

Media Relations: Tips from leading Azerbaijani experts



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Introduction

Media relations is a universal skill. There are standard techniques, or variations of them, that tend to work in almost any place - and methods that can be guaranteed to fail almost anywhere. Learn the correct techniques, and you will be able to communicate effectively with the media in your home country, or in any other for that matter. The Media Diversity Institute provides international expertise in media relations to Azerbaijani NGOs through manuals and training workshops.

But in every country there are always local idiosyncrasies that can make the difference between merely achieving a good working relationship with the media, and harnessing its power in ways that make your organization really stand out from the rest. These are the things that no-one not from 'here' - wherever here happens to be - can think of. Things relating to local tradition, culture or sometimes simply habit.

For this reason MDI has invited a selection of people from Azerbaijan to write a series of tips based on local experience. Some of them are journalists and editors who regularly seek or receive information from NGOs. Some of them are NGO managers with successful publicity track records. Others are public relations specialists who have made careers advising clients on skills similar to those outlined in this manual. Some of the addenda writers are more academically oriented, while others are more practical in nature. All are Azerbaijanis, with great experience of working in or with the Azerbaijani media.

Not all of them agree with each other. Nor does MDI necessarily agree with everything that each has written¹. But each of them has something interesting - and useful - to say.

We hope that, used in conjunction with the universal techniques described in MDI's other media relations manuals and training workshops, their experience will prove valuable to you and your organisation.

1. NOTE: MDI believes that journalists should never accept gifts or payments of any kind, because this fatally undermines their objectivity - and therefore their willingness and ability to report the truth at all times. MDI believes that NGOs which seek short-term gain by offering journalists gifts, damage the development of the media in their countries.

1. Public relations primer for Azeri non-profit organizations

*By Namik Heydarov,
public relations manager, Internews Azerbaijan*

1. WHAT IS PUBLIC RELATIONS?

Public relations (PR) management comprises a set of strategies and tactics designed to:

- build solid reputation
- help strengthen relationships with key audiences
- deal with crises effectively
- improve fund-raising capacity

2. COMMUNICATE

Communication and dialogue lie at the heart of public relations. Don't be afraid to talk to journalists and people around you about your programs, activities, success stories and even problems. You never know who can help you in times of crisis. Non-verbal messages are very powerful, sometimes even more powerful than words:

- a smile shows pleasure in dealing with a person
- a smart and clean appearance communicates a professional image
- a lack of eye contact implies a lack of interest.

3. IMAGE

A good organizational image is founded on substance and its creation should be more than a cosmetic exercise. Why is image important?

- people are more likely to do business with you
- donors are more likely provide funding
- you can attract better staff
- media and the public trust you to tell the truth
- you are more likely to be believed in times of crisis

4. JOURNALISTS

Maintain strong relationships with journalists; organize successful media events, and monitor coverage to ensure that your message is being conveyed.

Draw up a list of journalists and correspondents to make contact with and then telephone to introduce yourself. Invite journalists to lunch or out for coffee so that you can get to know them better. Sometimes, your friends, family members or colleagues may know one or two journalists in the area, who in turn could introduce you to a couple of other journalists. This is a way to build your "network" of journalists.

Consider organizing a formal media visit to which you can invite reporters you want to get to know. Organize site visits to demonstrate your work in action and in keep in mind the following:

- the idea is to bring everyone together - the media and key representatives from your organization - so that you can pitch your story and any follow up interview at the same time. Have quiet rooms available for media interviews after the event, and ensure that staff members, giving interviews are fully briefed.
- journalists are busy people. They need to go away with a good story.
- all journalists like exclusive news, but good stories should be shared, rather than all given to your favourite reporter.
- journalists may often waste your time, but wasting theirs is never an option if a good relationship is to be maintained.
- deadlines are vitally important to the media and should be treated with the greatest respect, so if you promise to provide information to a journalist by certain date, do not be late.
- understand how people in the press, radio and television work, and talk to the journalists about THEIR work; it will show that you care and establish more than just professional relations between you and a particular journalist.
- some journalists (particularly from television stations) may offer airtime in exchange for money. It is up to you whether to agree to pay or not. In some instances, if you refuse to pay, that may alienate a journalist, or if you actually do pay, it may ignite his/her voracious appetites.
- familiarize yourself with the news coverage and key authors of target publications to make sure you talk to the right journalists for a particular story (for example, inviting a journalist reporting on agriculture to a school opening or a book donation event is not right).

- the majority of journalists love to talk to experts. Make sure you know what you are talking about, throw some interesting facts and statistics into your conversation, and journalists will count on you if they need a particular technical question answered.

- please keep in mind that journalists are trained to be sceptical and even if you have a good story to tell, there will always be pointed questions; just don't get on the defensive and try to answer questions in a polite way and always get your messages across.

5. "BAD GUYS"

Economic hardships and political upheavals have made so-called journalism 'racketeering' a reality in Azerbaijan. There will be people, calling themselves correspondents or journalists, from some minor publications that will come after you threatening that they will publish something negative about you, your family or your organization, if you don't pay them money or do other favours for them.

