LIKE MOTHS TO A FLAME
The news media's influence
on the operations of the
United Nations and its specialized agencies

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Journalism

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Abstract

The Cable News Network was launched in 1980 and gained prominence in the latter part of the decade. Since that time, the satellite broadcaster and others like it have had a bearing on the conduct of international affairs. During that period, the United Nations system has experienced significant inter-agency competition, due to the growing influence of the transnational news media. Using sophisticated public relations techniques, the UN organizations and the specialized agencies are blurring their original mandates to seek out those issues that are attractive to the news media. Meanwhile, there has been a decline in the quality and quantity of international reporting. This contributes to a lack of understanding and interest within the industrialized world about developing world issues. The title "Like Moths to a Flame" implies the mutual danger for the international system and the media in the relationship they have developed over the past two decades.

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CHART 1: Glossary: International Organizations¹

United Nations Organizations

UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women

Specialized Agencies of the United Nations System

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
IDA	International Development Association
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IMO	International Maritime Organization
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
UNESCO	United Nations Economic, Social and Educational Organization
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UPU	Universal Postal Union
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization

Bretton Woods Organizations

WTO	World Trade Organization (formerly GATT - General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade)
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank)
IMF	International Monetary Fund

¹ Adam Roberts and Benedict Kingsbury, United Nations, Divided World (London: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. XIV-XVI.

CHAPTER I: Introduction

In the past decade, the globalization of the media has had an increasing impact upon the United Nations, its core organizations and the specialized agencies providing services to the world on a wide range of issues, from health care to labour to environmental standards. The UN organizations work with a fair amount of autonomy in the UN system but ultimately take their direction from the Secretary-General. The specialized agencies are the bodies that have their own executive boards and thus act autonomously from the UN, but do much of the essential work for which the UN has become renowned, such as health care, labour standards and environmental protection. Working with them, but not part of the UN system itself, are the so-called "Bretton Woods" organizations that focus on economic development and trade.

The thrust of my thesis is that from 1980 to the present day, the United Nations Organization, the bodies working under its auspices and the specialized agencies associated with it, have become increasingly influenced by the impact of the news media on their operations. The so-called "CNN effect" (the loss of policy control to the media) has intersected with "mandate creep" (the trend to do work already mandated to other UN organizations) to create changes in the operations and the decision-making process in the UN system. As a result, the UN and the specialized agencies have deliberately changed the structure, focus and funding of their operations as they compete for media attention and donor support. This has led to greater competition for donor funds, overlapping

neglect of their basic responsibilities to the international community to whom they owe their mandates and are thus committed to serve. Like moths to a flame, they come ever closer, seeking the attention of the media and funds from donors, losing sight of their objectives, with the prospect of eventually getting burned. This is what I seek to examine: how the UN and the specialized agencies begin to anticipate the influence of the transnational media and compete accordingly for donor support; as well, I examine if there is a way of avoiding this competition by grasping its importance and dealing with that influence.

The "CNN Effect"

The way the world communicated with itself began to change in 1980, with the transmission of the first signals of a little-known broadcaster based in Atlanta, Georgia. At 6:00 p.m. EDT on June 1, 1980, with substantial background noise and in-studio sounds (as if the broadcaster had been on the air for some time) the words from a producer "Take 11, mike cue, cue New York" followed by that of the announcers ".....Good evening, I'm David Walker...and I'm Lois Hart..."² were spoken. The Cable News Network – then identified as "The News Channel" – was on the air. In one instant, the birth of 24-hour-a-day satellite television news altered the face of journalism, and as it began to take hold, gradually changed diplomacy in the industrialized world. The Cable News Network, established by Atlanta entrepreneur Ted Turner, provided news to people

² CNN archives, CNN website [<http://www.cnn.com>].

in North America, and eventually worldwide, immediately – or as it became known, in "real time." Soon it was known globally as simply "CNN". In a few years, CNN began to take on an influence far greater than any ordinary television network. Described as the "sixteenth member of the Security Council"³ by former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, it and the other global news media began to act as the barometers or filters of what is valid, valuable or appealing for the powerful donors who are tuning in to them.

How did this happen? How did CNN and the other international networks develop this influence? For those parts of the world with extensive access to electronic media, satellite television news, as introduced by CNN, created a sea change for the role of television vis-a-vis its competitors in providing news. No longer would television take a back seat to radio in its ability to provide immediate news via telephone. No longer would newspapers be the sole source of detail and analysis of international events. No longer would the spoken or written word alone be sufficient to convey a sense of the gravity of events. Satellite television news meant direct broadcast of visual images of events, and remote ground-to-satellite transmission meant immediate reception of reports from the field.

As with any profitable commercial venture, the success of CNN spawned global imitators in many languages – BBC World, DeutscheWelle satellite, SkyNews, NHK International – among others. What was now being called the "CNN effect" (also called the "CNN

³ Cited in "The UN has been a success", Time magazine, October 23, 1995.

curve” or “CNN Factor”, and defined as the “loss of policy control to the news media”)⁴ on events began to proliferate. Within time, the impact of the “CNN effect” was felt in humanitarian organizations overseeing complex human emergencies. Non-Governmental Organizations found success in promoting their work through extensive use of public relations techniques that attracted the attention of the news media, particularly television. Gradually the notion of “agenda-shaping” was no longer an issue: what mattered in the assessment of many analysts was the *degree* to which the media shaped the agendas of political leaders.⁵

With the development of increasingly sophisticated technology over the next decade, television could bring the events of the world into the living rooms and boardrooms of the industrialized world. Advances in technology permitted the development of lighter cameras and satellite transmission equipment, cellular phones, satellite phones – providing easy access to far-flung corners of the world, with direct-to-satellite broadcasts feasible from a remote desert, the deepest jungles or the periphery of a distant battlefield. Soon this network with the strange name became a “must-see” for heads of government and heads of state around the world, many of them declaring that CNN’s reporters were more useful, informative and an effective tool for communicating in ways that few diplomats could ever be.⁶

⁴ Steven Livingston, Clarifying The CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention, Research Paper R-18, (Cambridge: Harvard University), June 1997.

⁵ Johanna Neuman, Lights, Camera, War (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), pp. 4-5.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 22-24.

CNN's reports allowed government leaders to speedily assess things for themselves as if they were in the field, rather than waiting days for cables or telephoned assessments from diplomats abroad. Over time, officials would take their cues from CNN broadcasts, or they would resort to sending messages via CNN directly to officials of other countries as part of a process of negotiation that took place via CNN.⁷

With the passage of time, increased competition and media reach, the mandates of some of these international organizations have begun to change. UNICEF took on responsibility for child labour (the remit of the ILO), literacy (UNESCO), and women's rights (UNIFEM and UNFPA). UNHCR has expanded into virtually every area of service: development (UNDP), medical (WHO), human rights (UNHCHR), services to women and children (UNICEF) (UNIFEM) (UNFPA), to deal with growing numbers of refugees around the world. The WHO has established sections responsible for human rights (UNHCHR), globalization (WTO, UNCTAD) and sustainable development (UNEP). The World Bank, once the builder of dams and infrastructure, is involved in education (UNESCO)(UNICEF) and immunization (UNICEF) (UNDP). This phenomenon has been dubbed "mandate creep" by those on the inside of the UN system.⁸ Without clear parameters to act upon, and desperately needing funding for programs that can sustain them, UN organizations and agencies have moved into those areas that can

⁷ Ibid., p. 1

⁸ OCHA report, Strategic Humanitarian Coordination in the Great Lakes Region 1996-1997, (New York: UN publications, March 1998) [http://www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/pub/greatlak/un.html#current], item 132.

produce optimum amounts of attention and extra-budgetary funding, the respective mandates of each organization notwithstanding. As well, to further complicate matters, with the dominance of CNN, many media have reduced their coverage of international affairs. Now a plethora of Non-Governmental Organizations have come onto the same field to compete for the donor funding of the industrialized countries and individuals. From CARE to OXFAM to Save the Children, the competition for donor funds and is enormous – a multi-billion dollar “business” to serve the least advantaged of this world.

All this has taken place in a period of immense change. The Berlin Wall has fallen and the phenomenon of globalization has had an immense impact on the economies of the most-developed and the least-developed countries. In the 1990s, the push to reduce deficits and debt resulted in cuts to foreign aid by the industrialized nations. As a result, they reduced their contributions to the UN and to the specialized agencies. Some agencies (e.g. UNESCO) have been officially or unofficially boycotted by the United States, the largest single source of aid funding. The end result has been immense competition between the UN, the specialized agencies and NGOs for the same scarce funds.

CHAPTER II: The Global Village

One of the first great events in the expansion of the global media occurred in 1989 on a cold November night in Germany: the Berlin Wall was breached by thousands of East Germans, without opposition and with the complicity of the authorities. And television was there to record the event, "live". The fall of the Berlin Wall was a media event in and of itself: an extraordinary sight that would shape the events of the world for years to come. It represented the defeat of the Communist "bogeyman" that had existed in the collective western consciousness for so many years, the beginning of the end of the bipolar world that had dominated the Cold War period of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. And it was represented by a physical act (the destruction of the wall) that could be seen as a metaphor for the communist system and the crumbling Soviet empire itself. It was "a television moment."

Amplifying its importance was the fact that it was being broadcast "live" into the boardrooms, homes and cafés around the world. If one event can be said to have proved to people that "real history" could occur in "real time", this was it. The "fall of the wall" drew a huge audience and was the harbinger for the end of communism in Europe. The success of that one broadcast had an impact on the growth of international media as well: it opened up new markets for satellite news channels, allowed for easier access to information and permitted greater access for the hitherto-restricted western news media to report on events in what had been the Soviet Union.

It also shifted the emphasis of reporting, particularly in the West. Where once the prism of the Cold War shaped the information being provided, the lack of that one dominant geopolitical issue rendered some stories irrelevant to editors in major centres. Political developments that in the past would have merited attention because of the East-West conflict were now less compelling. "Now a coup d'état in an African country is still a coup in an African country", said Bernard Gwertzman (former editor of the *New York Times*). As a news story it's marginal ... do you need to report it?"⁹

As well, further technical advances and the expansion of satellite "footprints" (broadcast areas) allowed viewers to watch and be watched in Africa, Asia and South and Central America. The transnational media were now creating the "global village" Marshall McLuhan had described a quarter of a century before.

After three thousand years of specialist explosion and of increasing specialism and alienation in the technological extension of our bodies, our world has become compressional by dramatic reversal. As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village. Electric speed in bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree. It is this implosive factor that alters the position of the Negro, the teen-ager, and some other groups. They can no longer be *contained*, in the political sense of limited association. They are now *involved* in our lives and we in theirs, thanks to the electric media.¹⁰

⁹ Cited in Warren Strobel, *Late-Breaking Foreign Policy* (Washington: USIP Press, 1997), p. 66.

¹⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964), p. 5.

It may have become a global village, but there were parts of the world that were on the “other side of the tracks”: the poor, developing countries of the “South” in Africa, Asia and South America. The result of this blind spot in the media was that enlightenment of people in the “North” about events in the “South” did not occur as had been predicted. Rather than a context-based reporting, the vast majority of stories on the developing world was based on disasters – famine, war, disease and death. As former television journalist Robert McNeil notes, the end of the Cold War spawned a new television age, which, through its desire to tell stories with pictures, had an effect on the UN and other international agencies, whose emergencies were made the more poignant with pictures.

For all those decades, the Cold War framed the world view. But suddenly, like governments and scholars and foreign offices, the media were cast adrift from these secular moorings and needed a new way of looking at the world. Television in particular has found it in humanitarianism.¹¹

McNeil says television’s new interest in humanitarianism brought an awareness of events, but this awareness did not translate into to a greater understanding of the issues or an involvement of those people in foreign lands in the lives of those in the industrialized world. Be they teen-agers, adults, women, men, Asians, or “Negroes”, they would remain on the periphery of “our” consciousness.

¹¹Robert McNeil, Modern Media and International Affairs, O.D. Skelton Memorial Lecture, Halifax (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs, 1993), p. 7.

The transnational media and their limited skill in reporting effectively on humanitarian events may have been a major contributor to the lack of understanding of those events and the “filtering” of certain issues. The history of the transnational media has been the story of a narrowing focus on issues based on the self-interest of the industrialized world, including a trend to censorship in the early days and efforts to manage the media agenda in most recent times.

International reporting: the lost art

At ten minutes past eleven our Light Cavalry advanced. The whole Brigade scarcely made one effective regiment, according to the numbers of the continental armies; and yet it was more than we could spare. As they rushed toward the front, the Russians opened on them from the guns in the redoubt on the right, with volleys of musketry and rifles. They swept proudly past, glittering in the morning sun in all the pride and splendour of war. We could scarcely believe the evidence of our senses! Surely that handful of men were not going to charge an army in position? Alas, it was but too true - their desperate valour knew no bounds, and far indeed was it removed from its so-called better part - discretion.

- from a report of the *Times* of London, November 1854¹²

The historical role of the transnational media in reporting international issues dates back to the coverage of conflict. The first war to be covered by a major medium was the British Imperial war in the Crimea (now part of Russia). In 1854, the Crimean war was the first conflict in which the British army first allowed a correspondent to accompany troops. Prior to that time, any war “reporting” had involved the printing of correspondence from soldiers themselves.¹³

The correspondent, William “Billy” Russell, was from a newspaper, *The Times* of London, that did not support the war, and subsequently helped to blunt the government’s ambitions. Russell became famous by stumbling upon the notorious “Charge of the Light Brigade” in which hundreds of British cavalry died. What might have become a forgotten chapter in history – or a classic military blunder that would most certainly have been covered up – was instead used as a rallying cry for future wars.

¹² Philip Knightly, *The First Casualty* (London: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1976), p. 3.

¹³ Ibid.

In the short term, the debacle in the Crimea and Russell's reporting of it shaped the government agenda. In 1855, the British government fell, due in part to the press criticism of the war. When the new Secretary for War, the Duke of Newcastle, met William Russell that year, he said, "It was you who turned out the government."¹⁴

Government leaders in Britain and elsewhere came to understand the possibility that the media could turn the public in favour of, or against, their wars or policies. The existence of a partisan press that was bankrolled by opposition party supporters, as well as those of the governments of the day, meant that the press could be used to manipulate public opinion for or against government policy. Napoleon recognized the threat posed by the press, stating that "three hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets."¹⁵

In the mid-1800s, the introduction of the telegraph led to fears by the American government that the "instantaneous" nature of the telegraph and the visual impact of battlefield photographs, would undermine both tactical advantages and public morale in the wide coverage afforded the American Civil War. This spawned widespread censorship of newspapers covering the war.¹⁶ Matthew Brady's graphic photos of huge numbers of dead and dying at the Antietam, Maryland, which are icons of that conflict,

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁵ Cited in McLuhan, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁶ Library of Congress website [<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/cwbrady.html>].

were able to be viewed exclusively in his gallery. His 1862 exhibition of "The Dead at Antietam" caused a great furore, but the photos were not published in newspapers until after the war was over.¹⁷ The *New York Times* reported that Brady had "brought home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war"¹⁸ but the newspaper did not print the photos.

The Spanish-American War is recognized as a watershed in the relationship between the media and governments. The war spawned some of the most infamous examples of so-called "yellow journalism" of the era. Newspapers of the time were accused of acting as boosters for the war in order to increase circulation. Looking for a conflict to cover in a bellicose turn-of-the-century environment, the Hearst news syndicate effectively manufactured a cause for the United States to go to war over Cuba: the mysterious sinking of the USS *Maine*.

In January 1897, William Randolph Hearst, publisher of the *New York Journal*, sent writer Richard Harding Davis and illustrator Frederic Remington to Cuba for a series of articles about the Cuban rebels' uprising against the Spanish occupation. Bored with the peace he found in Cuba, Remington wired Hearst: "Everything quiet. There is no trouble. There will be no war. I wish to return." Hearst reportedly replied: "Please remain. You furnish pictures. I will furnish war."¹⁹ A year later, the *Maine* sank. Whether a

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Knightley, op. cit, p. 56.

coincidence or not, the cry of “Remember the *Maine*” stoked the militaristic attitude of the time and was exploited by Hearst and his rival Joseph Pulitzer to sell newspapers. There was no need to control information, and there was no advantage to censoring a war that was close to home and supported by citizen and government alike. So the American press had a field day in Latin America and even helped to create the legend of future president “Teddy” Roosevelt and his “Rough Riders”.²⁰

The Boer War, which began in 1898, attracted a wide variety of journalists from almost every corner of the Empire, including a young Winston S. Churchill, who was captured and escaped while a journalist for the London *Morning Post*. Several Canadians covered the war, as there was a Canadian presence. Among them were Frederick Hamilton and John A. Ewan of the Toronto *Globe*, H.S. White of the Montreal *Star* and R.E. Finn of the Montreal *Herald*.²¹ The first journalist killed in the war was not from Great Britain, but rather Australian W.J. Lambie of the Melbourne *Age*. The British press had a role in whipping up sentiment at home and encouraged anti-Boer feeling by inventing hundreds of atrocity stories. The stories suggested that Boer civilians murdered wounded British soldiers; that Boer soldiers massacred pro-British civilians; that Boers executed other Boers who wanted to surrender; among the worst fabrications was the story of Boers attacking British Red Cross tents while brave British doctors and nurses were treating the wounded.²²

²⁰ Ibid., p. 57.

²¹ National Library of Canada website: [<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/2/13/h13-1008-e.html>]

²² Knightley, op. cit, p.75.

In the first truly multinational conflict, World War I, censorship was prevalent for good reason: the horror of the killing grounds could not be fathomed by even the most jingoistic of supporters of the war. Although written descriptions were permitted, the authorities on all sides recognized that photographs might provide people with a greater grasp of the chaos. As a result, “realistic” photos of the fighting were not published in the newspapers of Britain or any of its allies (nor is there any evidence of similar photos in the German media). The taking of pictures at the front was punishable by death. Only at war’s end did photographs and drawings begin to be published, to the horror of the reading public.²³ In Canada, if the stories provided unwanted details of death and destruction, government censors had the right to seize newspapers at the publishing plant or prevent them from being mailed out.²⁴

At the outset of World War II, editors and publishers complained vociferously when Allied governments attempted to impose a similar regime. In Canada, the initial, extreme sanctions were removed and replaced by prosecutions after-the-fact. Despite the latitude provided, reporters were not critical in their reporting. Canada's Charles Lynch looked back with some shame on the work he did as a Reuters war correspondent, saying "It's humiliating to look back on what we wrote during the war. It was crap ... we were a propaganda arm for our governments."²⁵

²³ Ibid., p. 99

²⁴ W. H. Kesterton, *A History of Journalism in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1967), p. 246.

²⁵ Interviewed on CBC Television documentary, “The Valour and the Horror”, 1992.

This collaborative relationship between Western journalists and the military changed following the wars in Korea and Vietnam. In both conflicts, reporters had fairly free rein to travel with troops and report what they saw. This latitude allowed for reporting of as much bad news as good on the prosecution of those wars.

Although many American correspondents agreed with government policy in both wars,²⁶ their continuous reporting of American casualties in the war in Vietnam, and the return of coffins stateside (the first international war in which this happened), eventually had a negative impact on public morale in the United States. This “Vietnam syndrome”²⁷ led to a change in government and military policy vis-a-vis the American media. As a result, under President Ronald Reagan, when the U.S. invaded both Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989), the media were left cooling their heels offshore until there were “successes” to report. There was no government interest in showing Americans dying on foreign beaches.²⁸ This media management strategy had been exercised effectively by the British when their troops invaded the Falkland Islands in 1982: the British media went in only after the British dead had been buried or taken away. The approach was subsequently copied by the Americans in Grenada and Panama.

One article written for a U.S. Naval War College publication outlined the lessons that the Pentagon could learn from the Falklands model. To maintain public support for a war, the article said, a government should sanitize the

²⁶ Edward J. Epstein, News From Nowhere (New York: Random House, 1973), pp. 211-220.

²⁷ defined by William Safire as “revulsion at the use of military power that afflicted our psyche for decades after our defeat.” New York Times, April 30, 2001.

²⁸ Warren Strobel, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

visual images of war; control media access to military theaters; censor information that could upset readers or viewers; and exclude journalists who would not write favorable stories. The Pentagon used all these techniques to one extent or another during subsequent wars.²⁹

This strategy of managing the media – and therefore controlling the message – led to the approach taken by the American and British governments and military in the Gulf War in 1991. All information was imparted at formal briefings, and all coverage would be undertaken by "pools" – small groups of cameramen or women, photographers and journalists who would be the "eyes and ears" for their colleagues.

The reason was obvious: since the war in Vietnam, the media had come to be perceived as influential in setting the military agenda in a way it had never been before. Combat operations developed with a number of tactics: avoid the sight of body bags, use air war instead of ground troops and “get in and get out” of a theatre of war to ensure that there would be no more “quagmires” like the Vietnam war. William Safire noted the impact of the media and public opinion on American military strategy.

The problem was addressed in a National Security Policy Review from the first months of the (George W) Bush presidency, dealing with "third world threats." It reads: "In cases where the U.S. confronts much weaker enemies, our challenge will be not simply to defeat them, but to defeat them decisively and rapidly." Any other outcome would be "embarrassing" and might "undercut political support," understood to be thin.³⁰

²⁹Center for Public Integrity, “Will Truth Again Be First Casualty?”, [http://www.public-i.org/story_01_092001.htm.]

There is no question that public support and positive media reporting are critical to a successful military operation. Seymour Topping, one of the “deans” of American journalism, suggests that new technology allows for a more independent – and thus more threatening – role for reporters. As a result, he says the military should work closely with the media to transmit the story *it* wants the public to receive.

With the end of the cold war and the development of ultra-fast satellite communications, old hard-fought issues such as military insistence on prior review of copy filed from war zones have become obsolete. Reporters roaming war zones equipped with portable satellite equipment are no longer dependent on military facilities to file stories or transmit photographs. Engaged now in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, such as those in Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, and Bosnia, the military have concluded that they must treat the media less as adversaries and more as partners.³¹

A narrow focus on humanitarian work

While the media are acknowledged to have played a role in shaping the military strategies of some industrialized nations, they have had a complicated relationship with humanitarian operations. Famine in Ethiopia, earthquakes in Mexico, floods in India, cyclones in Bangladesh have all grabbed headlines and coverage as events in remote places have become much more accessible. But there has not been a rapid expansion of international coverage of humanitarian work outside of those crises, or as they are known in humanitarian circles, “complex emergencies”.

³⁰ Safire, op. cit., New York Times, April 30, 2001.

³¹ Seymour Topping, “Review of Late-Breaking Foreign Policy by Warren Strobel”, Columbia Journalism Review, March/April 1998 [<http://www.cjr.org/year/98/2/books-strobel.asp>].

When the media, particularly television, had the ability to go almost anywhere in the world, the optimistic observer expected they would. But expectations of a new “golden age” of international television reporting were never fulfilled. One of the problems has been that while there is a perception of portability with modern television equipment, the reality is much more complicated.

Television is of a different organizational magnitude (to a one-person print media operation). The basic working unit in international television news consists of a correspondent, a field producer, a cameraperson, and a sound engineer, plus about 600 pounds of camera and personal equipment. If a report is to be prepared for satellite transmission, an additional 600 pounds of editing equipment come along.³²

The result has been that the investment has not been made on the long term to cover international issues, especially humanitarian issues, and subsequently they are not given the focus and context they might have been. As Anne Winter suggests in a UN study, the limits of the medium, combined with the trends in reporting, prevent a broad, context-based approach to development issues.

A good CNN story is one that unfolds in front of the viewer's eyes: it must be happening live, it must provide good and vivid images, it must preferably be relatively easy to access and to film, and be on a subject to which American audiences can relate. Measured against these criteria, coverage of emergencies in the developing world will clearly take precedence over the less spectacular long-term development concerns. This reinforces the common perception in the public mind that the emergency situation in developing countries is the normal state of affairs.³³

³² Garrick Utley, “The Shrinking of Foreign News”, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1997, p. 6.

³³ Anne Winter, *Is Anyone Listening?: Communicating Development in Donor Countries*, (Geneva: UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service, 1996), pp. 13-14.

In an interview with *Time* magazine, former UN Secretary-General Boutros

Boutros-Ghali echoed the suggestion that the media's focus is on *now*, not *how*.

Long-term work doesn't interest you because the span of attention of the public is limited. Out of 20 peacekeeping operations, you are interested in one or two. Two years ago, it was Mogadishu. Now it is Sarajevo. Tomorrow it will be Haiti. And because of the limelight on one or two, I am not able to obtain the soldiers or the money or the attention for the 17 other operations.³⁴

Despite the access of the media “centre” to the “hinterland”, there are business considerations that affect editorial decisions: the market for international news is far from overwhelming. Even though most transnational news gathering services (like Reuters, AP, AFP or UPI) have offices in far-off capitals, there is not yet a true appreciation of the importance of international news in the key markets in North America and Europe. The statement of American Senator “Tip” O’Neill that “all politics is local politics”³⁵ appears to have been taken to heart in the industrialized world: local and national issues continue to dominate newscasts from New York to Munich and from Vienna to Vancouver.

Projection

One reason for this is the psychological phenomenon of “projection”³⁶, which distorts the process of effective communication. Within the framework of the commercially-sponsored media (and government-supported media as well), it is important that

³⁴Cited in “ 'The UN has been a success' ”, *Time magazine*, October 23, 1995.

³⁵ Thomas P. O'Neill, Gary Hymel, *All Politics Is Local: And Other Rules of the Game*, (Holbrook, Mass.: Adams Media Corp., 1995), p. 1.

³⁶ defined as the “assignment of personal attributes to other individuals” , John R. Schermerhorn, Jr., *Management for Productivity*, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1984), p.349.

broadcasters and publishers attract the largest audience possible for a program or publication's advertisers. This causes a problem for the purveyors of news. If a viewer or reader in the industrialized world is inclined to see others *only* in the framework of his or her mindset or relationship to the other as “similar to me”, this means that (for the medium to appeal to a viewer or a reader as a consumer) there is a need to communicate according to the narrow interests of that viewer/reader consumer. This could mean that someone in another country who is in a state of hunger or need, or lives in a different climate or terrain, or is of another race, ethnic group or religion, is not likely to elicit any interest or empathy. This lack of empathy would be even more pronounced if the industrialized country viewer or reader has never been to the developing country – and Sierra Leone, Liberia and Angola are not magnets for tourists. Why should a person project their likeness onto a stranger in a strange and far-off country when there is nothing to link them beyond their membership in the human race?

