

The Media & Conflict

Krista, ON

What can the media do for people in war zones? More importantly, what *should* they be doing? That was the topic of discussion for the morning panel on September 14, 2000 at the International Conference on War-Affected Children.

The first speaker was Kwasi Appenteng. Kwasi believes that the media could affect the outcome of a conflict, but are often ignored or taken for granted. Not only should the media be active participants in conflict situations by spreading information and telling the true story, but they are also critical to conflict resolution. Using local languages and creative ways to present the information would promote awareness in conflict areas about what is happening.

Kwasi also believes that a conscious shift in the mentality and function of the media is needed. There needs to be a new emphasis placed on human rights – they are often not considered “sexy” and are therefore not popular news topics. Children’s rights, according to Kwasi, should be especially emphasized, and morals and ethics need to be discussed more in the media. An additional problem that Kwasi brought up is that in some countries, the state controls the information and is used too often as a source of information by the media.

The next person to speak was Gordana, a Bosnian who is now part of the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression. Gordana mentioned both positive and negative aspects of media coverage. On the positive side, she told two stories of girls during the war in Bosnia and how the awareness of their lives had motivated many people to help the Bosnians during the war in that region. On the negative side, she spoke about how journalists often try to hide some facts to make the story “digestible” but how she felt it was important to write about the realities of war.

The third and final speaker was Shelley Saywell, who creates documentaries as an independent filmmaker. Saywell said that there is less interest in documentaries because many people are not interested in exploring the stories they hear on the news in-depth. She also spoke of what she calls “compassion fatigue,” when people hear too much of a story and don’t feel any sympathy for it anymore.

The morning’s discussion ended with a period where audience members, who were mainly part of the media, were given the chance to ask questions about the speeches and experiences of the speakers. The discussion continued in the afternoon.

What Actions Youth Can Take

- Letters to editors, radio stations (ie. Talk radio), television stations, etc. to make the media know that we want to hear about these issues!
- Youth should endeavour to make the issues known in their own countries and around the world (ie. Through youth media organizations).
- Encourage major media organizations to have a youth reporter / youth voice represented in their reporting.

Youth Recommendations

- Media content should be regulated so as to ensure that international issues are more likely to be reported.
- Media led by youth should be created and supported in conflict situations and that information should be broadcasted throughout the world.
- Media should remain impartial in reporting on the issues.
- Information should be readily available to all citizens of countries so that they are aware of what is going on in their nation.
- Governments should not be allowed to censor the media.
- Reports on conflicts should be better researched and not far-fetched.
- The media should not give out information that may endanger the security or safety of youth; their safety needs come first, not the stories.
- Less restrictions should be placed on media reporting about youth issues in war-affected countries.
- More attention should be placed on children in war-affected countries.