This shameful phenomenon usually takes place if such 'journalists' sense that you have money. You can counter attack as follows:

- make it very clear, that you have no money and will not pay.
- say that he/she must be ashamed to approach you with such an unethical request
- if your NGO happens to help underprivileged children or is involved in a cause that breeds emotions, make the journalists feel guilty for exploiting humanitarian endeavour
- threaten a court action
- say that you know people at the Union of Journalists, Yeni Nasil or if approached by a radio or TV journalist, the head of station (make sure you have a list with names of the key officers beforehand) and you will tell them about this incident (normally, a journalist could be disqualified for unprofessional behaviour by the Union of Journalists)

Beware of the journalists whom your enemies might send to make your life difficult (e.g. head of local administration or ExCom, competitors, other NGOs, etc). The steps outlined above are applicable in this

situation also, but if you sense that the attack is orchestrated by and that the motive is not just getting money from you, it is better to pacify the journalist and involve them in sincere dialogue. Try to find out where the attack originates and act appropriately.

6. STORY

The main way to get on TV, radio or in the press is to issue a press release. A press release is simply your news story, written in a journalistic style. You have to call on your network of journalists and share the news you want to appear on TV or in the newspaper and always have your press release ready to a) refer to it for information; b) give it out to all those interested.

Do not skip a good occasion to create a story for the press. Opportunities to create news include announcements of:

- new services
- service enhancement
- staff and promotions
- winning of awards and honours
- moving to new premises
- important announcements, such as creation of new jobs or opening of new head office
- expansion of operations
- a beneficiary success story (e.g. beneficiary thanking your NGO for new artesian wells, power transformer or a telephone connection).

Your press release should expose five key facts about your story:

1. WHO will be doing the activity? (individual, organization or both)
2. WHAT will they be doing? It may be an activity or an announcement.
3. WHEN will they be doing it?
4. WHERE will the event take place?
5. WHY are you doing it? What is the reason?

Other points to remember:

- insert the date of distribution
- use a factual but interesting headline
- include a quotation to make your release look like an authentic media interview

- begin with an interesting story angle
- direct journalists to your web site (if any), where they can download relevant photographs and useful background material
- it is always good to have photos ready for the newspaper journalists; always keep negatives in your archive as you may need them in future
- include any background or technical information in a "Notes to Editors" section at the end of your release
- include at least two contact names with work and mobile phone numbers; these should be your PR manager (if any), director or supervisor of a unit issuing the release
- avoid jargon or technical terminology in a press release, unless for the professional press, like NGO magazines, third sector programs on TV, etc.
- make sure that your release arrives in time to meet deadlines
- send the release to all journalists in your list, but make sure you know how they want to get it from you (fax, email, by courier)
- releases should be addressed to a specific person or for the attention of the news editor, if they are being delivered by courier.

As I mentioned in Section 4 (Journalists), you may have to pay for your story to appear on TV or hit the national (or local) newspaper, but that is the last resort and should not be your priority. If you are doing an important job, the journalists will be after you, because their job is to find interesting information for their station or publication.

7. PRESS BRIEFINGS

If there is an important or heart breaking event (opening a new office, program expansion, staff member death, kidnapping, etc), you may call a press briefing. Below is a list of things to remember before calling a press briefing:

Press Briefing Checklist (small scale event, usually at your office):

Three days before your press briefing -

- find a suitable conference room or large office (check around for restaurants, hotels or simply a house, your own or your friend's)

- call and personally invite as many reporters in your network as possible
- confirm your spokesperson and experts
- develop press lines and main themes
- prepare written materials (press release, brochure etc) and background information.

Hours before your press briefing

- tell receptionists or security guards where to find you, in case someone is late and needs to be directed to the briefing room
- post a sign saying 'Press Briefing' on the door of the conference room.

During your briefing

- introduce reporters to your speakers and to each other
- offer coffee or soft drinks
- facilitate the briefing (every journalist should have a chance to speak)
- make an audiotape (if appropriate, copies can be given to reporters unable to attend)
- keep a record of who attended and who declined
- follow up with reporters after the briefing (call, send a fax or email, or send materials by courier).

8. MEDIA INTERVIEW

Being interviewed by the media can be an intimidating exercise. Prepare well and learn how to respond to difficult questions to ensure that your interview presents you and your organization in a professional and favourable light:

- decide beforehand what points you need to get across and seek opportunities during the interview to convey them
- unless you know and trust a reporter 100%, never agree to an unofficial 'off the record' interview
- speak in short, distinct sentences to help you get your message across
- run through likely questions with a colleague in preparation for an interview and to help build confidence.

9. PUBLICITY MATERIALS

Designing attractive publicity materials is as important as a well-written press release. Tackle design in the office or use a professional graphic designer or illustrator. Points to remember:

- check that your logo appears on everything you design
- choose a font size large enough for people to be able to read easily
- if commissioning a designer, ask about fees during any initial discussions
- choose artwork that is appropriate for your audience
- spot misspellings by reading from right to left
- look through other companies' brochures or other publicity materials to collect appealing design ideas
- choose local art college or freelance artists as a source of design talent

10. TRACKING YOUR COVERAGE

The harder you work at raising your organization's profile, the more likely it is that you will attract an increased number of calls from the media. Take note of who calls, the publication or program they represent, and the nature of their enquiry. It is recommended to keep a log of media calls. When you spot negative coverage, try to contact the journalist in charge of the report and engage him or her in a dialogue to understand the motives. Never threaten a journalist in this situation, but if the journalist continues to show your organization or your personally in a negative light for some time, and if there are defamatory or libellous points in the story, try to follow the steps outlined in Section 5 (Bad Guys).