In some cases there can be a counterweight to this phenomenon: members of a diaspora can be supportive of people they perceive as “brothers and sisters”, which can lead to an interest or support for reporting on the “home country”. Although this may be the case for Israel, Cuba and some European countries by the presence of diasporic nationals living in North America, it has not been effectively channeled through the African-American community or the Arab and Muslim communities. African-Americans do not appear to influence the American media when it comes to coverage of Africa. While

African-Americans constitute 13 per cent of the population³⁷ in the United States, they may be either too many generations removed from their “home countries” or lack the wealth and political clout to exert force or purchasing power on the American media. Ironically, events affecting the white populations of Zimbabwe and South Africa have attracted the attention of the media in the industrialized world, due in part to their attachment to the Commonwealth and the presence of a European diaspora.

In the case of the Arab and Muslim communities, Karim Karim has noted the “demonization” of those communities in the past several years places them in a weakened position when seeking balanced reporting from media in the industrialized world.

Although Muslim (and other Southern) countries have been incorporated into the international system of states, they cannot, according to the European discourses, be considered equals to the countries of the North. Whereas the modern liberal state is nominally Christian, its Muslim antagonist is generally seen as still holding on to the beliefs perceived as being integral to barbarism ... In this way, the hegemonic status of certain states on the global stage merges with older world views to create a *dramatis personae* of heroes and villains who engage in a violent struggle that defines the global moral order.³⁸

It also comes down to demographics. In the United States, Canada and most European countries, the dominant racial group is European Caucasians, not people of colour. As Susan Moeller points out,

Race matters. (Time columnist Barbara Ehrenreich) said,
“If there were a couple of million blonde, blue-eyed people

³⁷ CNN website: [<http://www.cnn.com/2001/US/08/12/white.black/>].

³⁸ Karim H. Karim, *Islamic Peril* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2000), p. 29.

facing starvation somewhere, the media coverage would be so intense we would know their names ... We'd see them as individuals."³⁹

This notion is supported by a very poignant example of a report that appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen* in May of 2001. The following article appeared as the third item on the back page of the first section – page A19 – under the heading “International News”:

Civil War Takes 2.5 million lives

About 2.5 million people died in eastern Congo during the country's 2½-year civil war, an international humanitarian organization says.

The overwhelming majority of deaths were related to disease and malnutrition – products of a conflict that has ravaged the vast mineral-rich country's economy and health care system – the New York-based International Rescue Committee said...“The loss of life is perhaps the worst in Africa in recent decades”, committee president Renold Levy said.⁴⁰

This is what Virgil Hawkins of the University of Osaka refers to as the “other side” of the CNN effect – the lack of desire to respond to the human suffering in Africa, central Asia, and other parts of the world where conflict and conflict-related disease and famine are responsible for millions of deaths. This lack of interest is generated by a corresponding lack of media presence. As a result, the conflict rages on, there is no military intervention, and there are few attempts at humanitarian assistance or diplomatic initiatives.⁴¹ Had they been blond and blue-eyed, those 2.5 million Congolese might have been at the heart of an enormous media-focused tragedy. Instead they are relegated to a

³⁹ Susan Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 22.

⁴⁰ *Ottawa Citizen*, May 10, 2001, p. A19.

column inch on the back page. In January of 2002, ABC (U.S.) television news began its report on the tragedy with an apology from host Ted Koppel, who stated that “few Americans know about the deaths of up to 2.5 million people in eastern Congo over the past three years and even fewer know why.” He added, “These are events you should have heard about on Nightline years ago.”⁴² This is a small but important way of proving that it is the reader or viewer in the industrialized countries, particularly those with wealth and influence, who determine the media agenda in the industrialized world. If “the customer is always right”, then the customer of the goods advertised in the media is always right as he or she sets the competitive media agenda.

But the most damaging result of this phenomenon is the limits placed on the range of international news that is covered. Major news reports from the developing world tend to focus on sensational themes of war, assassination, disease and disaster, because it is a way of striking to the most basic of emotions of the news consumer. And sensationalism is a way of selling the news.

With but a few exceptions, the media pay their way through selling advertising, not selling the news. So the operating principle behind much of the news business is to appeal to an audience – especially a large audience – with attractive demographics for advertisers. Those relatively few news outlets that consider international news to be of even remote interest to their target audience try to make the world accessible. The point in covering international affairs is to make the world fascinating – or at least acceptably convenient.⁴³

⁴¹Virgil Hawkins, Journal of Humanitarian Affairs, The price of inaction: The media and humanitarian intervention, May 2001, p. 15 [<http://www.jha.ac/articles/a066.htm>].

⁴² International Rescue Committee website [<http://www.intrescom.org/news/index.cfm?newsID=689>].

⁴³Moeller, op.cit., p.10.

As former NBC-TV foreign correspondent Garrick Utley notes, the emergence of the vast choice of channels is making news production unprofitable, and cutting market share for the American networks and for their news packages. This has an effect on *how* the news is reported.

The decline has pushed network news producers to the apparently logical, if journalistically undesirable, conclusion that foreign news is expendable unless it is of compelling interest to a mass audience. The new "litmus test" at work is whether viewers (in the producer's opinion) will instinctively "relate" to the story. As in other industries, as choice increases, power shifts from the producer to the consumer.⁴⁴

It is not surprising, then that assignment editors would assess the value of sending someone to a foreign destination balancing the corporate interest and the security of the reporter.

(ABC News assignment editor Laura) Logan learned to weigh the dangers to her personnel against the news value of the story – and senior local producers' interest in having it on World News tonight. "There's no sense in sending someone into a dangerous place unless there's a market for it", she said.⁴⁵

Why should these trends to considerations of the market, combined with projection and entertainment values, be so dominant in western newscasts? Because they are becoming, in the Hollywood-dominated media, the dominant discourse of our time. As Susan

⁴⁴ Utley, op. cit., p. 7.

⁴⁵ Warren Strobel, op. cit., p. 123.

Moeller notes, “news values are not universal: they are culturally, politically and ideologically determined.”⁴⁶ According to a 1996 survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, Americans only pay close attention only to those international news stories “of natural or man-made disasters and stories of wars or terrorism involving the United States or its citizens.”⁴⁷

The emphasis on news as entertainment and drama draws from culture, and from the corporate connection to the news media. In the United States, all the four major television networks are owned by corporate giants, most of whom are entertainment conglomerates – ABC by Disney, CBS by Viacom, and Fox by 20th Century Fox. CNN is owned by Time-Warner. NBC, the anomaly of the bunch, is owned by General Electric, but it has other entertainment holdings, such as the History Channel, and shares the ownership of the main business channel, CNBC. In Canada, private media have been snapped up by corporations seeking integration and power – Bell Globemedia and CanWest Global are the dominant players. As H.L Mencken is reported to have said, “the power of the press comes from the person who owns one.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Moeller, op.cit., p. 16.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

⁴⁸ Cited in Brian Buckley, The News Media and Foreign Policy: An Exploration, (Halifax: Dalhousie Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, 1998), p. 44.

The role of drama in news reporting is hardly new: as far back as 1963, the executive producer of the NBC *Evening News*, Reuven Frank, was instructing his staff that

Every news story should, without any sacrifice of probity or responsibility, display the attributes of fiction, of drama...It should have (dramatic elements)... these are not only the essentials of drama; they are the essentials of narrative.⁴⁹

In the coverage of the war in Vietnam, business considerations intervened in news decisions: the starkest images were the ones that attracted audience share and thus sold the most advertising. As a result, film cameramen in Vietnam said they had to seek out the most graphic footage.

‘What the producers want on the film is as much blood and violence as we can find. That’s the name of the game and every cameraman knows it’....Cameramen in Vietnam were ordered by the networks to “shoot bloody” – and this produced a strong focus on military action at the expense of the less-visible political considerations.⁵⁰

It is an approach that has grown even more intense in the past three decades. In a competitive market for news, the bottom-line has dictated that the print and broadcast media are part of the entertainment industry. According to UPI foreign editor Bob Martin, “the more bizarre the story, the more it is going to get played.”⁵¹ Juan Tamayo, former foreign editor of the *Miami Herald* told Susan Moeller:

I think the entire profession is leaning toward the ‘bring-it-down-to-the-man-in-the-street’ level ... we are heading into

⁴⁹Epstein, op. cit., p. 4.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 162.

⁵¹Moeller, op. cit, p. 10.

a period in which foreign reporting, which used to inform and educate, is now being asked to entertain. How can we change our product to attract or keep our readers? And the answer is, give them entertaining stuff...we are not giving our readers news any more...it's light, it's fluffy, it's crap.⁵²

In a 1995 study, the Pew Centre outlined the American media's coverage of international affairs in this way:

- More than 40 per cent of international news stories have conflict or its conditions as the "direct driving event";
- "Foreign events and disasters must be more dramatic and violent to compete with national news";
- One-third of international news stories are about the United States in the world, rather than about the world"
- Certain regions and topics are under-reported: Africa, South Asia, Australia and the Pacific Islands, agriculture, demographics and education.⁵³

Warren Strobel says there is a problem of lack of context when the media deal with international issues: "the news media, especially television, do a poor job of providing early warning of ethnic conflict, famine, and other elements of post-cold war humanitarian crises."⁵⁴ The demand being thin for a context-based, in-depth reporting of international issues, it stands to reason that there is therefore an equally-slim demand for a skilled cadre of genuinely international reporters, based in the field with a knowledge of the language or a familiarity with the region. It is far easier to import reporters from major centres and provide them with an interpreter and a guide than to keep seasoned

⁵² Ibid., p. 24.

⁵³ Ibid., p., 18.

⁵⁴ Strobel, op. cit., p. 219.

reporters and crews in far-off locations "on hold" for long periods of time at great expense. This is especially true when the frequency of reports from those areas might prove few and far between – it is an inefficient use of capital if there is no justifiable market for contextual reporting or correspondents. Even in these very turbulent times, international issues do not attract a substantial following. Local politics and national issues trump international issues time and again.

One must presume that although Canadians have shown a greater propensity for consuming international news, the driving interest of most Canadian reporting will be Canadian, or American, involvement in a news story. American content is popular given our obsession with our neighbours to the south and the volume of coverage available from American news services and networks. In Canada, for example, the average Canadian daily newspaper or nightly newscast contains “international” news coverage marginally greater than its American counterpart. The Kent Royal Commission on Newspapers calculated that most newspapers in Canada devote about 25 per cent of their "news" content to international issues⁵⁵, and that is probably accurate today. However, when stories are eliminated that mention a Canadian connection, or a link with an event occurring in the United States, the figure descends to less than five per cent on average.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Royal Commission on Newspapers, 1981, p. 125.

⁵⁶ based on a random survey of four major Canadian newspapers (*Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *La Presse*) July 2002.

This figure is what one might define as "pure" international news – stories that emanate from abroad and have no apparent link to Canada or the United States. However, they could involve the United Kingdom, France, or Canada's other G-7 partners. This leaves an even narrower window for developing country issues to enter – perhaps one per cent of daily news media content. This is not to say that there is not a Canadian market for "pure" international news: a 1991 study indicated that Canadians were interested in more international news; editors said that they were unable to provide more coverage due to the economics of paying for correspondents.⁵⁷

The cause and effect of this lack of interest and lack of market is by and large a low investment in the expertise or the bureaus to deal with international coverage. The complexities of covering a civil war, a humanitarian emergency or a political campaign require journalists familiar with the ground upon which they are standing. ABC's Ted Koppel notes that this can cause problems in the quality of the reporting, in that "real-time" coverage does not provide needed depth or context. He says that "putting someone on air while an event is unfolding is clearly a technological tour-de-force, but it is an impediment, not an aid, to good journalism."⁵⁸

⁵⁷Walter C. Soderlund, Robert M. Krause, Richard G. Price, "Canadian Daily Newspaper Editors' Evaluation of International Reporting", Canadian Journal of Communications, Volume 16, No. 1, 1991.

⁵⁸ Cited in Nicholas Fraser, "Conflict of Interests", Sunday Times, 24 July 1994.

Given the lack of resources devoted to international news, the average report from the field is undertaken by a correspondent who is flown in from elsewhere and neither speaks the local language, knows the local culture nor has contacts to cultivate, aside from official sources. This shoddy preparation can lead to a dependence on “in the field” contacts to the point that the stories can be easily skewed according to the biases of the sources themselves.

Aid agencies and international coverage

Aid agencies, the main operators in humanitarian operations, have much to gain and little to lose by undertaking intense public relations activity in the field.

Aid agencies need the media to obtain public visibility for their causes, their operations and to raise funds. On the other hand, inexperienced relief workers and “spotty young doctors” are treated as experts by even more ignorant reporters parachuted in for the event, who themselves depend on the agencies for their knowledge of local conditions, their contacts, transport and even in some cases for accommodation, security and assistance in finding their stories. An unhealthy tit-for-tat develops when reporters cater to aid agencies’ expectations of coverage for their own operations....⁵⁹

This mutually-exploitative relationship, in which journalists are sometimes beholden to aid organizations for transportation and services, can cause severe conflicts of interest.

Journalists are currently in the best position to judge NGOs, but those who are too critical of the organizations aren’t allowed access to their projects and NGOs are under no obligation to ... reveal their activities to the press. At any rate, few journalists are equipped to do a detailed and accurate analysis of development activities. It takes more time than journalists usually have. In a place like Somalia or Rwanda it was particularly difficult to criticize NGOs. They had all the money and the airplanes. The only rides to Goma (Zaire) for journalists who weren’t backed by big aid organizations were from NGOs. They were more than happy to help. The return on investment makes it all worthwhile because NGOs need nothing more than publicity. Their prime interest is in reaching their customers, the donating public. These are the people who

⁵⁹ Anne Winter, op. cit., p. 15.

must be convinced that the organizations are doing what they say they're doing, and NGOs look after their customers at all times.⁶⁰

In its 1996 report on Rwanda, the Danish Foreign Ministry noted that one of the lessons learned in Rwanda was that the role of the media in 1994 was not fully understood.

It is difficult to identify the policy implications of media coverage and the widespread concern among donor organizations and implementing agencies for profile, particularly when so little analytical information is available on the way the media influences agency behaviour. It is highly improbable (as well as being undesirable) that journalists will ever be controlled by humanitarian agencies in the way that they were controlled by the military during conflicts such as the Gulf War, or the Falklands/Malvinas conflict. Efforts to raise awareness among media personnel about the workings of the humanitarian aid system would benefit everyone.⁶¹

As leaders in the humanitarian "marketplace", NGOs like *Médecins sans frontières* (MSF), have been able to exploit some of the main stereotypes of their role as "dedicated, poorly-paid doctors" to attract attention to their work by media relations campaigns. MSF has been one of the most successful NGOs in the world, winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999. This success has been arguably as a result of impressive self-promotion, according to David Rieff, an American foreign policy analyst.

⁶⁰ Michael Maren, *The Road to Hell* (New York: Free Press 1997), p. 269.

⁶¹ Danish Foreign Ministry, *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience* (Copenhagen: Danish Foreign Ministry, 1996).
[<http://www.reliefweb.int/library/nordic/book3/pb022k.html>].

Some agencies, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) being the most accomplished, have become masters of spinning the story of an event to influence public opinion at home.⁶²

MSF, which during complex emergencies generates at least one news release each day and undertakes countless interviews, admits that it has to compete for “share of mind”.

Today, in the face of so much information, it would be easy to assume an accompanying increase in interest and sympathy. Yet it continues to be difficult to arouse this sympathy toward people who are still seen as faraway and unfamiliar. The globalization of media will not solve this problem, and it will be the role of humanitarian agencies to keep these issues in the forefront of public awareness. For MSF, greater awareness should lead to a greater sense of responsibility. As MSF enters the twenty-first century, the pursuit of these values in a drastically changing world environment will continue to guide the organization's mission and work.⁶³

Boutros Boutros-Ghali argued in a June 1996 speech that “through the issues, people and places it chooses to highlight – or to ignore – the media today has enormous influence over the international agenda.” This new reality, Boutros-Ghali said, “has drastically transformed the conduct of international relations, the age-old practice of diplomacy.”⁶⁴

When he was UN Under-Secretary for Peacekeeping Operations, Kofi Annan noted that

From (the war in) Ethiopia onward, the role of the media took an entirely new tack. The target of reporting shifted from objectivity to sympathy, from sustaining intellectual commitment to engaging emotional involvement...It

⁶² David Rieff, “Charity on the Rampage: the business of foreign aid”, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1997, p. 133.

⁶³ Rony Brauman and Joelle Tanguy, “The Médecins sans Frontières Experience”, 1998 [<http://www.msf.org>].

⁶⁴ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, “The United Nations and the Global Communications Revolution” (address to the German United Nations Association and the German Association for Foreign Policy, Bonn, Germany, June 20, 1996).

sometimes seemed that the media was no longer reporting on the agenda, but setting it.⁶⁵

Media influence and consensus

Despite much evidence to the contrary, there is a school of thought that contradicts the UN Secretary-General. Johanna Neuman represents this point of view when she says it is not the medium that controls the message, but rather the strength of democracy and its leadership.

There is a new day in diplomacy, a novel outlet for public opinion and a steep test for journalism. Above all, there is a challenge to leaders to exploit the new inventions. But technology gives no odds on its use. That is for people to determine – leaders and their publics, individuals all.⁶⁶

Neuman believes that media influence on an issue is inversely proportional to the consensus within a given society and control of that policy by government leaders. For example, she attributes the influence of the media in the war in Vietnam to a lack of public consensus on the war, combined with the government's failure to effectively prosecute the war. She insists that it is the manipulation of the media by those in power that trumps the ability of reporters to use the sophisticated technology they have at hand.

It is said that ours is an era of media power where instant communication has given life to Marshall McLuhan's prophecy of a global village. Borders have been erased by computers, goes the refrain, and pictures are driving international affairs. It is my contention, by contrast, that

⁶⁵ Kofi Annan, "Peace-keeping in Situations of Civil War," New York University Journal of International Law and Politics, Vol. 26, 1994, p.624.

⁶⁶ Johanna Neuman, op. cit., p. 278.

pictures drive diplomacy – as words did in an earlier era – only when there is a vacuum of political leadership.⁶⁷

This is a point of view that is shared by journalist Warren Strobel. Strobel accepts the concept that the role of the media in influencing policy and the corresponding loss of policy control only occurs when there is neither a policy being clearly defined by government leaders, nor a public consensus on the issue. As he defines it, "the news media's ability to influence policy is inversely related to the degree of consensus in the government and society ... and second, the news media enhance and accelerate shifts in policy or national sentiment that are already under way."⁶⁸ Strobel also implies that there is an incestuous relationship between newsmakers and reporters, and that frequently those in government hold the winning hand over the media, as they have privileged access to information, in the ongoing competition for the public's attention.

The CNN Effect is narrower and far more complex than the conventional wisdom holds. In a more perfect world, the news media – especially television – would be a more independent force, pointing out problems and helping set the public agenda. In reality, CNN and its brethren follow newsmakers at least as frequently as they push them or make them feel uncomfortable. The struggle between reporters and officials continues as before – just at a faster pace.⁶⁹

In a monograph for Dalhousie University, Brian Buckley (a former director-general with the Canadian department of foreign affairs) also disputes the notion that the media are all-

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁸ Strobel, op. cit., p. 37.

⁶⁹ Warren Strobel, "The CNN Effect", *Washington Journalism Review*, May 1996 v18 n4 p32(6) [<http://spectrum.troyst.edu/~jjoyner/security/articles/CNN%20Effect.htm>].

powerful and attributes their ability to influence policy to “weak or indifferent leadership than any new power of the media themselves.”

Even within that limited segment of foreign policy which does attract coverage, the role of the news media is much more modest than that sometimes ascribed to it. The much discussed “CNN effect”, in those instances in which detailed analysis has been performed, appears most frequently to arise from a confusion of cause and effect.⁷⁰

Countering that trend of thought are those who have worked in the humanitarian field, like Anne Winter, who suggests that the advent of television, and especially satellite television, changed the equation.

The sheer power and influence of this medium means editorial decisions about coverage....will to a certain extent influence the political agendas of governments. If CNN and others like it decide not to cover the conflict in, say, Angola, this country may fall off the world map. So while these companies cannot be blamed for choosing the material that is best suited to their medium, the consequences of these decisions on political priorities and public opinion can be far-reaching.⁷¹

Robert McNeil, a former PBS journalist, points out that George Bush, initially hesitant in aiding the Soviet coup in 1991, watched CNN and decided to support Boris Yeltsin when he saw him standing defiantly on a tank.⁷² McNeil suggests that television *has* changed the conduct of foreign affairs.

Television has created a different order of public opinion. In the issues which touch foreign affairs, the public witnesses the same apparent reality as its leaders. The

⁷⁰ Buckley, op. cit., p. 44

⁷¹ Winter, op. cit., p. 14.

⁷² McNeil, op. cit., p. 4.

public is no longer a mass to be sold a policy after it is decided. It is now active in seeing a policy made, one might even say in getting policy made.⁷³

The decision-makers as well themselves recognize the influence of the media. Former American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger once said of the Clinton White House, “our current political process does its books every night with *Nightline*.”⁷⁴ Former US President George Bush even commented that he “learned more from CNN than from the CIA.”⁷⁵

If there is common ground between analysts and actors on the role of the media in decision-making, it is this: there is a difference between making foreign policy and responding to a humanitarian disaster. Involving military forces in a dispute or changing economic policy are assessed as "doing something" genuinely substantive. By comparison, supporting humanitarian activities in response to the same dispute is to be “*seen* to be doing something.” Thus, rather than arguing over whether the media does influence Government Policy, I would argue that the response of donors and governments to humanitarian needs is seen as the "need to do something and to be seen to be doing something" that is not Policy *qua* policy. And that response is to a "need" that is clearly articulated and exposed by the media. Once a famine or the consequences of war are portrayed from far-off locations, there is an immediate response by donors and the public – one anticipated by the UN organizations, specialized agencies and NGOs. In

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Cited in Buckley, p. 44.

the days of print, this was possible and certainly not as easy, instantaneous or graphic. In the days of satellite broadcasting, it can be done almost anywhere on and off the planet.

Heads of UN agencies

In interviews with heads of UN agencies, the role of the media is accepted as important, like it or not, in setting the agendas of their organizations. It is seen as both a useful tool and a dangerous influence. It is acknowledged as a directing force, like an electronic weathervane, pointing the way in identifying the important issues of the day.

Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, says technological change has made it easier for people to understand international issues. She believes it is unusual that people did not respond to issues like globalization and its impact before, and suggests the emergence of television has shaped the public reaction.

People have known about poverty and problems of health through reading about it for the last century... but it is only in the last 25 years that everyone has been able to see it on their TV screens. And the response that has developed is an understanding of the lack of fairness and the big gaps in income. People see the faces of the people who are suffering in humanitarian catastrophes and widespread poverty. Democratic reaction around the world has developed with people are saying 'this is not right, we have to change ... into greater equity and equal opportunities' around the world.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Cited in "How to make a billion and bring peace on earth", Anne Applebaum, The Spectator, London, May 14, 1994, pp 8-10.

⁷⁶ Interview, Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, Geneva, September 4, 2001.

Brundtland acknowledges the value of the news media as a major means for the WHO to develop awareness of international challenges, but she feels that it tends to stress the negative aspect of such stories, which makes people feel powerless.

(Television) has a major effect, and it helps to be able to mobilize the necessary resolve so that solutions can be not only found and also so that action can be taken, with public awareness and pressure from civil society and from others, so it does help. But sometimes when on the TV screens people see a lot of devastation and they feel incompetent or out of reach, to know what can be done, that they may just feel despair. They might think 'this is something which is beyond me'. (The media) should be encouraged to give good reports on immunization or other programs so that people can feel that if they contribute, one way or another, by supporting a policy or by giving some of their money ... whatever way they choose, they can make a difference.⁷⁷

Carol Bellamy, the current Executive Director of UNICEF, was a New York politician before being chosen to run the Peace Corps by her friend Bill Clinton. She was then appointed to UNICEF by Clinton when the previous Executive Director, James Grant, also an American, died suddenly. She was running late for our interview in New York, as she was directing her staff thousands of kilometres away in the field to be sure that they wore their UNICEF hats and shirts for more effective media exposure. She recognizes that the American media do not cover international events as well as media outside of the US do, and suggests that this has led to a greater openness or support for the UN system in international capitals, but not necessarily within the United States. She sees a special role for the media:

⁷⁷ Ibid.

I think (the media) is an educator. I used to think tax lawyers ran the world, now I think communications runs the world. I think all kinds of communications media play a very major role. I would not call the media a promoter for the cause, but I don't think it has been harmful of the work of the UN.⁷⁸

Bellamy's comments are echoed by former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Within the context of a comment by American industrialist Ross Perot that in the world of instantaneous communication, diplomats "are relics of the days of sailing ships"⁷⁹, Boutros-Ghali said, "For the past two centuries, it was law that provided the source of authority for democracy. Today, law seems to be replaced by opinion as the source of authority, and the media serve as the arbiters of public opinion."⁸⁰

Louise Fréchette, who had to deal with the Somalia Affair⁸¹ as Deputy Minister of National Defence, recognizes the role the media can play in portraying the operations of the UN either positively or negatively.

I would say that transparency and accountability have been proven to be....positive factors in improving governments this is true of organs, the press plays a role, the press always understands and reflects accurately everything that's happening here. But I think that the UN is very open to the press. We are very conscious of the need to explain what we do. Frankly we have nothing to hide – we should recognize mistakes when they are made we should promote the good things that happen. I think that is must be attuned to the way in which information is shared and projected.⁸²

⁷⁸ Interview, Carol Bellamy, New York, July 19, 2001.

⁷⁹ Cited in Strobel, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Canadian soldiers on assignment beat Shidane Aron, a Somali teen-ager, to death in 1993. The murder was allegedly covered up by high-ranking military and National Defence officials.

⁸² Interview, Louise Fréchette, New York, July 18, 2001.

UNHCR Director-General Ruud Lubbers leads an organization that has suffered greatly because of the “yo-yo” effect of reporting on humanitarian emergencies. He says media are useful in bringing an issue to light, but the effect of “donor fatigue” is that crises have to be more and more debilitating or sensational to attract attention. That puts pressure on the agencies like UNHCR to depend on complex human emergencies to maintain their funding, and sometimes being unable to support services in so-called “silent emergencies”, which do not have as high a media profile. It is a situation he abhors.

It’s absolutely idiotic to think that your obligation, your moral and political obligations, depend on media coverage. This is absolutely very dangerous. It is as dangerous as if your politics would be all that you are playing in the media. Media are useful, but it cannot be that political obligations are only determined by the media.⁸³

The UN body that is responsible for coordination of humanitarian and social affairs, ECOSOC (the Economic and Social Council of the UN) recognized this problem in its 2001 report.

The international media can now conduct more or less constant live reporting as disasters and emergencies unfold. This has led to decision-makers and the general public being more aware of the devastating and widespread effects of certain crises and has motivated more rapid responses. An unfortunate corollary to this is that countries in crisis not under the media spotlight may struggle to receive the necessary resources.⁸⁴

⁸³ Interview, Ruud Lubbers, Geneva, September 4, 2001.

