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Extending the Reach of Peace-Builders

A Media Outreach Guide for
Dialogue & Reconciliation Practitioners

prepared by

Search for Common Ground's

Partners in Humanity
programme

for constructive & vibrant Muslim-Western relations

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Using this Guide.....	2
About “ <i>Extending the Reach of Peace-Builders</i> ”.....	2
What is Common Ground Media Outreach?.....	3
Why Integrate Common Ground Media Outreach into Your Projects?.....	4
II. Reaching Out to Media.....	5
What does the Media Want?.....	5
Reaching Your Target Media Outlets.....	6
▪ Identifying Your Audience.....	6
▪ Developing Key Messages.....	6
▪ Integrating Common Ground Into Your Messages.....	7
▪ Disseminating Your Messages.....	8
Reaching out to Local Media.....	9
Reaching out to International Media.....	10
▪ Cross-Cultural Communication.....	11
▪ Tips for Shifting from High to Low Context Communication.....	12
▪ 5 Guidelines for Reaching International Audiences.....	13
III. Checklists.....	15
Building a Media Outreach Plan.....	16
Interview Preparation.....	17
Writing an Editorial or Opinion Piece (Op-ed).....	18
Issuing a Press Release.....	19
Preparing for a Press Conference.....	20
IV. Tips & Tricks.....	21
Interviews.....	21
Opinion Pieces and Editorials.....	23
Press Releases.....	24
Press Conferences.....	24
Difficult Questions & Bad Press.....	25
▪ Handling Tough Questions.....	25
▪ Bad Press.....	26
V. Models & Templates.....	27
Press Release Template.....	27
Press Release Sample.....	28
Interview Resource Document.....	29
VI. Useful Links & Additional Resources.....	30
Third Party Resources.....	30
<i>Common Ground News Service</i> Guide for Writers.....	31

I. USING THIS GUIDE

About the “Extending the Reach of Peace-Builders” Guide

The media provides a powerful opportunity to reach broad audiences quickly and effectively. For individuals and groups working to address conflict, this makes it a compelling tool. It can increase the breadth and scope of reconciliation and dialogue initiatives. It can serve as a vehicle for reaching the various parties in a conflict. And it can help your organization gain visibility with potential donors, partners and clients. In addition, media coverage can improve the image of a conflicted region globally by pointing out the constructive work of local peace-builders.

However media today is often a forum for negative and extreme perspectives, and it is often difficult to navigate the media world so that your constructive messages and success stories get heard or seen through all the noise and activity.

This guide has been designed to complement *Search for Common Ground’s* media outreach training workshops for non-governmental organizations, civil society activists and other individuals and groups working in the fields of conflict resolution, dialogue, reconciliation and related human security initiatives, but it can also be used on its own. It has been developed to provide short and easy tips and suggestions for traversing the realm of the media and making yourself heard. It is not a comprehensive guide, but a practical tool for organizations and individuals with little time or money to spend on media outreach but a lot to gain from engaging in it.

For those who attended the workshop:

This guide will serve as a refresher, providing condensed “how to” advice and easy-to-use checklists on the key information, skills and knowledge that were transferred during the workshop.

For those who didn’t attend the workshop:

This guide provides practical information on the core components of media outreach strategies and related activities. First-time users should read through the entire guide to gain a broad understanding of media outreach and its related tools.

- The first section, “Reaching Out to Common Ground Media”, provides some background information to get you thinking about what the media want - locally and internationally - and to prepare you to create documents and messages for your different audiences.
- The next section provides tear-out “Checklists” that can be used and reused as you engage in your most frequent media outreach activities.
- The “Tips and Tricks” section provides additional detail on these practical action items and suggestions for maximizing the benefits of your media outreach initiatives.
- The “Models & Templates” section provides examples of successful media outreach activities that you can refer to when developing your own strategies.
- And if you are still looking for more information, the last section, “Useful Links & Additional Resources”, provides some electronic and print resources you can access for more details.

What is Common Ground Media Outreach?

Why do extreme views and violence get more coverage than the stories of those who have time after time intervened to prevent armed conflict and intolerance? And why is it that a few rare reconciliation or dialogue efforts become international success stories while most go unnoticed?

Media outreach is a set of targeted activities that can be integrated into any project to attract busy journalists and reporters to cover your story, raise awareness about a particular issue or crisis, garner public support and spur decision-makers to action. It focuses not only on developing basic tools -- writing press releases and opinion pieces, hosting press conferences, and building interviewing skills -- but also on creating compelling messages that resonate with media audiences i.e. your target audience.

Common Ground Media Outreach incorporates the philosophy that, when dealing with topics that have the potential to inflame tensions or even violent conflict, it is critical to do so in a manner that brings all players “to the table” – whether literally or metaphorically – to understand any differences and work together to achieve common interests.

Rather than focusing on areas of diverging opinion, or alienating one party by concentrating solely on their destructive activities – which can become a self-fulfilling prophecy – common ground media outreach highlights the opportunities to work collaboratively, creating hope for reconciliation.

The idea is to leverage the power of the media to change the way that individuals look at conflict in their own lives, away from adversarial approaches and towards cooperation.

Why Integrate Common Ground Media Outreach into your Organization's Projects?

Successful media outreach in the reconciliation and dialogue fields has a couple of obvious benefits:

- *Raising awareness and dispelling myths* - International media coverage of reconciliation & dialogue work around the world, especially those efforts in regions that are generally characterized by violence has the ability to change opinion, overcome destructive stereotypes and mobilize key agents of change.
- *Opening up channels of communication* - The media is a channel for communication between groups that seldom come face to face;
- *Increasing the number of people affected* - A broader, larger audience for your projects and programmes results in greater impact and scope; and
- *Increased visibility and credibility* - When your organization and its work appears in print or on broadcast media describing "what can be done", it can increase your ability to influence others and tackle even greater problems.

With just a few extra activities and a subtle shift in the way you talk about your work, common ground media outreach is an affordable and effective way to increase your organization's reach. In addition, each time media outreach is incorporated into a project plan it becomes exponentially easier and less time-consuming to integrate it next time. Every time you reach out you make new contacts, your organization's name and goals become more familiar to the press you are targeting.

The Long-Term Benefits of Media Outreach

Consider one possible outcome of greater media outreach on your part.

You contact a local journalist and pitch your story. Although the journalist can't use your story at that time, she calls you back 3 weeks later to comment on a story of national interest in which she would like to balance the positions in the article with a civil society voice. The article is controversial and therefore very widely-read in the region.

A reporter for an international news outlet reads it and puts your organization on their radar for when they need a reconciliation perspective for their articles.

You send the article to a potential donor who now has third-party substantiation that you are no longer just another applicant, but one who has a reputation that can bring about real change and is respected in your part of the world.

II. REACHING OUT TO MEDIA

What does the Media Want?

Media practitioners are often writing under deadline. In order to get their story in before the paper goes to print, or before the news goes live on television or radio, they need to receive timely news in a format they can easily integrate into their report or article without the need to rework it. The better you can tailor your media outreach to what the media wants, the better your chances of seeing media coverage.

Key things that media want:

- “News” that is unique, timely, new and appealing to a broad audience. “News” holds up to the “so what” test: So why should anybody care about that? So what?

Original and topical data, information, events, statistics and/or insight into **what’s new** in the field and how that impacts the greater public. What people need to know now, today or tomorrow.