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career on marketing and public relations work
for various international organizations.*

2. Mutually beneficial cooperation - the foundation of relationships between the media and NGOs

*By Rovshan Shikhly, deputy editor-in-chief,
“Ayna” and “Zerkalo” newspapers*

Non-governmental organizations eager to establish effective relations with the mass media, which could lead to wide coverage of their activities, should consider the following.

First of all, one should keep in mind that the cooperation must be mutually beneficial. While the media provides an opportunity for NGOs to inform the public about themselves, NGOs, in return, should supply the media with interesting information. Keep in mind that the media exists due to its popularity. Media outlets are in search of topics that would increase their audience and so make them more able to attract money from the allocation of advertisements - topics that are interesting for readers, listeners, and viewers.

One of the most common means of spreading information to the maximum number of media is the press-conference. NGOs should not neglect this, but should not abuse either. Too frequent calling of press-conferences may cause the audience and the media to think that the NGO engages just in talk. This would probably be a subjective attitude and may sometimes be wrong - but it exists.

In order to find out what the audience is interested in, it is important to conduct systematic monitoring of the media (or, for greater convenience, the leading media). This should be done by the NGO's press service which is working with the media, or by a relevant person at the NGO. Moreover, the monitoring will let you identify which reporters cover the issues related to your organization's program. As they are the ones who would most understand your work, it would be more effective to invite them in particular to press-conferences. Furthermore, here you find a psychological factor at work - the invited journalist will feel his or her value to you, and will work with enthusiasm on the material presented at your press-conference.

Cases where NGOs, particularly human rights organizations, make awards of diplomas, valuable presents and money to journalists who actively report on their issues are not uncommon in Azerbaijan. This practice is quite effective because it strengthens the journalists' desire to keep those issues at the centre of their attention.

Now let us deal with an important theme - the establishing of personal contacts with reporters. Remember that media representatives are just like everybody else: they have their own stereotypes, sympathies and aversions. Personal contacts and good relationships with media representatives is an important fact in ensuring positive coverage about your organization. Never treat journalists as enemies. The root of problems is often that there are competent and incompetent journalists. But it is crucial not to fear journalists. Rather, treat them with respect and keep up contact with them - for instance, it would be a good idea to congratulate journalists on holidays.

Having set up contacts with journalists, you can be sure that the information you convey will not be neglected. Azerbaijan is a country where contacts resolve a lot of things, if not everything. NGOs should keep this in mind and, consequently, should establish relations with the senior media representatives. The best way is to have contacts with the leadership.

Another common way of conveying information is the interview. It is important to do the following to ensure a successful radio or TV interview:

- prepare properly, plan the conversation and determine what the interview will be about;
- determine your position (human rights defender, expert, concerned person or mixture of all three);
- think with common sense, not with emotions;
- listen carefully to the questions and answer to the points;
- concentrate on a certain subject and do not try to talk about everything in the world;
- act naturally, be confident and calm;
- answer clearly and concisely;
- have a nice appearance;
- watch your speech

To pick up tips, listen to and watch interviews of well-known people - they have experts who work on their image and manners.

You can also convey information via newsletters. These newsletters must meet the following criteria: be concrete, be brief, and be accurate.

Unfortunately, Azerbaijan is not immune to instances of journalists asking for money to publicize your information. I would not recommend agreeing to such a

doubtful cooperation with these 'journalists'. In the long run it will not bring anything good. But speaking of money, in exceptional cases, when a certain media outlet is not interested in your information, you can publicize it by signing an official contract detailing the terms and prices for conveying your information as an advertisement. That is a business relationship, and there is nothing wrong with this.

For an NGO that does not have sufficient funds, but wants to achieve publicity, then it should increase its media relations efforts in the ways I have described above. You can short-cut many of these methods (though they are often useful) by conveying information that is very attractive - often that means sensational information. But the sensation should not become your aim. Most important is that the information you choose to publicize should have a social value.

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is the deputy editor-in-chief of the "Ayna" and "Zerkalo" newspapers. He has an MA in political science and has worked in journalism since 1998, including stints as a political correspondent and deputy editor for 'Zerkalo'.

3. Make allies of journalists

By Arif Aliyev, chairman of the Baku Press Club and “Yeni Nasil” (the Union of Azerbaijani Journalists)

Establishing proper relations with the media should be a strategic objective of any non-governmental organization. If an NGO wants to gain public support for its ideas, thoughts or plans, without which it is impossible to be successful, then it has to be able to make allies of journalists.

Unlike NGOs, the mass media is a commercial structure. In other words, its interest in any developments or organizations is not measured only by the public importance of information. The way in which this information is presented is also of big importance. The more striking and unique the form, the more attractive the information will be. However, to present unique and striking information requires money. Unfortunately, the vast majority of NGOs live with financial constraints - they lack the means to arrange exhibitions, promotions, and even press-conferences. That is why experts recommend that such organizations build their links with the media using press-releases and direct interviews.