⁸⁴ Economic and Social Council Substantive session of 2001, Geneva, 2-27 July 2001, UN document E/2001/85, section 5, p. 3. [<http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ecosoc/doc2001.htm#s1>].

Juan Somavia of the ILO feels that the media play an important role in the operations of his agency. However he points out that the media agenda, which emphasizes short-term news cycles over long-term analysis, makes it hard for organizations like the ILO to get media attention on key long-term issues.

I think that depends on what line of business you are within the UN. For those that are very closed day-to-day operations on the ground, things that make news – and tragedies make news – I think evidently the media and the instant media like CNN play a very important role in depicting the situation. For those of us who are engaged in longer term processes – and process is not news – it doesn't have the attraction. It makes things much more difficult because you do not respond to the needs of the news market. On the other hand, it's indispensable for media not to be spot media, but to really cover society. The media themselves are struggling with that, because the more you do spot media, the more you sell newspapers, but the more you try to deal with the longer-term issues in society, the more you lose readership.⁸⁵

Somavia says the means the ILO is using to get attention is to show journalists the projects the ILO is doing on the ground, so that these projects can be representative or indicative of the ILO activities elsewhere.

We did that with one journalist who was doing a piece on slavery linked to the Durban meeting, and it was fabulous, because we had 5 or 6 people around the table talking about it. And for the journalist, it was much more interesting because the project interested him and he could zero in on it. So it produces two things, first, you can go beyond the generalities and second, you can show the expertise the institution has. I am beginning to do that, to tell the people who actually wrote the reports to go and do the press

⁸⁵ Interview, Juan Somavia, September 10, 2001.

conference and to “tell them about your product”. Media have the need for spot news; the issues the ILO deals with have to do with real lives of people and that is also news. So try to put in front of the camera, in front of the journalist try to balance, try to respond to the objective needs of the media. So why don’t we present our “products” in a way that is media useful.⁸⁶

This process of adapting to the media agenda to get the “products” of the agencies known is one that the more media-savvy leaders such as the new crop of leaders in the UN system is pursuing. Given that the UN is being led by Kofi Annan, it is not surprising that he encouraged Somavia, Lubbers and Brundtland to put their names forward to head the agencies they now lead. Annan is extremely aware of the impact of the media and is capable of using it to effect.

The journalists speak

Reporters who have worked both at home and abroad recognize that they can have an influence on the policies in their home countries. While they may not see their role as reflecting public opinion or attempting to change the agendas of governments or agencies, inevitably at the best of times, they do just that, by uncovering a scandal, or showing a contradiction in a policy, or simply allowing someone to verbally “paint him or herself into a corner.” Christopher Waddell, formerly a journalist for The Globe and Mail and CBC, says that he never wrote a story with the anticipation that it would end up with a controversy in parliament, even if that might have been the consequences of it.

I always wrote the stories because I thought they were really interesting, but I never spent any time guessing “Will

⁸⁶ Ibid.

this one have a big impact, or will that one?" I would just do it and see what happens. Even today, guessing what will have an impact is a hard thing to do.⁸⁷

He says that the best way to avoid being "spun" by government officials is to obtain a range of different views. However, with the decline in resources, the ability for reporters to work as part of a "beat system" has prevented a strong expertise in important areas.

You might be doing *Groupaction* one day, and the next day covering climate change. So when you don't have the knowledge, you don't know the people, you are then easy prey for interest groups and you almost inevitably end up doing stories about conflict, because conflict is easy to cover.⁸⁸

As an analyst, his impression of the UN agencies is that their focus has been on the more sensational, image-laden.

One suspects different elements of the UN have different agendas. UNICEF and some of those sorts of groups, have discovered, that as unfortunate as they are, pictures of famine can have a big impact on generating financial support for them.⁸⁹

Patrick Brown, the Asia correspondent for CBC for more than a decade, says he doesn't believe he has ever had an effect on government policy. Although he calls the UN "indispensable", as "the only global organization we have got...by its nature it is useful, however flawed", having expressed that sentiment, he's quite frank in his assessment of the UN.

⁸⁷ Interview, Christopher Waddell, August 1, 2002.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

On the ground I have seen so much waste and incompetence. The most egregious example I can think of is Cambodia (in the 1990s) there were just thousands of people floating around in air-conditioned vehicles. The requirements of the UN Staff for first world conditions in third world countries took up most of the budgets.⁹⁰

Brown says he believes the media had an impact on the UN agencies when they went to East Timor as an intervention force, he says they adjusted their approach, applying the lessons learned in Cambodia. He believes the UN agencies are not as bad in competing with one another as are the Non-Governmental Organizations. (NGOs).

It is more of an NGO phenomena where NGOs are competing for donor dollars and therefore are competing for media attention. In selecting their projects they are also competing for media attention and in selecting things they are also playing to people back home. That is certainly the case with a lot of NGOs and there is a lot of competition and backbiting as to who is going to get attention ... and it is understandable. It is up to us, if we are telling an aid story, it has to be compelling – this is television. I can't get anybody to watch five minutes about a guy who sits in an office deciding about microloans.⁹¹

Brown recognizes the problems of "fatigue" of donor issues, and the tendency to exaggerate to get a reporter's attention. He notes that when he was in Afghanistan in November of 2001, the UN agencies were "constantly talking up" the alleged "humanitarian disaster" that was about to occur after the American bombing, and failing to mention the droughts, famine and economic problems over the previous three years

⁹⁰ Interview, Patrick Brown, August 1, 2002.

⁹¹ Ibid.

that had led thousands of people to already be camped out on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

What the UN was doing was sitting outside of Afghanistan and saying day after day 'there is a humanitarian crisis'. I had been in Afghanistan and not many reporters had, and the agencies were always complaining that no one was paying attention. Now that they had everyone's attention they went over the top, and there was a sort of a "Crying Wolf" phenomenon.⁹²

He said the result of the lack of a disaster led his desk editor to say, "Until we see an Ethiopia in our pictures, until something new develops ... enough refugees already."⁹³

While trade issues have not had the amount of media "play" that humanitarian crises have, the increased profile of the globalization movement may be leading to a greater interest in trade issues. Robert Evans, the Reuters business correspondent in Geneva for the past 11 years, says that the media has had an increasing influence on the work of the WTO, given the anti-globalization movement. But he is not sure that the influence of the media on the WTO has been as radical as that on the humanitarian agencies

You could say that the media treatment and what happened in Geneva in 1998 and Seattle in 1999 has pushed the members of the WTO to realize that they have to meet with the demands of the developing countries and to be seen to be doing things for the developing countries. So you had a "Doha development round."...Globalization and the media have "made" the (higher profile for) the WTO, and so it is bound to be influenced by the media.⁹⁴

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Interview, Robert Evans, September 3, 2002.

He noted that his colleagues have assessed that the other UN agencies in Geneva tend to "move from crisis to crisis – just as newspapers do", and by comparison, the WTO has made changes but not as radical as its counterparts. He attributes this to the WTO's lack of dependency on donor funding.

The debate continues

The debate on the quality and value of international reporting is bound to continue for years to come. There are a number of key points that must be acknowledged:

- the reach of transnational media is far greater today than it was 20 years ago;
- decision-makers rely on the electronic media for information in a way they did not do in the past;
- there are dominant themes, stereotypes and issues that are reported from the developing world;
- humanitarian issues may be more easily affected by media effects than military action or foreign policy;
- local, regional and national news stories are less expensive, less onerous and more popular to cover;
- international news gets low priority as a result of the market for news in the industrialized world;
- when international stories are forced to "compete" for space or airtime in industrialized country media with national or local news, national or local news wins.

If one accepts these conclusions, what does it mean for the future of international reporting on humanitarian issues? If the current trend continues, it more than likely means that there will be less and less reporting of international stories unless they have some connection to the industrialized world – the closing of the "window" of international news. This has the potential to mean less expertise, less context, and less substantive content, and more "seat of the pants" reporting, more mistakes in defining the story and more sensationalism.

If Susan Moeller is right, then this tendency to reduced and formulaic coverage will lead the public in the industrialized world to have a shrinking interest in events and problems in the developing world. Moeller's thesis is that as "compassion fatigue" develops and grows, the public in the industrialized world becomes more desensitized to international issues. The current trend would be to provide news on famines, disasters, or deaths that are so unspeakably horrific that they garner attention as would any freak show. Moeller, to her credit, suggests that there is a market for stronger, substantive, less formulaic, reporting on humanitarian issues.⁹⁵

But the evidence indicates the tendency to cliché and stereotype will continue. The main reason for this, as has been pointed out, is the market-driven nature of the news media. The economic bottom line is the dominant factor in North American (and European)

⁹⁵ Moeller, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-322.

media, and is bound to become more so, as the society itself becomes more competitive and commercial. International news is not the only area to suffer: subjects like science, education, or philosophy or critical social questions like homelessness, are bound to be marginalized as a result. Despite the efforts to regulate them, the media will reverse the trend to “dumbing down” when television is no longer competing with radio and newspapers for advertising, tabloids stop making money, literacy rates increase, there is a growing interest in international events and it proves more profitable to reach out to a more educated market. In two words, probably never.

The only hope is that a more critical population, led by a new generation of informed and experienced leaders, will demand a greater degree of quality information and will recognize the problems of corporate ownership of the information they consume. They will also expect less formulaic coverage and more in-depth explanation of *how* and *why* things happen. The emergence of the Internet may offer an alternative source of news from anywhere in the world on any subject in “real time” without the filter of a corporate owner – or even a reporter. This *more* open competition may make it necessary for all media to seek out new issues and new territory to explore – a case where the profit motive may actually drive a demand for better, contextual and more effective coverage of international issues.

CHAPTER III: Playing for Keeps: competition within the UN system

When the United Nations Organization was founded in San Francisco in June of 1945, it inherited many agencies that predated the founding of the organization. When the League of Nations was established in Geneva in 1919, there were several regulatory organizations already established, and new ones were added. These “Specialized Agencies”, as they came to be known, owed very little to the UN when they joined the UN system in 1945. The World Health Organization (WHO), The International Labour Office (ILO), The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) were established with their own executive boards and budgets. They were not then – and are not now – answerable to the secretary-general of the United Nations and are funded through a combination of member-state contributions (in effect, “membership dues”) and extra-budgetary funding. One revealing fact is that it was not until the spring of 2001 that a Secretary-General of the UN spoke to the meeting of the WHO Executive Board – 53 years after the WHO was born.⁹⁶

UN organizations, such as the United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations

⁹⁶ WHO Annual Report, 2001.

Environmental Program (UNEP) and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, are funded exclusively by donations from industrialized countries. Many were established as temporary operations (like UNICEF, whose “E” for emergency has been dropped) but have become part of the permanent UN framework.

The founding of the UN was seen as a bridging of the gap between the competing schools of “idealism” and “realism.” The UN’s founders “were committed to creating new international structures that were international in nature. Part of their realism was the conviction that they had a responsibility to try to make things work better in the future through such structures.”⁹⁷

This was a group that was seized with the post-war idealism of the need to end conflict, hunger and disease and based its work on a normative and idealistic notion of the future of humankind. Former Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, who was present at the founding of the UN, wrote that

The growth of the United Nations into a truly effective world organization was our best, and perhaps our last, hope of bringing about a creative peace if mankind was to end a savage tradition that the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must. With all its weaknesses, which soon became clear but after all, were only those of its member states and the system of international anarchy in which they had to operate, the United Nations was at least a foundation for a new world on which we could build.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Paul Kennedy and Bruce Russett, “Reforming the United Nations”, *Foreign Affairs*, 1995, p. 56.

⁹⁸ Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson, Vol. 1* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) 1972, p.283.

This was the basis of the foundation of the UN and its agencies, although Pearson proved to be accurate in his assessment of the inherent weaknesses of the UN. Prior to the 1980s, the mandates of UN organizations were quite clear: they undertook activities with clear mandates assigned by the UN or their Executive Boards. UNICEF was a well-connected service agency for children in need. UNHCR managed camps for a small number of refugees in a relatively stable bi-polar world. Among the specialized agencies, WHO established normative health standards, mostly in the developing world. In 1981, WHO declared its desire to seek "Health for All" the people of the world, especially the developing world, by the year 2000. This overarching and some might say, overreaching objective has been set aside for a series of more feasible and fundable "high-profile" policies.

This year's report has shown the major developments and achievements in health in the past 50 years and described the economic trends, population trends and social trends which will influence health in the early 21st century. Substantial gains have been made in life expectancy and in infectious disease control; these need to be safeguarded.

On the *unfinished agenda* for health, poverty remains the main item. The priority must be to reduce it in the poorest countries of the world, and to eliminate the pockets of poverty that exist within countries. Policies directed at improving health and ensuring equity are the keys to economic growth and poverty reduction.⁹⁹

Technical organizations like the ITU and WIPO, which focused on regulatory matters in electronic communications and intellectual property, are now the focal points for the

⁹⁹ WHO, The World Health Report, (Geneva: WHO Publications, 1998), Executive Summary.

regulation of globalization in telecommunications and pharmaceutical patents respectively.

Since the 1980s it appears that the “balance of power” in the agencies has shifted. Funds are beginning to flow to those organizations perceived to be doing the most and being the most effective, especially in competition with the non-governmental organizations. Some agencies and UN organizations have fallen by the wayside. The UNDP, once a strong actor in the developing world, has seen its role gradually subsumed by the World Bank, although it may be making a comeback of sorts as it finds its market “niche” in development communications. It has been the author of the UN development report, which ranks countries according to their quality of life. UNICEF is expanding into the area of literacy, once the most important area of UNESCO’s mandate.¹⁰⁰ The evolution of the GATT into the WTO, combined with the growth of the World Bank, has made the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) increasingly irrelevant.

Northern powers have continually questioned the relevance of this body and attacked its operating mandate. Pressure from the North has led to the downgrading of UNCTAD within the UN structure, which is a trend, which must be reversed if the United Nations is to play a central role in solving economic problems. The criticisms of the North have focused in part on the inefficiency and wastefulness of UNCTAD, some of which have not been without foundation.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰see UNICEF, *Education for All: No Excuses* (New York; UNICEF publications, 2000).

¹⁰¹United Nations: “United Nations Reform: Perspectives from the South and the North”, FGD occasional Paper No 14.

This “mandate creep” has made for complicated relationships between organizations in the UN system. Noting that competition for funds between NGOS has increased in the past decade, experienced Canadian humanitarian worker and analyst Ian Smillie adds that the infighting within the UN system has been fierce.

The problem of field co-ordination is not restricted to NGOs. Bilateral donors are often the worst instigators of competition and mis-coordination, and there are currently 16 different UN agencies with a mandate to work in relief and emergency situations. Until a smaller number are *effectively* mandated and adequately funded to co-ordinate relief operations, including the gathering of up-to date information and the development of a rapid response mechanism, these problems will remain.¹⁰²

Mike Moore, the Director-General of the World Trade Organization and a former Prime Minister of New Zealand, says that when he arrived in Geneva in 2000, he was struck by the level of competition between agencies.

It was sort of surprising when I arrived here – the number of institutions that were almost at war with each other, similar to tribes and political parties back home. This became a bit of a surprise and I really did not know – what are we supposed to do (about this)?¹⁰³

A 1999 Japanese government report¹⁰⁴ recognized the problem of overlapping mandates and called for a review or at least recognition that competition between humanitarian agencies was a problem. At the same time, bilateral aid began to dry up as governments

¹⁰² Ian Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar* (London: IT Publications, 1995), p. 118.

¹⁰³ Interview, Mike Moore, Geneva, September 10, 2001.

¹⁰⁴ Koichiro Matsuura, “Revitalizing the U.N. Specialized Agencies,” Government of Japan website: [<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/culture/unesco/un-matsuura.html>]

cut back their aid budgets as part of deficit cutting exercises. In Canada, Japan, the United States and Europe, the push to reduce deficits and debt in the 1990s resulted in cuts to foreign aid. In Canada, foreign aid was cut 35 per cent in the past decade. Only in the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries have foreign aid budgets not been the means to reduce deficits. Despite recently rising GDPs, the G-7 countries have continued to reduce foreign aid.¹⁰⁵

Within that Official Development Assistance (ODA) “envelope”, governments have reduced their contributions to the UN and to the specialized agencies, in some cases, preferring to undertake their own bilateral work rather than contribute to multilateral agencies. Some agencies (e.g. UNESCO) have been officially or unofficially boycotted by the United States for lengthy periods of time. The end result has been competition between the UN organizations, the specialized agencies and the NGOs for the same scarce funds.

¹⁰⁵ OECD reports, 1999 [<http://www.oecd.org/pdf/M00018000/M00018516.pdf>].

CHART 3: ODA as a Proportion of GDP, 1990-2001 **CHART 4: Data – ODA as a Proportion of GDP, 1990-2001**

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Canada	.44	.45	.46	.45	.43	.38	.32	.34	.29	.28	.25	.23
Ireland	.16	.19	.16	.20	.25	.29	.31	.30	.31	.30	.30	.33
US	.21	.20	.20	.15	.14	.10	.12	.09	.10	.10	.10	.11
UK	.27	.32	.31	.31	.31	.29	.27	.26	.27	.24	.32	.33
Japan	.31	.32	.30	.27	.29	.28	.20	.22	.28	.34	.28	.23
Netherlands	.92	.88	.86	.82	.76	.81	.81	.81	.80	.79	.84	.82
Sweden	.91	.90	1.03	.99	.96	.77	.84	.79	.72	.70	.80	.76
Norway	1.17	1.13	1.16	1.01	1.05	0.87	0.85	0.86	0.91	.90	.80	.83

Source: OECD website: [<http://www.oecd.org>]

CHART 5: Gross Domestic Product, G-7 countries, 1990-2001

Source: OECD website: [<http://www.oecd.org>]

At the same time, governments are beginning to suggest that aid is not the panacea it was once thought to be. Despite billions upon billions of dollars in aid over more than half a century¹⁰⁶, there has not been an appreciable reduction in poverty around the world. Aside from India, which has benefitted from the bilateral support of the industrialized nations (for geopolitical reasons, given India's role as a major democratic power in Asia) there are few real successes.

International assistance, connected to international media attention, has tended to focus on emergency relief, because when it is required, it is required urgently, and to a great extent because governments and private donors give more readily when they see a critical need. And in portraying that critical need in such stark terms, the media play an important

role – especially in the support for non-governmental organizations involved in complex human emergencies. One of the main problems that arises is that the push for emergency aid reduces budgets for long-term aid funding. And the lack of long-term funding effectively guarantees the prospect of eventual emergency demands. There are few people who would contradict the notion that the famine in Ethiopia in the 1980s would have been ignored were it not for the compelling images that appeared on British, American and Canadian television. But campaigns like “Band Aid” do not solve the long-term problems.¹⁰⁷

While critically important, such aid does not develop local capacity to solve the problems that created the famines in the first place, and in the opinion of some assistance specialists, sometimes makes the situation worse. For instance, massive infusions of grain can depress local grain prices, further damaging an already weak agricultural economy.¹⁰⁸

Ian Smillie recognizes the failings of the media in his examination of the competition between agencies, noting that some emergencies do not attract the same profile as others. This can cause problems for UN organizations and especially for NGOs, which live off the donor funds.

Where private donor funding for emergencies is concerned, most NGOs have come to rely heavily on the media as a fundraising aid. When the media 'discovered' Biafra, Ethiopia and Somalia, donations to NGOs grew quickly and dramatically. But some emergencies, like Somalia, are quickly forgotten by journalists. Private donor funding and

¹⁰⁶ \$31.498 billion in US\$ from 1971 to 1999 alone, according to a study by Dr. Klaus Hufner of Freie University in Berlin [www.globalpolicy.org/finance/tables/assess].

¹⁰⁷ Michael O'Neill, *The Third America: the emergence of the non-profit sector in the United States*, (London: Jossey-Bass, 1984), p. 125.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 135.

with it the possibility of independent NGO programming, declines as a result. Some emergencies never become major media events – Angola, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Liberia are examples. NGOs ability to respond is limited to whatever unrestricted funding can be raised. The application of such funds to serious but unpublicized relief needs comes undoubtedly at the expense of development programming elsewhere.¹⁰⁹

In response to this dependency, there is movement among some NGOs to focus on long-term issues, such as small business enterprises, literacy, health care, water and sanitation, nutrition or gender empowerment. At the same time, discussions between the industrialized and developing countries now focus on trade, not aid. Access for the developing countries to markets in the industrialized world is the preferred route. The meeting of the World Trade Organization in Doha, Qatar, in November of 2001 emphasized that the next round of trade negotiations would focus on the issue of trade and development.

International trade can play a major role in the promotion of economic development and the alleviation of poverty. We recognize the need for all our peoples to benefit from the increased opportunities and welfare gains that the multilateral trading system generates. The majority of WTO members are developing countries. We seek to place their needs and interests at the heart of the Work Programme adopted in this Declaration.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ian Smillie, Relief and Development: the Struggle for Synergy (Providence, RI: Thomas J. Watson Institute 1998), p. 39.

¹¹⁰ World Trade Organization: Doha Declaration, WTO web site, [http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min01_e/mindecl_e.htm]

One could reasonably speculate that the combination of this trend towards long-term solutions and away from responses to complex emergencies, while substantively positive, has two significant repercussions. First, long-term solutions do not make for interesting news reports, as they lack the drama and the conflict inherent in war or humanitarian emergencies. Therefore, despite the importance of long-term solutions in the developing world, there might be less, not more, media attention paid to humanitarian work in the international field.

Secondly, this lack of media attention could mean more competition between NGOs, UN organizations and the specialized agencies for the attention necessary to attract donor support. In a world of declining investment in Official Development Assistance, it raises the prospect of further “mandate creep.” Alternatively, policy-makers may see the value in investing in longer-term policies, and bring the media through a process of “education” in development, away from the standards that have led to compassion fatigue among donors – and competition between agencies.

Case studies: three organizations that have changed the world

Within the established international system, there are four kinds of organizations:

- UN Organizations;
- UN specialized agencies;
- the “Bretton Woods” Institutions;
- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

In this examination, NGOs are important, but I am focusing on the other three. Of the UN organizations, the most successful by far is UNICEF. The New York-based United Nations Children’s Fund raises over a billion dollars annually for its work around the world. The oldest and most influential specialized agency is the World Health Organization, based in Geneva and on all five continents, with a budget of a billion dollars and accountable to an independently appointed executive Board. The Bretton Woods organizations, named for the small resort town in New Hampshire where a conference on world monetary reform took place in 1944, includes the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), also known as the World Bank. The General Agreement on Tariff and Trade became the World Trade Organization in 1995. It is reliant solely on member contributions for its operations and reports to the General Council, its administrative body.

Each of these organizations differs substantially from the other, but they have one key element in common: within the genre of organization they represent, each is very successful. UNICEF is clearly the best-funded operation, with the highest profile of the UN organizations, while WHO is the most established of the specialized agencies. The WTO, while not as influential as the World Bank or the IMF, is gaining in profile and importance as world trade grows. Two of the organizations (UNICEF and WHO) have in the past two decades, moved steadily into the jurisdictions of other agencies and UN organizations, while the third has so far resisted the urges to tread on the mandates of other organizations.

a. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF began its institutional life as the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund — the result of the post-war emergencies that occurred in Europe, the Middle East and China in the 1940s. It was formally established on 11 December 1946 by a unanimous decision of the first session of the United Nations General Assembly. Children in post-war Germany and Eastern Europe were starving. UNICEF was intended to be a temporary organization providing blankets and dried milk to children in both the vanquished and victorious countries. More than half a century later, that temporary organization is one of the most important, if not the most important, in the UN system.

After requests from the nations of the 'developing' world for greater services, and the impact of hugely successful fund-raising campaigns based on appeals with images of starving children, the United Nations agreed to make UNICEF a permanent part of the UN. During the 1950s, the organization focused on controlling or eradicating diseases such as yaws, trachoma and tuberculosis.

In 1954, Danny Kaye, an American entertainer, was appointed UNICEF's first "Ambassador at large", charged with "making known the needs of children throughout the world." Other UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors included Audrey Hepburn, Sir Peter Ustinov, Harry Belafonte and "James Bond", Roger Moore. A Japanese celebrity, Tetsuko Kuroyanagi, had raised US \$26 million in Japan by 2000. These "ambassadors" have acted as the "human face" of the organization, especially in the media; the UNICEF program was the first effective use of celebrities to promote a humanitarian cause and raise funds. Not only did these celebrities know how to use the media, they were also magnets for media attention from the industrialized world. Subsequent to UNICEF's use of Ambassadors, other aid organizations and NGOs followed with their own "stars"¹¹¹.

In 1959, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child – a forerunner of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1965, UNICEF received the Nobel Peace Prize. The award stated that "even the most reluctant person is bound to

¹¹¹ Save the Children used Sally Struthers to pitch for them, World Vision has employed "Jeopardy" host Alex Trebek and evangelist Billy Graham, while Amnesty International had help from Joan Baez, Peter Cook and the Monty Python comedians; Mine Action had Princess Diana.

admit that UNICEF has proved that compassion knows no boundaries". In the 1970s, UNICEF's basic services approach focused on training and motivating local people to help them to help themselves.

In 1979, The International Year of the Child focused the world's attention on the needs of children. The UN General Assembly designated UNICEF the lead agency in the United Nations system to coordinate the Year's activities. The Year of the Child raised sensitive subjects, such as child labour. UNICEF was having to deal with the problems created by the exodus from rural areas occurring in many countries.

In 1982, UNICEF launched what it called the "child survival and development revolution" to reduce the high number of child deaths. UNICEF's new Executive Director, James Grant, proposed a direct attack on infant and child mortality, heavily promoting the use of simple, low-cost techniques such as breastfeeding and immunization. Grant was not reluctant to promote the cause in some unorthodox ways. There are many accounts of meetings with world leaders in which he would pull a packet of oral rehydration salts (ORS) from his pocket and point out the cost of the packet – five cents. According to former advisor Martha Walsh Cohen, Grant would then effectively shame the leader into supporting the use of ORS to save the lives of his country's children, or the lives of children in a developing country.¹¹²

¹¹² Interview, Martha Walsh Cohen, May, 2002.

In 1989, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, covering the rights that UNICEF has traditionally worked for, as well as civil and political rights. In 1990, children's issues reached a high point on the agenda at the World Summit for Children. Seventy-one world leaders made a commitment to child survival and development, agreeing on specific goals for the year 2000. In 1992, an assessment was made of UNICEF by consultants sponsored by four important donor countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark and Switzerland. It proposed that UNICEF work towards a shift in orientation, to providing services through developing country governments (the approach of many of the specialized agencies) and to becoming an advocate for the empowerment of women and the rights of children. However, it also noted the problems of mandate creep.