- A story geared towards **their audience** - their readers, viewers or listeners – that shows that you understand what these groups **want** to know and why they want to know it.
- **Clear, concise wording** that avoids industry-specific terminology, clichés and acronyms, is of an appropriate length, and requires little to no editing on their part.
- **Proof.** Evidence that your insight is useful, statistics that demonstrate real change, data or expert quotes that support the argument you are making or illustrate the point you want to get across.
- A **contact person** they can reach at a moment’s notice who is well-versed in the topic and who can provide quotes that are interesting, valid and accurate. A spokesperson who is reliable and whose remarks they can trust.
- **Education** on a specific event, social phenomenon, etc. Journalists and reporters are experts in getting at the news, not necessarily experts in conflict or reconciliation and dialogue. Let them know they can contact you to get a better understanding of the broader context or specific details.
- **News that their competitors don’t have.** Every media outlet strives to be the “first”. The first to get a story, the first to report the truth, the first to see things from a new angle. They want contacts who will push this information to them, and they will often reward these contacts by approaching them for quotes or by picking up and running their news.

Reaching Your Target Media Outlets

Selecting 2 or 3 key messages that you want to get across to the media is probably the most important part of your media outreach campaign. These messages will form the foundation of all your activities – writing, responding to interviews and speaking. These key messages must demonstrate that you understand how your project fits into the broader picture and what the implications are – what is newsworthy about your project, and why your audience should care.

There are three things to keep in mind when targeting media outlets: i) identifying your audience, ii) developing your messages, iii) integrating common ground into your messages, and iv) disseminating your messages.

Identifying Your Audience

First of all, it is important to be clear on who your audience is. If you are aiming to attract the attention of US policymakers and academics, you will want to target media outlets like the New York Times or the New Republic. For the general public, it might be a better strategy to target local and regional papers and television stations. Your messaging will differ based on your audience.

For example, if you are trying to change the way Christians and Muslims in the general population see each other, then you will want to target local press outlets with messages such as:

“Prominent Muslim and Christian leaders, Imam X, and Reverend Y, agree to work together to create an interfaith dialogue camp for over 500 young people in the country.”

On the other hand, if you are trying to change government policies that have a negative impact on Christian-Muslim relations within a specific country or region, then you will want to target national or international press with messages such as:

“Christian-Muslim violence and discord have resulted in 100 million dollars’ worth of wasted economic productivity in country or region X.”

Developing Key Messages

Once you identify who your audience is, creating key messages for your media outreach campaign becomes a matter of understanding what this audience believes and why. What are its values? Do terms like “fairness” or “human rights” resonate? What are its fears? Is it concerned about terrorism, or losing its identity? What misunderstandings or stereotypes lie at the root of what it thinks? Does it believe that secular societies are against religion, or that all Muslims are terrorists? What can you add to the debate to disprove or reinforce these beliefs? Which topics are likely to dominate people’s thinking with regards to your work?

Select two or three of the biggest and most relevant themes that fit into your audience’s values and interests and create some statements that are unique, and perhaps slightly controversial, compelling, or unusual. It is useful to develop a one-liner, a one-sentence “sound bite” that catches people’s attention and inspires an emotion or reaction. For example, “New research shows X type of conflict resolution is more effective and less costly”. This is something the reporter can run as a headline. It fits with what sceptics believe

about conflict resolution and sparks interest to read the rest of the article where you will provide proof points or solutions.

There are also certain key phrases that support your organization's goals and mission - for example, *"assisting the poorest of the poor"*, *"changing the way you see the 'other'"* or *"regional security that works for people"* - that should be essential components of every press interview you do. As reporters begin to associate your organization with these key phrases, YOUR key phrases, they will begin to identify you using these specific descriptors and help you acquire the reputation you want in this space.

Messaging Examples:

1) If you are running a truth and reconciliation council and want to share the important stories, discussions, apologies and results with the general public to increase the impact of this project, a possible message may be:

- *"Families of victims and perpetrators of the 1972 massacre agree on the need for structural reforms in the government."*
- *"Muslims and Hindus sit together for the first time in history in city X to discuss reparations for the violence each community has brought upon the other."*
- *"The country Y truth council invites the public to share its stories over the Internet."*

2) If you are working with women in places of conflict, and want to encourage government policymakers and international decision-makers to come down harder on the use of rape as a weapon of war, a possible message is:

- *"A campaign to publicly acknowledge acts of rape and name the rapists has resulted in an 80% decline in rape as a weapon of war, and serves as a model for the rest of the country."*
- *"International support for the rights of women in times of war has notable impact at the local level."*
- *"The high instances of rape as a war crime in country Z are a blow to women's rights around the world."*

Integrating Common Ground into Your Messages

Every opportunity to develop messaging is also an opportunity to promote a more inclusive, constructive approach to addressing the conflicts faced in your line of work.

A common ground perspective:

- Provides constructive and solution-oriented perspectives and concrete steps for collaboration and understanding where possible
- Seeks areas of common ground or common goals and interests
- Promotes dialogue and cooperation
- Emphasizes positive examples of interaction between Western and Muslim cultures
- Expresses constructive self-criticism

- Instils hope and optimism in readers that non-adversarial solutions to conflict are possible
- Highlights positive experiences between individuals that humanize the other and offer hope
- Contributes to understanding between Muslim and Western cultures

Sample themes and approaches include:

- Highlighting organizations and people working for a better national, regional or global environment
- Interpreting information, events, polls and analyzes in ways that encourage rational, moderate and positive thinking
- Educating readers on specific non-adversarial approaches of conflict resolution
- Illustrating to readers that “common ground” is not about settling for the lowest possible denominator but seeking a higher denominator
- Informing audiences about little known dialogue projects around the world
- Elaborating on non-Western or Muslim conflict resolution perspectives and theories to contribute to understanding of Muslim-Western relations
- Encouraging policy-makers and international decision-makers to adopt more conciliatory approaches in their policies
- Accentuating the shared humanity and interdependence of humankind
- Dispelling myths and negative stereotypes, and sharing information on widely misunderstood or controversial concepts that serve as obstacles to respect, cooperation or understanding

With only a few tweaks, any message can be made to fit the dual purpose of highlighting the issues in your region while simultaneously inviting a peaceful and cooperative approach to addressing them.

Disseminating Your Messages

It is important to mix your key messages into the conversations you have with interviewers. If you repeat messages over and over without providing any proof or evidence, however, the story will not come together. Your role as a spokesperson needs to be balanced; you need to be an educated resource as well as a representative of your organization and the broader reconciliation and dialogue field.

Therefore, it is essential to patiently offer valuable information to the reporter or journalist on issues and subjects that interest him or her. If, from the first meeting, you have proven yourself to be a valuable information resource on reconciliation, or conflict prevention and resolution, the reporter will be more receptive to hearing and repeating your key messages.

It is also important to tailor the key messages to meet the needs of different reporters. For example, while a reporter who regularly writes articles in the Christian Science Monitor about the Levant region may be interested in reconciliation, this interest may be limited to what governments are doing to reach this end. Conversely, a broadcaster from BBC is going to be more interested in how your programme has shifted the political or social fabric of the place you live in, rather than the details of implementation. While it is important to be cognizant of their requirements, you will have the opportunity to begin to spread your messages by weaving them into an ongoing dialogue.

