

**DEALING WITH THE MEDIA IN EMERGENCIES – SOME DO'S AND DON'TS**  
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**09 October 2001**

Some of us are seeking advice on how best to deal with the media in these difficult times. Here are some tips -- do's and don'ts -- that I have put together using a variety of sources such as the UNICEF Information Manual, UNHCR's Handbook for Emergencies and the UNICEF/ESARO Emergency Preparedness and Response Training document. PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS WORK IN PROGRESS -- comments are invited.

**DO...**

1. Frequently refer to UNICEF's mandate, mission and guiding principles, stressing UNICEF's child rights focus, secularity, political and ideological neutrality
2. Stress that UNICEF is deeply concerned about children who are affected by conflicts and emergencies and that we are there to do all we can to reduce the harmful impact of the situation on their health, psycho-social state and development, welfare and on life itself. For example...
  - children get lost or are separated from parents and family with resultant loss of family life and care; exposure to cruelty, abuse and neglect; risk of being forced into hazardous/exploitative labour
  - Children may not know who they are -- they can lose their identity and nationality; privacy and confidentiality; no access to information about themselves.
  - Children may not know their country and culture, lose their knowledge/memory of their natural social and cultural setting
  - Children witness terrible atrocities -- they are not protected from conflict situations; they can lose their dignity and respect; they are subject to inhumane treatment; they stand to lose their childhood.
  - Children are born and raised in, and often confined to, refugee camps, with all the above risks as well as loss of identity and nationality, no freedom of movement, no access to information, limited (or no) primary education and preparation for repatriation; loss of freedom of thought, belief and religion, and to meet with others; no fair treatment under juvenile justice.
  - Children are militarized -- exposed to violent, cruel and dangerous situations; made to do life-threatening work; risk of abduction; risk of corporal punishment and sexual abuse; restricted rest, leisure and play.
  - Physical and sexual abuse are common, with girls at special risk of all the above plus risk of early pregnancy, STIs, HIV-AIDS, stigmatization
  - Children miss out on education opportunities
  - Children may be forced to head the household
3. UNICEF tries to safeguard child-friendly spaces through psychosocial support and guidance, child protection and basic education
4. Whenever possible, speak out on behalf of the children, this will gain respect and sympathy for your mission
5. Stress that while UNICEF is responding to the situation by providing emergency assistance, we are essentially a development organization and are there to help the government and the community meet their longer-term goals.
6. Through the above, you will uphold UNICEF's hard-earned fair reputation, and by doing so, will support UNICEF's difficult role of having sometimes to act as 'honest broker' between combatants

7. Keep communication lines open between yourself and your colleagues back in the office and beyond. This will help keep our work transparent and honest, and will reduce stress on yourself by sharing the burden.

8. Work on the principle that the best publicity ultimately comes from sound programmes and honest provision of information, not from hype and self-promotion.

9. Support your team and do not be shy to point out what UNICEF is doing/has done to assist. Take the press to the site if this is feasible.

10. To minimize the probability of your being mis-quoted, precede your meeting with the press with a written statement, or follow up with one without delay.

11. In the early days of an emergency, when little information is available, quotes from the UNICEF representative, regional director and executive director, and from UNICEF press releases, will be helpful to journalists. If you have access to the internet, check the UNICEF website and intranet frequently. If in doubt about what/how much information to give out, consult your supervisor.

12. Be quick to establish communication with sources of information at the emergency scene and among other UN agencies and partners. Keep up-to-date estimates of the affected population and proportion of children (please be gender aware here and disaggregate your statistics by sex) and women; the number of people UNICEF is helping and for what period of time; descriptions of UNICEF assistance, their quantities and value; where supplies come from and how, when and where they arrived, how they are being distributed, and the challenges being faced.

13. Mention the donors whenever you can. Be generous in giving credit to active partners.

14. If the press is around, especially with cameras, and there are no reasons for maintaining a low profile, do wear a UNICEF cap, t-shirt or badge in order to make our work more visible to the public and our donors. Interacting with children when the cameras are rolling conveys a caring, child-friendly image of the organization and its people. Make sure that UNICEF equipment, transport and supplies are prominently marked with the UNICEF name and logo. Since UNICEF supplies have decals already attached, ensure that they are positioned so as to be seen by the cameras.

15. Make yourself accessible to journalists 24 hours a day. If you have something to say, be proactive in seeking out journalists. Often they can be found in the lounges and bars of hotels, waiting for people like you who can give them authentic information. Journalists like to meet UNICEF people who are compatriots or who speak their language. Note their names and affiliations and inform your supervisor about your contacts.

16. Be friendly with the press. Look at the interviewer. Be relaxed, appear confident and in control. Keep answers short and to the point. Be positive. If in front of a camera, make and maintain eye contact with the interviewer, not the camera. Hold a steady gaze. Wear suitable, subdued-coloured clothes. Avoid stripes. If in the field, wear casual, clean clothes. Check your appearance before going in front of the camera -- hair, buttons, zips? Consider your presentation in advance -- make your most important points first (be mindful that the editor is likely to cut chunks out of the interview). Before you begin, discuss with the interviewer what line the discussion will take.