UNICEF's attitude to closer cooperation/coordination with other UN agencies is contradictory at different times and at different levels in the organization ... (a particular case study) pointed out problems in overlapping mandates and activities among UN agencies that can result from different degrees of agency integration with the national government, especially in the absence of a more effective mechanism for inter-agency coordination.¹¹³

When Grant died suddenly in 1995, Carol Bellamy was appointed UNICEF's new Executive Director. She was determined to change the orientation of the organization

¹¹³ Poul Engberg-Pedersen, Sheila Dohoo Faure, Ted Freeman, Strategic Choices for UNICEF: Synthesis Report 1992, (CIDA and Danida, Ottawa and Copenhagen, 1992), p. xiv and xv.

from one that emphasized operational work in the field to a new UNICEF that spoke out as an advocate for the rights of children and women, and reduced its field presence. She says her appointment occurred on the basis of her background.

It's not as if you can write a letter 'Dear Mr. Annan, I'd like to be the executive director of UNICEF'.... If I hadn't been (Director of) the Peace Corps when the UNICEF position came open that I wouldn't have been on anybody's radar screen. They were looking for someone who had some financial management experience but someone who had some development experience and they were looking for a woman. I think that it was definitely the last thing and little bit of the first two.¹¹⁴

It was also a time of upheaval and turf battles for UNICEF and two of its UN competitors, ILO and WHO respectively, on child labour and immunization. In the mid-1990s, the ILO had issued a document¹¹⁵ explaining the problems of exploitation of child labour throughout the world, and it sought to stop it. While the ILO sought a consensus among its member states on the issue, UNICEF took up the cause and established its primacy in child labour¹¹⁶, drawing media attention to the issue and raising hundreds of millions of dollars for programs that it established.

The current Director-General of the ILO, Juan Somavia admits that the competition with UNICEF, as well as other agencies in the UN system, has caused the ILO some problems and concern.

¹¹⁴ Interview, Carol Bellamy, July 19, 2001.

¹¹⁵ ILO, "Child Labour : What is to be done"; document for discussion at the Informal Tripartite Meeting at the Ministerial Level, ILO, Geneva (June 1996).

If one is doing a good job and it is not being reflected I would say it's more of an ILO problem than a media problem. While I think anything UNICEF can do with child labour is great, I think that in essence all of us in the multilateral system are not here to try to show which one can get its flag higher. That is precisely the problem, the problem is you have a global problem, which is the global economy – globalization – being dissected by different institutions coming at it from different angles. But what you have is an integrated animal that needs to be dealt with in an integrated way and the only way you can do that is by getting all the multilateral organizations to work together. Now we're not doing this sufficiently. We have been found wanting of a much better cooperation, and we can go even further, obviously not in the case of child issues, but in other issue we are giving contradictory advice – there is a sort of multilateral schizophrenia.¹¹⁷

Carol Bellamy grudgingly acknowledges there is competition with other UN agencies for media recognition or coverage, but attributes it to lack of interest in humanitarian work as compared to peacekeeping.

There is a little bit of competition, but out of UN (New York) headquarters generally those of us involved in the economic and social issues generally, we are like chopped liver, it is all focused on the Security Council. But if you go to Geneva, the media there are much more informed about the humanitarian and economic and social issues.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ See “UNICEF background papers at the International Conference on Child Labour”, Oslo, October 1997

¹¹⁷ Interview, Juan Somavia, Geneva, September 10, 2001.

¹¹⁸ Interview, Carol Bellamy, New York, July 19, 2001.

In 1996, UNICEF celebrated its 50th anniversary. The annual State of the World's Children report focused on children in war. Increasingly, in the 1990s, UNICEF's work was once again with children in conflict. Understandably, as the juxtaposition of the evils of war and the presumed innocence of children made for compelling imagery and subsequent donor response. In 1999, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child celebrated its 10th Anniversary. Over the previous decade, the Convention had radically changed the way UNICEF worked. The drive to meet children's needs developed into a broader, advocacy campaign aimed at ensuring the rights of all children.

In May of 2002, the organization worked at a program of renewal, based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The meeting, which had been postponed as a result of the September 11 attacks on New York, brought together children and adolescents from around the world, to meet with diplomats and leaders. The purpose was to hammer out a new agenda for children for the millennium. The result was a ten-point plan that will more than likely provide UNICEF with the authority for a broadened mandate that will allow it to expand into the remits of other UN organizations.¹¹⁹

1. **Put children first.** (UNFPA, UNIFEM)
2. **Eradicate poverty: invest in children.** (UNDP, World Bank, UNESCO, ILO)
3. **Leave no child behind.** (UNHCHR)

¹¹⁹ United Nations, Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, Supplement No. 3 (A/S-27/19/Rev.1) "May 2002. Pp 9-10. UNICEF website [<http://www.oecd.org/pdf/M00018000/M00018516.pdf>].

4. **Care for every child.** (WHO, UNESCO)
5. **Educate every child.** (UNESCO, UNIFEM)
6. **Protect children from harm and exploitation including terrorism.** (IATA, ILO)
7. **Protect children from war.** (UNHCR, UNHCHR)
8. **Combat HIV/AIDS.** (UNAIDS).
9. **Listen to children and ensure their participation.**
10. **Protect the Earth for children** (UNEP)

While UNICEF has proven extremely successful as a donor-driven agency, moving into "safe" mandates held by others, somewhat like a drug addict, it has to keep feeding its "fix" of donor funds. It is therefore more difficult to take risks in policy areas that might be unpopular or affect UNICEF's long-term operations. As Carol Bellamy admitted, the plan for the special UN session on children was a very pragmatic one, and not as idealistic as the World Summit for Children a decade before.

The (Special Session plan) does take into account that you can't do everything everywhere, so it says you have to take this and basically make it appropriate for your own country or your own region. And this isn't a judgement of good or bad, it is after the experience of having the convention (on the child) in place, it is a document that is useable by every country, rather than just so-called developing countries....so not everything is quite as simple as to be 'countable' – you can count kids immunized, but you can't count how quickly you can make a street child not be a street child, so not everything is quite as simple to be countable... so it's not necessarily more activist, but it is broader, and it takes into account a much more diverse world than I think existed in the discussions ten years ago.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Op. cit., interview, Carol Bellamy.

As it moves into the sixth decade of its existence, the organization that was established as a temporary arrangement in the post-war emergency, shows no sign of slowing down. With a budget of US \$1.139 billion (approximately \$1.7 billion CDN),¹²¹ it is the most successful UN organization, and one of the most recognized "brands" in the world. Like the humanitarian equivalent of the Faustian bargain with the devil, this success can have its price.

¹²¹ UNICEF: State of the World's Children, 2002 (New York: UNICEF 2002).

b. World Health Organization

The World Health Organization celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1998, but its history significantly predates its founding. In 1919, as part of the development of the League of Nations in Geneva, it brought together the Pan American Sanitary Organization in Washington D.C. and l'Office International d'Hygiène Publique (OIHP) in Paris, as part of the Health Organization of the League. In 1945, Brazil and China supported the founding of a world health body. This became the WHO in 1948, with 61 members.¹²²

The World Health Organization then worked to establish itself as a standard-setting body, offering advice to member countries on health protocols. In 1951, the International Sanitary Regulations were passed, establishing ways to deal with smallpox and typhus. In 1973, a major policy shift occurred, when the Executive Board of WHO determined that there was widespread dissatisfaction with global health policy. WHO decided to collaborate with, rather than assist, its member-states in developing practical guidelines for national health care systems. This was considered at the time to be a radical move.

¹²² based on information from The Second Ten Years of the WHO, 1958-1967 (Geneva:WHO, 1967) and the WHO website: [<http://www.who.int/aboutwho/en/history.htm>].

In 1974, WHO launched an Expanded Programme on Immunization to protect children from poliomyelitis, measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus and tuberculosis. At the time, less than 50 per cent of the world's children were being immunized. In 1977, the World Health Assembly set a target that the level of health to be attained by the turn of the century should be "that which would permit all people to lead a socially and economically productive life".¹²³ This was referred to as "Health for All by the Year 2000", and was followed up by a joint protocol with UNICEF in Alma-Ata, USSR the next year and a UN General Assembly resolution in 1981.

In 1979, WHO's slow but steady approach to health care paid a dividend: a Global Commission revealed that 50 years after establishing a protocol to fight it, smallpox had been eradicated. This was the WHO's first major world accomplishment in the field of public health.

AIDS

In 1987, in the face of rising deaths caused by AIDS, WHO expressed great concern over the pandemic, and established the Global Program on AIDS, led by an American AIDS expert, Dr. Jonathan Mann. But it had serious problems with the administration of WHO, led by Director-General Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima.

¹²³ WHO website: [<http://www.who.int/archives/who50/en/health4all.htm>].

(Nakajima was asked) , "Aren't you worried about AIDS?" He said, "Ah, don't talk to me about AIDS; I have malaria, which is a much bigger killer of people, on my hands." ¹²⁴

And for a time, malaria was. But AIDS was growing exponentially; malaria was not. As a scientist, Nakajima understood the implications. But a U.S. official who worked with him then said Nakajima concentrated on the constituency politics of reelection. That meant providing money for popular programs, not drawing attention to a problem that few nations wished to acknowledge.

"It was all demand management," the U.S. official said. Inside Nakajima's secretariat, institutional rivals of the AIDS program told him that Mann's program was excessive for the tiny number of AIDS cases that could be proved, according to WHO senior manager Marjory Dam. Nakajima set out to "normalize" the special program's status, cutting resources and subjecting it to layers of unsympathetic management. ¹²⁵

Dr. Jonathan Mann subsequently resigned and the program was eventually transferred to the new UNAIDS program, established jointly with several UN partners in 1996.

Nakajima was already on shaky ground: in 1993, at the World Health Assembly where his post was to be renewed for five years, the majority of the 16 members of the Executive Board voted for Nakajima; however, in the formality of the country-by-country voting, a vast majority (58 member-states) including the United States, voted against him.

¹²⁴ Barton Gellman, "World Shunned Signs of the Coming Plague", Washington Post, July 5, 2000, A1

¹²⁵ Ibid.

The result was budgetary and, some might argue, political stagnancy. The WHO's budget remained at a not-adjusted-for-inflation US\$ 419 million from 1996 to 1999.¹²⁶ During that time the Government of Japan provided 20 per cent of the total WHO budget, a clear sign it was propping up its "favourite son" Nakajima.¹²⁷

Meanwhile, the success of the campaign against smallpox led to seeking to vanquish polio by the year 2000, a campaign begun in 1988. At the time, the disease was found in sporadic pockets around the world, and the prospect of defeating it was only tempered by the fact that the Salk and Sabin (oral) polio vaccines were easy to administer but required a "cold chain" (a link of refrigeration units) to ensure the impact of the vaccine. Eventually the target date was put off until 2005, when it became evident that the heat and distance in the developing world worked against the cold chain.

In 1993, WHO established the first joint program with other UN organizations, the Children's Vaccine Initiative, with UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank and the Rockefeller Foundation. Initial support gave momentum to its search for a universal "magic bullet" vaccine that would cover all major childhood diseases. After a few years, that campaign was dropped, and much of the momentum and budget went out of the CVI. There was little media interest in immunization, which had been universally accepted and established in the industrialized world in the 1990s, although millions of children were

¹²⁶ Klaus Hufner, (Berlin, 1999) website:[<http://www.globalpolicy.org/finance/tables/assess.htm>].

¹²⁷ Koichiro Matsuura, "Revitalizing the U.N. Specialized Agencies," Government of Japan website: [<http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/culture/unesco/un-matsuura.html>], p. 5

dying from preventable diseases in the developing world at the time. (see Chapter V: "Immunization: the miracle cure that died in the media"). The CVI eventually became the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, largely funded by Microsoft founder Bill Gates. According to two experts who were very involved with immunization and CVI, there were two problems preventing it from going anywhere: money and politics. "It was never really allowed to get off the ground," said Dr. Philip Russell, former head of the initiative and a retired U.S. Army general who ran vaccine and military research programs. "First of all, we never had any money."¹²⁸ William Muraskin, a historian and author of "The Politics of International Health," says that "WHO and UNICEF were locked in a bitter turf battle over which should be the leader in immunization efforts, and neither was eager to relinquish any ground to an upstart initiative."¹²⁹

Subsequently, the WHO lost much of its attractiveness and the continuing leadership of Nakajima prevented all but the Japanese government from providing more than token funding support. When Nakajima declared that he would be stepping down, the Washington Post published an editorial that was headlined "Good Riddance" when it was republished in the International Herald Tribune.

Over two terms he has brought to this once-proud agency notoriety for bad management, a marked deterioration of its programs and a measure of cronyism and favoritism verging on the corrupt. So it is good news indeed that this unfortunate figure, whose ways and works have long been a scandal in the international public health community, is not

¹²⁸Tom Paulson, "Vaccine program hopes for success where others failed", Seattle Post-Intelligencer, March 23, 2001.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

going to run for a third term but will step down on schedule next year instead. The world body has suffered a crisis of public confidence in recent years, and Dr. Nakajima, a pharmacologist first elected in 1988, is one of the proximate causes. He has outraged legions of professionals in almost all of the regions around the world by his intrusive and arbitrary management style and by his inability to focus his organization on what many of its members thought to be the most pressing public-health priorities. No less than 58 WHO members voted against his bid for a second term.¹³⁰

It was obvious that the next Director-General of WHO would have to be someone of stature and experience, who would be a force for change. Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Prime Minister of Norway and a formidable intellect who had led the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development in the early 1980s, announced her resignation as PM in October of 1996 and won the WHO job in January of 1998. In her inaugural speech to the World Health Assembly, she declared

World trade, environmental changes, lifestyles and culture; in all these fields we must be able to analyse the driving forces and speak out for health and development. The world is in transition. So accordingly WHO must be in transition. Looking ahead. Our Constitution provides us with a broad and impressive mandate. But a mandate is no road map. It must be made according to the needs - of the people, the communities and the nations we are meant to serve. We need to focus our work..... This is why I wish to focus the technical support and normative work of the World Health Organization and at the same time bring the Organization more firmly into the political arena.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Editorial, Washington Post, May 2, 1997, page A18.

¹³¹ G.H. Brundtland, Speech to the Fifty-first World Health Assembly, Geneva, 13 May 1998 [<http://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/1998/index.html>].

In the years subsequent to that declaration, Brundtland has been true to her word. WHO has become a more focused and much more political organization. Priorities have been shaped according to the profile they attract, and major campaigns have been waged against the tobacco companies, against infectious diseases like malaria and in the areas of globalization and sustainable development and their links to health. As well, she has sought to re-integrate the UNAIDS program back into WHO, a move that the other agencies oppose. She has proved a tough taskmaster, hiring and then replacing several heads of sections of the agency when they did not perform. And she undertook a general "purge" of the executives from the Nakajima era, going as far as to shuffle 700 people to different offices in the WHO building in Geneva at the beginning of her term.¹³²

Under Brundtland, WHO has become a more operational agency, rather than setting standards for health in collaboration with national departments of health. In becoming more operational, it has sought out those "political" issues that attract donor attention and support. When asked if the presence of the UN Secretary-General at the Executive Board was a sign of a greater importance for health, Brundtland replied,

Well, to me it demonstrates that fact famously, that for some reason, health issues have not, until now, been seen as major political, economic and development concerns. They have been seen as a specialized area, not at the center stage of politics or democracy and decision making. They were more like an expert field where a specialized agency was not a natural arena for the secretary general. Now what has changed: the focus and awareness on health as a key political and social issue has increased, and just as I invited the secretary-general to come. So it just illustrates

¹³² Author's notes, interviews with WHO staff, 2001.

that health has moved center stage, with the AIDS epidemic as a driving force.¹³³

But some critics argue that Brundtland's drive to get a higher profile for health issues has compromised the agency's ability to deal with some of the more difficult issues that lie within its responsibility. Nutrition is one of the most important elements of human health, according to the WHO. The ability to provide food having been accomplished in all but the most crisis-ridden or war-torn places in the world, the issue of what is being eaten is now almost as important as whether food is available. The problems of obesity in low-income families around the world, or the inaccessibility of proper nutrition to children and the impact it has on intellectual development, are issues with serious long-term impact on developing and developed countries. However, nutrition is a difficult issue to sell in the media without relying on stereotypes, as Kraig Klaudt found when he worked for "Operation Breadbasket" in the United States.

Poor and hungry people are often portrayed as dependent and helpless. Based on the images they see on television many North Americans believe the people of sub-Saharan Africa are emaciated and unable to feed themselves ... Similarly, a typical image of a hungry person in the United States is that of an unemployed minority street person. On the contrary, the majority of hungry people in the United States are white, live outside urban areas, and are either children or adults employed at wages below the poverty level.¹³⁴

¹³³ Interview, Dr. G.H. Brundtland, September 4, 2001.

¹³⁴ Kraig Klaudt, "Transforming the Politics of Hunger", Hunger magazine, 1994.

WHO's priority for nutrition is reflected in the treatment of its nutrition section. Dr. Graham Clugston, one of the world's foremost authorities on nutrition, is shunted into a corner section of a building in the WHO Geneva complex, with a staff of 25. Meanwhile, the Communicable Diseases section has a staff of 450 people and a budget of US \$283 million, working on the response to high-profile diseases like tuberculosis, malaria and Ebola, among others. Its Executive Director, David Heymann, admits that his program is dependent on an effective relationship with the news media.

Media are very important and we spend a lot of time with the media, making sure that we get the right messages out, because if the messages are clear and communicated properly, then the media can provide those messages to the general public and to targeted populations. We are very much interested in making sure that we communicate our messages properly, and this is the basis of our fund-raising strategy.¹³⁵

Dr. Clugston attributes the lack of emphasis on nutrition on the desire of WHO's donors to meet their own short-term political goals.

It is related to the visible impact and what you do about it. They (donors) tend to think of obesity as a greed thing ... while as for starving kids, they say "Well, they need food, but we'll give money to the World Food Program for food." What you do about malnutrition is complicated and multi-sectoral and difficult to get a visible impact – the bang for the buck. There is a quantitative element and the visibility of impact, the need to say that things have been done or that they have been perceived to have been alleviated. They won't do it for monitoring or education or data banks.

¹³⁵ Interview, Dr. David Heymann, September 3, 2002.

Donors prefer the short-term issues to be able to stand up in parliament and say "Look what we did".¹³⁶

Dr. Heymann admits that donors "tend to be interested in the short term, but we try to convert them to the long term – and that is what the press can help us with. But they (donors) are focused on the short term, especially in emergency and humanitarian action, but not as much in development work." ¹³⁷

In a scathing article in the leading British medical publication *The Lancet*, Vicente Navarro, a professor at the School of Medicine at Johns Hopkins University, tore into a WHO report on health systems around the world and Dr. Brundtland's inclination to emphasize short-term, high profile issues.

The WHO has been surrounded by an aura of humanitarianism and social concerns that has protected it from close scrutiny. But, just as the WTO, World Bank and IMF have come under increasing criticism, so too should WHO. It is a political institution, heavily involved in propaganda in the guise of political neutrality, ignoring the critical voice that denounced its behaviour ... We need to be far more critical of the currents in the WHO that are increasingly attuned to the needs of large interest groups, responding to a culture of entrepreneurship, competition, and market values that conflicts with the needs of our populations, as the US experience with the health-care system clearly shows. ¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Interview, Dr. Graham Clugston, September 3, 2002.

¹³⁷ David Heymann, op. cit.

¹³⁸ Dr. V. Navarro, "Assessment of the World Health Report, 2000", *Lancet*, Nov.1, 2000, pp 1596-1601.

Another issue, sleeping sickness, was put aside by WHO in the late 1990s when there seemed no interest or attention to the disease, even though a drug existed that could cure it. The disease kills 300,000 people annually in Africa, mostly in rural areas. Only recently, following a series of articles in the *Globe and Mail* and other media, and a "shaming" campaign by *Médecins sans frontières*, did things change. The media profile resulted in a stronger push by WHO to encourage the production of the drug by multinational pharmaceutical manufacturers.¹³⁹ The change in policy was either an amazing coincidence, or an example of how the media (and an effective NGO communicator in MSF) can influence policy at the WHO.

WHO's budget has increased substantially over the past three years, mostly due to the desire to become involved in "political" issues. Whether this is a good or bad thing will depend on how the funds are used. One could argue that the ability of the WHO to deal with the more obscure and long-term issues really does depend on its credibility with the international community, a credibility which has increased as a result of the very political leadership of Dr. Brundtland. On August 23, 2002, Dr. Brundtland announced that she will not stand for another term when it comes time in 2003.¹⁴⁰ So the question of her legacy and WHO's future course will be a matter of ongoing speculation.

¹³⁹ see "A legendary killer allowed to get away", *Globe and Mail*, September 23, 2000 and "Big push against sleeping sickness", BBC, October 1, 2001

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_1572000/1572409.stm].

¹⁴⁰ WHO website:[<http://www.who.org>]

c. World Trade Organization

The World Trade Organization came front and centre onto the international stage with a change of name and mandate as part of the successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round of talks in the 1990s. However, it had existed and worked dutifully for trade liberalization for over half a century under the innocuous name of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

At the end of World War II, the birth of the United Nations prompted many world leaders in the west to examine the need for an organization that would oversee a rules-based system of trade among states. The disasters of war and depression led to the conclusion that trade should be encouraged rather than discouraged. As well, the Smoot-Hawley tariff in the United States in June 1930 had a devastating effect on world trade. The tariff raised average import duties from 39% to 53%. The idea was to protect domestic industries from foreign competition and it sent a clear signal that the United States was not going to lead the world out of the Depression.

Other countries retaliated with similarly protective tariffs. As a result, the total volume of world trade plunged downward from a monthly average of \$2.9 billion (U.S.) in 1929 to less than \$1 billion (U.S.) by 1933. Banks failed, prices plummeted, and the lost exports forced factories to shut down. By 1932, unemployment in the industrial world had reached 30 million.

In response to the protectionism of the world economic depression, Canada was one of the 23 nations that organized the GATT in Geneva in 1947. The trade pact itself came into effect at the start of 1948 with the goal of abolishing quotas and reducing tariffs among the Contracting Parties. The GATT was also to be a place where states could consult with one another on trade problems, collect data on world trade, and study its characteristics and trends. In 1950, only seven percent of world production was exported; today it is 23%.

By the late 1980s, there was a feeling that the existing GATT deal needed to be revitalized. The GATT, which had always operated on consensus among members and deference to decisions, was becoming bogged down in complex issues, and there was a collective desire for a more robust dispute settlement mechanism. For seven years, negotiators worked from Uruguay to Geneva and tried to reach an agreement. The United States and the European Union haggled over farm subsidies, and the deal came close to collapse many times. In the end, fear of what a global trade war could do to national economies brought about a deal in December 1993. For the first time, areas such as services, farming and intellectual property were brought under the GATT umbrella. Tariffs on pulp and paper, pharmaceuticals and chemicals would be cut to zero; they would be reduced on wood and non-ferrous metals, with the exception of aluminum.

It proved to be an effective instrument of world trade liberalization, playing a major role in the massive expansion of world trade in the second half of the 20th century. By the time the GATT was replaced by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, 125 nations had signed its agreements; its rules governed 90% of world trade; and, total trade in 1997 was fourteen times the level of 1950. The GATT's principles and most of its trade agreements were adopted by the WTO. Canada played a major role in developing the WTO as an institution that encompasses the interests of all nations. The WTO features a greatly expanded array of rules to open up global trade and, for the first time, a fast and effective dispute settlement system. The name, World Trade Organization, was the brainchild of Canadian trade minister John Crosbie, who in 1989 proposed the name change to reflect the changes in the organization.

The GATT had many deficiencies, and (I was) urged to make it a Canadian initiative to replace the GATT with a new body, an international-trade organization, which we soon christened the World Trade Organization.¹⁴¹

That name, it could be argued, is one of the main "albatrosses" around the neck of the WTO. As the GATT, the organization was seen as having limited scope and unable to impose decisions. As the WTO, there was only one significant change to its mandate: it would now be able to insist that any decision of the dispute settlement body would be

¹⁴¹ John C. Crosbie, No Holds Barred: My Life In Politics (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1997), p. 324.

binding. Nonetheless, the WTO functioned in much the same way as the GATT always had. It occupied the same decrepit building on the shores of Lac Lemman in Geneva; it had the same 300 to 500 officials working for it; and it operated by consensus as a member-driven organization. It did not seek extra-budgetary funding as did the UN agencies. And it operated solely on the contributions of member states. But it had one major symbolic difference from the GATT: it had the words “World” and “Trade” in the same phrase.

In October of 1999, the WTO issued a three-centimetre thick document analyzing its role in the environment, stemming from a series of decisions that had been linked to environmental rules. It concluded that trade could improve the environment through the reduction in restrictions on environmentally-friendly trade and services. It suggested that there is a correlation between an increase in standard of living and environmental progress.

The way forward is multilateral environmental cooperation ... trade is really not the issue, nor is economic growth. The issue is how to reinvent environmental policies in an ever more integrated world economy so as to ensure that we live within ecological limits. The way forward, it would seem to us, is to strengthen the mechanisms and institutions for multilateral environmental cooperation, just like countries 50 years ago decided that it was to their benefit to cooperate on trade matters.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Håkan Nordström and Scott Vaughan, Trade and Environment, (Geneva: WTO Publications, 1999), p. 7.

The WTO chose to recommend a stronger multilateral environment regulator, or a more robust UNEP, rather than taking on the role of trade and environment regulator itself.

While other organizations, the WHO, UNICEF and ILO among them, were conspicuously attempting to hive off some of the authority held by UNEP, the WTO was recommending a stronger UNEP or a super agency for the environment.

The reason for the reluctance of the WTO to step in on the environment reflects some basic truths about the organization, despite its grandiose title. It is an organization that is run by its members – who do not want to see it involved in any adventures outside of trade. It protects its own monopoly on trade, by not intruding on anyone else's jurisdiction; and it does not seek out extra-budgetary contributions from members to run programs outside of its purview. A Swiss management expert who has studied the WTO explained it this way:

The WTO is like a marriage counsellor. It brings countries together and offers to sort out their problems. If they cannot be solved, then it offers a way of brokering a deal, and if that doesn't work, it takes them to the divorce court where the settlement is established. It does no more and no less.¹⁴³

The WTO, for all the criticism levelled at it, has determined that it will not seek out issues that are not within its purview. It does not seek a higher media profile. This may be because it is a member-driven organization or it may be due to its desire to prevent other

¹⁴³ Interview, Professor Suzanne de Treville, Université de Lausanne, September 9, 2001.

agencies from encroaching on trade issues. The accession of a new Director General from a developing country (Supachai of Thailand) in 2002, combined with the Doha Development Agenda, will make for a different culture and possibly more involvement with other organizations, particularly those in the UN system.