Some tips on disseminating your message:

- **Include your key messages** in all of your media outreach materials – op-eds, press releases, interviews, promotional materials, publications, banners, etc. Integrate them into all interviews or discussions with press, reporters or other stakeholders
- **Create a document** and provide it to your key staff, partners and spokespeople
- When faced with unrelated questions during media interviews, **use the opportunity** to bring the conversation back to your key points. If presented with difficult questions, your messaging can serve as an excellent transition that brings you back to your agenda.

Examples of **transitional comments**:

- *“I’m not sure about that, but what we have seen in the field is...”*
- *“That’s an interesting perspective, but let me tell you what our funders/governments/the local populations feel...”*
- *“Let’s not forget...”*
- *“Actually, it’s really about...”*
- *“Let’s put this in the right context...”*

Reaching out to Local Media

The great thing about local media is that they are nearby and often easily accessible. It is usually possible to contact them personally. Also you generally share the same language and they are familiar with the context you are working in. They understand and follow what is going on locally so they require less explanation and background than international or regional media, and they can be the best way to expand the audience of your project to include the general population in your region.

However, like any ongoing relationship, relationships with media must be nurtured and developed. Just because you are doing work in the region they cover doesn’t necessarily mean they understand how your work is relevant or newsworthy. Also, like journalists, reporters, editors and producers the world over, they are constantly being approached by people with “newsworthy stories” and, without some strategic planning, your press release or article may end up at the bottom of a big pile.

Tips on networking with Local Media:

- Meet and greet: ask for an initial **face-to-face meeting** with local editors and reporters to introduce yourself and your organization. It is helpful if you can share an important piece of news at this first meeting – it will make them more eager to meet with you, and demonstrate to them that you know what they need.
- **Invite media to events**, conferences, and workshops hosted by your organization. Make sure to invite your key media champions to office parties and other events when appropriate to show your appreciation and to keep in touch.

- Make sure your media contacts are the **first to know** when something interesting happens in the field; touch base once or twice a month to share new industry research, polls, or successes.
- Put them on your press release **distribution list**.
- Offer to work with them on articles and make sure they know they can come to you for a comment, a quote or an explanation – sometimes you may even have to **put them in touch with another expert** in the field. Although this sounds counter-intuitive, they will soon realize you are a reliable and accurate source of information.
- Relationships with media sometimes develop beyond the strictly professional. If common personal interests are found **relationships should be nurtured at a personal, human level** as well. Small acts or tokens that demonstrate interest in a thoughtful manner, and show you've remember key details about each contact, can go a long way in developing mutual understanding that is immensely helpful in nurturing relationships with media.

Reaching out to International Media

Getting your stories into international media can give you important access to policy makers, academics and lobbyists. It gives global importance to your work and can be a great success story to use with potential donors, who may also be consumers of these programmes and publications.

Dealing with international press has a different set of challenges than dealing with local press. First of all, there is often a geographic distance that precludes face-to-face interaction. In fact, when it comes to large international media outlets, even getting in touch by phone can be tough. Opportunities to put a face to the name of international editors, journalists, reporters and producers are rare, but can be very rewarding.

Meeting foreign correspondents, photographers and bureau chiefs of these media outlets can be a good way to make some initial contacts. And when travelling for work or pleasure to the headquarters of your target media bureaus, it is always a good idea to see if it is possible to schedule meetings with the reporters who cover your part of the world. As someone who could give a first-hand perspective of a situation on the ground in Indonesia for example, if you combine that with the lure of a news story, you could come across as a compelling contact.

Second, there are cultural and language differences that can create obstacles to getting your news in print or on the air. If your message does not resonate with a European or American audience, there is little chance that a European or American newspaper or television station will run your story. The same goes if your press release is not available in the language the media is produced in. As a result, the quality, language and relevance of your outreach must speak for itself. Being aware of communication or cultural differences can also help to improve your interactions.

Cross-Cultural Communication

Across the world communication styles can vary immensely. What is a compliment in one country could be an insult in another. An expression or gesture that is commonplace in Afghanistan may be confusing or even offensive to an Australian audience. Because many of the most widely-read news sources – BBC, CNN, the New York Times, the Guardian, the Financial Times – are based in the West and cater primarily to Western publics, it can be useful to consider how different messages will be perceived by Western editors and audiences.

Most sociologists divide the world into high and low context styles of communication. High-context communication takes into account things such as history, body language, socially accepted hierarchies and existing relationships, and relies less on explicit explanations and direct statements. The meaning is implied by the context, rather than put into words.

Low-context communication, on the other hand, assumes no history of prior interaction, no societal norms or generally understood social structures and no other contextual factors, and therefore relies heavily on explicit wording and direct statements to get across what is expected. A low-context speaker assumes that the other party has no prior knowledge of the issue and explains things in great detail, rather than relying on non-verbal indicators and assumptions based on an existing relationship between the two parties.

Although no country or culture can be labelled exclusively high or low context, because individuals will use both styles of communication during their day-to-day interactions with others, countries such as Germany, England, Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand tend to use low-context communication styles in their public discourse, whereas countries in the Middle East and Asia, as well as many Latin countries, tend to use high-context communication in the same situation.

For example:

<p>A high context comment: When you enter a cow's barn, moo. When you enter a goat's shed, bleat. (Malay proverb translated) *</p> <p>A low context response: <i>I don't understand; what do you mean? Be specific about what I have to do.</i></p>	<p>A low context comment: In order to make things run smoothly in your married life, when you move in with your spouse and their parents your life will be very different and you will have to accept their different routines and habits and adopt them as your own while you are there. For example...</p> <p>A high context response: <i>You're embarrassing us both by stating the obvious; it is clear what/who you mean.</i></p>
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* Example take from: Salleh, Lailawati Mohd, Ohio University, "High/Low Context Communication: The Malaysian Malay Style", Association for Business Communication Annual Convention, 2005, <http://www.businesscommunication.org/conventions/Proceedings/2005/PDFs/09ABC05.pdf>.

Tips for Shifting from High to Low Context Communication:

- Avoid introducing information or arguments that are not directly related to your key messages. Stick to **key messages and facts**, rather than indirect explanations.
- Talk about **the future impact of your programme**, rather than what happened in the past that led up to your project or influenced its development.
- **Focus more on the individual** and the impact on the individual, rather than the group or the community.
- **Do not expect your reader or listener to assume, or intuit anything** in your message. It is fair to assume that people know very little about your work (or even your field) and to provide all the necessary details.
- Demonstrate characteristics of determination, achievement, optimism, over-achievement and problem-solving. Where possible, **demonstrate how you have taken a unique path despite the challenges**, how you have identified a solution to a problem and are implementing it, how you have gone above and beyond what was required or expected, and that you are positive about the future.
- **Debate is welcome**. Go ahead and be controversial or say something different – SO LONG AS YOU BACK IT UP WITH FACTS. Also, don't be afraid to say no. Unless you clearly state that you disagree, it may be assumed that you agree with the interviewer.
- **Try not to overuse metaphors, aphorisms, anecdotes or clichés**. Many expressions or clichés do not translate directly or may not be understood in other parts of the world.
- Religion and belief are often considered as outside the realm of business or media in Western societies. Expressions referring to God's will and protection may seem strange to certain audiences. **Use religious expressions sparingly**.
- **Remain calm and composed**, even when excited or provoked. Outbursts of emotion or raising your voice are sometimes seen as a reflection of poor information, because many feel that a well-informed, knowledgeable speaker would remain cool and collected. Try to stick to the facts, use an even tone of voice and rely on explanation rather than passion to get your message across in a way that will resonate with this audience.

