to building good relationships. If people post negative comments, be courteous and professional in your reply.

People from all backgrounds use social media. In shaping their online presence, NHRIs must consider the needs of the different groups of people with whom they will engage, especially marginalized groups. For example, NHRIs need to consider how they can adapt their materials to engage people with disabilities, people with low levels of literacy, people who use minority languages and older people.

4.4 Developing a social media strategy

It is critical that NHRIs develop a strategy to guide their online communications.

Using social media is not without risk. For example, a careless, poorly worded or politically partisan post can be shared almost instantly with thousands of people. This has the potential to seriously damage the NHRI's reputation and its relationships with different stakeholders.

Other challenges and concerns that NHRIs may have include:

- Losing “control” of their message

- Knowing how to respond to negative comments or feedback

- Being overwhelmed by the volume of feedback

- Making “mistakes” in a public forum.

- Finding the additional resources and staff time to “do” social media well.

A social media strategy is a document that sets out what you want to achieve through your online communications, what social media tools you will use to achieve these goals, how you will use those tools effectively and how you will manage any potential risks to the NHRI.

For example, it is important to have a clear and consistent approach for dealing with criticism, as mishandling these comments – for example, simply deleting negative posts – will simply attract further criticism.

Different social media channels have different strengths and weaknesses. Selecting the social media platforms that will be most effective will depend on your NHRI's goals, audiences, staff time, existing resources and how your online activities complement and reinforce your broader communications strategy.

An effective social media strategy will attract and engage new supporters, keeping them informed, interested and keen to support your work and promote human rights messages with others in their online networks.

Set your goals

Make sure the key goals of your social media strategy are **SMART** (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely). These goals should be closely aligned with your broader communication strategy, which, in turn, seeks to achieve deliver the objectives set out in the NHRI's strategic plan.

SMART goals are:

Specific: They should be detailed enough to determine whether or not you have achieved them. For example, how will you know when you've finished "building awareness?"

Measurable: They should be able to be quantified, using a numeric benchmark.

Achievable: They should be realistic, based on what the NHRI or similar organizations have accomplished previously.

Relevant: They should relate directly to the strategic objectives of the NHRI.

Time-based: They should be able to be achieved within a set amount of time; for example, six months or 12 months.

If your NHRI is new to social media, it is a good idea to start with between one and three SMART goals. You can add to these goals once you have developed greater experience and enjoyed some success.

Define your audience

As with all communication, it is critical to be clear about who you want to reach. As far as possible, define your intended audience in precise terms. For example, "young people aged 16-30 years" is more useful for preparing a strategy compared with simply saying "young people".

Different tools have different audiences. For example, Facebook tends to be better at reaching younger people; Twitter is generally more useful for reaching professionals and journalists; and Pinterest tends to have a strong following among females.

Find out what social media platforms your supporters and potential supporters are using by talking to friends, family members, NHRI colleagues and people in partner organizations about the sites they use.

Choose your platforms and plan your posts

It is essential that you consider how much time the NHRI can afford to spend on social media (see "Different types of social media platforms" on page 66 for recommended update frequencies). As a minimum, you will need to set aside at least two hours each week for every social media platform you manage.

Determine how best you can engage people in your work and build relationships with new supporters. Your strategy should outline how many posts you will make each week, the broad type of content you will post and who will be responsible for managing and approving posts and responses to comments.

Create targeted calls to action, ensuring that everything you post is consistent with the SMART goals set out in the strategy.

Find your voice, start posting and listen

What you say and how you say things online is of critical importance to the community perception of the NHRI. The ultimate key to success in social media is to be authentic and engaging.

Before you start posting content, it pays to research how similar organizations approach their social media communication and the type of “voice” they use.

In general, NHRIs should use a casual, informal tone and post regularly. This helps create the impression of an accessible institution that is interested in talking with people about the issues that matter to them.

In addition to considering what you want to achieve through social media, NHRIs should also consider what they can “give” to their supporters.