CHART 6: International Organizations and Mandates

Approximate years that sections within agencies were developed

Policy areas	UNICEF ^a	WHO ^b	WTO ^c	Agency responsible
Sustainable development	1995	1998		UNEP
Complex emergencies	1971	1990		DHA/OCHA
Nutrition	1980	1960		WFP/FAO
Child Labour	1994	1998		ILO
Refugees	1996	1996		UNHCR
Family planning	1970	1972		UNFPA
Women's rights	1980	1996		UNHCHR
Literacy	1998			UNESCO
Human rights	1980	1996		UNHCHR
Globalization	2000	1999		WTO
Trade	1994	1999	1944	WTO

^a. Source: Poul Engberg-Pedersen, Sheila Dohoo Faure, Ted Freeman, Strategic Choices for UNICEF: Synthesis Report 1992, (CIDA and Danida, Ottawa and Copenhagen 1992), p. xiv and xv

^b. Source: WHO: The Second Ten Years of the WHO, 1958-1967 (Geneva:WHO), 1967

^c. Source: Gary Sampson, ed., The Role of the World Trade Organization in Global Governance, (New York: United Nations University Press), 2001

CHAPTER IV: Shaping public consciousness: the impact of public relations and the media on the way we perceive the news

A brief history of “PR”

In the beginning, there was Edward Bernays.

Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud, was dubbed the “father of modern public relations”.¹⁴⁴ He was the first person to articulate the need to shape corporate mandates to meet the public’s expectations, as well as shaping the public perceptions of corporate products to permit greater market share. He had postulated that in the more mobile 20th century, the prejudices and certainties of small communities would give way to the “anomie” of large cities and rootlessness of a mobile generation. This would permit the media to be more effective “bases” in influencing people's thoughts and ideas.¹⁴⁵

In one of his most notorious undertakings for a client, Bernays convinced a group of suffragettes to smoke cigarettes in a New York parade for the woman’s vote in the 1920s. Photographs of these “emancipated” women, smoking what Bernays called “torches of freedom”, were published widely. Suddenly, smoking in public was acceptable and

¹⁴⁴Museum of Public Relations website:[<http://www.prmuseum.com>].

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

fashionable for women who wanted to be perceived as “modern”.¹⁴⁶ Within a decade, women’s smoking rivalled that of men.¹⁴⁷

Ironically, having been an advocate for smoking at the beginning of the century, in his later years Bernays campaigned against smoking and preached extensively about the health dangers of tobacco. Bernays was a man who not only understood the psychology of public opinion enough that he wanted to harness it, he also grasped the role that the media would have as a very effective tool in shaping the public’s perception of its own interest.

In his book “Engineering Consent”, Bernays determined that the media, particularly the electronic media, were changing the way the world perceived itself in the 1950s.

Competition for the attention of the public has been continually broadened and intensified because the public decides whether an enterprise is to succeed or fail. New instruments of transportation and mass communication, airplane, radio, movies, television, accelerate the spread of ideas. People who previously had little access to them are exposed to attitudes, ideas, and courses of action.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ obituary, New York Times, March 10, 1995

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Edward Bernays, Engineering Consent (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), p. 5.

In 1971, Bernays looked at the influence of public relations upon the world and declared that “Public relations, effectively used, helps validate an underlying principle of our society— competition in the marketplace of ideas and things.”¹⁴⁹ In ensuring that this competition was effectively managed, or “engineered”, to ensure consent or support for a client’s initiatives or products, Bernays recommended a constant process of “adjustment, information and persuasion”.¹⁵⁰ Adjusting an approach or a policy was the key element of the three: information and persuasion would follow the adjustments.

Adjustment is a primary element in good public relations. It is generally recognized that people, groups, and organizations need to adjust to one another if we are ever going to have a smooth running society. A company that does not adjust its attitudes and actions to the public suffers the result of poor public relations. A public that lacks understanding of a company is also adversely affected. Ignorance, prejudice, apathy, distortions need to be corrected. When maladjustments are based on real abuses, irritating conditions should be changed. Maladjustments caused by imagined abuses, or misunderstandings, are likewise susceptible of correction.¹⁵¹

Thus one of the key elements in an effective public relations strategy is to make non-judgmental adjustments, according to the attitudes of the marketplace. Given that policies, *qua* policy, or decisions in response to complex challenges, are not easily “adjusted” to satisfy the marketplace, one would think that the application of public relations techniques in policy-making – especially in the case of international humanitarian causes – would be impossible or dangerous.

¹⁴⁹ New York Times, op. cit.

¹⁵⁰ Edward Bernays, op. cit., p. 7

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

And yet, some of the most successful public relations companies in the world are engaged by the most successful humanitarian organizations. Golin Harris, a subsidiary of the Interpublic group (2001 earnings: US \$6.7 billion) undertakes UNICEF's public relations campaigns. Its other clients include McDonald's, DaimlerChrysler, Nintendo, Amazon.com, Borden, Diamond Technology Partners, eBondTrade, Lowe's, Ernst & Young, Quantum and Tyson Foods.¹⁵²

In an analysis undertaken for the Union of International Associations, the point is made that there is always a desire to gloss over the problem of incompetence in an organization's administrators, and that this trend has been endemic in the UN and its agencies. Unlike corporations who face bottom-line criteria and corporate objectives, an international organization can declare that it has met its objectives without too much fear of contradiction. The analysis places the responsibility for the papering over of failure on the practitioners of international public relations.

On the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations, there have been calls for candour about its actual operations. In this spirit there is a need to distinguish between laudable articulation of strategic ideals and the degree to which these are implemented in practice – independently of public relations exercises designed to reinforce wishful thinking.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Interpublic website: [<http://63.111.58.35/>]

¹⁵³ Union of International Associations, "Strategic denial: unwritten rules and wishful thinking" [<http://www.uia.org/strategy/74unwrit.htm>].

The degree to which public relations strategies are influencing decisions on the delivery of aid has grown enormously within the unregulated system of NGOs and UN agencies. This point is reinforced by an account of Rwanda in 1994, in which the competition between agencies was fierce. In a description of the aid operations on the border of Zaire and Rwanda, veteran aid worker Michael Maren identifies the transformation from aid operation to public relations exercise.

At Goma, the NGOs all had their banners and bumper stickers and T-shirts. Logos were everywhere, like the Nike “swoosh” or Coca-Cola. It was like being at a grand trade show of charity. Too much of this, mixed with shameless and aggressive self-promotion, and the gloss starts to wear off. What once looked so pure and selfless starts to smell.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Michael Maren, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

The media prism: shaping our thoughts

The central issue of an examination of the impact of the news media on decision-making is: Can the media actually shape or change the behaviour of their audience? From the evidence accumulated so far, and the sometimes-contradictory comments of experts in the international field as well as journalists, the answer would appear to be a resounding “maybe”. Yet from the public relations community, the question is answered definitely in the affirmative, and details are even provided on “how-to”.

It is therefore necessary to seek out the analysis of those people who have devoted their lives to examining the media to determine exactly *how* it is possible. Is it a magic formula or a spell that one casts? Is it a scientific equation? Is it the result of learned behaviour or a change in our environment? Does the environment influence the content of the media or are they shaping the demand so that the supply of information can follow? And most importantly, are some people immune to their chimeric influence or is it all-encompassing in its effects?

There is no question but that the media have always been perceived as having an important influence on the opinions of people. One must only look at the 1970 Davey and 1980 Kent Royal Commissions that examined the power and influence of the media in Canada, as well as the Hutchins Commission in the United States in the 1940s, to realize the power the media are presumed to wield.

In the 1920s, the debate in the United States between two of the most prominent writers of the time, Walter Lippmann and John Dewey, had the two at either end of the spectrum of the role of the media. Lippmann wrote of the prejudices of a society that needed to be reshaped from above by elites, while Dewey outlined his ideas of the supremacy of information in shaping public discourse. However, neither questioned the ability of the media to influence people's opinions and ultimately, their actions. Lippman's description of the role of the citizen and public opinion is as pertinent today as it was 80 years ago.

The practice of appealing to the public on all sorts of intricate matters means almost always a desire to escape criticism from those who know by enlisting a large majority which has had no chance to know. The verdict is made to depend on who has the loudest or the most entrancing voice, the most skilful or most brazen publicity man, the best access to the most space in the newspapers. For even when the editor is scrupulously fair to "the other side", fairness is not enough.¹⁵⁵

Dewey, on the other hand, believed that people had the ability to form opinions through transactions of public communication: "It is not necessary that the many should have the knowledge and skill to carry on the needed investigations; what is required is that they have the ability to judge of the bearing of the knowledge supplied by others upon common concerns."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Walter Lippman, Public Opinion (New York: The Free Press, 1922), p. 252.

¹⁵⁶ John Dewey, The Public and its Problems, (New York, Holt 1927), cited in [<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/1643/dewey.html>]

Of the two, Lippmann feared the influence of the media the most and was very doubtful about letting the public direct any policy, because of its great susceptibility.

Public opinion is always wrong. Much too intransigent in war, much too yielding in peace, insufficiently informed, lacking the specialized knowledge with which lucid judgments can be based.¹⁵⁷

Marshall McLuhan introduced the notion that the media was more than a means of transmitting ideas or pictures. He suggested that in and of itself, they were a force with intrinsic elements that were self-defining. He noted that the head of NBC, General David Sarnoff once stated, "We are too prone to make technological instruments the scapegoats for the sins of those who wield them. The products of modern science are not in themselves good or bad, it is the way they are used that determines their value."¹⁵⁸ McLuhan excoriated Sarnoff, using a series of allegories ("The smallpox virus is in itself neither good nor bad...") to make his point.

There is simply nothing in the Sarnoff statement that will bear scrutiny, for it ignores the nature of the medium, of any and all media, in the true Narcissus style of one hypnotized by the amputation and extension of his own being in a new technical form. General Sarnoff went on to explain his attitude to the technology of print, saying that it was true that print had caused much trash to circulate, but it had also disseminated the Bible and the thoughts of seers and philosophers. It has never occurred to General Sarnoff that any technology could do anything but add to what we already were.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Cited in Johanna Neuman, op. cit., p. 90

¹⁵⁸ Cited in McLuhan, op. cit., p. 11

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

Neil Postman picks up this thread in a way that defines the great challenges in the age of television. When another medium arrives on the scene, it not only has an impact on the existing media, but it *changes* and *shapes* the consciousness of people.

We are now a culture whose information, ideas and epistemology are given form by television, not by the printed word. To be sure, there are still readers and there are many books published, but the uses of print and reading are not the same as they once were; not even in schools, the last institutions where print was thought to be invincible. They delude themselves who believe that television and print coexist, for coexistence implies parity. There is no parity.¹⁶⁰

It is clear that reading offers the opportunity for a "personal" perspective on an issue or a story: the imagination "fills in" the details (the way something appears, how an event occurs) just as the spaces appear between the words on a printed page. Television news does not: it has an almost "dictatorial" effect on one's imagination: the picture and sound are provided and the story is shaped. Reading is a skill that has been acquired by most of the world's population – but not a vast majority, given illiteracy rates everywhere. This skill reduces popular access to newspapers, while television is accessible to all, literate and illiterate alike. Above all, television is immediate: it takes time to produce a print story and then for it to be distributed. Although television production is not "direct to market", satellite links allow immediate broadcasting of an image, and it requires no time to view an image, while reading can be a laborious process.

¹⁶⁰Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death (New York: Penguin, 1985), p.28

If what Postman says about the dominance of television is true, then it has enormous implications for the reporting of events – even more so for humanitarian emergencies. Some events take time to develop, while others are fast-breaking. The greatest complaint of policy-makers dealing with military crises is that the speed with which the media operates tends to "accordion" the time required to make decisions.

There is little doubt that real-time television images of dramatic policy developments greatly increase temporal pressures on senior officials to come up with a response, either in word or in deed, to the events portrayed. That pressure is not irresistible, but it is resisted at the risk of media and political criticism and ultimately, even one's own political health.¹⁶¹

However, within humanitarian agencies the reverse is true: time is required to undertake some of the most complex programs, while in some other cases, it is not. The responses that take a long time are often not covered in the media, while the ones that do not take a lot of time, are. The development of a nutrition program takes years and a malaria control program many months, while the delivery of food in a famine or the spread of a virulent disease like Ebola (and its subsequent treatment) can be done in a matter of days. The former make poor television, the latter have all the elements of drama. The latter become TV stories, the former do not.

¹⁶¹ Strobel, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Timing is one of the most critical elements of television news. In the electronic age, a story can be "old" in days, if not hours. In a reflection of the "supply and demand" of the marketplace, the speed in which a story is covered is often more critical than its accuracy. Nik Gowing, a UK analyst who has worked for ITV and BBC, says flatly, "'The more immediate the real-time journalism, the greater the inaccuracy, and therefore the lower the credibility.'"¹⁶² His comments are echoed by several authors and analysts, including former White House policy advisor Brent Scowcroft, who cited a dictum to his colleagues: "First reports are almost always wrong."¹⁶³ This contention is supported by Warren Strobel, who says matter-of-factly,

Simply put, the capacity to 'go live' rarely means improved journalism; it often means the reverse. The essence of a reporter's work, after all, is reporting and analysis. The demands of logistics and the drumbeat of constant deadlines means that in many, although certainly not all, instances there is less time to do both.¹⁶⁴

While the capacity to go "live" can be attractive, the logistics of it may not be, primarily due to the expenses involved, and the farther away from "home base" (more than likely London or New York), the more expensive the proposition of covering a story. Budgets are therefore a major factor in determining how a story is covered, especially in television, where the cost of a crew is enormous. In 1997, ABC News, which had then been recently acquired by Disney, was covering a story in Africa (on Ebola, no less) that the author organized for WHO. The producer mentioned that under the new (and tighter-

¹⁶² Nik Gowing, "Dispatches from Disaster Zones", Conference Paper, 27 May 1998, p. 27.

¹⁶³ Cited in Strobel, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

fisted) management, the crew was expected to shoot a thousand feet of film for each minute of story run, whereas the standard had previously been four thousand feet of film per minute.¹⁶⁵ These competitive pressures are contributing to the decline in international news coverage.

The financial burden of (a TV crew's) luggage is only one factor making the network television foreign correspondent an endangered species. New technologies in cable and satellite TV have turned the stable, predictable, almost automatically profitable television marketplace into a competitive cauldron in which journalism must compete with entertainment programming.¹⁶⁶

The criteria that are used by the news business to judge whether to invest in a story are probably irrelevant in terms of the historical importance of an issue – but they are driven by competition between news agencies and networks to be the "first" with the story (Note that even stories in the industrialized world have an effective "shelf life" of a couple of days). This means that the quicker the story is reported, the more superficial it's likely to be.

(With the advent of same-day satellite broadcasting) newscasts saw a marked shift from overseas features and background stories to hard news. They gained the immediacy of broadcasting "today's news today" at the cost of more explanatory coverage....For the foreign correspondent, instant satellite communications left little time for developing expertise in a specific country.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Interview, Robert Campos, April 1997, author's notes.

¹⁶⁶ Utley, op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 4

In the same way that a televised hockey game focuses exclusively on the puck and the players around it, rather than providing the required detail on the play going on "off-camera" (which the crowd in the arena can see), television shows only those events that it considers pertinent, or that will attract the eye. And it leads the other media to do the same. Thus can occur the photo or film of a child in a desert town, where there are actually hundreds of healthy people around. Or the emphasis on one image-laden story over another "issue-based" one.

Neil Postman notes the domination of the image-laden world we now live in, the consequences of changing from a culture obsessed with the written word (The Age of Exposition) to one that is overwhelmed by imagery (The Age of Entertainment).

Television gave the epistemological biases of the telegraph and the photograph their most potent expression, raising the interplay of image and instance to an exquisite and dangerous perfection. And it brought them into the home. We are by now well into a second generation of children for whom television has been their first and most accessible teacher and for many, their most reliable companion and friend. To put it plainly, television is the command centre of the new epistemology. There is no poverty so abject that it must forego television. There is no education so exalted that it is not modified by television. And most important, there is no subject of public interest – politics, news, education, religion, science, sports – that does not find its way onto television. Which means that public understanding of these subjects is shaped by the biases of television.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Neil Postman, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

Television can also inform other media in the way it covers a story. Visual impact is important in shaping a print report. The decision as to what will lead a newscast or make a headline is a topic of intense discussion among journalists wherever they gather. One cliché often heard at tabloids is “if it bleeds, it leads”. A Canadian media expert and former journalist, the late Robert Spence and a public relations expert, Della Smith, defined the criteria for news as ACE – Action, Conflict and Emotion.¹⁶⁹ One might add to it an interest in financial issues, or money, to make the acronym MACE. This powerful combination of elements is what news editors use, either consciously or subconsciously, to assess what events will make headlines. The more elements, the more likely the headline will take prominence. These criteria are illustrative of the tendency of news reports to focus on the fleeting and the superficial rather than the long-term or the substantial.

A classic example of a story that attracted enormous media attention around the world, and yet had no "earth-shaking" global historical importance, was the death of Princess Diana, the estranged wife of Prince Charles, in August of 1997. Diana, although beautiful, an established media celebrity and patron of good causes, was not a world leader and owed her position to the man to whom she had been married and to the children she bore for him. Her life and death did not change the nature of the British state, nor did they cause a revolution in thinking nor an economic upheaval –

¹⁶⁹ Palmer-Jarvis Communications seminar on the news media, Canadian Institute of Mining, Metallurgy and Petroleum, April 1991, author's notes.

what might be understood as important ways of shaping history. But her death involved:

- **Moneyed** families,
- **Action** of the car hitting the tunnel pillars (repeated over and over again in animated form) the placing of flowers at various palaces and the pageantry of her funeral,
- **Conflict** between the Al-Fayeds and the Windsors and within the Royal Family itself, and the
- **Emotion** of thousands of grieving admirers in the streets of London and Paris.

Thus, this was a story that made headlines day after day in September of 1997, even if it proved to be a footnote in history. The BBC is considered to be one of the most prestigious newsgathering organizations in the world, and yet, when the Princess Diana “story” hit, BBC was swept away in the same tsunami of media fervour. The managing editor of the BBC evening news, John Curran, says that the moment the word came out that Diana had been hurt in a car accident in Paris, he focused completely on the logistics involved, and not news judgment or the politics of the story. The BBC was just like any *paparazza*.

I was awakened at home at four in the morning with a brief report that Diana had been injured in a car accident in Paris. My immediate thought was "do we have a correspondent and a camera available in Paris" and if not, how do we get one there, if only to get film of her coming out of the hospital. Then all hell broke loose.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Interview, John Curran, BBC, February 2001.

Canadian Barry McLoughlin, one of the leading practitioners of the art of media consulting, emphasizes the need to understand the way reporters and assignment editors set their priorities, and urges government and private sector officials to adapt to these priorities.

Being media savvy means being more alert to the importance of the media in explaining the policy directions of governments, the corporate vision of companies and the goals and achievements of not-for-profit organizations. It also means being more sensitive to the public impacts of statements and actions; and being more understanding of the way the media work and why they do what they do.¹⁷¹

Della Smith, who was one of the people who identified the ACE criteria now says that she feels news reporting has become too superficial. And rather than counselling her clients on how to feed the system, she tries to find ways to be ethical and different in approach.¹⁷²

The need to attract media and public attention to the issues affecting the developing world have drawn the attention of Kraig Klaudt, the Director of an advocacy organization called the "Massive Effort Against Poverty", based in Switzerland. This organization is dedicated to the principle that more effective advocacy strategies, using electronic media effectively, can make serious changes in donor policy. Klaudt developed a strategy he refers to as "CAUSE", to develop media interest in an issue. The CAUSE approach relies

¹⁷¹ Barry McLoughlin Associates, Advanced Media Skills and Crisis Communications, (Ottawa:self-published, 1994), p.14.

¹⁷² Interview, Della Smith, Vancouver, June 24, 2002.

heavily on electronic and "new" media to get the message out, and Klautdt employs data and tracking of media to prove his points.

CHART 7: Creating a CAUSE

CAUSE¹⁷³	Celebrity	Activity	Unexpected Story	Symbol	Event
Indian Independence	Mahatma Ghandi	Passive resistance	Jallianwala Baga atrocity	Spinning wheel	1930 salt march
American Civil Rights movement	Martin Luther King	Sit-ins	Medgar Evers murder Church bombing	Klansmen "I have a dream" speech	Boycotts Washington March Riots
Vietnam War	Jerry Rubin Jane Fonda	Burning draft cards Occupation of university buildings	"Pentagon Papers" My Lai Massacre Kent State	Peace symbol	Chicago riots
Apartheid	Nelson Mandela	Divestment campaigns	Murder of Biko	ANC Colours	Sun City
AIDS in US	Ryan White	ACT-Up	Blood samples	red ribbon	AIDS day

The CAUSE approach evolved from a strategy that he developed effectively in taking the TB program of the WHO from the early 1990s from a minor section of the organization to a powerhouse of fund raising. At the time, the World Health Organization was caught in a dilemma: how to raise the profile of the problem of tuberculosis, a disease of the 1950s, on the stage 40 years later, which was making a comeback? The disease was killing people in large numbers again in tandem with AIDS, and the WHO TB section was short of funds. Although the death toll was not as significant as malaria and some childhood diseases at the time, the TB section needed to draw attention to it. Four options were considered: further research for a vaccine; development of more effective

¹⁷³ from a slide presentation by Kraig Klautdt, "Creating a CAUSE", obtained September 2001.

antibiotics; massive hospitalization of patients; and a course of extensive treatment requiring a labour-intensive approach called “directly observable treatment”.

On the advice of Klaudt, who was at the time the media and fundraising director of the TB section, the DOTS or "Directly Observable Treatment System" campaign was chosen. Based on original research by Dr. Carl Stevwo, the DOTS approach was to ensure that a TB patient received all his or her medication over a period of several months – something very difficult to do in a developing country with a mobile population and limited capacity to observe patients. Some senior officers on an advisory board subsequently resigned, arguing that DOTS was impractical. Nonetheless, it was offered as a panacea and raised hundreds of millions of dollars for what was depicted as a growing worldwide problem. Media were used extensively, to raise donor contributions, symbols were created, the campaign was "piggy-backed" onto AIDS campaigns for higher visibility, and the constant message was that TB could be cured if money was provided – unlike AIDS, where despite massive donations, there appeared to be no success. The media trumpeted the DOTS strategy and the funds rolled in.¹⁷⁴

As he likes to say "If you are not visible in the media you simply are not visible in politics. Political decisions are often governed by what is on the media agenda."¹⁷⁵ Given his success, Klaudt is very wedded to the idea of "branding" in health campaigns, to ensure that the potential donor identifies with the cause. As a result, he is very cynical

¹⁷⁴ author's notes, confirmed in Interview, Kraig Klaudt, Geneva, September 6, 2001.

about open-ended campaigns that do not have a specific objective. He is particularly scathing about the WHO's own "Health for All" campaign.

An example of how we have failed in international public health in marketing and packaging: the "Health For All" initiative. It's probably a lesson in how NOT to market a movement: "Let's be all things to all people." Health —, that includes almost anything anyone can imagine — for all! Can you think of a more vague or unfocused Brand?¹⁷⁶

He notes that the greatest challenge in advocacy communication is in convincing scientific people to "buy in" to the idea of "branding" the response to the disease or work they are undertaking.

Branding in public health is not fully understood or appreciated among the health practitioners in the commercial sector. You want to get people to use your product you must put 50-70% of your budget to create brand value, brand reliability into the market. But it's surprising how, when we look at successful public health interventions how these private sector lessons are rarely applied. So I think branding was an incredibly important part. Of course obviously no brand — McDonald's hamburger or Coca Cola — can have brand value unless the product is dependable each and every time.¹⁷⁷

He suggests there is a 180-degree difference between science and communication.

If you are giving a dissertation and were drafting medical or scientific papers for publication you would start with the details of your argument, you build your case and you work down to your conclusion at the end. Advocacy communication is just the opposite. You might only have 5 minutes — maybe only 5 seconds — to get someone's

¹⁷⁵ Interview, Kraig Klautt, Geneva, September 6, 2001.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

attention, so you have to start out with the conclusion first and then fill in the gaps slowly until you reach the finer details.¹⁷⁸

Klaudt's work over the past decade is strong evidence of the effectiveness of a strong strategy and applied tactics being capable of directing public opinion. It is a long way from Bernays' first efforts, but applies many of the rudimentary techniques he pioneered.

Symbols

The use of symbols is a key element in news reporting, especially in television. The notion of representative images or individuals is crucial to a viewer's basic understanding of a story. This approach, first honed in Vietnam ("the soldier, the peasant, the official, the family")¹⁷⁹ was one of the staples of the "dramatization" of news favoured by Reuven Frank of NBC in the war in Vietnam.

"The picture is not a fact but a symbol", Reuven Frank notes, "the real child and the real crying become symbols of all children. In the same way, a particular black may be used to symbolize the aspirations of his race, a particular student may be used to symbolize the claims of his generation, and a particular policeman may be used to symbolize ... the concept of authority."¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Epstein, op.cit., p. 5.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

The application of symbols in a story is also a key element in public relations techniques. While counselling that the growth of media has provided opportunities for public relations practitioners of the 1950s to do “good or evil on a scale never before possible”, one author identified the way these symbols could be used.

The correct use of themes and choices of symbols becomes even ever increasingly important, for on them depends in great part the effectiveness of the message. Symbols have been created for every activity and every institution. If themes are countless, symbols are even more so, for every theme is capable of projection through a variety of symbols.¹⁸¹

Another area is the need for symbols in the classic dichotomy of good versus evil, which aligns with the natural human instinct of responding to the needs of the supposed “victim”. In the genocide in Rwanda, there was a need to show victims in the 1994 genocide. However, although the TV cameras showed the victims of the genocide, it was easier to show the effects of the exodus of the perpetrators of the original crime.

Julia Taft, president of Interaction, the coalition of US-based NGOs, said that when pictures were shown of Rwandans being hacked to death, private relief groups got “no money whatsoever” from the viewing public. That did not change until the refugees flooded into Zaire and there were “pictures of women and children innocents in need.”¹⁸² This matches the analysis of Virgil Hawkins of the University of Osaka, who suggests that the hunger for symbolism drives the news and policy.

¹⁸¹ Doris E. Fleischman in Edward Bernays, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

¹⁸² Strobel, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

Attracting viewers and readers means grabbing and keeping their interest, and this requires keeping stories simple, sensational, and easy to understand. This has resulted in the emergence of the coverage of conflict as an oversimplified "morality play", in which one side in a conflict is portrayed as evil, and the other as a victim, with a formula that puts pressure on the international community to intervene and rescue the victim.¹⁸³

Humanitarian emergencies are rife with symbolism. The starving child, the forlorn mother, the overwhelmed and haggard relief worker, the empty sack of food, the fight for the last rations, the blood-spattered hospital, the piles of coffins, the mass graves. They all speak of despair and disaster. The most effective of all these symbols has been the face of a child. Children, especially young children of any race or colour represent innocence, purity and potential. For this reason, most public announcements or advertisements use the faces of children who have not yet reached puberty. This despite the fact that childhood rights are defined in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* as "human rights to be respected and protected for every child under the age of 18 years and requires that these rights are implemented in the light of the Convention's guiding principles."¹⁸⁴ Nonetheless, few (if any) adolescents are portrayed in public announcements of the wide range of organizations established to "serve" children.