Five Guidelines for Reaching International Audiences

The Aspen Institute and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund developed a resource called *US in the World* designed to assist foreign policy experts, community activists, professional communicators, elected officials, educators and others who want to better engage other Americans on global issues. Their research, based on polling, focus groups and other techniques, resulted in the development of 20 recommendations for creating effective messages to talk to Americans about US Foreign Policy issues. These recommendations are available online at http://www.gii-exchange.org/guide/top_20/index.shtml.

Although these recommendations were developed for a specific purpose, there are several overarching themes that can be drawn from this research and that are applicable in creating messages that engage Western audiences more generally.

1. Describe the Broader Context Before Going Into Details

Set the scene for your news in ways that draw your audience in and makes them want to hear more. For instance, if you want to give examples of reconciliation projects between local groups in your region in the larger context of safeguarding security and opportunities for future generations, you could do so by saying *"We are working to create a peaceful future for our children"* or *"When I grew up in my multi-racial, multi-religious community we were welcomed into each other's homes, shared in the celebration of our different traditions and respected our difference. I want my children and grandchildren to experience the same feeling of security and acceptance in whatever community they grow up in."*

Focus on big issues that are familiar and relevant to international audiences, such as living free from violent conflict, cutting off terrorism at its roots, and bringing competing groups together to work to solve common problems – these are all big concepts that are important to Western audiences and therefore resonate with them and encourage them to read on or to put down the remote control.

Also, by tying your local issue e.g. armed violence in your city and countryside with global concerns e.g. greater peace and security in the world, you create a wider audience for your messages and a more familiar context for the rest of your arguments.

Getting at the Bigger Picture

Most people instinctively feel that dialogue efforts are a good thing, but promoting a small dialogue project in Alexandria or Kuala Lumpur won't get any airtime or print pickup unless it gets at the reasons why these discussions are important. For example:

- Does this event bring together interfaith groups that are representative of the larger international population, especially in light of continued tension between Muslim and Western cultures?
- Does this event serve as a success story that can be replicated in other parts of the world?
- Has the project led to a marked decrease in violence that has paved the way for national reforms, created international trade opportunities or had an effect on neighbouring groups or countries?

2. Focus on Issues that are Relevant to Foreign Audiences

Issues such as confessionally-divided electoral districts in the Middle East, religious pluralism under the state religion in Bangladesh or the curriculum in *pesantren* (religious schools in Indonesia), may be extremely important in your part of the world; however they may be alien, misunderstood or irrelevant to foreign or international audiences. Try to find issues that resonate with these audiences while describing what your project is attempting to do. Particularly if you are trying to influence government behaviour and policy-making, it is important to understand what your target government sees as its foreign policy priorities and what motivates its general public to lobby in favour of the important issues you are working on.

Americans, for example, are practical, action-oriented, output-focused people. In addition to wanting this type of response domestically, they also want this reflected in their foreign policy. By showing how your projects are effective at producing tangible results, and introducing simple steps others can take to help make a difference, you're likely to appeal to more people.

3. Keep it Simple

Keep things simple. This is where you want to remember the top 3 ideas that you developed in your messaging that you want to get across to viewers, listeners and readers around the world. Your audience may not work in your field or live in your region and likely don't know the specific details of local problems that could affect them at a more international level. For example, as a reconciliation advocate your key message for a broader public should not be something as specific as *"it is important for groups such as GPPAC, USIP and ICG to push for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution XYZ."* A more appropriate message might be something like, *"We've learned what works to help people reduce the tensions between communities. Let's join with our international partners to invest in effective solutions – like the institutionalisation of conflict resolution courses, or integrating diversity programmes into schools that provide introduction to the various faiths or ethnic groups in the region – and produce lifelong communication and problem-solving skills."*

4. Focus on Constructive Outputs

People want to help change the world for the better; however they are bombarded by negative stories in the media of all the terrible problems that our generation faces. Rather than listing off a bunch of negative statistics, start out with stories of the positive successes you have already achieved. Even if these successes take place on a small scale, share with audiences the possibility of replicating these successes on a larger scale throughout your region or even in different regions.

5. Stay Calm and Composed when Faced with Tough Questions or Criticism

You will appeal to the widest possible audience when you use reasonable, rational language. Coming across as angry, emotional, defensive or politically-biased could undermine your credibility with readers and listeners.

If you are responding to critics, begin with a positive spin. For example, *"The dialogue and reconciliation field has proven time and again that it has the tools and the constructive ability to ..."* then share with us your successful examples.

III. CHECKLISTS

This section includes a number of tear out checklists. These lists can be copied and used for each project you implement, or tacked to the wall for a quick and constant reminder.

For first time users, these lists will help to frame your thinking and break down key outreach processes into easy-to-complete tasks. For more seasoned users, they provide a reference to double-check your work before approaching the media and a visual reminder of the key steps in any media outreach programme.



Building a Media Outreach Plan

- Do you understand how your project fits into the larger picture? What is the big story? Why is it newsworthy? Where is the common ground?
- Have you identified the media outlets and individual practitioners that are most appropriate for your project/and target audience?
- Have you drafted three key messages you would like to get across to media who contact you or that you may contact as part of your outreach campaign?
- Have you included action items such as the development of a press release and/or an op-ed?
- Have you created one or two “sound bites” based on your key messages?
- Have you identified the best individual in the organization to speak to the press on this project and are they aware of the key messages and bigger story?
- Have you considered other low-cost, high-impact activities that can draw the media’s attention, such as events, publications or activities that are relevant and can easily be integrated into your initiative? Are they unique, creative, newsworthy?

**Helpful Hints*

There are many creative ways to attract media to your projects and to make your work newsworthy. Consider hosting award ceremonies or book releases. Issue press invitations to special events. Get your organization involved in other events that will be heavily covered by press. Use your imagination. Potential funders will also appreciate this resourcefulness and ingenuity.

**Helpful Hints*

Media outreach activities can appear overwhelming, especially the first time you do them. It may seem that there is not enough time to fit them in when you are already struggling to keep your organization afloat. The reality is that the payoff is huge relative to the amount of work. To keep it manageable, think about creating 1-page documents for each of your projects or key messages. While waiting for your next meeting, jot down a few key points about your latest study, your new project, frequently asked questions or a recent success story. Do it now! When it comes to creating a press release, writing an article or responding to a journalist, much of your work will already be done. Store these comments, or “talking points” in a prominent place where you can update them, add to them or refer to them quickly and easily.



Interview Preparation

This checklist helps to prepare for meetings or interviews with media.

- Do you know the time and location of your interview, or the phone number of the journalist if you are speaking with them over the phone? Do they have your phone number in case they need to contact you?
- Are you familiar with the journalist, their interests, previous interviews they have conducted with your organization and previous articles they have written?
- Do you know your organization's mission and vision so that you can incorporate them into this interview?
- Have you developed the three key points you would like the journalist to take away with them?
- Are you familiar with the details of your organization's project, the broader context as well as concrete success indicators that you can introduce into the interview? Are there any political, economic or social trends that make your project particularly timely?
- Do you know how your project fits into a bigger picture that the journalist can use as a hook in their article? Or into the story the journalist has already told you they are writing?
- Have you reviewed any potentially sensitive questions that may come up and how to respond?
- Are you familiar with recent and/or upcoming conferences or projects being carried out by your organization or in your field that might be of interest to the journalist or analyst?
- Do you have brochures, business cards, annual reports or other short documents that you can leave with the journalist to refresh their memory about your organization when they go back to write the story?