It is possible to be very successful in your relations with the media even using just press-releases and interviews. For instance, in June of 2003, several journalistic organizations, after having agreed to cooperate with each other, called a press conference. At the conference they introduced to reporters a project that aimed to increase access to information during the presidential elections. The next day, six newspapers published reports about the event. Two weeks later, a different journalists' organization issued a press-release about the creation of an 'Elections Information Centre' to assist the mass media. This information was reported by 14 media outlets - four newspapers, wanting more information about the activities of the centre, requested interviews.

So, how one can achieve these sorts of results? Given that an NGO has restricted financial and operational means, how should it issue press releases and conduct effective interviews that

attract the attention of the media - and thereby the public - to issues that it considers important?

The press-release

Press releases are the most common way of conveying information to journalists. When preparing a press-release it is important to consider the following:

- The lay out of the press-release:
 - use your organization's letterhead, indicate its address and phone numbers, and included a contact person;
- Attract attention:
 - choose a title that will catch the journalists' attention immediately - type that title in capitals;
 - put the most important and most attractive information in the first paragraph. If you do not manage to attract journalists with the title and the first paragraph, then you have failed in your attempt to publicise it;
- Dont make things long:
 - try to make your text not longer than one page;
- Write clearly and concretely:
 - take care to make the press-release readable: avoid overused phrases, use only those images and examples that are clear to everybody;
 - refer to the opinion of your NGO's management's on the issue with which the press-release deals;
- Answer six questions:
 - write your text in a way that answers six questions: who, what, when, where, why and how? If you miss one of the questions, you may encounter difficulties;
- Be very accurate:
 - correct all grammar mistakes. Any negligence with names, dates and even simple words may cause a journalists to distrust your organization as a source.

The interview

- Choose an appropriate place for the interview:
 - It is good to find a place that relates, even symbolically, to the subject - this is especially important for TV interviews.
 - Do not create artificial obstacles for journalists, this can affect their mood/attitudes.
 - Consider the interior of the space.
- Never change place and time of the meeting
- Prepare for the interview as if you are meeting your opponent, yet meet the journalist as a friend.
- Take the preparation for the interview seriously - do your homework.
 - You probably know that journalists love to put interviewees into difficult situations by indirect questions. Therefore, prepare your answers to important or undesirable questions in advance.
 - Do not forget that even though you may have identified specific topics for the interview, journalists will usually not stick to your plan.

In principle, there are many similarities between a press-conference and an interview. However, there are a few specific differences you should be aware of. For an interview, for instance, never miss an opportunity to gather information about the journalist and his media outlet, and to use that information. Determine the subject of the interview in advance, and a list of issues the journalist wants to touch upon. Find one or two key phrases and emphasize those phrases at appropriate moments so that you can stress your points and keep the interview on track as you planned it.

A path leading to success

Many well-known people with experience of conducting successful interviews make certain recommendations on how to act during an interview. Those recommendations could help you to achieve your media goals. Key recommendations are:

- Find out in advance how much time and print space the journalist has allocated for you. Try not to overly exceed those limits. Try to predict in advance which of your thoughts and phrases could be misinterpreted or distorted in the case that your interview is shortened. Express your thoughts clearly and accurately;
- If you are asked a difficult or provocative question, count to five before answering;
- Before answering each question, try to recall whether you have recently answered the same question. Try not to create contradictions between your previous and current thoughts. If there is a contradiction, you must explain it;
- If you cannot clarify any piece of information, justify - in simple terms - why you cannot do that.

A list of 'DOs' and DON'Ts

The public relations department of the international NGO 'World Learning has prepared a helpful list of interview 'DOs' and 'DONTs':

Dos

- DO repeat powerful thoughts;
- DO pause (think before answering, or pause after you answer);
- DO give firm and unambiguous answers to ambiguous questions. (Acknowledge the existence of the problem in general, briefly mention negative aspects of the issue, and elaborate more on positive sides);
- DO ask for an explanation, in the case that a question is not clear;
- DO refer to suitable results of any relevant research, survey or analysis.

Don'ts:

- DON'T lie;
- DON'T ever say 'this is not for the press' while the microphone or the recorder is on;
- DON'T comment on issues that are outside your competence;
- DON'T answer hypothetical questions;
- DON'T back off under pressure and say 'yes' or 'no';

- DON'T deny;
- DON'T use long and very complicated sentences.

There is one more 'don't'. Don't consider your work to be completed as soon as the interview is over.

- If you referred to names or figures during the interview, provide the journalist with documents reflecting those data;
- If you are worried about anything, ask the journalist to show or read you the material before publishing it;
- After the material is printed, give a call to the journalist to express your opinion;
- If you promised anything to the journalist during the interview, and kept your promise, then remind the journalist of this.

One more piece of advice: if you will be required to give interviews often, then go through a special training course. It is not very difficult to get used to communicating effectively with journalists and doing so as allies. But training will equip you with techniques to deal with journalist's 'weapons' - the microphone and the camera.