¹⁸³ Virgil Hawkins "The price of inaction: The Media and humanitarian intervention", *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs*, 15 May 2001, University of Osaka, p. 3 [<http://www.jha.ac/articles/a066.htm>]

¹⁸⁴ UNICEF: UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, [<http://www.unicef.org/crc/convention.htm>]

Michael Maren points out that children are often the focal point of any NGO public relations strategy, aimed at expanding donor support, or “market share”. The use of children in humanitarian advertising is not new, but it has been refined over time by groups founded to serve children.

There is perhaps nothing more wretched than the exploitation of children for fund-raising, yet nothing more common. NGOs that focus on children had always fallen back on this mission whenever outsiders questioned their motives and practices: “We may have made some mistakes, but if you write anything that reduces our donations, you’ll be hurting the children” is a refrain I’ve heard often over the years. And for the most part, journalists keep their suspicions to themselves.¹⁸⁵

Marshall McLuhan wrote extensively about the media's need to create typologies, of which children are among the most important. In a harsh, sexist and not politically correct assessment of the media's way of shaping symbols, he zeroes in on the way children can be exploited as visual images, not as human beings.

...literate man is quite inclined to see those who cannot conform as somewhat pathetic. Especially the child, the cripple, the woman and the colored person appear in a world of visual and typographic technology as victims of injustice. On the other hand, in a culture that assigns roles instead of jobs to people – the dwarf, the skew, the child, create their own spaces.¹⁸⁶

The use of children as symbols of weakness can even go beyond the truth. In some cases, images of children in relief appeals have been fraudulent, in that the film or photos of

¹⁸⁵ Interview, Michael Maren, *Might Magazine*, March/April 1997, website: [http://www.netnomad.com/might.html]

¹⁸⁶ McLuhan, op. cit, p. 17.

starving babies are taken out of context. In 1992, Michael Maren pored over film from Somalia, where photos of starving children were rife, and noticed that they were edited.

...the camera pans away or pulls back, and you see there's people going about their lives. There's people driving cars, smoking cigarettes, and so on. What you can do with a camera in a refugee situation is you can compress the hunger. You can package it, frame it, and it always looks worse than it is. It looks like you're taking part in the liberation of Buchenwald, when in fact it's a lot more complicated. The raw footage shows....that there are people who are eating. And it becomes very clear that this is not a food shortage; this is a political problem or an economic problem-that's why people are starving to death. And that's more complicated than the message these organizations drive home, which is "This baby is starving; send money and we'll bring him food." The starving baby picture is a lie.¹⁸⁷

At the very least, the images of children are exploited for a purpose – to raise funds for a cause. When the war in Afghanistan broke out, the first images that appeared in newspaper advertising for humanitarian agencies (like UNICEF Canada) were of children "who would need food" according to the advertisements.¹⁸⁸ In the case of famine, photos of children are used extensively. Susan Moeller calls starving children "the famine icon."

The media's coverage of famine is distilled down into the simple iconic image of a starving infant. An emaciated child is not yet associated with the stereotypes attached to its colour, its culture or its political environment. Skeletal children personify innocence abused. They bring moral clarity to the complex story of a famine. Their images cut through the social, economic and political context to create an imperative statement.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Maren, op. cit., *Might* magazine interview. [<http://www.netnomad.com/might.html>.]

¹⁸⁸ UNICEF advertisement, *Globe and Mail*, October 2001.

The desire to set financial goals ahead of established mandates resonates in the inclination of UN organizations and agencies to pursue public relations approaches in meeting their objectives. Constant adjustment, information, and persuasion, employing the appropriate symbols (like the face of a child) are effective tools in this “Darwinian” competition between agencies and between the agencies and the NGOs. The prospect that this might lead to misrepresentation is just as great as a hockey player taking a penalty to advance the team's chance of winning, or a politician providing patronage to a supporter to ensure an electoral success. Pictures of children in distress have the potential of being the "coin of the realm" for relief agencies in complex humanitarian emergencies.

¹⁸⁹ Moeller, *op.cit.*, p. 98

Raising the bar: compassion fatigue

Susan Moeller suggests that the next step from the application of symbolism is the use of “standards” to ensure a kind of “shorthand” that explains an issue. Therefore, a famine consists of a certain number of starving people – preferably in the tens or hundreds of thousands. A “tragedy” is the deaths of several hundred, thousand, hundreds of thousand, or even millions of people. A complex human emergency or war is important, depending on the numbers of people killed and the impact on geopolitical issues, the connection with the home country and consumer concerns in the West (for example, the effects of Middle East tension on the price of oil). An assassination or death of a prominent person is important in the way that it connects to the West. Disease is threatening, depending on how many people have died or how many people could be threatened among the Western viewers.

But the most important factor in determining relevance is where the famine, assassination, disease or death occurs – as they say in real estate “location, location, location”. Where the event is occurring on the planet in relation to the largest media centres: New York, London, Paris, and to a lesser extent, Toronto, is most important. But like shock therapy, this system of standards creates a tendency among both donor country officials and the general public, to develop a “compassion fatigue” that flags as each emergency develops. This then creates an expectation of a *more* serious crisis or

emergency. So the tragedy of 1970 does not equate to that of 1990, and the emergency of 1990 will inevitably have to be swamped by the “bigger” event of 2010. It is a logical progression, but the problem is that it must become more and more graphic or offensive to have an effect. In an era when television viewers can switch channels with a remote control in an instant, they reduce the impact of the images being shown.

Both statistical and anecdotal evidence indicate the growth of the fatigue factor, in with the viewing public over the years, becomes desensitized to the images of suffering or horrors that they feel powerless to do anything about and that do not directly touch them...Together the remote control and the fatigue factor make a powerful combination ... An audience researcher for NBC was told by one respondent, "If I ever see a child with flies swarming around it one more time, I'm not going to watch that show again."¹⁹⁰

Susan Moeller points out that compassion fatigue has infiltrated itself across the board in the media's, the public's and, by extension, the public opinion driving donor countries. Thus it shapes the decisions at every level.

It's difficult for the media and their audience to sustain concern about individual crises over a period of months and maybe even years. Other more decisive – and short term – events intervene, usurping attention, and meanwhile, little seems to change in the original scenario. There is a reciprocal circularity in the treatment of low-intensity crises: the droning "same-as-it-ever-was" coverage in the media causes the public to lose interest, and the media's perception that their audience has lost interest causes them to downscale their coverage, which causes the public to believe that the crisis is either over or is a lesser emergency and so on and so on.¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Cited in Strobel, op.cit., p. 65.

¹⁹¹ Moeller, op. cit., p 12.

Journalistic standards

Susan Moeller concludes that there is a need to establish much higher standards of reporting in order to maintain public interest in an issue, and not to be focused on the drama and entertainment formula of news that currently dominate.

The public is saying: "Enough. We don't want what you are giving us." The solution to compassion fatigue ... is to invest in the coverage of intentional affairs and to give talented reporters, camerapeople, editors and producers the freedom to define their own stories – bad and good, evil and inspiring, horrific and joyous. The solution is for those talented people to cover that panoply of stories day in and day out, year in and year out, and to be concerned less about the "bottom line" than for the "morning line."¹⁹²

Not surprisingly, this is a point of view shared by reporters themselves. Even those in television admit their concern over the trend towards entertainment in news and the dominance of television. CBC News Anchor Peter Mansbridge says he and his colleagues are "perturbed" every time studies are released that indicate television is the main source of news for Canadians.

Sometimes their only source is TV. I know what they are getting. They're not getting enough. We (at the CBC) like to think we take it beyond the headlines because we do documentaries, we go for an hour, we do analysis. But if you take (the script of) an hour-long newscast ... you couldn't fill the front page of your paper.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 322

¹⁹³ Cited in Sarah Hampson, "TV's thinking head", The Globe and Mail, Saturday, June 22, 2002.

Mansbridge said his former colleague Joe Schlesinger always said "Television is the menu; if you want to eat, go somewhere else" meaning that there was more detail to be found in newspapers, magazines or radio.¹⁹⁴

Whereas many print reporters say the presence of CNN and other electronic media on an international story means that their pieces will get used, former Globe and Mail reporter and CBC TV analyst, Christopher Waddell says that in Canada, reduced budgets have tended to force television to "follow the lead" of the print media when it comes to generating stories.

The problem in Canada is that television news is a function of matching news stories, which has structurally come about as a result of cutbacks. As the networks expanded into having "all-news" networks, they didn't increase the resources.¹⁹⁵

In the climate of faster technology like the internet, increasing globalization and increasing convergence, the influence of television, public relations and marketing techniques, and entertainment disguised as news, the notion of journalistic responsibility is gaining momentum. In an extensive collaboration with journalists in the United States, former editors Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenthal have established a series of criteria that they see as the elements of responsible touchstones for journalism as a profession. The criteria are built around the concept of ensuring information for an informed citizenry: that a journalist's first obligation is to the truth, that the essence of journalism is verification, that it must serve as an independent monitor of power, and that it must

¹⁹⁴ Comment, CBC correspondents forum, Ottawa, May, 2002.

provide for public criticism and compromise. It also sets standards for content: the news must be "comprehensive and proportional, interesting and relevant, and its practitioners must be protected – in their words, "to be allowed to exercise their personal conscience."¹⁹⁶ It is an interesting phenomenon and one that bears watching, as convergence and globalization combine with entertainment and marketing to continue to squeeze the genuine "news" (notably, international news) content out of the media.

¹⁹⁵ Interview, August 1, 2002.

¹⁹⁶ Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenthal, The Elements of Journalism (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), p.12.

CHAPTER V: From arsenic to immunization: case studies in humanitarian issues and the media

The following case studies are laid out as examples of the agenda-setting abilities of the media, to drive, determine, pervert or prevent decision-making on issues by international agencies. They include examples of events that have their focus in Africa, Europe and Asia, as well as having a global reach. Each one of them provides a substantive support for the underpinning of the thesis that the UN and the specialized agencies are influenced by the power of the media in setting their courses.

a. A cautionary tale: Rwanda 1994-1996

When the airplane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprian Ntayamira was shot down as it approached Kigali airport on April 6, 1994, events unfolded that led to the deaths of at least half a million people in a massive genocide. Astonishingly enough, two years later, the people who committed the murders were the object of a massive humanitarian undertaking to save their lives, driven by much greater media attention than had been originally given to the genocide that they perpetrated.

Rwanda is a small, landlocked country in central Africa about the size of the Niagara peninsula (26,338 sq km) with a population of 6.7 million people. Formerly a German colony, it was ceded to the Belgians as a "prize" of World War I. In 1994, there were three main ethnic or tribal groupings in Rwanda: the Hutu, who were farmers, and who constituted about 80% of the population; the Tutsis, who herded cattle and were 20%, and the Twa, or pygmy people.

The brutal Belgian colonialists, supported by the Catholic Church, had long encouraged systematic discrimination between the tall Tutsis and the squat Hutu, which caused enormous resentment. As well, passbooks were issued identifying a person by his or her tribal or ethnic background. Upon independence in 1962, the Hutus ensured a repressive majority rule that excluded the Tutsis. In turn, in 1972 in neighbouring Burundi, the Tutsis killed 200,000 Hutus.

In the Cold War period, Rwanda became a client-state of the West. Its one-party government was a secure apparatus that ensured repression when required to maintain the government's security. In the 1990s Rwanda was classed by the World Bank as one of the poorest countries in the world.¹⁹⁷ Almost all of its exports were of primary commodities – coffee, tea and tin. This meant that its economy was utterly dependent on the fluctuations of commodity prices, which fell dramatically: in 1993, government

earnings from coffee exports declined from \$144 million in 1985 to \$30 million in 1993.¹⁹⁸ This caused serious problems for the Rwandan economy and created greater tension.

Even before commodity prices had collapsed, Rwanda obtained more income from aid than from its own exports, as it supported the West in the Cold War. After the end of the Cold War, there was a new concern in the West, about the need for pluralism and democracy in Africa. The emergence of Nelson Mandela in leading South Africa was a sign of a new era for Africa as a whole. Consequently, in Rwanda, there came a push for multi-party democracy and power sharing as part of the Arusha Peace Accords, pressed by the UN and the United States to make peace.

However, the accords, signed in Arusha, Tanzania in August of 1993, put the Hutus and Tutsis, at loggerheads. There was open conflict between militant groups, such as the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front, and the Rwandan army. Human rights groups warned the international community of impending calamity. Many Rwandan human rights activists evacuated their families from Kigali believing that massacres were imminent.

¹⁹⁷ United Nations, Report Of The Independent Inquiry Into The Actions Of The United Nations During The 1994 Genocide In Rwanda, (New York: United Nations, 1999) chapter 5.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

The eve of genocide

In December of 1993 a small force of soldiers arrived in Kigali. Many were Belgian, others from various African and Asian nations and a handful of officers and logistics personnel from Canada.¹⁹⁹ The head of the mission, General Romeo Dallaire, was Canadian. Rwanda on the eve of genocide was not unknown to the international media, nor to international decision-makers. It had a history of internal conflict over several decades, and an internal structure of built-in discrimination that dated to colonial times. As the UN was anticipating moves towards peace, the Hutu were preparing for war.

As the report of IPEP, *The International Panel of Eminent Persons*, organized by the Organization for Africa Unity notes, the world community had to have been aware of the tension: newspapers from around the world provided details of the conflict in Rwanda from the outset. There were headlines about the conflict in *Le Monde* in France, Belgium's *de Standaard*, *The New York Times*, and others. Adding that Human Rights Watch had collected more than thirty pages of articles warning of the catastrophe, they concluded:

All these data reflect three important truths:

- Violence was rampant for years before the genocide and was escalating perceptibly.
- This state of affairs was well known.

¹⁹⁹ George Mason University, Institute of Public Policy, Program on Peacekeeping Policy, website [<http://www.gmu.edu/departments/t-po/peace/unamir>].

- It was also known that the situation was not the product of chance.²⁰⁰

It was a potent combination of factors: a mission of intervention based on weak rules of engagement, containing as its core the white soldiers of the same country which had repressed Rwanda for decades – and then abandoned it. All this in a country and a region known for intra-state violence. Meanwhile, the overall direction of the mission came from an ambitious American-educated African, Kofi Annan, at UN headquarters in New York. He recognized that the United States government had been dealt a severe blow by its fruitless peace effort a year before in another African country, Somalia.

The Somalia factor

In December of 1992, the then-President of the United States, George Bush, made a decision that some say sealed the fate of the Rwandan Tutsi sixteen months later.

Watching a CNN documentary on starvation in Somalia, the "lame-duck" (he had lost the election a month before to Bill Clinton) president had watched a CNN documentary on Somalia and declared that "Barbara and I will never forget all those children who were dying ... no one should have to die at Christmastime."²⁰¹ At first welcomed in Somalia as conquering heroes (their arrival was covered "live" on CNN, in a midnight beach landing), the American soldiers were soon treated as pariahs. The final indignity for the

²⁰⁰ IPEP report, OAU website [www.oau-aaa.org].

²⁰¹ Strobel, op. cit., p. 141.

Americans was the deaths of 18 soldiers in the streets of Mogadishu in October of 1993, shot by supporters of warlord Farah Aidid.

Both CNN and the world's newspapers had extensive coverage of the massacre. From that moment on, the new Clinton administration focused on "exit strategies" for any further humanitarian interventions by the United States. It became clear that henceforth, American interests would be directly equated with the risk of media exposure of casualties. The development of "Presidential Decision Directive 25" was issued following the Somalia debacle, and was a checklist of reasons *not* to get involved in a conflict unless American strategic interests were threatened. According to American reporter Philip Gourevich, Somalia conditioned the Clinton White House about conflict.

After Somalia, it's really clear that the Clinton administration was terrified of body bags. What they didn't want was dead American troops on television, in an intervention whose strategic necessity, whose essence to the national security was not obvious.²⁰²

The directive was being developed as tension in Rwanda increased. At about the same time, in January of 1994, an informant in Kigali provided General Dallaire with details of plans being formulated by the presidential guard to distribute weapons to kill Tutsis. He passed this information on in a fax to the office of the head of peacekeeping operations, Kofi Annan. Annan ignored the request for action on the issue, and instead recommended

²⁰² Interview, Philip Gourevich, Frontline: the Triumph of Evil, Public Broadcasting Service program, PBS website: [<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/Interviews/gourevitch2.html>].

that the Rwandan President be informed of the plans that his own guards were formulating.

On April 6, when Habyarimana's plane was shot down by the presidential guard near Kigali Airport it was reported to have "exploded" on landing. When the killing began, there was total confusion in the media reports as to what exactly was going on. Initially, the reports in the European and North American media referred to "civil war" or "tribal strife" between "the militia" and the army fighting rebel forces.

On April 7, ten Belgian peacekeepers were tortured and killed when they gave up their weapons to the presidential guard. The killings had been planned months in advance, to create a "Somalia-type" episode for the Belgians to be reported back home and cause the core of UNAMIR to leave. The reporting of the killings began the unravelling of the mission, and discouraged others from coming to take the place of those who departed.

An April 13 *Newsday* editorial asked, "What is to be done?" and recommended "nothing."²⁰³ The *New York Times* stated: "No member of the United Nations with an army strong enough to make a difference is willing to risk centuries-old history of tribal warfare and deep distrust of outside intervention."²⁰⁴ Later, in support of the administration's position, the *Times* wrote: "...to enter this conflict without a defined

²⁰³ *Newsday*, cited in [<http://mediafilter.org/CAQ/CAQ52Rw4.html>].

²⁰⁴ *New York Times*, *ibid*.

mission or a plausible military plan risks a repetition of the debacle in Somalia."²⁰⁵ This in spite of military calculations that an army of 6,000 could have effectively stopped the genocide.²⁰⁶

Of the 2,370 reports listed in Lexis-Nexis between April 7 and May 1, the first to mention the word "genocide" was a letter to the *Washington Post* by an American relative of a Rwandan Tutsi family on May 6 and a copyrighted article in the *Baltimore Sun* dated May 8 by Human Rights Watch. By that time, an estimated 400,000 people had been killed. On June 10, the *New York Times* headlined a story "Officials Told to Avoid Calling Rwanda Killings 'Genocide'".

As a responsible Government, you don't just go around hollering 'genocide,'" David Rawson, the United States Ambassador to Rwanda, said in an interview. "You say that acts of genocide may have occurred and they need to be investigated."²⁰⁷

On March 26, 1998, US President Bill Clinton acknowledged for the first time that "we did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide." He used the word 11 times.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ *New York Times*, *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Carol Off, *The Lion, The Fox, and the Eagle* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2000), p. 58.

²⁰⁷ Jehl Douglas, *New York Times*, June 10, 1994.

²⁰⁸ Carol Off, *op. cit.*, p 114.

The escape from Zaire

Although the Hutu had been the aggressors in the 1994 genocide, their plight had previously been the object of some media attention. In June of 1994, over a million Hutu had escaped Rwanda to the border areas of Rwanda and Zaire. They had fled the new Tutsi-led government that had promised to seek out the agents of the genocide. Although there had been some reporting of the massacres of the Tutsis, when calm came to Kigali in June with the change of government, there were far more journalists present to witness the exodus of the Hutu. As a result, photos and video images of starving Hutus were much more prominent and memorable than similar film of bodies of Tutsi floating in Rwanda's rivers only a few months before. And the humanitarian agencies arrived to serve these starving "victims" among whom were the *génocidaires*.

The humanitarians descended en masse, whether or not there was something useful for them to do. Aid workers in Rwanda asserted that the headquarters of several of the most established aid organizations overruled their recommendations not to intervene, insisting that if they were not involved, fundraising would be hopelessly compromised. Most aid organizations now admit that there was far too much duplication of effort and that many agencies performed poorly.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ David Rieff, review of "The Road to Hell" by Michael Maren, Foreign Affairs, January/February 1997.

Suddenly, the cause of the *genocidaires* became more important than the victims of the genocide two years before. The international media, having a sense that it had “missed” the genocide, did not want to be left out in this one. Ironically, they garnered international sympathy for the plight of the Hutu as “refugees” (although they were technically refugees, many of them had blood on their hands), as their suffering was well-documented and extensively reported.

The Hutu exodus was a political success for the leaders for one reason: they knew that relief aid would be there when they crossed the border. They knew the West would respond. And when the West did respond, it was a signal for other refugees to desert Rwanda and head for the border. The word was out in Rwanda that food and medical care existed on the other side. Aid made the exodus possible. Aid made the exodus logical. Life was better on the outside, despite the scenic horror of the camps. The killers fled into the open arms of international charity.²¹⁰

In 1995, the findings of the *Committee for Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda* concluded that the media failed in both reporting the genocide and providing a context to the crisis that followed.

The international media played a mixed role in the Rwanda crisis. While the media were a major factor in generating worldwide humanitarian relief support for the refugees, distorted reporting on events leading to the genocide itself was a contributing factor to the failure of the international community to take more effective action to stem the genocide.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Michael Maren, op. cit, p. 261.

²¹¹ Steering Committee for Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, "The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience" (Copenhagen: Danish Foreign Ministry), 1996 [<http://www.reliefweb.int/library/nordic/>].

1996: the return to Rwanda

In 1996, a new humanitarian disaster loomed in Rwanda. The source of the problems was the armed conflict between the Zairian Tutsis (called the *Banyamulenge*) and the Hutu gangs in the refugee camps, who controlled the Hutu refugees and prevented them from repatriating to Rwanda. At the same time, civil war was raging in Zaire between the regime of dictator Mobutu Sese Seko and a series of rebel groups (including the *Banyamulenge*) led by Laurent Kabila. The resulting decline in both safety and services left the hundreds of thousands of refugees with little choice but to move from the camps. The Rwandan government wanted to prosecute many of the people on the other side of the border for the atrocities that had occurred in 1994, but the international community was reluctant to let them have easy access to the refugees. As well, the prospect of a major humanitarian undertaking was a serious challenge for UNHCR, UNICEF, the agencies and many NGOs.

WHO, which did not have a genuinely operational role in the camps, established a Great Lakes Crisis Task Force, composed of 20 people, most of whom were doctors dealing with problems or conditions that might arise – water and sanitation, cholera, dysentery and other serious communicable diseases.²¹² A key part of the effort (and two of the 20 staffers) involved the information section. UNHCR, which had failed in keeping the

²¹² author's notes, WHO, October 1996.

camps in Zaire free from being taken over by Hutu gangs, now felt the need to show that it was enforcing its mandate within Rwanda. It prepared to set up camps in Kisangani on the Rwandan side of the border from Goma in Zaire. The reason for this was simple: once the rebel groups controlled the area around Goma, the authority of the Mobutu government in Kinshasa no longer applied; however, this was the government that was represented at the United Nations, and on the boards of the WHO, UNHCR and others.²¹³ So the UN could not easily cross the border into Zaire.

However, *Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF) and many other Non-Governmental Organizations were not restricted in this way, thereby giving them a strategic advantage over the UN organizations and agencies, which sat on the other side of the border. As a result, much of the reporting on operations in Goma, favoured MSF and the other NGOs. However, MSF made a statement about the possible health problems of the refugees that undermined its credibility and that of other NGOs.

The announcement signalled that up to 1200 refugees would soon be dying each day. MSF also demanded international military intervention to protect the refugees by way of safe areas. The MSF announcement backfired within days when thousands of adequately fed refugees began streaming back into Rwanda. Until November 9, MSF believed "we

²¹³ Ibid.

had enormous credibility because we are seen as physicians and high priests. By virtue of being MSF we could respond to human need and plough through political barriers."²¹⁴

At the same time, competition was breaking out among the UN agencies and the NGOs for the responsibility to deal with the crisis. UNHCR argued that the Rwandan refugees were its responsibility alone, as they had been living in UNHCR camps. UNICEF argued that the children among the refugees were its responsibility. The UN's Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) was in charge of UN emergency action. UNDP thought that Internally Displaced People were its responsibility. The ongoing turf war between UN organizations and agencies, as well as NGOs, was fought in the battle for media profile. In a report on the crisis, the UN's Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (successor to DHA), did not mince words.

Connected to this is the issue of media exposure. Visibility is achieved in part through media coverage, a fact which generates even further competition for market share for the more 'media-friendly' populations, such as unaccompanied children. For difficult caseloads, such as sanitation projects and prison assistance, fewer agencies are willing to work in these 'media-unfriendly' sectors. The perceived equation is that high-volume operations in media-attractive operations generate visibility, which in turn generates funds, which facilitates expanded operational capacity, and so on.²¹⁵

Maria Neira was the head of the WHO cholera task force. A Spanish national, the 36-year-old doctor had served in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide and had first-hand

²¹⁴ Nik Gowing: "Dispatches from Disaster Zones", Conference Paper, 27 May 1998, p. 27

²¹⁵ Strategic Humanitarian Coordination in the Great Lakes Region 1996-1997, an Independent Study for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 1998) item 144.

experience with its brutality: her office secretary had led several other women in slaughtering 100 Tutsi women and children. She was not at all sympathetic to the plight of the Hutu, as she had seen what they had done in 1994. Nonetheless, as the ranking expert on cholera and as one of the few member of the Great Lakes Task Force with an interest in going there, she went to Kigali from Geneva in October of 1996 and established a protocol for treatment of cholera.²¹⁶ She determined that what MSF had been telling the media was cholera (which is highly contagious and virulent) was in fact, bloody diarrhea (which is neither contagious nor virulent). On one of her first evenings in Kigali in October of 1996, she arranged to brief the key organizations involved there. Representatives of almost 40 groups (including UN organizations, agencies and NGOs) attend. Along with one other WHO doctor (the head of mission in Kigali) she established the protocol for treating cholera and WHO was accepted as the lead agency in testing and treatment protocols.²¹⁷ She noted the infighting for media exposure and turf.

As the UN waited for the refugees to cross the border, the Rwandan government decided to act. It declared that all returning citizens would be welcomed back to Rwanda and "invited" them to return to their communes as close to 600,000 people walked across the border and into the forests of Rwanda. On November 15, they did. In almost all the newspapers of the world and every television station, an extraordinary scene was presented: a virtual river of African humanity, walking into Rwanda, beyond the reach of the international humanitarian agencies and back home. The result was substantial. For

²¹⁶ Interview, September, 2002.

WHO, it meant pulling back its border operation and collaborating with the Rwandan government to ensure health standards of the returnees in their home communes. For MSF, it meant moving on within weeks, because where there was no emergency (and no media) there was no work.

The scene of the returning Rwandans was run repeatedly. The reporting failed to give adequate context, explaining that almost all of the men and significant numbers of the women and adolescents among the returnees had committed murder two years before. The result of the negative reporting was that UNHCR lost the support of donors. For UNHCR, it meant picking up the pieces. Criticized for not having protected the refugees when they were in the camps, UNHCR was excoriated by donors for not providing secure shelter for the refugees in Rwanda.