**Helpful Hints*

Developing a brief document in advance of each interview using this checklist as a template will provide you with a report containing key information such as journalists' backgrounds, their areas of interest and their interviewing styles. It can also help to focus your thoughts on the theme of the story or briefing and prepare for questions they may ask. You can update these documents after each interview and use them as valuable sources of information for future interviews. (See the section on Models and Templates for a tear out sample of this document).



Writing an Editorial or Opinion Piece (Op-Ed)

- Do you know who your audience is? Is it the general public, or policymakers and academics? Does your target audience match the audiences of the publications you've targeted for printing your article?
- Did you limit your article to no more than 1 major point?
- Is your article shorter than 750 words?
- Did you start off with a "hook" or a "grabber"? For example, does your opening sentence get people's attention and encourage them to read more?
- Is your position on the subject clear?
- Does your opinion/position on the topic appear in the first paragraph? (Unlike many writing formats where you build up to your opinion or conclusion after highlighting the arguments, an op-ed begins with this statement and then provides the supporting information).
- If you took out any mention of your organisation, would the article still stand alone? (Many editors who need to make cuts tend to cut this information first and they are looking for an opinion on a big issue that affects their readers – not a description of your association or your project.)
- Have you included constructive recommendations or highlighted opportunities for change?
- Is your article slightly controversial, giving a unique or unexpected perspective on the topic? Are you adding new information or a new point of view to the debate?
- Is your topic timely? Is it relevant with respect to the political, social, economic climate of the moment? Have you tied it to a recent event, policy-decision, or date?
- Is it clear why you are the expert on this? Have you included a one-sentence by-line that outlines your credentials?
- Have you demonstrated why people should care about this topic? What is the bigger picture? Why is it important to your reader?
- Did you include quotes from experts, facts and evidence to support your position? Are all controversial statements, accusations or opinions supported with numbers, statistics and/or facts?

**Helpful Hints*

Different publications have different requirements for editorial submissions. Make sure you find out what these are and stick to them. It would be a shame if your article was rejected simply because it exceeded the word limit or was in the wrong format. When possible, try to pitch your article idea to the opinion editor before submitting it.



Writing a Press Release

- Did you begin with a “hook” or “grabber” – an interesting fact or outcome - that encourages the journalist to read more? Are the first 10 words of your release the most important?
- Does the headline plus your introductory paragraph tell a compelling story?
- Is the information newsworthy?
- Is your press release one page long and definitely no longer than 400 words? Is it succinct and to the point?
- Does your formatting follow the standard press release format? (See the Models and Templates section of this guide for an example of this format).
- Did you start with the most important information and then move to the least? Did you begin with a brief description of the news and then move on to the facts, details and other supporting points?
- Is it possible to cut off the bottom half of the release and still provide journalists with sufficient information?
- Did you include expert quotes, facts and evidence to support your position? Did you stick to the facts and provide real-life examples?
- Can media representatives create their story based on the information you’ve provided?
- Did you remove any jargon, clichés or acronyms?
- Did you include your name, contact details, and a brief description of your organization at the bottom of the release?

**Helpful Hints*

Remember that your press release is not an advertisement. It is an opportunity to provide timely, newsworthy information to journalists that is relevant to their readers.



Preparing for a Press Conference

- Do you have something very new and interesting to announce, something that is bigger and more exciting than what you might cover in a press release?
- Have you determined what key points you want the media to take away with them and planned your conference presentations to highlight these messages?
- Are the location and time convenient for media (generally towards the middle of the work week between 11am and 1pm and always several hours before daily media deadlines and a few days before weekly or monthly deadlines)?
- Have you developed a clear, concise invitation to the press identifying what is newsworthy about the conference and sent it to media and other stakeholders at least one week before the event? Did you follow up with phone calls to key journalists and participants?
- Have you identified a solid moderator from your organization and 1 to 2 high level speakers whose participation will help to draw the media to your event?
- Do the speakers understand their roles?
- Have you rehearsed the conference with your speakers and moderator? Have you prepared your speakers with sound bites about your organizations and practised responses to potentially sensitive questions?
- Does your rehearsal fall within the 1 hour (ideally 45 minute) time limit?
- Have you prepared visual aids (handouts, press releases, studies, pictures, maps)?

**Helpful Hints*

The Q&A session following your brief presentation should be quick and lively. Make sure your answers are short and to the point, then ask for the next question.

**Helpful Hints*

Press conferences can be costly and time-consuming logistically. Think carefully about whether this is the best forum to get your message out and save it for your most newsworthy announcements.

IV. TIPS & TRICKS

Interviews – General Tips & Tricks

- **Be a knowledgeable source** on the topic and the field.
- **Be sensitive to reporters' interests and schedules.** Some will want to take their time or rush through the meeting. Ask how much time the journalist has before the meeting starts and be flexible if they change their mind and want more or less time. If the reporter changes the topic away from your news, answer their question and then transition back to your key messages.
- **Treat reporters like a potential donor.** Be respectful, helpful, professional, considerate and friendly. Go the extra mile to fulfil their requests. Work with them to understand the issues and get up to speed on new concepts.
- **Be friendly and relaxed.** Many reporters have an informal style, with the exception of a few hard-news reporters. Treat the interview like a fun yet informed conversation rather than a presentation.
- **Be prepared.** Take the time to find out about the journalist and what they tend to cover before you approach them.
- **Leave them with something.** Make sure to leave something with the journalist – your business card, brochures, project summaries and/or other short documents that they can refer back to if they are looking for additional information after the meeting. In addition, if you leave them with something, be it a small item with your logo or a just a common bond, they may be more likely to think about you when they next need a comment on something!
- **Be interested.** Go ahead and ask the reporter about themselves. What do they cover? What is their background in your field? Are they writing a specific story? If so, who else are they interviewing and what is their angle?
- **Don't lose your temper.** If the journalist disagrees or if they play devil's advocate, remain calm and rational. Clearly explain your perspective. They might be trying to get you to say something you didn't have planned, something emotional or controversial, something you don't want to say. Take a deep breath and remember your key points.
- **Be generous.** Many reporters will ask you what you think of other organizations in your field. They may even ask you about politicians or businesses. It is not necessary to give them undue praise, however be polite and accurate, and don't give the impression you are jealous of other organizations or individuals in your peer group.

Broadcast Interviews

- **Be relevant.** Broadcast opportunities, due to their short turnaround time and segment time, are more challenging to prepare for. You may want to scan the news headlines for a few days prior to the interview to learn of any current new stories that you might be asked to address.
- **Make sure your message is more “visible” than you are.** Don’t wear black, white or patterns. Don’t wear flashy jewellery or accessories that might distract watchers from your message. Act natural and remember to breathe and blink and use some normal gestures such as nodding or small hand gestures.
- **Remember your sound bites.** This is an opportunity for you to get across one or two key points. Make sure they are the ones that you worked so hard to prepare as part of your messaging.

