

SESSION II: Non-Governmental Triggers to Humanitarian Action**The Media**

Mr. Clyde Sanger, Director of Communications at Canada's North-South Institute, made a presentation that focused specifically on the media, and on the complex, and at times chaotic, triangular relationship that exists between the media, humanitarian workers and policy-makers.

Mr. Sanger's argument constituted a defence of the media, which had received some criticism in the previous session. He argued that the better journalists have an intuition about situations that comes from years of experience, and that in most cases, they turn out to be correct. Mr. Sanger argued that journalists have a tendency to work in isolation, in competition with their colleagues and at a distance from policy-makers. Humanitarian workers, on the other hand, often have better local networks and a greater ability to draw upon reports produced by academics and other analysts, with the result that they may be less isolated in carrying out their work. Journalists benefit from several advantages. They are very mobile - more so than humanitarian workers and policy-makers - and can ask awkward questions as they need not be as cautious as those who make or advise on policy.

Mr. Sanger next discussed the comparative advantage of the different media, highlighting the importance of distinguishing among them rather than talking about the media as a uniform instrument. First, television reaches the broadest audience but is open to imbalance. Visual images can have great impact and television can stir the public even if it sometimes provides little new information. Mr Sanger cited as examples the "CNN effect" and the role of the media in covering Operation "Restore Hope" in Somalia. Second, radio is more direct than television and passes through fewer filters, but generally reaches a smaller audience. Finally, print media lends itself to discussion of complicated issues and disputes since it can provide longer articles with in-depth background and analysis.

The media do not like early warning stories but instead tend to wait until events have occurred and violence has exploded. This phenomenon is linked to the fact that the media tend to rely on visiting "firemen" rather than on resident journalists - that is, journalists who arrive only once events have taken place. Local media can often be self-limiting in that they may prefer to run articles by reporters on staff in favour of pieces by freelance journalists or journalists from other companies. Then there is the broader problem of gate-keeping by editors. Although journalists may produce good stories, they have still to get them past editors. Often, such gate-keepers do not necessarily get into the field, and their judgement as to what is newsworthy may be coloured accordingly.