Several delegations urged UNHCR to implement the protection-related recommendations made in the evaluation as a matter of urgency and requested further information on action taken to address them. One delegation emphasized the necessity for a well-defined policy and strong protection presence in the field, and called on UNHCR to develop workable and wide-ranging cooperation with NGOs and donors. Another delegation suggested that UNHCR should draw on the experiences of other international and bilateral agencies in the context of emergency capacity and conflict prevention. A delegation also suggested that host Governments and the international community should share the responsibility with UNHCR for separating refugees in camps from individuals who have committed atrocities. Other points voiced by delegations included the need for improved logistics and statistics, a better understanding of the social, cultural and political

²¹⁷ Ibid.

background of refugees, and stronger links between UNHCR and human rights field operations.²¹⁸

These criticisms resulted in a drop in contributions to UNHCR of tens of millions of dollars.²¹⁹ As a result of the reductions in contributions, several thousand people were laid off and operations restricted. Years later, Ruud Lubbers commented on the phenomenon of budgets that spiked and descended according to the relative success of operations in complex humanitarian emergencies.

It is true, when you depend on voluntary contributions, the media play an enormous role to activate politicians to go to parliament or to cabinet to make a plea for money for a big operation. But if the big operations are not there – or are not perceived to be big – it's much more difficult. In Macedonia, for example, a hundred thousand people were fleeing, but we are living in the sort of world that we need it to be hundreds of thousands before we can call it "big" again. There's a lot of crises we have seen in the beginning and at the end of the cold war, people thought "we have to be generous, because this is temporary" but it has continued. And part of the donor fatigue is linked to that.²²⁰

The difficulty in serving complex emergencies has been that the so-called "silent emergencies" such as UNHCR's operations in places like Sierra Leone, Liberia and Angola have not been able to raise the funds they required to operate effectively. So the organizations become dependent on complex emergencies to be able to pay for the "standard" annual operations. The criticism of UNHCR and the other agencies that

²¹⁸ Report of the Seventh Meeting of the UNHCR Standing Committee (30 April - 1 May 1997), item 34 [<http://www.unhcr.org/>].

²¹⁹ Ibid., items 4 and 5.

²²⁰ Interview, Ruud Lubbers, Geneva, September 10, 2001.

battled over the mandates in Rwanda and Zaire was the subject of the 1998 OCHA report, which concluded that not only in the Great Lakes region, but right across the UN system,

... issues of competition for visibility, mandate confusion and bureaucratic rivalry come at a time when the critics of the UN system, both in the north and in the south, are increasingly numerous. Those who would castigate the UN for bureaucratic jealousy and lack of focus on outcomes have fuel for their fires. Though this criticism does a disservice to the motivations of those involved, the phenomenon of competition for visibility is one which has grown to proportions where it undermines perceptions of the motivation of humanitarian action.²²¹

The Rwandan debacle ended with a battle for media profile, donor attention and mandate creep, ironically a competition to serve a population that had committed one of the most heinous crimes of all time – the genocide of 800,000 fellow citizens two years before. And the media, which could have provided context and information, only fuelled the fire of competition and undermined the long-term efforts of a major UN organization, UNHCR. The media, especially television, never got the story right: they failed to be present when the genocide occurred in April 1994, then they provided sympathy for the *génocidaires* in June of that year. Two years later, they were present when the same killers returned as refugees to face justice, and only reported on the short-term issue of the return and the logistical challenges it caused. As Anne Winter points out, “The Rwanda crisis only became an international priority once the satellite dishes were installed”²²², but not before. And not after.

²²¹ OCHA report, op. cit., item 145.

²²² Anne Winter, op.cit., p. 14.

The international community learned many lessons from the debacles in Rwanda, as the critical analyses that came from OCHA and others indicated. However, it seems as if the media never really grasped the errors they committed, and only now, analyses on the genocide are pointing that out. In time, UNHCR would regain positive media profile and enormous donor support. It came three years later, when it became responsible for refugees from the conflict in Kosovo, a war that attracted the media attention, involvement and investment of North Americans and Europeans alike – for blond, blue-eyed people who were similar to those watching and reading in the industrialized world.

b. Immunization: the miracle cure that dies in the media

When Edward Jenner discovered the smallpox vaccine two hundred years ago, it opened the world to the possibility that one day, all diseases might be cured. In the succeeding decades, the reach of vaccines has increased immeasurably: diseases that once were thought to be part of life were being eradicated. In the 1950s, the Salk and Sabin polio vaccines freed the post-war generation in North America and Europe from fear of a crippling disease: they have conquered polio gradually from continent to continent until it remains in only a few small pockets of resistance in Asia. A decade ago, 60 per cent of the world's children did not receive the six basic vaccines. Today, close to eighty percent of children are immunized with the "basic six" vaccines (measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, polio and tetanus). This rapid advance came about from the emphasis given to immunization at the World Summit for Children in November of 1990 in New York. Nonetheless, tens of millions of children remain unvaccinated. Close to 4 million children still die annually from diseases preventable with existing vaccines including those against measles, hepatitis b, rubella and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b. Another 8 million children die each year from diseases that could be prevented with new vaccines.²²³

²²³ Children's Vaccine Initiative, "Investing in the Future", advocacy document, (Geneva: Children's Vaccine Initiative, 1998) author's files, p. 5 .

Despite attempts by the UN's Children's Vaccine Initiative (CVI) to create interest, nothing moved vaccines into the spotlight until the creation of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, founded with supporting funds from the world's richest man, Bill Gates. With money and profile, immunization was back on the front pages again. The failure of the Children's Vaccine Initiative, and the appearance on the international stage of the GAVI, are clearly linked to the need for attracting media profile and "share of mind" for the issue of immunization.

Immunization: the challenges

The first crucial problem in promoting immunization is that it is not the most attractive of subjects in an image-conscious society. As well, preventive medicine like vaccines, while a cure, do not take effect suddenly and dramatically. Thus immunization rarely attracts the attention of either still or television cameras. Second of all, it is a cure that is taken for granted in the industrialized world, where immunization of children is by and large universal. And third, immunization is saving lives of people with whom few people in the industrialized world can readily identify: poor, rural people of colour in Asia, Africa and Latin America – areas which are traditionally under-covered – and people that are seen as marginalized. So there is no "link" to the problem in the developing world, no projection or "similar to me" recognition, to understand its importance to saving lives. In short, it is not a topic that excites industrialized country media interest.

As well, there is a variety of priorities facing immunization, thus limiting the “single message” approach preferred by the media. There are four key areas in immunization that, depending upon what expert one speaks to, will be placed at the top of the list:

- immunization for the “basic six” (diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, polio, tuberculosis and measles) which 10 per cent of the world’s children did not receive at the time;
- the introduction of newly-developed vaccines to combat diseases like hepatitis and meningitis;
- the introduction of a “super” polyvalent vaccine, the so-called “magic bullet”, which could be administered orally at birth and provide lifelong protection against the full range of vaccine-preventable diseases; and
- the need for new research to deal with emerging or well-established diseases, like AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

This was the dilemma facing the Children’s Vaccine Initiative when it was first conceived in 1990 following the Children’s Summit in New York: where to proceed, and what to attack. It appeared to be blessed with riches: supported by the key agencies and organizations in the UN “family” (World Bank, UNICEF, WHO, UNDP), as well as the Rockefeller Foundation.²²⁴ Instead of focusing on one challenge at a time, or narrowing

²²⁴ William Muraskin’ “The Last Years of the CVI and the Birth of the GAVI”, Paper presented at the Workshop on Public-Private Partnerships in Public Health, Endicott House, Dedham, Massachusetts, April 7-8th, 2000.

its options, CVI chose to attack all of the challenges facing it at once. This was its first problem: in a competitive marketplace of ideas, it was trying to sell four complex programs instead of one. And it was supported by five organizations, all of which had been competing with one another for donor attention and mandate dating back to the 1980s when the head of UNICEF, Jim Grant, had called for a "Children's Revolution," which offended immunization experts at WHO. They were also annoyed by Grant's push for National Immunization Days, instead of regular immunization.²²⁵

Initially, there were two great positives to the immunization campaigns promoted by the CVI: the first, in the United States, attracted attention to the need for immunization in the UN's backyard. The low immunization rates in the American ghettos meant that it was more likely that a child would be immunized in Africa than in Harlem. The result was an enormous increase in support for immunization across all levels of society in the United States. However, once the American immunization targets were achieved, the issue faded. The second push for immunization was a campaign that was already underway, with the support from the American and International Rotary Clubs: the global campaign to eradicate poliomyelitis. This disease had only a generation before run rampant through American and Canadian families. The introduction of the Salk and Sabin vaccines in the 1950s was a genuine medical miracle to which people in North America could relate.

²²⁵ William Muraskin, The Politics of Immunization (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 50.

Unfortunately for CVI, the polio campaign was led by the WHO's Global Program on Vaccines, or GPV, whose Director, J.W. Lee was also the Executive Director of CVI. It was not in the best interests of GPV and its potential donors to be upstaged by CVI and its focus on research, the introduction of new vaccines the increase in the basic six vaccines or the development of a super-vaccine. To do so would be counter to GPV's success in raising funds and its objective to eradicate polio and gain credit in much the same way that eradicating smallpox a decade earlier had done for the WHO.

However, fights over power, influence and turf, were not something alien to the politically suave administration coming into WHO, and being concerned about such fundamental issues did not require them to be immersed in the WHO bureaucratic subculture.²²⁶

A number of issues arose both within and without WHO, which led to the decline of immunization rates and sounded the eventual death knell for CVI. There had been concern within WHO that the CVI would be too independent, so Dr. Lee was aggressive in convincing his superiors at WHO that the CVI would not have too dynamic a role.

Many of the activities in the CVI strategic plan have been carried out also by [WHO/]GPV. Increasingly our partners find it difficult to see the differences between WHO and CVI. Therefore, they find it increasingly difficult to support financially GPV and CVI at the same time. It resulted in the decrease of CVI's core funding for its secretariat function....Some believe CVI will be most useful in a culture [i.e. outside of WHO] where it can freely dream about finding hundreds of millions [of] dollars if not billions to help introduce new vaccines. Some [i.e., Lee] believe that these ambition[s are]... an example of [a] false

²²⁶ Ibid., p.38.

persistent belief not substantiated by sensory evidence, in other words, [a] delusion.²²⁷

Meanwhile, although UNICEF had been supportive of the research for the "magic bullet", it had been struggling with the problem of "donor fatigue" and was pushing for countries to pick up the costs of immunization. In a major turn from its role as an operational agency, it was shifting its focus from children towards an emphasis on human rights and women's issues.²²⁸ In one of its major promotional brochures from that period, of 20 subjects, immunization is given scant mention in a middle section. The leading issues of the brochure are children's human rights and advocacy issues. The CVI is not even mentioned in the immunization section: its emphasis is on polio eradication and while the reality was much different in 1997, it touted erroneous accomplishments in immunization rates.

The world community...at the end of 1990, achieved "universal child immunization", raising immunization coverage of the world's children from 20 per cent to 80 per cent in six years.²²⁹

This was a fairly clear sign of the faith UNICEF placed in CVI in 1997.

"It was a real mess," said Dr. James Maynard, one of the primary architects of Gates' Children's Vaccine Program. Scarce resources, political infighting and lack of a shared vision not only hamstrung the Children's Vaccine Initiative, he said, it contributed to a broad decline in global immunization systems worldwide. "Everything just collapsed," said Michel Zaffran, program manager for vaccines at WHO. "Every agency was just fighting for their

²²⁷ Speech Dr. J. W. Lee, Executive Secretary, CVI, CVI Meeting of Interested Parties, 12 June 1998, Cited in Muraskin, *The Last Years of the CVI and the birth of the GAVI*, op.cit., pg. 159.

²²⁸ Paulson, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, op. cit.

²²⁹ UNICEF, *UNICEF at a glance* brochure (New York:UNICEF, 1997), p. 20.

own flag rather than working together on the big picture."²³⁰

While CVI struggled, the GPV program and its polio eradication campaign were still thriving, thanks to \$500 million in support from Rotary International. In March 1998, a "Vaccine Summit" was called, of experts on immunization from WHO, UNICEF, and the industry. At the same time as CVI was in decline for lack of cash, one of the world's richest men was becoming interested in vaccines via a newspaper article. Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, was "shocked" by a 1998 newspaper article

...documenting the discrepancies in income, health care and life expectancy in different parts of the world. Poor countries were carrying 90 percent of the world's disease burden but receiving only 10 percent of its health resources. And these widespread medieval health conditions were thwarting social and economic development. "Trey sent me that article," his father recalls, using Bill's childhood nickname. "And he said, 'Dad, maybe we could do something about this'." ²³¹

The Gates Foundation then offered a \$100 million grant to create the Children's Vaccine Program. Dr. Gordon Perkin, the Gates Foundation's global health czar, convinced everyone that a new effort -- a global alliance -- was needed to rejuvenate immunizations.

²³⁰ Paulson, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, op.cit.

²³¹ Geoffrey Cowley, "Bill's Biggest Bet Yet", Newsweek, February 4, 2002.

This led to the Gates Foundation providing \$750 million in seed money for a new Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, or GAVI. At a conference that brought together all the CVI partners at the Rockefeller Foundation retreat in Bellagio Italy, in March of 1999, ostensibly to upgrade CVI, it was killed by the WHO.

WHO said it was willing, even eager, for a renewed global alliance, but it wanted the partners to do the work of coordination themselves. The failures of WHO which had led to the creation of the CVI in 1990 was a thing of the past; the new administration under Dr. Brundtland would make sure that WHO carried out its mandates; indeed, with a reinvigorated and proactive WHO even the existing CVI was superfluous, and there certainly was no need for a new enlarged Initiative. As a result, WHO shockingly announced that the CVI would be dismantled and terminated by the end of the year (1999).²³²

The action of WHO shocked the participants, and the death of CVI did not go unnoticed by those who had championed it.

"If the World Health Organization had followed through on its mandate, GAVI would not have been necessary," said the outspoken Jacques-Francois Martin, head of the Global Fund for Children's Vaccines, GAVI's financial arm (and former board member of the CVI).²³³

Jonas Store, the Chief of Staff to the new Director-General of WHO, Dr. Brundtland, denied that WHO was responsible for the death of CVI. There was a sense that CVI had been associated with the regime of Dr. Nakajima, and the access to Bill Gates's money

²³² Muraskin, *The Politics of Immunization*, op. cit., p. 45.

²³³ Paulson, op. cit.

and public profile was going to ensure that WHO had a more high-profile role in immunization. As Store put it:

The new leadership was elected [by the World Health Assembly] for CHANGE - the membership worried about its [WHO's] leadership, [the need for] partnership with private sector, and need to innovate. We didn't want to give vaccines to someone else. That would be abdication. The new leadership saw their election as requiring them to revolutionize the agency, and part of that was to take back control over areas that had been relinquished under the previous regime... The CVI was based on the assumption that WHO was losing its leadership. Now that is going to change. She [Brundtland] felt immunization was the place WHO should exercise leadership. We saw that WHO had been gradually sidelined in [the] area of vaccines in the 1990s.²³⁴

Like an Agatha Christie novel, there were many people and organizations having the motive and means to kill off the CVI. The fundamental premise of the organization was probably its undoing: that five competing organizations could cooperate effectively. But, if it had been more successful in meeting its goals, doubtless all five would have taken credit for its success. As John F. Kennedy said after the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion: "Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan."²³⁵

²³⁴ Muraskin, *The Politics of Immunization*, op. cit., p.39

²³⁵ John F. Kennedy, cited in
[http://www.americanpresident.org/kotrain/courses/JFK/JFK_In_His_Own_Words.htm].

The prospect of CVI being a success in the media was slim: immunization did not have the cachet, the speed, or the positive image that the short attention spans of television require, and it was "old" news – it had been done before. CVI was also hamstrung by the absence of a budget for advocacy and communications work. In the end, the GAVI had all of those things, and the attraction of the world's wealthiest American with a high profile and a sense of how to communicate effectively. Whether Bill Gates succeeds where CVI did not is an open question. Currently the headline stories and magazine covers focus, not on the successes of immunization campaigns or the GAVI strategy, but instead on the personal interests and passion of Bill Gates.

c. Arsenic in Bangladesh: losing the race against time

In 1970 and 1971, East Pakistan was devastated by a cycle of calamities rarely imagined, even in the poverty and squalor that had been the hallmarks of life in South Asia in the middle of the 20th century. First, a cyclone hit the main city of Dhaka and surrounding villages, killing a million people almost overnight. Then cholera and dysentery began to kill people by the tens of thousands as the ground water became excessively polluted with the bodies of the dead and the excrement of the living. War followed this devastating cycle, as Pakistan attempted to maintain its breakaway province in the fold. Millions were dislocated, and tens of thousands died in the fighting.

Over the few short years of this ongoing disaster, 10 million people died in all. When the country that emerged from the struggle was named Bangladesh ("Bengal nation"), the name became a synonym for poverty and despair. The country was desperate for some good news. UNICEF and other agencies brought it in the promise to assist the people of Bangladesh in digging shallow tubewells as a source of fresh water. These wells were relatively simple to dig, and only required a depth of 25 metres to be fully efficient in providing fresh water to individuals and communities. At the time of the cyclone, 50,000 tubewells were in operation.

By the 1980s, millions of these wells had been built in Bangladesh (by 2002, the calculation was over 10 million). In 1985, the first case of a person with arsenicosis –

arsenic poisoning – was reported in western Bangladesh. The person had no reason to be suffering from arsenic poisoning because there was no evidence of arsenic present in the area, either in nature or in industrial applications. Gradually, more cases began to be reported, of people suffering gangrene or liver problems with the telltale spots that indicated arsenicosis.

Five years after the discovery of the first arsenicosis cases, UNICEF published a thorough analysis of its tubewell programs in Bangladesh, India and Nigeria. There is no mention of arsenic in the publication, titled "From Handpumps to Health". Under "prognosis", the author is optimistic.

Progress towards these targets (of increased tubewell use) has been consistently accompanied by efforts to broaden the programme's range and deepen its impact. A great variety of professional skills have been deployed in developing methodology and procedures. The inspiration for the continuing process has the same inspiration that brought UNICEF into the picture in the first place: a transformation in the health of children in Bangladesh and a transformation in the quality of family life in one of the poorest rural environments in the world.²³⁶

In time, tests were conducted to determine the source of the arsenic poisoning. It was determined that the tubewells were the source, with trace amounts of arsenic carried in the water. The trace amounts varied between 10 and 100 parts per billion – amounts that were almost undetectable without very sophisticated testing equipment. UNICEF and the international community worked to contain the cycle of blame for not testing the ground

²³⁶ Maggie Black, From Handpumps to Health, (New York: UNICEF, 1990), p. 49

for arsenic when the tubewells were first dug in the 1970s. It explained that there was no evidence of naturally-occurring arsenic in the area, and backed that up with a study by the British Geological Survey to corroborate that the discovery of arsenic was something unexpected – the product of the erosion of arsenic-bearing sediments into the land that became Bangladesh, when the Himalayas began, millions of years ago.

UNICEF then undertook a series of pilot projects aimed at testing wells in various areas of the country, mitigating arsenic contamination in the wells and experimenting with new technologies and bringing experts from around the world to work on the problem. The section of UNICEF Bangladesh once responsible for water and sanitation was "ramped up" to provide alternative sources of fresh water through the filtering of arsenic.

Although delays in providing fresh water meant more people would get ill, UNICEF made a conscious decision not to describe the matter as a "crisis" or to undertake a massive financing campaign. The organization sought out research on the causes and the means of solving the problem before taking the step of raising the funds necessary to solve the problem.

In the first stages of the discovery of arsenic contamination, its instincts were proven right: reporters from a variety of media flocked to Bangladesh to cover the story. And the reviews were not good. The charge was led by CNN's Christiane Amanpour, reporting on special assignment for CBS's flagship public affairs program, 60 Minutes, in a piece titled "With the best of intentions". While the report was balanced in showing the

problems of disease that the tubewells had solved, it did nothing to counter the impression that UNICEF was at fault in causing the original problem.

They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and this story is a dramatic example of that. When UNICEF first started its safe water program 25 years ago, it helped to nearly halve the number of child deaths in Bangladesh. Before that, hundreds of thousands of children like these were dying every year from diseases like cholera and diarrhea, found in the dirty surface water. But no one suspected that the clear water in the new wells would simply replace one poison with another.²³⁷

Another report by Susie Emmett of BBC news in July of 1999, portrayed the arsenic crisis as the "world's largest case of mass poisoning" and interviewed several high-profile UN and UNICEF staff to make its point.

As a first-time visitor to Bangladesh, you cannot but help be impressed by the charm, the skill and the resilience of many of its people. Like this young girl, no more than 13 or 14 years old, who sang for me so clearly. (*Singing continues*). Beneath an open, cloudless, blue sky, she sang of death, a frequent visitor to every community in this impoverished country. A song from the grave, where the deceased tells the grieving loved ones that you cannot help, but follow me now. This girl's village, as well as all others affected by last year's terrible floods, has made a remarkable recovery. But the whole country is slowly coming to realize the invisible dangers lurking in the waters below ground. A danger that is slowly ruining the lives of men, women, and children in almost every part of the country.²³⁸

²³⁷ CBS *60 Minutes* documentary : "With the Best of Intentions", script, June 6, 1999.

²³⁸ BBC World Service Omnibus Report: Arsenic in Bangladesh. First aired July 17, 1999.

In response to the negative reporting, UNICEF Bangladesh decided to pursue an aggressive media strategy. This approach was led by the Director of Communications at UNICEF Bangladesh, June Kunugi. Kunugi was a UNICEF veteran who had served in Vietnam, Japan and Kosovo. With the approval of UNICEF New York, the regional director, Nigel Fisher and her immediate superior, UNICEF Bangladesh representative Shahida Azfar, she posted a short-term position for a communications officer in Dhaka who would deal almost exclusively with raising awareness of the efforts being undertaken by UNICEF to deal with the arsenic crisis.

The position was filled (by the author) in early March of 2000. After a few days of discussions with UNICEF water and sanitation engineers, a visit was arranged to the local hospital to interview medical experts and meet with arsenic patients, who suffered from ailments ranging from gangrene to liver cancer. After an orientation session on the consequences of arsenic contamination, work began on the strategy on how to raise the profile of the arsenic issue in order to raise awareness and donor funds. It was agreed that an aggressive campaign was required to deal with the problem, which was widely being described in Bangladesh as the “arsenic crisis”. In one meeting on the issue, Shahida Azfar declared that she wanted to be on a “war footing” on arsenic contamination. Over a period of two months, materials were developed and a strategy formulated that would focus on the urgency of the issue. The slogan and theme for the campaign was “The Race Against Time”. A 700-word op-ed article drafted for the campaign outlined the extent of the problem.

Two recent events have focused the issue clearly. In March, the British Geological Survey released its final analysis of the arsenic crisis and urged the authorities to provide alternative sources of water to the most affected areas immediately. Then the Dhaka Community Hospital hosted an international conference in mid-May at which the “Dhaka Declaration” pressed for more action on arsenic mitigation.

This is a race against time – for time itself is our enemy: if we test wells and provide alternatives quickly, research shows that the symptoms of arsenicosis can be reversed. If not, men, women and children will become sick and die. Twenty-five million people in Bangladesh are living with this threat. That is how urgent our work has become.²³⁹

A brochure was developed explaining how the arsenic had come to rest in the soil. A new “Fact Sheet” was drafted to outline the problem and set out a solution. And a new UNICEF booklet on the entire arsenic mitigation program was prepared for the web and for distribution to decision-makers. A production team had been gathering material for a 25-minute video presentation for months, to be shown abroad and at fund-raising events. The media campaign was to be delivered as part of a donor strategy that would involve an extensive tour of industrialized country capitals in Europe and North America.

The strategy would seek to raise the \$22 million that had been targeted in 1999 (and not raised) that was required to “kick-start” the arsenic mitigation work of UNICEF. It was approved by all members of the weekly arsenic committee, which included management in water and sanitation as well as fundraising. The committee had heard Dhaka Director Shahida Azfar again declare that she wanted the approach to the arsenic problem to be to

²³⁹ Shahida Azfar, unpublished op-ed article, “In Bangladesh We Are Racing Against Time To Ensure Safe Water”, May 2000, author’s files.

place UNICEF on “a war footing.”²⁴⁰ The assessment of UNICEF Dhaka was that the issue of blame for the development of the tubewells was no longer a factor. The challenge, as expressed at a meeting of the World Bank, UNICEF and Bangladeshi social agencies at the Dhaka community hospital on May 12, was to “solve the problem”,²⁴¹ not to be concerned with blame. An account in the *Asia Times* provided a sense of the urgency at the meeting.

Health experts at the arsenic conference lamented that despite the huge sums of money spent so far and promises made at similar international meetings, little had been achieved. Kazi Quamruzzaman, chairman of the Dhaka Community Hospital Trust, pointed out that “not a single penny” of the millions of dollars spent so far in Bangladesh, was used for providing affected people with safe drinking water. Others reminded the government of its promises made at similar conferences in 1997 and 1998, to take urgent steps to provide safe drinking water. The resident representative of UNICEF, Shahida Azfar, described the challenge of tackling arsenic contamination as “a race against time” which could not be won without swift action today.

Mahmudur Rahman, coordinator of the Dhaka Community Hospital Trust, however, blamed the government, NGOs, the UN and other development agencies for not working together effectively to tackle the problem. “We have urged the UN agencies, government and non-governmental organizations, and stakeholders to sit together to address the issue in a united manner,” he said.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ author’s notes, UNICEF meeting, Dhaka , May, 2000.

²⁴¹ author’s notes, Dhaka Community hospital meeting, Dhaka , May, 2000.

²⁴² Tabibul Islam, “Donors want arsenic pollution curbed faster”, *Asia Times*, May 26, 2000.

Despite the unanimous support of UNICEF Dhaka and the pressure building from Bangladeshi organizations lobbying on the arsenic issue, there was a negative reaction when the media strategy was submitted to UNICEF New York. Conditioned by coverage of the issue by the American media in previous years, it feared a frontal attack by the media on UNICEF's overall reputation for its original involvement in the tubewell program. Officials at headquarters worried that the issue of blame would have a damaging impact on UNICEF's ability to attract donor funding and would thus reduce its overall operations. At the same time, a lawsuit had been undertaken in Bangladesh's courts against UNICEF for complicity in the arsenic contamination of tubewells. Taking responsibility for the program might mean greater liability. UNICEF had evidently learned the lesson that it was better to opt for a lower profile on arsenic in Bangladesh than attempt to deal with the problem.