Opinion Pieces and Editorials – Tips & Tricks

- **Get the timing right.** Editorial or comment editors are looking for educated, well-reasoned, accurate opinions on timely themes that are making headline news – i.e. an anniversary of an event, policy that is in the making, or a phenomenon that is occurring as you write. Not only should you write in a timely matter, you should also submit your article as quickly as possible. If you wait a week, your article may be yesterday’s news.
- Every publication has different **guidelines**. Take the time to find out what they are so that your article isn’t rejected before someone has even had time to read the content. Some publications have restrictive words counts and rarely consider articles longer than 750 words. Some expect a certain style or format. For example, the New York Times guidelines can be found on the website at the following link: <http://www.nytimes.com/ref/membercenter/help/opedsubmit.html>. Click on the article written by the op-ed editor David Shipley for his own views on what makes a good article.
- **Create an outline** of your article first, highlighting your key points, and then fill in the details, i.e. don’t just sit down and write your thoughts and feelings.
- Particularly with well-known publications with international audiences, who the author is sometimes has a significant impact on whether or not it is run. **Consider ghost-writing** the article on behalf of such an expert and submitting it – WITH THEIR APPROVAL – under their name.
- **Length is important.** Keep your piece between 650 and 750 words maximum. This will help you focus your message, and the readers’ attention, on your key ideas. It will also increase the chance your article is run.
- Keep your sentences easy to read, your paragraphs short (no more than three sentences) and your **style** simple and straightforward.
- Develop **a good working relationship with the op-ed editor**. Thank them personally for running your piece and work with them politely if they ask for changes, revisions or clarification.
- Include a short **cover letter** (one or two paragraphs) that explains why your article is timely and of interest to readers of this particular publication. You may even want to submit an abstract of the article to the opinion editor before writing your article to make sure it will meet the needs of that particular publication
- **Include Common Ground messaging** which encourages cooperative, rather than adversarial, solutions to the challenges you’re addressing
- **Submit your articles for inclusion in our Common Ground News Service (CGNews)**. SFCG publishes two weekly news services on Muslim-Western and Arab-Israeli relations which are distributed to individuals and media outlets around the world who frequently reprint our articles. See the “Useful Links and Additional Resources” section of this guide for more guidelines on writing common ground articles. We welcome your submissions.

Press Releases - Tips & Tricks

- Like an op-ed, a press release has to **tell a newsworthy story**.
- Unlike an op-ed, it need not focus so much on the larger debate, but instead **focus on the who, what, where, when and why of your news**.
- Even if an editor does not read the second half of your press release, they should still have all the information they require to understand your news. As a result, your press release should **be top-heavy**. Begin with the most important information and move down to the detail.
- **Adopt the industry-accepted format and style**. A press release is shorter than an op-ed piece, ideally one page and absolutely no longer than two. It does however require the same simple text, short paragraphs and top-heavy structure. It should be possible to cut off the bottom half of the release and still provide journalists with sufficient information.
- **Layout is extremely important** for a press release. It should follow specific guidelines. Your press release should be sent out on your organization's letterhead. See the Models and Templates section for a sample press release layout.
- Make sure to have *at least* one other person **proof read your final press release** for substance, style and layout.

Press Conferences - Tips & Tricks

- In terms of set-up, **a press conference looks like a panel discussion**. The moderator and 1 or 2 speakers sit at a table at the front of the room.
- The **ideal time** to host a press conference is in the middle of the work week, avoiding media deadlines. For Western press, the best time would generally be midday Tuesday through Thursday.
- **Be prepared** to greet technical staff and camera people or photographers 15 minutes prior to the start time.
- The **role of the moderator** is to welcome guests, introduce speakers and facilitate the Q&A in order to keep everything to the prescribed time limit.
- **Keep to time limits**. Begin as close to the scheduled time as possible, and not later than 10 minutes after the scheduled start time.
- None of the speakers' statements should exceed **10 minutes**.
- **Q&A time is important** so watch the clock closely and don't forget to open the floor for questions for the media.
- **Market your organization**. Remember that your logo and organization's name should be displayed prominently behind or in front of the table. Props and other visual aids also look good on camera.
- It's important to thank your guests for coming and to **signal the end** of the conference, on time.

Difficult Questions & Bad Press

Handling Tough Questions

During the interview process, there is a possibility that you may be asked to field a tough question from a reporter. There are ways to effectively address these difficult questions. Listed below are some tips:

- **Ask the reporter to repeat or elaborate on the question** so you are certain what is being asked. This will help you to avoid unnecessary or irrelevant explanations and new issues which could hurt rather than help you.
- **Shift the focus.** If the reporter's questions or tone seems challenging, you can slow things down and shift the focus to them by asking *"That's interesting, what brought you to that conclusion?"*
- **Don't become confrontational or argumentative.** The last thing you want to do is to insult the reporter – as they always have the last word...i.e. the article or report! One way to deflect an aggressive question is to calmly reply, *"Good question! I've heard that perspective before. I have some evidence/information/facts that may suggest a different picture..."*
- If you don't know the answer to the question or if you aren't sure, **you can delay responding.** Simply say, *"What a great question. I have the information back in the office, or with a colleague. I will get that information from them and call you back in a few hours. Will that be enough time for you to meet your deadline?"* And then be sure to get back to them within 24 hours.
- If you are asked a question to which the response is confidential, use the same response to delay the reporter. Then take the time after the call to **calmly develop an answer to questions about confidential information.**
- If you do say something that you didn't mean to say or that could hurt your story or your work, **approach the journalist to have the material changed.** Sometimes the journalist may be amenable to your request.

Bad Press

Although bad press is rare, it does happen from time to time. It is not possible to “undo” bad press, however there are some things you can do:

- If a reporter contacts you to warn you they are going to run an unflattering story, **ask for details**. Get all the details that they have. What story are they going to run? Where did they get their information?
- Take the time to **prepare a response**. The worst thing you can do is reply when you are angry and frustrated. After listening to the perspective of the reporter and asking questions, tell them you would like to pull together some facts and information and send it to them by email. Tell them exactly when you will send it to them. And that you would also be happy to speak with them directly, once you have the materials at hand, to explain your point of view and help them to answer any outstanding questions.
- Look at the section on “**transition language**” on page 8. It will help you to address a sensitive topic and bring the conversation back to your own messages and supporting information.
- If the news has already gone out, contact the reporter or journalist who wrote or presented the news and **ask for an opportunity to give your side of the story**. If there is any incorrect information, now is the time to ask them to run retractions or corrections. This will show the journalist/reporter that you are approachable and willing to help them get the right information and put a “human” face on the organization or work that they have criticized. Next time they may think twice before giving you bad press, or contact you beforehand to get your contribution to the story.
- **Write an editorial or opinion piece** to the paper presenting your side of the story. Do not attack the individual who wrote the initial piece. Instead, provide your counter-argument logically with supporting facts and evidence.
- **Approach alternative media sources** that might be interested in running a story contrary to that of their competitors. Offer to provide an alternative perspective and be prepared to back up this offer.

V. MODELS & TEMPLATES

Press Release Template

<p>(your organization's letterhead)</p> <hr/>
<p>FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:</p>
<p>TITLE (bold, all caps)</p>
<p>Date – The first sentence should grab the attention of readers and make them want to read more.</p>
<p>The most important and newsworthy details should appear first and supporting detail can follow.</p>
<p>Who, what, when, where and why should all be answered.</p>
<p>Include 2 or 3 quotes in the next few paragraphs.</p>
<p>Your release should ideally fit on one page and include no more than 5-7 paragraphs.</p>
<p>-END-</p>
<p>Contact: (name, title, email, organisation and all relevant phone numbers so that media can reach you easily, at any time, for more information or a quote if necessary)</p>

The next page shows a sample press release that was distributed during the 2006 media outreach training workshop in Beirut.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

ARAB PEACE-BUILDERS MAKE THEIR PRESENCE KNOWN

Beirut, June 8, 2006 - Arab peace-builders refuse to allow images of burning cars and explosions to define the Middle East. Women and men of diverse faiths and political views from across the Arab world met this week in Lebanon to learn to communicate better with local and international audiences.