*Arif Aliyev,
is the co-founder and chairman of the Baku
Press Club and the Chairman of "Yeni Nasil"
(the Union of Azerbaijani Journalists)*

4. Minorities and the media in Azerbaijan

By Elena Taranova, president, LOTOS (the Association of Disability Organizations of Azerbaijan)

Between March 2002 and March 2003, LOTOS together with 'Perspective', a Russian disability organization, implemented a project called 'Disability and the Media'. The project's goals were to build positive public opinion with regard to people with disability, to get the media to cover disability issues with less prejudice and more accuracy, and to create an image of a disabled free from stereotypes.

When the project was launched, our press and TV were not reporting on disability issues as frequently as we would have wished. Moreover, the quality of the coverage, and the terms used in the coverage left us hoping for better. It was not the case that we did not have professional journalists who could write about the disabled appropriately and without prejudice. Simply, society had fixed upon an image of the disabled as totally helpless and sick, those who awaken feelings of pity and compassion. The media, however, actively maintained those popular stereotypes. Therefore, we tried to empower the media to cover disability-related issues differently than they in the ways they had become accustomed to. In general, we succeeded.

Drawing on the experience we gained during the project, I would like to give you some recommendations which, hopefully, will assist you to better communicate with the local media.

- First, it is important to find out how often and in what context our media covers minority issues, what trends exist in transmitting this information, what the articles and TV footage is about and so on. For this purpose NGOs would need to conduct a monitoring and analysis of articles and TV/radio broadcasts. If you do not have your own archive, you can certainly appeal to NGO resource centres.
- Identify for yourself what you do not like in existing articles and footage related to minority issues. Make clear what and how would you like to change.
- Find out which media outlets cover minority issues frequently, which ones seldom, and the ones that avoid such broadcasts altogether. Moreover, track the orientation of the articles and footage. Is it friendly or hostile? Does it view people with disabilities as pathetic victims - or as equal members of society?

■ Regardless of the quality of the articles or footage, you should identify names of the journalists who address minority issues more frequently than others. (Usually, people covering those issues in print and broadcast are the same). For instance, if you have found out that the person, who always covers diversity issues at newspaper "X", is "Y", then it would be logical for you to contact that particular person, at least in the beginning. Such people should become your targets in the initial stages of establishing close contacts between your organization and the media.

■ Now, when you have sufficient information and statistical data, you can easily offer your cooperation. Probably it will be somehow difficult in the beginning to attract journalists. But in the longer run, it will depend on your capacity and means (sometimes you would have to pay, especially to TV) as well as the information you can present.

■ Even if you deal with professional journalists, do not be afraid to express your thoughts and wishes about an article (footage or program). They may be professionals in their field - but you, possibly, are no less professional in yours.

■ As a rule, even very experienced journalists may not know half of what you know. If you share your information, this will benefit everybody - the journalist will be better equipped to write (or film) what you expect from him or her, and the article (or footage) will turn out to be more interesting and worthy.

■ Sometime in future, you will meet a journalist who never wrote articles or filmed on minorities. Therefore, be prepared not just to state the essence of the issue, but also talk about how to write about it. In other words, be prepared to perform as an expert and a consultant on diversity. But do not overdo it. Occasionally some journalists are inclined present others' ideas and thoughts as if they are their own. In the case of a TV presenter who prefers a monologue to a dialogue, do not tell them before the interview everything that you plan to say during it. It is better if you are asked about something when the cameras are rolling, not before.

■ Always invite journalists to your events. Keep in mind that TV journalists seek 'bright pictures'. If the event is taking place in a closed space with monotone interior, where there is nothing particularly attractive, then the broadcast people will find it boring. But if you organize something outdoors, for instance in nature, or even inside, spicing it up with lively debates, presentations, speeches and so on, would make it interesting for TV journalists.

■ If the coverage of your event on TV and in the press is of major importance, then plan the event so that it does not fall in on the same day as other events that could eclipse yours.

■ If you plan a long-term relationship with media representatives, then it would be reasonable to hold a training workshop for journalists. However, make sure that the majority of the invited journalists can come to the workshop. Do not plan your training workshop to last longer than three hours, otherwise, many of the invitees may not show up due to the pressure of their schedules. Below are the several important issues you would have to consider if arranging such a workshop:

- Send a press-release about the event to everyone: indicate the purpose, give a brief description, note the time, the place and the duration of the event.
- Participants must represent diverse groups. You can also invite people who represent minorities (they do not have to be members of your organization) and are willing to talk about themselves or about a particular issue that would engage the media.
- Together with the participants, make a list of appropriate (positive) and inappropriate (negative) terms that relate to your minority-group, i.e. disabled people.
- You can also present to your audience the negative and positive articles you have observed in the press. While discussing the articles, you also need to focus on those terms that strengthen the negative stereotypes. Before comparing negative and positive articles though, encourage the participants to redo a negative one, and present the positive ones afterwards.
- As an exercise, you can suggest journalists to do the following: give the journalists 20 minutes and ask them to interview a minority representative and write a related article. Then welcome journalists to present the articles followed by discussion what was good and bad in the article, and why.