17. Arrange a system for rapid clearance of press releases or advisories, making sure that the Representative or the officers responsible for clearance (e.g. the information officer) are always available so that emergency releases are not unduly delayed. Reach an understanding on how to handle any information that has not been confirmed or that must be withheld, and how to deal with controversial issues.

18. Information officers must keep partners informed about UNICEF press releases, advisories and statements. If the UNICEF position varies significantly from the picture being given by agency partners, sort out the problem before going public, but stand by the facts you have verified. Where there is doubt, double-check and get verification from more than one source. Temporary staff without UNICEF or UN background are often engaged in emergencies. Sometimes they will be the only available UNICEF spokespersons. The information officer must see to it that all emergency staff understand inter-agency ground rules for dealing with the media, as well as UNICEF's special need for fast and accurate information for public release.

19. Brief colleagues in preparation for press interviews. These should be arranged when a UNICEF officer returns from the site, or done by radio or telephone to the scene, if possible.

20. Journalists are eager to reach the affected scene. If you can, offer a place for a journalist on an aircraft or vehicle carrying supplies, this will be greatly appreciated. You should be strategic here in your choice of journalist -- pick the most influential or the one most closely associated with development-oriented media outlets, but do not imply or expect that this will influence ("buy") coverage favourable to UNICEF.

#### DON'T...

1. Never take sides in a political or religious discussion. If pressed, state that UNICEF is there to uphold the best interests of the child.

2. Avoid hype and use of jargon or overly technical language. Avoid alarmist and emotional language in briefings and press releases and advisories. Just state the facts. Do not make evaluations, comparisons, speculations or predictions -- if made at all, they should be in quotes from identified expert sources.

3. Avoid associating yourself with problems or issues outside the humanitarian role of UNICEF.

4. Don't make unnecessary comments about matters not directly related to UNICEF concerns. Do not comment on policies or actions of the government or other agencies. Avoid making judgemental statements.

5. Don't seek out the press unless you have specific, useful information to share and without consulting your information officer or supervisor

6. At the same time, never refuse to speak with a media person as this can convey the impression that you have something to hide (many journalists are very sensitive to such reactions)

7. Never lie to the media and do not provide figures unless you are confident that they are accurate. Always cite sources for any figures you release. If the story has not been accurate, phone or write to the reporter with the correct facts of the matter. Do not exaggerate the UNICEF contribution to any operation involving the host government, local authorities, international agencies, and national and international NGOs. Do not claim sole credit for UNICEF for operations that are shared, and do not forget to mention the donor if there is one.

8. Remember that the media work to strict deadlines. Speed is all-important to journalists. Do not keep them waiting.

9. In television interviews, remember the following pointers: do not wear striped clothing, loud ties or other inappropriate clothing; don't wear sunglasses or jewellery; do not move your eyes about, instead let them rest on your interviewer; don't look into the camera; avoid jargon, pompous, bureaucratic language and avoid profanities; don't smoke; don't fidget or fiddle with pens, lighters or other objects, such

mannerisms show up prominently on TV; don't say "I think" too often, it sounds as if you are uncertain of your subject.

10. Do not attempt to influence journalists or 'buy' coverage favourable to UNICEF by providing assistance e.g. a seat on an aircraft or vehicle. This betrays a dishonest approach and is likely to backfire and do more damage than good.

11. Don't beg or complain in order to get your story used, just rely on facts and honest provision of information. Conversely, don't ask for a story to be killed or suppressed. Attempts at censorship will backfire and are likely to generate immediate unwanted consequences, such as stepped-up investigation of the matter you wanted suppressed, and an unfavourable story on your attempts to suppress it.

12. Because UNICEF cooperates with journalists, we run the risk of being identified with negative coverage that may anger the government and other partners and could strain the relationship. In sensitive situations, take care to not to provide journalists with comments that could be used to link UNICEF to criticism or negative coverage. Never lower your guard when in general or casual conversation with journalists -- remember they are on the job 24 hours a day -- as are we!

13. UNICEF has always been free to conduct independent information and advocacy. However, today's emergencies are increasingly complex and demand responses that depend on coordinated, inter-agency teamwork. Be mindful that breaking ranks with the joint operation in an attempt to draw more attention to UNICEF's role will sour inter-agency relations and convince donors that the UN agencies do not cooperate well with each other. Donors and the media are alert for evidence of slow and bureaucratic response, waste, duplication and lack of coordination among relief agencies -- do not help provide such evidence!

14. Reporting violence against UNICEF staff members demands particular care. Premature or emotional reactions through the media could put lives at risk and be hurtful to families. Never give out information in haste. Great care must be taken both with the wording of public statements and the timing. They must be neutral in tone -- avoid subjective language. For example, use the words "shot and killed" , not "murdered" or "executed". People seized by government or opposition forces should be reported "detained" or "being held", not described as "hostages" or "prisoners". In describing opposition groups, use their names, do not describe them as "rebels" or 'terrorists'. It is essential that no public announcement be made by UNICEF until we have positive identification of victims and confirmation of the circumstances, if possible by independent sources.