Think about how you can add value, by posting content that might be interesting to your supporters (such as videos, photos, infographics or links to articles or websites); asking people what questions they have and giving short, plain language answers; and celebrating the inspiring work of individuals and organizations who are promoting and protecting human rights in the community.

Pay close attention to any messages or mentions related to your NHRI. If someone mentions your NHRI or a key spokesperson in a post, acknowledge it and, if appropriate, add something to keep the conversation going.

Promote your social media presence on your website, in your newsletter, in media releases, in email footers and any other ways you communicate with your stakeholders. Establish links to your social media platforms from your website and invite staff and partner organizations to “like” your page and respond to initial posts to help build a sense of community.

Measure your results

Regularly tracking audience engagement is a crucial way to chart progress towards your SMART goals and to identify whether you need to make changes in managing your social media activities.

Many social media platforms include free, built-in monitoring tools to help you track user behaviour. These include tools such as Page Insights (Facebook) and Analytics (YouTube).

Four simple metrics to measure the effectiveness of your online activity include:

Views: the number of times people view or open your content

Followers: the number of people that form your supporter base

Engagement: the number of people who actively participate (comments, shares, likes)

Conversion: the number of tangible, “real world” results you achieve, such as people attending NHRI events promoted online.

These reporting metrics are a very useful way to measure performance, evaluate your efforts and inform future directions by identifying trends, audience preferences and successful tactics.

4.5 Developing a social media policy

A social media policy is a code of conduct that provides guidelines for NHRI staff who post content online, either as part of their official job requirements or in a private capacity.

The aim of the policy is to set expectations for appropriate behaviour online and to ensure that content posted by staff will not expose your NHRI to controversy, criticism or embarrassment.

The policy should include guidelines for when an employee is required to identify themselves as a representative of the NHRI on a social networking website, as well as requirements regarding what types of information can be shared. For example, it should include a restriction on disclosing confidential information involving the NHRI.

Some social media policies are long and include a number of very specific rules. Others are short and broad. Every NHRI has different needs, issues and concerns so there is no “one size fits all” policy. Nevertheless, there are a number of issues to consider when developing a social media policy for your NHRI.

Personnel

Identify who will have overall responsibility for the NHRI’s social media presence. This person will be required to answer staff questions on policy, monitor activity and lead social media campaigns. Decide if one person will be in charge of coordinating the content for all social media platforms or if different people will be responsible for managing different social media platforms.

Process

Identify who will contribute the information that the NHRI will post. Is generating content everyone’s responsibility or are certain staff members responsible for seeking out content? Do new posts and responses to comments need to be approved by a manager? How will this process work in practice?

Topics that are off-limits

Outline what issues and topics are appropriate for posts and online discussions. These should focus on the work and mandate of the NHRI. Likewise, it is important to set out those topics that are not appropriate for posting. For example, posts or comments that are politically partisan can seriously undermine the NHRI’s reputation for independence. A good social media policy will help guide staff through the ethical issues that can arise when communicating online and help protect the reputation of the NHRI.

Privacy and permissions

Ensure that NHRI staff respect the privacy of people in their online community. Seek permission from people featured in a photo or video before posting, including parental permission for images that feature children. When posting information about sensitive issues, ensure that no confidential or identifying details are revealed, such as people’s names, location or affiliations.

Balancing personal and professional

The social media policy may also identify specific areas of work-related information that would be inappropriate for NHRI staff to disclose on their personal social media accounts. When commenting on certain issues and current events, the policy may specify instances where NHRI staff disclose where they work.

Dealing with criticism

NHRIs are not immune from criticism. There will be occasions when people post a complaint or negative feedback. Being on social media is about engaging in a dialogue and the way you respond to criticism is a key factor in shaping your online presence. Your supporters and other followers will watch this closely.

Be calm, constructive and professional in your response to criticism. Acknowledge the person's opinion or complaint and provide a brief reply. Where appropriate, provide a link to relevant information on the NHRI website or that of a partner organization.