Elena Taranova, is the president of LOTOS (the Association of Disability Organizations of Azerbaijan). She established the organization when working at Oxfam GB in Azerbaijan as a disability program coordinator. She is an engineer/mathematician by education, and was a silver medallist at the XI Para-Olympic Games held in Sydney in 2000.

5. Ten golden rules to improve your NGO's relations with the media

By Zeynal Mammadly, lecturer at the journalism faculty of Baku State University

Golden rule # 1: Make efforts to get to know a media institution well. Be sensitive towards journalists who write on the topics of your interest: congratulate them on all their achievements, pass on all relevant information that you have. Try to benefit from journalists' need for various information sources. A simple phone call or an e-mail can be a very valuable help to you.

Golden rule # 2: Create a database containing names of media outlets and journalists, their addresses, phone numbers, anniversaries, birthdays, topics the journalists specialize in, the circulations of their newspapers and magazines and ratings of TV and radio programs. Do not forget to update the database.

Golden rule # 3: Be very attentive to inquiries from the media. When speaking to them, first relate things you have seen and know, and then what you think only afterwards. Get facts, examples and quotes ready in advance. Inform journalists of anything you are doubtful about. Share your sources of information and contacts with the journalist in case he wants to get additional information. Otherwise, you will lose their interest in you and their trust.

Golden rule # 4: Congratulate journalists on their professional holidays. A pen always makes for a beautiful present. If you cannot afford it, simply make a call. Journalists like presents as much as anyone else: you could collect a number of articles by a particular journalist and make a small book out of it (or collect audio or video materials on one cassette) as a gift to him. An interesting photo of the journalist at one of your events could also be a good present.

Golden rule # 5: When commenting on minorities do not restrict your comments only to ethnic minorities. Do not forget that for slim and averagely built people, large people can also be considered a minority. Similarly women in the company of men; elderly surrounded by youngsters; the opposition in

the parliament and others. If we do not restrict our notion of diversity only to a person's ethnic background, then we help journalists to comprehend diversity better. This will reduce journalists' tendency to evade this issue, and will create opportunities to emphasize the importance of tolerance in society as well as minority issues.

Golden rule # 6: When talking about minorities, do not forget the majority. Keep in mind that the media is constantly keen to increase its audience. Media likes sensation and shock news - which leads to increased circulation and ratings - as much as diversity and pluralism.

Golden rule # 7: Pay special attention to the structure of any press-release you prepare for the media. Use headlines that reflect the main fact. Be accurate about sources. Ambiguous and suspicious facts can lessen attention to your event, and can cause your organization to be thought of as an accessory to a political group. Make sure that when reporting your event, commenting on it, or conveying the thoughts expressed at the event, you are not exposing the media to threats of defamation. No media institution enjoys ending up in courts.

Golden rule # 8: Build up your organization's database of its work. Maintain and update photo and video archives as well as voice recordings. A photo or footage of a socio-political activist, artist, scientist, or of an ordinary citizen can be valuable to a newspaper, TV or radio station. If you are sensitive to the work of the media, you can easily determine which footage or photo - and when - can be helpful to which media. That particular media outlet will be very grateful to you. Moreover, they will name you in their article or program.

Golden rule # 9: Give the media a hero! An ordinary person's rights and freedoms, his hopes and experiences, sufferings and joys are always interesting to the media!

Golden rule # 10: Do not forget that we all can end up being a minority in various circumstances. Even

the media that you have approached is a minority among a group that you had to choose from? Doesn't the peculiarities of that media outlet, its journalists, and its uniqueness, make it too a minority?

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6. Eight points for gaining more publicity

By Naile Aliyeva, “Yeni Nesil” Union of Azerbaijani Journalists

1. The first reason why journalists do not write about national minorities is the low level of the media's professionalism. The second important reason is that the press is politicized. Often a journalist would consider this topic as unimportant. My first suggestion, therefore, is to increase journalists' awareness of this issue, which could probably be carried out through training.

2. Any newly established organization should publicize its work. One NGO I know of has no registration, no bank account and could not get grants. Nevertheless, it has undertaken a number of activities, and this is how it publicizes them: it sends press-releases about its work to local media and to international NGOs, via internet and fax. This kind of media relations requires very little money. When journalists need more detailed information they contact the organization.

3. Minorities can arrange a contest for journalists. They could even organize a photo-contest on a topic that of concern to their group. Considering the financial situation of journalists, it would be most effective to announce a money award. I make this recommendation from my own experience - I have organized two photo-contests and two best-article contests.

4. Exhibitions are another option. A disabled group, for example, could arrange an exhibition or even a sale of the handicrafts that they have produced. If they sell some of the products, that is great - but even if nothing is sold the event is still likely to attract the attention of the media.

5. Establish contacts with local reporters your region. Every TV channel and many newspapers have their local reporters. It is good to invite them to organized events, but much better to also invite them to parties. This can be a very powerful tool. Recall the saying that "one face is ashamed of another..."

6. When writing projects, it is good to allocate funding, in form of honorarium, for journalists to publicize events.

7. The 'Ayna' newspaper is also a useful contact. It publishes weekly supplements about NGOs, and may sometimes include your information.