"Reconciliation and conflict resolution experts in the region need to take responsibility for getting their stories out," said Leena El-Ali, director of *Partners in Humanity* at *Search for Common Ground* (SFCG) and the organizer of this workshop.

The training dealt with the unique challenges facing civil society in this region. "Some participants have compelling stories of peace but fear arrest or persecution if they make these stories public," said Oussama Safa, general director of the *Lebanese Center for Policy Studies* (LCPS), providing local training expertise.

Rula Salameh, a participant from the Palestinian organization the *Middle East Non-Violence and Democracy* (MEND) centre agreed, "We need to find creative ways to overcome the obstacles and to get our news out, to stop making excuses and to use the opportunities we have."

Participants came from across the region, including such conflict-ridden countries as Iraq and Palestine, and work with civil society organizations, universities or religious institutes to try to overcome conflict between faiths, communities and cultures. Their work focuses on such diverse issues as Muslim-Western relations, women's participation, youth leadership, minority rights, and interfaith dialogue as a means to promote peace both locally and between their communities and the rest of the world.

Complementing the local component, co-trainer Hana Fazal from the *Media Diversity Institute* in the U.K. provided participants with the best tips for reaching out to international audiences during the 5-day workshop.

Search for Common Ground is a non-profit conflict resolution organization that aims to transform the way people deal with conflict. Founded in 1982, Search for Common Ground has offices in 18 countries around the world, in addition to a variety of multi-regional programmes such as *Partners in Humanity*, which works to improve communication and understanding between Muslim and Western cultures.

- END -

Contact:

Leena El-Ali,

Director, *Partners in Humanity: for constructive and vibrant Muslim-Western relations*

Search for Common Ground

Mobile: XXX

Email: lel-ali@sfcg.org



Interview Resource Document

Interview Preparation & Institutional Knowledge

Journalist/Reporter: Name

Interview Details: Time, date and location of the interview.

Media outlet: Which publication or TV/radio station are they working for?

Journalist/Report Background: A quick internet search will help to identify the types of stories they usually cover. What angle do they take? What topics do they usually write on? Are they usually complementary or critical of your type of work?

Story/angle: Feel comfortable asking the journalist or reporter what story they are writing and what they want you to comment on. Sometimes they will be more forthcoming than others but they should provide you with a general idea of what they are writing on and how your comments will fit in. This will help you to customize your comments for their audience – so you have greater control over your message while still bridging your key messages with the topic they are writing about.

Your Messaging: The key messages, sound bites, etc that you want to communicate in this interview, but customized to the journalist's key story or angle. If the reporter has indicated which questions they will ask, you could draft answers for them here. Otherwise try to imagine what they might want you to comment on and answer them here.

Potentially Controversial Issues: If, due to the topic of the story or the interviewer's background, you feel that they may raise some controversial or potentially damaging issues, consider how you or your organization's spokesperson might address these.

Notes: Since you will be keeping this document as a resource for the future when you are doing a similar type of interview or are interviewing again with the same reporter, this is where you can add any unexpected events, lessons learnt or feedback you want to record.

VI. USEFUL LINKS & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Third Party Resources

1. The full text of joint Aspen Center/Rockefeller Center publication *U.S. in the World: Talking Global Issues with Americans* can be found at: www.usintheworld.org.
2. Several resources can be found in the “Keeping Current” section of U.S. in the World’s Website: <http://www.usintheworld.org/current/SUPresources.php>
3. The Jossey-Bass Guide to Strategic Communications for Nonprofits: **A Step-by-Step Guide to Working with the Media to Generate Publicity, Enhance Fundraising**, Bass Non-profit & Public Management Series by Kathy Bonk, Henry Griggs, Emily Tynes can be found at most online book retailers.
4. *The NGO Media Outreach: Using the Media as an Advocacy Tool*, produced by the Coalition for the International Criminal Court includes a **step-by-step guide to developing media contacts**: can be found at http://www.iccnw.org/documents/CICC_MediaOutreachManual_Sep03.pdf.

Common Ground News Service Guide for Writers

The Common Ground News Service (CGNews) is an independent source of news and opinion that disseminates fresh, solution-oriented articles to promote constructive perspectives and encourage dialogue. We publish and promote articles by local and international experts on current Middle East issues and on the relationship between Western and Muslim societies worldwide. The service is a non-profit initiative of Search for Common Ground, an international non-governmental organisation headquartered in Washington and Brussels, whose mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict -- away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions.

CGNews is a weekly news service published in six languages – Arabic, English, French, Hebrew, Indonesian and Urdu. It is distributed to hundreds of media outlets around the world and to over 23,000 individual subscribers which include policy-makers, think-tanks, diplomats, journalists, activists, academics and students, among others. Launched in 2001, CGNews spans linguistic, geographic and political barriers to distribute articles to media outlets and individuals that may otherwise never benefit from such exchanges, much less cooperate by contributing to and reprinting from the same news service.

CGNews articles include both original, commissioned pieces as well as reprints sourced from a diverse set of publications, and our articles have been reprinted over 10,000 times in a varied list of over 1000 media outlets including *The Christian Science Monitor (US)*, *The Washington Post (US)*, *Chicago Tribune (US)*, *The Washington Times (US)*, *Al Hayat (Saudi Arabia/UK)*, *Arab News (Saudi Arabia)*, *The Jakarta Post*, *The Guardian (UK)*, *Birmingham Post (UK)*, *Pakistan Link*, *Qamar Online (Pakistan)*, *The Daily Star (Lebanon)*, *L'Orient le Jour (Lebanon)*, *Al Arab Online (UK)*, *Al Wasat (Bahrain)*, *The Yemen Times*, *Al Jazeera Online*, *The Jordan Times*, *Al Ghad (Jordan)*, *Al Ittihad (Abu Dhabi)*, *Haaretz (Israel)*, *Maan News Agency (Palestine)*, *AMIN (Palestine)*, *Surabaya Post (Indonesia)* and *Hidayatullah.com (Indonesia)*.

The CGNews board of editors comprises individuals in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Europe, South Asia and North America with extensive knowledge of the Middle East, issues relevant to Muslim-Western and/or Arab-Israeli relations, and a “common ground” orientation.

CGNews appears in two editions. One is *CGNews-Middle East*, featuring solution-oriented articles primarily on the Arab-Israeli conflict, published in Arabic, English and Hebrew. The other is *CGNews-Partners in Humanity*, which addresses issues pertaining to Muslim-Western relations and is published in Arabic, English, French, Indonesian and Urdu. The following information provides general guidelines that apply to both but were written specifically with examples for the latter.

The CGNews – Partners in Humanity Mission:

Today, with the exception of a small number of people around the world, there is little direct exchange of perspectives between Western and Muslim individuals, communities and nations. Thus, in our global community where news travels fast and radical elements have learnt to use modern media effectively, those like Search for Common Ground, who are working for peace, reconciliation and a more secure world, have adopted media as a major tool in their repertoire.