In some cases, your supporters may also respond and answer the person's criticism.

Never engage in a slanging match. Not only is it unprofessional and damaging to the type of online community you are seeking to build, ugly online debates can spill out of the online space and be reported in the mainstream media.

Responding positively and appropriately to criticism is one thing. However, NHRIs should make clear to everyone using their social media platform that "trolling" (when people post inflammatory or highly discriminatory comments to generate a response from others) and other offensive posts will not be tolerated.

The NHRI should set out in its policy how it will respond in such cases. For example, individual posts on Facebook may be removed or comments for a particular YouTube video may be disabled.

It is important that the NHRI clearly states to all users the sort of behaviour that is acceptable on its social media websites, such as in the example below from the Australian Human Rights Commission.²⁹

²⁹ Australian Human Rights Commission; "Social Media Policy"; available at <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/social-media-policy>.

The **Australian Human Rights Commission** engages in social media to promote discussion and debate on human rights issues. We welcome feedback and suggestions, and endeavour to respond to messages.

We ask that the conversation on our pages is tolerant of other people's views.

Here are the basic guidelines for our social media pages:

All discussions and material on our sites should be family friendly and respectful of a diversity of opinions.

Posts and comments should not vilify or attack individuals on the basis of personal characteristics such as race or religion.

Posts and comments should be relevant to the topic under discussion.

Have your say, but do not spam our pages with repeats of the same information.

Advertising is not allowed.

Posts that contravene the above guidelines will be removed, and repeat offenders could be banned.

If you follow us on Twitter, we will not automatically follow you back. This is to discourage the use of direct messaging and spam.

The Commission encourages "friends" and "followers" on its pages, but this does not imply endorsement of any kind.

Chapter 5: Supporting journalists in their work

In this chapter:

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Challenges to freedom of expression
- 5.3 Challenges to human rights reporting
- 5.4 Promoting excellence in human rights reporting

5.1 Introduction

Access to independent and reliable information is essential to the health of a country's democracy.

Firstly, it gives people a solid foundation on which they can make responsible and informed decisions about the issues that are important to them. Secondly, access to information is a vital component for ensuring the accountability of government and other powerful institutions.

A strong and independent media – one which is free to question and critique – plays a vital accountability role. Often described as the “fourth estate” (or the fourth branch of government), the media has long been viewed as a key mechanism through which the public can hold their governments to account.

By drawing attention to human rights violations and systemic discrimination, the media can bring these issues to the centre of public debate, raise community awareness and demand a response from government and other decision-makers.

The media is also a key shaper of community attitudes. Almost everyone relies on the media to find out what is “news”, to follow discussion of key social, economic and political topics and to participate in public debate.

The power of the media to frame and influence how the public thinks and feels about particular issues, including human rights issues, continues to be very significant.

Media reporting can, for instance, promote the social, economic and cultural benefits of migration and the contribution of migrant workers. On the other hand, inaccurate or biased reporting and commentary can inflame prejudice and discrimination towards migrants and refugees.

Given the vital role of the media in helping to build strong and fair communities, NHRIs should ensure they take active steps to support the work of journalists and media outlets in the country.

This includes being strong and consistent advocates for freedom of expression and freedom of information; identifying and advocating practical steps that can create the legal, political

and social conditions required for independent journalism; and supporting journalists to report accurately on human rights issues.

5.2 Challenges to freedom of expression

There are a number of factors that can undermine the independence, reliability and diversity of the media, including:

- Government regulation of print and broadcast media

- Government licensing requirements for print and broadcast media and, in some cases, licensing requirements for journalists

- Threats to or limited protection of sources of information

- Restrictive censorship and defamation laws

- Violence, intimidation abduction and murder of journalists by powerful forces and the targeting of journalists reporting in conflict situations

- The growing concentration of media ownership.