8. Minorities NGOs can also create networks. Although there are several coalitions and networks in Azerbaijan, not all of them are active. Nonetheless, I think that this can be one of the most effective tools for advocacy.

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media, domestic violence against women,
freedom of expression in the Caucasus,
trafficking and the improvement of journalists'
professional skills.*

7. NGOs and the press: what is the best way to cooperate?

*By Nurani Kasimova, senior
journalist/commentator, 'Ekho' newspaper*

Do you know the difference between a rat and a white hamster? Well, the hamster has a better PR image. Of course this comparison is in jest, but nowadays nobody challenges the notion that the importance of public opinion cannot be overestimated. For NGOs, a successful collaboration with the press is a vital issue: much of their operations are based on attracting public attention to issues and events. Here the press remains the main channel.

The press secretary

First of all, it is important to understand one thing - work with the press is very serious. That is why it is better if someone from the team specializes in working with press, rather than just doing it in their spare time.

The first task is to choose your 'press secretary'. The main requirements are the following:

- a detailed knowledge of what your organization is about;
- good public speaking skills;
- ability to speak both Azeri and Russian (knowing a third language would be even better);
- being good at making friends, a sense of humour, and being an interesting person to communicate with. These qualities may be a plus for an ordinary person, but for a press secretary they are necessary for performing the job, just as a mechanic has to know how to repair a car.

The next logical question - what is a press secretary supposed to do?

Primarily, he or she has to answer journalists' questions. Many NGOs are very important sources of information for the press in various specialist fields, ranging from ecology to human rights. But in order to get reporters to bombard you with calls and questions, you have to make a big effort. Of course, searching out information is the first duty of a journalist. But just as a sick person is expected to tell the doctor where his pain is, NGOs have to tell the journalists about their problems and issues they consid-

er important, rather than just wait for someone to knock on their door and ask "what are you up to?" This is especially the case for a newly established organization.

NGOs can employ almost every form of collaboration with the press: issuing press releases; inviting journalists to various events; arranging press conferences, briefings and even presentations.

The press release

The simplest, most readily accessible and effective form of PR work is writing press releases. A press release is a brief message for the press. It describes a concrete event. If five trees were planted - write a press release. If a guide on crossing the road was handed out to school children - write a press release. If cookies were bought and delivered to prisoners in jail - write a press release. It is important to summarize exactly what has happened, which project it was a part of, and what the main idea of the event was. And do not forget to add your phone number at the end.

Events

You can invite journalists to events before they happen. It is better to invite them at least a day before the event, so that the journalists have time to plan their schedules. It is also important not to get offended if a journalist ignores the invitation. It makes sense to break all connections with a newspaper, only if the information you gave was misrepresented.

The press conference

Another well-known form of working with the press is the press conference. Of course it makes sense to gather journalists for a press conference only if an event is very important and deserves wider attention than a few lines in a press-release. For example, an NGO could arrange a press conference if it conducted research on an important issue such as the environment, children's rights, or freedom of religion and wanted to present the results.

One can also use presentations to work with the media. For instance, if your organization prepared a textbook about the environment, or published an

Azerbaijani 'children's' constitution', these would be causes serious enough to organize a presentation for. During presentations the atmosphere is informal and frank - people exchange business cards and chat. It is not necessary to treat guests with expensive meals or wine.

Personal contacts

Working with the press requires personal contacts with journalists, because only this kind of contact can make for long-lasting collaboration. In this case, you have to prepare press packages of informative materials before hand. These materials should tell journalists when your organization was established; what it does; what it has already achieved; what kind of international projects it has participated in; where is it located; its contact phone numbers, e-mail and web-site address. (I strongly recommended you to create a web-site).

Most NGOs make their first mistake when they try to establish contacts with famous journalists. They neglect the fact that journalists also have their specialized fields: some write about the economy, others about internal policy, and others still write about foreign policy. Journalists specialized in show-business would not necessarily write about the environment. In fact, many newspapers, TV and radio stations have specific journalists who write about NGOs. You could also make connections with journalists who specialize in the same field as you do: the environment, human rights, children's rights, etc.

The most important thing when contacting the press is asking yourself the following questions:

1. What do I expect from this contact?
2. What do I want to tell the journalists?
3. Will this information be interesting to the journalists and their audience?

Information that you will give to journalists has to meet several requirements:

- The information has to be new and fresh and not merely repeat already known facts in a different guise;

- It has to be interesting to the audience;
- Crucially, it has to be precise, accurate and based on reliable sources. NGOs often accuse journalists of not paying attention - but journalists main accusation is that NGOs offer dubious information, which would be the worst mistake that you could make in your relations with the press.

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8. Access to the press by national minorities

By Azer Hasanov, former country program manager, Oxfam GB Azerbaijan

The leaders of community based or non-governmental organizations representing a national minority are probably aware of the principles behind establishing relations with the press - the main difficulty is the availability of financial resources.

Difficulties faced by national minorities in accessing the press are largely the same difficulties faced by any other social group, though a difference lies in the fact that national minorities mostly live far from the capital. A regional press does not exist everywhere - and much of that that does exist is under the influence of local government bodies. Here looms the problem of how independent the press is - any article or programme in the 'dependent' mass media on the infringement of the rights of national minorities is viewed as the stirring up of national hostility.