Orders were sent from New York to "spike" the aggressive media and public awareness campaign that had been supported by UNICEF Dhaka only a week before. In its place was developed a more anodyne approach to the issue, one that shifted the responsibility for raising funds and awareness on arsenic to the World Bank. The rationale came in a memo from UNICEF New York assistant director of communications Sally Burnheim, who had consulted with two colleagues at UNICEF New York: Greg Keast, Senior Advisor of the Water, Environment and Sanitation Section Programme Division of UNICEF, and Peter Mason, Senior Advisor to the Executive Director and former head of the legal bureau at UNICEF. They said "there was a consensus that an aggressive

campaign was not required". The rationale was that "this was a campaign that would last at least a decade" and that no one in New York liked the theme of "The Race Against Time", as it was "not only clichéd, but also inappropriate."

Burnheim wrote that there was a feeling that this is not a genuine "emergency" along the lines of disasters such as that in the Horn Of Africa. "If this were really an emergency, we would be providing bottled water" to the millions of people suffering from arsenic poisoning, she wrote.²⁴³ This echoed an ironic comment in a *New York Times* article two years before that "If this were the United States, they'd call out the National Guard and get everyone bottled water."²⁴⁴ She suggested that the memo's analysis that the media would be "sympathetic" to the extensive work developing alternatives and give a "fair hearing" to UNICEF was "naive and simplistic".²⁴⁵ The op-ed was rejected as UNICEF normally was able to place three per year in the *New York Times*, and those placements were being saved "for other issues".²⁴⁶

A new memo was drafted, eliminating any proactive media campaign, and the materials, and the campaign to raise funds and donor awareness were shelved. The arsenic committee met less frequently and UNICEF gradually withdrew from its frontline position on the issue to allow the World Bank to take the lead. June Kunugi left to work

²⁴³ Author's notes, UNICEF memo, May, 2000.

²⁴⁴ Barry Bearak, "New Bangladesh Disaster: Wells That Pump Poison", *New York Times*, Nov. 10, 1998.

²⁴⁵ Author's notes, UNICEF memo, May, 2000.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

for UNICEF New York, Shahida Azfar became the head of UNICEF in Egypt. Ross Nickson, a UNICEF water and sanitation consultant who worked closely with New York on the issue, favoured expanding the program. Within a year he was back in Scotland.

I thought it might have made sense to bring the (Bangladeshi) army in and train them to provide the alternatives. We were making real headway in the pilot projects, but we were only five people, originally doing five thanas (townships of roughly 300,000 people) and now they have the same number of people trying to do 40 thanas.²⁴⁷ You do the math.²⁴⁸

An article in the London *Guardian* six months later excoriated UNICEF and the international community for doing nothing about the worsening arsenic emergency. In an incredibly ironic piece, UNESCO, which had suffered so greatly from the creeping mandates of UNICEF over the years, published an article titled "Bangladesh's arsenic poisoning: who is to blame?" by a "UK-based science journalist" named Fred Pearce.

Even now as the scale of the calamity emerges, nobody is admitting culpability. Not UNICEF, which initiated the tubewells programme and paid for the first 900,000 wells, nor the World Bank, a fellow sponsor. Not the Bangladeshi government, or the foreign engineers and public health scientists who did not think to test the water for so long.

The same agencies that played godmother to the catastrophe are now wringing their hands and saying it will likely take 30 years to find all the poisoned tubewells—longer than it took to sink them all. So why are the authorities and international experts proving incapable of coming up with a solution?²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ There are 489 thanas in Bangladesh. At least 200 are thought to be affected by arsenic contamination, according to DPHE/DFID (UK) Regional Arsenic Survey, 1998.

²⁴⁸ Interview, July 2002.

²⁴⁹ UNESCO *Courier*, January 2001, website [http://www.unesco.org/courier/2001_01/uk/planet.htm].

In the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* on July 14, 2002, Barry Bearak wrote of his trip back to Bangladesh, four years after the arsenic crisis had begun. He found much the same problems, more deaths, and little being done by the international community. In an ironic turn of phrase, he wrote,

But the race against time has gone badly. In the four years since The *New York Times* first looked into the situation, the nation's "arsenic mitigation project" has been hobbled by the unforeseen problems of so unprecedented a crisis. It is yet another example of how the world's poor continue to die from unsafe water, a threat long ago surmounted by the wealthy.

Suspicious of each other, the World Bank and the government became stubbornly bound up in their mutual bureaucracies, many critics say. Most of the country's estimated 11 million wells have yet to be tested. Most stricken villages are absent solutions. Most people — the trusting converts to the "safety" of tube wells — are baffled when now told that within the water lie the malign beginnings of arsenic-induced cancer.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Barry Bearak, "Bangladeshis Sipping Arsenic as Plan for Safe Water Stalls", *New York Times*, July 14, 2002, p. A1.

UNICEF New York had made a conscious decision to shelve its response to what had been described as the “worst mass poisoning in history”. Its decision took into account two factors: the prior media coverage of the issue, in particular the American media coverage, which was so visible in New York, and the threat to UNICEF’s status as the most important, powerful and wealthy UN organization.

Senior staff at UNICEF New York saw the risk of dealing with the arsenic crisis as being too great, given the chance of association with failure that the contaminated wells represented. With a new program raising funds to offer a solution for the crisis, the organization could have come out as the "hero" of the piece rather than as the "villain". Instead it chose to keep a low profile, because of what it saw as the risk of losing donor support and funding for other causes. The *New York Times* may have brought the arsenic crisis back onto the media radar just as the problem begins to build. The result may be unwanted media attention, and more serious liability, with UNICEF's decision in 2000 not to do anything becoming the focus of the headlines. In the long term, the organization may face the consequences it attempted to avoid in the short term.

CHAPTER VI: Conclusion

As mentioned, there is a consensus among some academics that the media, particularly television, have agenda-setting *propensities*, but not policy-directing *capacities*. For example, Johanna Neuman opens her book, "Lights, Camera, War" with the suggestion that the CNN effect exists.

It is an article of faith in foreign-policy circles these days that the advent of instantaneous and global technology has given the news media more of a voice in international communication and robbed diplomacy of its rightful place at the helm. Foreign-policy types call it the CNN curve, and the term is not a compliment. It suggests that when CNN floods the airwaves with news of a foreign crisis, policy makers have no choice but to redirect their attention to the crisis at hand. It also suggests that crisis coverage evokes an emotional outcry from the public to "do something" about the latest incident, forcing political leaders to change course or risk unpopularity.¹

But she concludes it is genuine leadership, and not the agenda-setting capabilities of the media that determines the direction of policy in the modern world.

One of the lessons of history is that no matter how much technology levels the playing field and empowers those who were until then powerless, ruling elites retain much influence. There may be more players on the field, and the viewing audience may be larger, but the game is unchanged.²

²⁵⁰Johanna Neuman, op. cit., p.14

²⁵¹Ibid. p.17

Brian Buckley comes to a similar conclusion, suggesting that “the relationship between the provision of news to the public and the conduct of foreign policy is most clearly marked by three characteristics. It is reciprocal, episodic and ambiguous.”²⁵³ His point is that the implications of the growing role of the media in setting the public agenda are not clear, but he weighs in on the importance of policy makers to resist media pressures.

Democratically-elected policy makers will continue to be exposed to substantial media pressures, though perhaps from different directions. More than ever will it be necessary for them to recall that they alone have been entrusted by the public with the general – often unarticulated – common good; they alone are responsible for it.²⁵⁴

Former White House correspondent Warren Strobel recognizes that the media can *push* leaders into making a decision, and can then cause them to *pull* away from that decision (e.g. Bush’s decision to go into, and Clinton’s decision to pull out of, Somalia. The oft-heard comment was that “pictures got us in and pictures got us out.” Strobel suggests that the role of leaders is to understand the impact of the media and not to react too hastily. But while rejecting the media’s role in shaping policy, Strobel admits that the media are important in shaping public opinion in their reporting on conflicts and war.

The new and growing view, more pronounced in some of the uniformed services than others, is that media relations are an important part of “winning the war” and should be understood at all levels, from the strategic to the tactical commander. ...Planning for the news media has become an

²⁵³ Buckley, op.cit, p. 43.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 53.

integral part of doctrine and training for peace
operations.²⁵⁵

Many analysts appear reluctant to show a clear link between the role of the media and the shaping of policy, even though public acceptance of any policy is crucial to its success. Given the balance of their analyses and the credibility of their experience, it would seem folly to contradict them. Nonetheless, I suggest that for a number of reasons their conclusions might be said to be half-right.

This is because leaders have long had to make decisions while taking into account the role of public opinion in guiding their way. It can be said with some justification that the most important decisions are those that are **not** popular. If every decision made by a government was solely based on short-term political considerations or on what is attractive or appealing to the public, there might be no income taxes, no police, no customs agents, no infrastructure, no war (or war all the time). But we accept that constraints such as taxes or police are necessary in order to avoid anarchy. Similarly, “to lead” means to manage as a long-term steward of public funds, as well as acting as a crisis manager or a distributor of largesse.

Nonetheless, it would be extremely naïve to think that our attention to and relationship with the news media over the past century have not transformed us as human beings. As Neil Postman points out, television is so dominant as a medium and as a phenomenon,

²⁵⁵ Warren Strobel, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

that we no longer discuss the epistemology and the effects of the medium on us: we only talk about what is "on". The news media's ubiquity, especially in the industrialized world, has made us more aware of the exigencies of the world at large. They have also had a huge impact upon our culture and our collective consciousness. They provide us with an interpretation of our government system that underpins our democracies in the developed world in a way that no other medium has. And that includes all of us in society – leaders and followers, the best educated and the least literate. While some analysts take issue with the impact of the media in shaping the foreign policy of nation-states, they are not seized with the impact of the media in shaping the international organizations that serve those nation-states. And, as has been pointed out, there are distinctions made between the conduct of foreign policy in war and the undertaking of humanitarian work. BBC editor Nik Gowing's contention that "real-time TV reports appear to be most influential when they deal with humanitarian crises...."²⁵⁶

In the last half-century, with the popularity, ubiquity and efficiency of the electronic media, that influence has been accelerated. As the world has become smaller and the reporting of events abroad has become more pertinent, humanitarian issues – often in the form of the dramatic complex emergency – have become more visible, to both citizen and decision-maker alike. As McLuhan said, we have been transformed by the impact of immediate visual images.

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a

²⁵⁶ Cited in Buckley, op.cit, p. 37.

bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.²⁵⁷

In the emerging mobility of the 20th century, Edward Bearnays believed that the American public would be less and less grounded in the narrow parochialism of their pasts. The result of this undermining of prejudice, would be a greater susceptibility to the power of suggestion, or the allure of change. Thus, the ability to transform public opinion by using new media technologies and images was the Bernays' work, in "engineering" public consent. As he noted, "the engineer of consent must arouse interest, and to do so his activity must be newsworthy"²⁵⁸ and the means of being newsworthy was and is the media. Walter Lippman saw this emerging leviathan 80 years ago.

The creation of consent...has improved enormously in technic, because it is based on analysis rather than on rule of thumb. And so, as a result of psychological research coupled with modern means of communication, the practice of democracy has turned a corner. A revolution is taking place, infinitely more significant than any shifting of economic power.... None of us can begin to understand the consequences, but it is no daring prophecy to say that the knowledge of how to create consent will alter every political calculation and modify every political promise.²⁵⁹

As Lippman predicted, the success of Bearnays' work can be clearly identified in the multi-billion dollar industry that he spawned. Public relations fundamentals are based on

²⁵⁷ McLuhan, op.cit, p. 7

²⁵⁸ Bernays, op. cit. p. 22

²⁵⁹ Lippman, op. cit., p. 158

the ability to shape behaviour by constantly adjusting strategy and tactics to match what is the prevailing ethos. That is what leaders attempt to do. The cynical comments of the 19th century French politician, Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, at the barricades in France, "I am their leader – I've got to follow them",²⁶⁰ are not dissimilar to Bernays in the context of modern political and media strategies. The contrary point of view is that expressed by Johanna Neuman and Warren Strobel, who see decisions being made on the basis of a consensus in society and a clear definition of policy by leaders. The only time they see the media having the ability to exert influence on public opinion are those circumstances in which there is a lack of consensus in society and a vacuum of leadership. However, with the same breath that they describe this requirement of a policy vacuum for the media to have an influence, they are quick to make the distinction between making policy and humanitarian action as that between "doing something" and "being seen to be doing something". If this is true, then, for the donors and the organizations themselves, what better opportunity to be "seen to be doing something", than to be out in the field dealing with the after-effects of a policy gone bad – a famine caused by war, refugees resulting from genocide, or deaths prevented by vaccines. And the public will support that urge to "do something" out of reflex that does not need to analyze or question who is at fault, or what policy led to the calamity. At times when there is this kind of a "reflex" consensus in society, the media surely reflect that expression of public opinion.

²⁶⁰ Columbia World of Quotations, [<http://www.bartleby.com/66/56/35256.html>].

However, Ledru-Rollin's demagogic inclinations notwithstanding, it is safe to say that our leaders are *of* us as well as *above* us, and are just as influenced by the media as any common citizen. That is why we elect them – we perceive or project upon them a reflection of, or at least a comprehension of, our aspirations. Once they fail to meet our expectations, in the best traditions of democracy, they are often turned out.

Therefore, in this era it would be almost unthinkable to elect a leader who was not acutely aware of the effects and demands of media and public relations, public opinion polls, and who did not have the extensive skills required to apply that awareness. As Robert McNeil suggests,

It has to be recognized that, ever since politicians discovered how to adapt public opinion sampling and consumer product mass marketing, image-making is how they win office. But it does not end there. Governments in office cannot chuck the image-making habit. Increasingly, government policy is marketed by images. The making of foreign policy becomes in part, a contest of images. Televised images condition the public. Constant opinion polling measures their highly simplified views. Politicians react to the polls.²⁶¹

If that is true of elected leaders, it quite clearly must be the case with appointed or elected heads of organizations. Although their mandates are not circumscribed by the ongoing exigencies of electoral politics, such as press or public accountability, they are still public figures with significant responsibilities and the budgets to go with them. Without the daily requirements of a legislative question period, a board of directors responsible to

²⁶¹ Robert McNeil, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

shareholders, or the give-and-take of a system of checks and balances, they are provided with extraordinary powers unlike those of the private or public sectors.

One of my colleagues at UNICEF once suggested that Executive Director Carol Bellamy “was the most powerful person in the world” because she had no one to counter her authority – unlike presidents, prime ministers or corporate leaders. Often in discussions of policy, UNICEF staffers would speak of “what Carol wants” and not what might be the most appropriate policy.²⁶²

The greatest measure of these leaders’ success becomes their ability to attract funds and world attention to their respective causes. As a result, more and more individuals with expertise in the political realm are being brought in to manage international organizations. Note the trend currently developing: at present, six of the heads of the most important UN organizations and specialized agencies are former political leaders, five of whom are former heads of government. The deputy secretary-general of the UN, Louise Fréchette, a former senior public servant in Canada, thinks this is normal.

The fact that they have each led governments provides them with the ability to focus on issues and to make decisions effectively, taking everything into account. And they can pick up the phone and call heads of government and heads of state.²⁶³

²⁶² Author’s notes, Bangladesh, May 2000.

²⁶³ Interview, Louise Fréchette, New York, July 18, 2001.

Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway in the 1980s and 1990s, believes the move to appoint more former politicians is a trend and that it can "be very helpful" in advocacy campaigns. Her experience as the chair of the United Nations Commission on the Environment made her a believer in the need for high-profile leadership in the international field.

The fact that I was a PM leading a UN commission made a major difference to the breakthroughs and to the profile that went with the advocacy of the whole issue of sustainable development at that time. One of the recommendations that we made at that time was that we really need to have government and the international community integrate the political realities of the different separate entities of the UN system. With a stronger secretary-general, and former prime ministers in each agency, we can take responsibility for the integral approaches instead of the segregated separate institutes, about issues that are linked. So that is why this trend, this whole awareness of the inter-linkages, inter-dependencies which is the character of leadership at the top level, helps the system and helps the international community.²⁶⁴

Carol Bellamy says there is an enormous value in having former politicians in the top positions at the UN agencies.

But getting appointed by the secretary-general is much easier than getting elected by these boards in the specialized agencies. If you haven't had some kind of public experience, being a politician isn't just kissing babies, using it that way, it is a tough business out there. It requires strategy, and it requires communication. People have benefitted from (having people with that experience). Brundtland is a medical doctor and she has a real background for WHO; Lubbers was, a prime minister and to have those jobs, you have got to be pretty substantive.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Interview, Dr GH Brundtland, Geneva, September 4, 2001.

²⁶⁵ Interview, Carol Bellamy, New York, July 19, 2001.

Canada's ambassador to the UN and the World Trade Organization in Geneva, Sergio Marchi, an experienced politician himself, says it is an asset to have former political leaders in charge of UN agencies, as they understand the media.

The fact that they have all been politicians in their home countries, and senior at that, they know the media game quite well from their own perspectives, but they've come a long way (and know) the needs of the media. They understand the exaggerations of the media in their pursuit of the news. So I think they bring to the equation a lot of experience and wisdom. The second thing I think that is important for them to do, and again, politics I think trains you to do this...is to build coalitions...²⁶⁶

In the same breath, Marchi acknowledges that competition between agencies remains a serious problem. He asks "Where is the coherence among all their organizations – that is to say 'how well are they working together'? On that score I think they and the (NGOs) have a lot of work still to do."²⁶⁷

In the past century, as Robert McNeil notes, political leaders have had to take into account the role of the media in informing the public. It should come as no surprise that international administrators might be chosen as much for their ability to articulate an issue and to assess the political impact of public opinion as for their skill in international administration and negotiation.

²⁶⁶ Interview, Sergio Marchi, Geneva, September 10, 2001.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

The corollary of Johanna Neuman's conclusion that decision-making must be left up to leaders, with limited recognition for the media, must therefore be that leaders who ignore the impact of the media on decision-making do so at their peril. The political battlefield is littered with leaders who eschewed the demands of the media and suffered grievous defeats. Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, Joe Clark, Jimmy Carter, Kurt Waldheim, Kim Campbell and Boutros Boutros-Ghali all had wellsprings of support among their particular publics until they made decisions, did unseemly things that became media phenomena or spoke out on issues that undermined their public esteem.

The problem remains, however, in that if the media carry too much influence on international decision making, does "the tail end up wagging the dog" – that is, can the superficial trump the substantive in a detrimental way? The answer must be a qualified *yes*. In the case studies cited in this paper, decisions were arrived at, or policies shaped, with serious consideration of the impact of the media. These decisions more than likely would have been approached differently in a media vacuum, or in the less-intensive international media glare of two decades ago. And I offer them as representative samples, not anomalies.

In Rwanda, the ability of the media to attract humanitarian intervention for the *genocidaires* and the competition for media attention by NGOS and the UN are recognized by the UN itself as well as several authors as a bleak chapter in the history of the UN.

The lack of media interest in immunization in the 1990s, and the concurrent failure of the Children's Vaccine Initiative, can be linked to the reduction in immunization rates on the "basic six" diseases. And the higher media profile of the Bill-Gates-led Global Alliance on Vaccines and Immunization (and increased immunization rates for the "basic six") are indicative of the media's power in setting the health agenda.

It is easy to rationalize UNICEF's decision to avoid potential negative news media treatment of the issue of arsenic contamination in Bangladesh by saying "once burned, twice shy". But the mandate of UNICEF is not to "ensure the ongoing financial support for the organization to the detriment of the children of the world"; rather, it has been, since its inception, to serve children in emergencies. *Not* acting in an emergency is an abrogation of the organization's and the UN's mandate.

The lesson of the case studies is that the media can and do set the agenda of the humanitarian agencies and their work. The question that remains is: should they? While as a tactical or strategic approach it can be the difference between financial failure and success, over-reacting to the demands of the media or setting an agenda in anticipation of what will prove popular or media-friendly is a denial of the notion that one should do the "difficult" jobs well. The classic parable of the ant and the grasshopper teaches us that "living for today" and lack of planning can lead to one's demise.

In today's media environment, it seems that to be successful, the opposite can be true. Some newspapers used to boast that they offered "history on the run." But that claim is absurd in today's desire for vacuous immediacy over substantive context. A lack of genuine insight on the part of reporters, the enormous impact of sights and sounds from complex emergencies, the brevity of "news cycles" and the temptation to seek funding to maintain or expand operations in the face of ruthless competition, have all made meeting short-term funding goals a necessity, not a luxury, for many UN organizations and specialized agencies.

If short-term goals get priority, where does that leave either the long-term goals or the necessary but unattractive elements of the mandates? Water, sanitation and nutrition programs are fundamental building blocks in the maintenance of life, but by and large they do not get the attention they should. In the competition for media attention and donor funding, the mundane tends to be set aside for the newsworthy. Nigel Fisher, UNICEF's Special Representative in Afghanistan, acknowledged that in Afghanistan the problem of media attention and long-term planning conflict. Asked if it made him angry that "it takes a war to get attention to Afghanistan," he replied:

What happens in emergencies is that when a crisis breaks you get a lot of global attention and media attention and a lot of donor support. The problem is to try and sustain that past the initial crisis when the bombardment stops, when the TV cameras go away. How do you maintain an ongoing support in Afghanistan? My hope is that this time, given that the crisis is so linked with the terrorism issue,

that many people are already saying 'the answer ... is long-term reconstruction, peace and security in the country.'²⁶⁸

This statement echoes the case studies and other material in underlining the contention that the mandates of the sample organizations have been shaped by the news media in the past two decades. These examples are, regrettably, the tip of the iceberg. The panoply of organizations that are no longer relevant because they did not know how to play the media “game” could fill a page. And how many other, similar case studies are there? UNESCO, UNDP, UNCTAD and many more have suffered cutbacks or proven irrelevant as they fell victim to the expanded mandates of the UNICEF, the World Bank and the WTO. UNEP is on shaky ground (partially because of its location in Africa, and thus off the media radar screen) in spite of its responsibility for one of the most compelling issues of the day.

Free and open competition is thought by many modern economists as the most efficient way of separating things of value from those that are to be considered inferior. But there are two problems with “quasi-Darwinian” competition between international organizations: first, their mandates are expected to be within exclusive areas of jurisdiction (so that in a perfect world there would be no competition between them at all).

²⁶⁸ Interview, Nigel Fisher, "This Morning", CBC Radio, October 10, 2001.

Second, they are expected to undertake difficult and sometimes unpopular programs and projects that must look to the long-term. The criteria applied by the media (short-term goals and priorities based on image) or competition for power and profile are quite clearly counter-productive to these objectives.

Thus, genuine leadership at the heads of these organizations, and in the leadership of the countries supporting them, must recognize the egregious influence media can impose on the operations of the UN. Only through recognition of the problem can it be solved. In the same way that acceptance of a diagnosis is the first step towards curing a disease, the acknowledgement of the media's influence in humanitarian operations is a good way of countering their most damaging effects.

Clearer mandates, more intense coordination to prevent cut-throat competition and the support of member-states to circumscribe responsibilities would be important first steps. Alternatively, efforts to coordinate media efforts between NGOs, the UN and the specialized agencies would go a long way towards establishing international priorities in the minds of journalists and opinion leaders in a calculated, strategic and substantive way. At the same time, the media themselves must take up the greater study of the international organizations as part of their own mandate to educate and effectively inform the public – beyond those who are already interested or involved. The better training of journalists, the greater dedication to complex issues and the assigning of reporters with a

view to long-term understanding of the region, territory or country to which they are assigned, should be part of their mandate. Garrick Utley says there is too much “dashing around the world”²⁶⁹ by journalists and he suggests in future reporters will be judged “on the quality and depth of knowledge he or she possesses.”²⁷⁰

Foreign correspondents will have to be versatile and informed journalists who can write commentary for videotape as well as for print, knowledgeable specialists who closely follow a country, a region or topic and can appear on camera or on line to talk about it and respond to questions and comments.²⁷¹

But, as Walter Lippmann noted, even if there are changes in the media’s approach, they cannot be relied upon as sources of decision-making.

The press is no substitute for institutions. It is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing in one episode and then another out of the darkness into vision. Men cannot do the work of this world by this light alone. They cannot govern society by episode, incidents, and eruptions. It is only when they work by a steady light of their own that the press, when it is turned upon them, reveals a situation intelligible enough for a popular decision.²⁷²

It is up to the United Nations and its agencies to operate with a “steady light of their own,” rather than falling prey to the shifting interests of the media.

²⁶⁹ Garrick Utley, op.cit, p. 22.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Lippman, op. cit., p. 229

It is that lack of focus, sacrificed for timeliness – an engaging if frustrating attribute of the media – that is leading to a lack of context in donors and the general public. This, in turn, is drawing the UN, the specialized agencies and many NGOs to seek out the most attractive aspects of their mandates and to neglect the harder work, in a way never envisaged by the founders of the UN. And without some determined action, this trend will continue. The media will always have an influence on the way policies are shaped, decisions are made and actions are taken, especially in humanitarian work. But despite their crucial role in scrutinizing issues and informing the public, they should not be the sole determiners of power, profile, prestige or profitability on the international stage. It is up to the people who care about the respective roles of the United Nations, its organizations and the specialized agencies to ensure that all continue to function as they were intended: to serve the public interest and to advance the cause of a better world. Genuine leadership in nations and in organizations must take into consideration the influence of the media in shaping opinion and policy – because that influence is a huge factor in the process.

For these organizations, the media can be as important as any issue, or any financial or logistical factors of a crisis, when making an assessment to effectively manage that issue or crisis. However, at other times, when one must choose between long-term policy and short-term media agendas, the leaders of the UN and its agencies have no choice but to operate with a sense of a higher responsibility, to choose the policy that ensures the long-term betterment of humankind, whatever the consequences.

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United Nations Foundation: <http://www.un.org/>

UNICEF <http://www.unicef.org/>

UNESCO <http://www.unesco.org/>

UNHCR: <http://www.unhcr.org/>

World Health Organization: <http://www.who.org>

World Trade Organization: <http://www.who.org>

Interviews

Carol Bellamy, Executive Director, UNICEF, New York

Patrick Brown, CBC Correspondent, Bangkok

Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director General, World Health Organization, Geneva;

Graham Clugston; Director, Nutrition, WHO Geneva

John Curran, Editor, BBC Television News, London

Robert Evans, Journalist, Reuters News Service, Geneva

Louise Fréchette, Deputy Secretary General, United Nations, New York

Marie Heuzé, Director of Communications, United Nations, Geneva

David Heymann, Executive Director, Communicable Diseases, WHO, Geneva

Kraig Klauert, President, Director, Massive Effort, Winterthur

Ruud Lubbers, High Commissioner, UN High Commission for Refugees, Geneva

Sergio Marchi, Ambassador to the United Nations and WTO, Geneva

Michael Moore, Director-General, World Trade Organization, Geneva

Maria Neira, Director of the WHO Guinea Worm programme, Geneva

Ross Nickson, water and sewer consultant, Dundee, Scotland

Della Smith, partner, Quest communications, Vancouver

Juan Somavia, Director-General, International Labour Organization, Geneva

Chris Waddell, Professor, Carleton University School of Journalism, Ottawa