As more and more people search for news or contribute information online, governments may also seek to block public access to certain websites or track individuals who post political material on social media or blogs.

These factors not only severely impede freedom of expression; they can also have a “chilling effect” on journalists and others. The threat of repercussions for publishing or broadcasting a particular story has the potential to lead journalists to “self-censor” or avoid covering certain topics altogether.

This has direct consequences for the strength of public discourse and the ability of the media to hold decision-makers to account.

NHRIs can play a leading role to promote and defend freedom of expression and freedom of information. They can use their mandate to draw on international human rights standards in order to challenge laws, policies and practices that undermine the independence of the media and the ability of journalists to carry out their work.

Protecting journalists in Nepal

In June 2013, the **National Human Rights Commission of Nepal** joined forces with UNESCO, professional journalists associations, security and judicial bodies and other national and international bodies in a coordinated effort to defend press freedom.

The two-year initiative aims to increase the safety of journalists and end impunity in the crimes against media outlets and individual journalists, while also contributing to the overall peace effort in the country.

It is part of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which includes a focus on:

Helping governments develop laws to safeguard journalists

Providing training courses for journalists in safety

Establishing real-time emergency response mechanisms

Strengthening the safety of journalists in conflict zones

Raising public awareness of the damage done when a journalist's right to freedom of expression is curtailed.

It also calls for enhancing protection for women journalists in response to the increasing incidence of sexual harassment and rape, decriminalizing defamation offences and encouraging adequate remuneration for full-time and freelance employees.

In Nepal, the Commission, UNESCO and its partners will work to establish a nationally-owned and independent mechanism to provide an appropriate framework to tackle the issue of journalists' safety and impunity.

They will also seek to build the capacity of security and judicial institutions to protect journalists and strengthen the ability of journalists to protect themselves.

More than 100 journalists around the world were killed in 2012, making it the deadliest year for media professionals since UNESCO began keeping records on the issue.

More information on the UN Plan of Action is available at:

www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/freedom-of-expression/safety-of-journalists/un-plan-of-action/.

5.3 Challenges to human rights reporting

While media reporting of human rights issues has grown significantly in the past two decades as "human rights" has become more of a mainstream issue, the extent and quality of human rights reporting remains inconsistent.

Many human rights issues, especially those that are less visible, continue to go unreported. The focus of reporting tends to fall primarily on civil and political rights, while discussion of economic, social and cultural rights is largely ignored by the media.

Further, reporting of human rights issues can commonly occur without the context or explanation that is necessary for people to properly understand the issue.

A report by the International Council on Human Rights Policy³⁰ found journalists faced a number of challenges in reporting on human rights, including:

Ignorance of what human rights are; many journalists and editors, as with others in the community, are not familiar with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other key international human rights standards

Confusion about where human rights are; there can be a tendency to view human rights violations as something that takes place “elsewhere” and overlook domestic issues where international human rights standards apply, such as the treatment of women, indigenous people, people with disabilities or refugees

Limited awareness about the scope of human rights; while there is broad awareness of certain key civil and political rights, understanding of economic, social and cultural rights – such as the right to housing, health and education – is generally low.

Given this limited awareness of human rights, journalists can “miss” important human rights stories or fail to see the human rights dimensions of stories that they might prepare on topics such as economic policy, education, housing, the environment, health or transport.

In addition, journalists can use human rights terms that have a specific legal meaning – such as “genocide” or “war crimes” – in a way that is careless or imprecise.

As the International Council on Human Rights Policy noted:

*These shortcomings diminish the professional quality of reporting, and hamper the communication of information that is sometimes essential for understanding. They indicate that the profession should identify or improve reporting and editorial standards in order to enhance the accuracy and consistency of human rights coverage.*³¹

NHRIs can support the media to be accurate and informed reporters of human rights. An important starting point is for NHRIs to open a dialogue with news editors, journalists and other media professionals so that both groups can better understand their respective roles and responsibilities.