Journalists are very careful when they write about the rights of national minorities for five main reasons:

- 1)** they tend not to know the specific differences between the rights of national minorities and human rights violations in general. Many journalists have never acquired systematic knowledge on national minorities;
- 2)** an article about national minorities written by an uninformed journalist may cause deep anger amongst those minorities;
- 3)** social and economic events attractive to journalists (those causing sensation) tend not to happen in the areas where national minorities live. But journalists are always on the hunt for such events;
- 4)** at present very few mass media outlets can send a journalist to the provinces to write an article. One of the reasons is lack of financial means. Another is that if a journalist expends several days on one article, it puts extra pressure on the rest of the editorial staff;
- 5)** journalists get paid based on the number and volume of articles they write, not on the articles' news

value - another reason that few want to throw off their work and head for the hills to write an article.

Having said all that, ideas that I have come across that can help gain publicity include the following:

■ We once held an exhibition of paintings by disabled children. Invited journalists were satisfied with writing a few lines of information about the exhibition. But we wanted more comprehensive publicity. What were we to do? After the exhibition, we sent colour copies of the paintings to the newspapers, and added information about the little artists. Three newspapers published the information and the paintings. In this way, we got the publicity that we wanted.

■ We once we planned a series of articles on the rights of women suffering from domestic violence. In spite of our efforts we could not find a specialist journalist in this field, to bring the issue to readers' attention in the way we wished. Finally we turned to students for help - and found a post-graduate who was about to write a scientific work on domestic violence. We gave him contact details of women facing domestic violence in the region where our programme was operating. The student used those contacts for his research, conducting a number of interviews with victims of domestic violence. In return, he agreed to publish portions of the research as articles. We worked with him and, following our comments, he amended his articles to take our ideas into account. Eventually both we and the student benefited - we got the publicity that we wanted, and the student collected enough material for his scientific work.

■ Refugee communities use a method that is worth noting. Each community member gives 1,000 manats (\$0.20 USD) to a community fund each month. The money collected is spent on the communities' common social problems. In many cases coverage of the problem in the press is part of the solution. Community leaders (the village elders, or other people representing the community) reimburse journalists' travelling and living expenses from the community fund, allowing journalists to cover the issue while avoiding extra expenses.

■ Other than money, minority NGOs can also award special prizes - it could be something as simple as, for example, a landscape of Khinalig village made of cockleshells and bearing the words "A Friend of the People of Khinalig". The press can be informed that author of the best writings or programmes on Khinalig during 2004 will be awarded the prize. (It will be easier and cheaper to spread this information through the information agencies: Turan, Trend, etc.). An award ceremony could be held at the end of the year.

■ Or, May 19 may be declared as "The day of Khinaligians' victory over the Romans". This will surely arouse interest!

■ Newspaper editors and the heads of TV and radio companies are not immune to the weaknesses characteristic of ordinary people. For anyone, no holiday is more precious than his or her birthday. If, for example, an NGO representing sexual minorities finds out the dates of birth of three or four senior journalists from the ANS television station, and sends bunches of flowers to them on the relevant days, that NGO's issues will undoubtedly be covered, if not positively, at least from a neutral viewpoint.

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programme manager position with Oxfam GB
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Bank's poverty reduction process in
Azerbaijan.*

About the Media Diversity Institute

The London-based Media Diversity Institute is a non-profit, non-partisan organisation which promotes conflict resolution through diversity reporting in developing societies.

The institute's Reporting Diversity Network (RDN), brings together journalists, news organisations, media assistance centres, journalism schools and others in a collaborative effort to mobilise the power of the news media in support of a deeper public understanding of diversity, minority communities, inter-group conflict, and human rights. The RDN promotes the highest standards of professional journalism as they relate to coverage of minorities, diversity, and inter-ethnic relations, and develops the tools, training vehicles and practical reporting initiatives required to implement those standards.

Fair, accurate, sympathetic and in-depth reporting is vital in promoting understanding between different groups. The media has all too often been used as a weapon, promoting prejudice and discrimination. MDI aims to change that and turn media into a tool for strengthening human rights and democracy.

We do this primarily through education, training and co-operation with:

- ✓ practicing journalists;
- ✓ journalism professors and academics;
- ✓ media owners and decision-makers;
- ✓ media, human rights and minority organisations.

Our comprehensive approach, dealing with the issue of diversity from all angles, is the Institute's unique characteristic. We train journalists and media managers in best practice; we teach minority organisations how to communicate with the media; we work on strengthening minority media and we work with the journalism professors who will train future generations of journalists.

MDI activities are divided into nine main areas:

1. diversity awareness training for journalists and media decision-makers

2. practical diversity training and professional development for mid-career journalists
3. diversity reporting news production initiatives, including team-reporting and news agency projects
4. diversity curriculum development, in cooperation with journalism faculties
5. media and public relations training for minority groups
6. projects designed to promote reconciliation through the media
7. production of diversity handbooks, resource manuals and training manuals
8. post-conflict professional development for journalists, with a special emphasis on Post Trauma Stress Disorder (PTSD)
9. media monitoring of diversity-related issues



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