CGNews – Partners in Humanity seeks to distribute, as widely as possible, timely articles of the highest quality that help promote a shift to positive and constructive thinking

about how to address deteriorating Muslim-Western relations. This initiative aims to bring about a paradigm shift in the thinking of readers of mainstream media on Muslim-Western relations by promoting thoughtful analysis of issues as broadly as possible.

CGNews-Partners in Humanity believes that the ability and willingness to deal peacefully and constructively with those issues distancing Muslim communities from their Western counterparts are not the domain only of policy-makers and bureaucrats. Grassroots projects and cooperative efforts abound globally, though they rarely make their way into mainstream media and onto the desks of decision-makers and interested individuals. Our subscription list includes thousands who stem from a long list of professions, and includes over 1000 media outlets.

CGNews Authors:

Anyone with an interest in Muslim-Western affairs is invited to submit articles to *CGNews – Partners in Humanity* through our website – www.commongroundnews.org, or via email – cgnewspih@sfcg.org. Regular contributors include scholars, religious leaders, writers, policy-makers, civil society practitioners, dialogue and reconciliation activists, economists, artists and musicians, amongst others.

We also encourage young writers – the thought leaders of the future – to submit articles for our ~Youth Views~ column. Each week, we select and distribute one article by a writer under 27 years of age.

Style & Format:

Word Limit: The word limit for all articles is a maximum of 750 words in order to comply with the word limits of many major publications, making it easier for them to reprint our articles.

Language: We have the capacity to receive articles in Arabic, English, French, Indonesian and Urdu. However for review and editing purposes, we prefer to receive them in English where possible. We edit all English-language articles in accordance with British language conventions for international distribution.

Style: Since we are aiming for widespread distribution, articles should be written in a journalistic style that is appropriate for mainstream consumption: for a reader who is intelligent but unfamiliar with your topic. We encourage writers to dig deeply into any given topic, addressing the complexities of issues and participating in meaningful dialogue. Articles should not read like essays but like op-eds, and paragraphs should be kept short.

Terminology: Keep jargon, clichés and technical terms to a minimum to facilitate translation into other languages. We recognise that many foreign words have no equivalent in other languages. In these cases, when you use a foreign word, please put it in italics and provide a brief explanation in English.

When it comes to Muslim-Western relations, many terms have been co-opted or demonised. Words such as jihadist or Islamist are rarely used to mean struggling for one's faith, and seeking a formal role for religion in a political system, respectively. Instead they are irresponsibly and inaccurately used as synonymous with terrorist, militant, activist of fundamentalist.

In order to reduce the misuse and misunderstanding of such terms. Search for Common Ground has created a terminology document outlining the most frequently misused terms and appropriate alternatives. This document is available online at http://www.sfcg.org/documents/Muslim-Western_Terminology.pdf

Guidelines:

A common ground article:

- Provides constructive and solution-oriented perspectives and concrete steps for collaboration and understanding where possible
- Seeks areas of common ground or common goals and interests
- Promotes dialogue and cooperation
- Emphasises positive examples of interaction between Western and Muslim cultures
- Expresses constructive self-criticism
- Instils hope and optimism in readers that non-adversarial solutions to conflict are possible
- Highlights positive experiences between individuals that humanise the other and offer hope
- Contributes to understanding between Muslim and Western cultures

Examples:

Sample themes and approaches include:

- Highlighting organisations and people working for a better national, regional or global environment
- Interpreting information, events, polls and analyses in ways that encourage rational, moderate and positive thinking
- Educating readers on specific non-adversarial approaches of conflict resolution
- Illustrating to readers that “common ground” is not about settling for the lowest possible denominator but seeking a higher denominator
- Informing readers about unheard of dialogue projects around the world
- Elaborating on non-Western or Muslim conflict resolution perspectives and theories to contribute to understanding of Muslim-Western relations
- Encouraging policy-makers and international decision-makers to adopt more conciliatory approaches in their policies
- Accentuating the shared humanity and interdependence of humankind
- Dispelling myths and negative stereotypes, and sharing information on widely misunderstood or controversial concepts that serve as obstacles to respect, cooperation or understanding

Copyright & Permissions:

An author bears sole responsibility for his/her article’s content and is expected to show intellectual honesty (i.e. no plagiarism) and accuracy (i.e. fact checking), and to identify all information taken from other sources. We expect that all submitted article are unique and have not been published elsewhere.

If your article is selected for publication in *CGNews – Partners in Humanity*, anyone is free to reprint the article so long as they attribute the article to both the author and to *CGNews*.

Submission Process:

Articles can be submitted through our website at www.commongroundnews.org, or by email to cgnewspih@sfcg.org.

Review Process:

In order to deepen our approach and ensure the best long-term results, the *CGNews-Partners in Humanity's* editorial board consists of 7 editors based in *Beirut, Geneva, Islamabad, Jakarta, Toronto and Washington*. Collectively, the team has extensive and nuanced knowledge of the points of contention in Muslim-Western relations. These individuals consult, via email, on all articles that are published by *CGNews-Partners in Humanity* to ensure the highest quality output.

We publish articles from a wide variety of authors, each requiring their own detailed review process:

Unsolicited Articles

All articles that have been submitted but have not been solicited for publication undergo a peer-review process by the team of *CGNews* editors. Submissions for *CGNews-Partners in Humanity's ~Youth Views~* column as well as regular articles are welcome. The review process can take between 2 days and two weeks depending on the timeliness of the article.

Solicited Articles

- a) *CGNews* publishes multi-author series on special themes several times throughout the year. In these cases, the editorial board solicits articles from local and international experts on specific themes. The topic is often predetermined by *CGNews* editors.
- b) *CGNews* also requests standalone, non-series articles from specific authors on a topic within their expertise, often determined by the writer. Our *~Youth Views~* editor also approaches young writers and helps develop their topics where appropriate.

CGNews editors give feedback on submissions, and may offer suggestions on developing them further or ensuring they meet our common ground guidelines. Any editing - for length, content or clarity - is collaborative; we ensure that we have full agreement from the author on a definitive version before publication.

Distribution mechanisms:

There are three ways we encourage widespread distribution and readership:

a) *Media Clients and their Multiplier Effect:* By making our articles available to all publications, including electronic publications and online media portals, we access their readers and an audience we may not otherwise reach. While it is impossible for us to track 100% of our reprints, since few outlets report back to us when using an article and since many outlets are not on the internet to facilitate our tracking process, our research nonetheless reveals very successful reprint rates.

b) *Direct Subscription across Languages:* *CGNews - Partners in Humanity* is sent to thousands of individual subscribers around the world through e-mail, about a hundred of which are media outlets. Recipients include government officials, diplomats,

academics, members of the defence community, journalists, civil society leaders and others who have an interest in the West's relationship with Muslim countries and communities.

c) *Access through the Internet:* All issues of *CGNews – Partners in Humanity* can be found on the CGNews website www.commongroundnews.org. An archive of past editions is structured in an easy-to-navigate way with original material classified and highlighted.

About SFCG

Founded in 1982, Search for Common Ground (www.sfcg.org) works to transform the way the world deals with conflict - away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative problem solving. We work with local partners to find culturally appropriate means to strengthen societies' capacity to deal with conflicts constructively: to understand the differences and act on the commonalities.



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