For example, NHRIs can organize meetings or seminars with media organizations and journalists’ groups to discuss:

Challenges and concerns around human rights reporting in the country

How best the NHRI can provide journalists with accurate and reliable information or resources on human rights

How both groups can cooperate to create the legal, political and social conditions required for independent journalism.

NHRIs can also work with universities or journalism schools to incorporate teaching on human rights into pre-entry, undergraduate or post-graduate courses.

30 International Council on Human Rights Policy; *Journalism, Media and the Challenge of Human Rights Reporting*; 2002; pp. 113-117.

31 *Ibid*; p. 5.

The **Human Rights Commission of the Maldives** held a Media Forum in October 2012 with the goal of supporting the Maldivian media to become more “human rights friendly”.

As media freedom is a fairly new concept, and trained journalists in the Maldives are few, reporters are often unaware of how to cover sensitive news and information. In addition, important topics can get sidelined as there is a heavy focus on Maldivian politics.

The workshop sought to build positive relations with local media and improve media skills in reporting human rights-based issues, with a particular focus on:

- Reporting sensitive news featuring children’s rights issues

- Reporting on issues related to women, using approaches that respect the rights of women

- Building awareness among the Government and the public about the rights of migrant workers.

The approaches that journalists could use when reporting news related to children, women and migrant workers were extensively discussed in the forum.

Discussions also looked at how the Commission could support the media in their work, with participants suggesting that the Commission update its website more frequently and facilitate further awareness raising workshops on human rights reporting for media personnel.

The **Human Rights Commission of Malaysia** has held dialogue sessions with the media, and conducted courtesy visits to the offices of media outlets, as a way of understanding how the media work and promoting greater cooperation between the Commission and the media.

In 2013, the Commission conducted a series of consultations to promote the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism among the media. The consultations sought to raise awareness among the media about Malaysia’s international human rights obligations, arising from its first review by the UPR Working Group in Geneva in 2009, as well as the issues that may be raised as part of the second review in October 2013. The consultations were well-attended by various media representatives and received positive media coverage.

5.4 Promoting excellence in human rights reporting

Journalists are under no obligation to promote human rights. Their responsibility is to select and report on those issues that they decide are the most relevant and newsworthy for their audience.

It is therefore the responsibility of NHRIs and other human rights organizations to understand the news values (see page 13) that guide news reporting and present their issues to the media accordingly.

Nevertheless, many journalists have a strong personal and professional commitment to report on human rights and corruption issues. Some face intimidation and danger in undertaking investigations that uncover abuses, violations or illegality. Others go to great lengths to ensure that the stories of marginalized individuals and communities are heard.

Fearless and professional reporting can be a catalyst for social change. It can hold the powerful to account. It can lead to changes in laws. It can transform public opinion and mobilize a community in support of an issue.

It is important that such reporting be publicly acknowledged by NHRIs, both to highlight the positive contribution of the individual journalist and the media outlet that supported him or her and to encourage other journalists to consider how they might report on other pressing human rights in the country.

Some NHRIs in the Asia Pacific region have established awards programmes to recognize excellence in media reporting on human rights issues. These events also provide an important opportunity for NHRIs to deepen their relationships with journalists and promote the vital work of the media to a broader audience.

Since 1987, the **Australian Human Rights Commission** has held an annual Human Rights Medal and Awards programme to recognize outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights in the community. Among other categories, the programme includes Human Rights Awards for excellence in print journalism, radio journalism and television journalism, with an independent panel of media experts assessing the nominations and selecting a winner.

The **Human Rights Commission of Malaysia** has held an annual Human Rights Awards since 2011 to honour outstanding individuals, groups, organizations and agencies for their significant contribution to promoting and protecting human rights in Malaysia. In 2013, the Commission added three new awards to recognize excellence in human rights reporting.

Both Awards programmes recognize the important role of the media in uncovering human rights violations, bringing these issues to public attention and helping drive positive change.

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