

IMAGES OF FAITH

ENCOURAGING SELF-REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

*A HANDBOOK FOR JOURNALISTS COVERING RELIGION &
BEST PRACTICES FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE EXPERTS*

IMAGES OF FAITH:

ENCOURAGING SELF-REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

A Handbook for Journalists Covering Religion &

Best Practices for Interreligious Dialogue Experts

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SELF-REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

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Impressum

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This publication is based on the findings of a KAICIID working meeting of over 40 journalists from secular and religious news media, entitled “Covering Religion: Making Best Practices Count,” held in Cape Town, South Africa on April 12, 2014.

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KING ABDULLAH BIN ABDULAZIZ
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INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE



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FOREWORD

KAICIID, an independent and autonomous intergovernmental organization, was founded on the idea that dialogue among people of different faiths and cultures will bridge differences, reduce fear and instil mutual respect. The Founding States—the Republic of Austria, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom of Spain—created KAICIID to enhance and engage in interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and serve as a forum for representatives of major religions and faith-based and cultural institutions and experts.

Dialogue practitioners have a fundamental role to play in building communities' resistance against prejudice, strengthening social cohesion, supporting conflict prevention and preserving peace. Yet other social sectors including education, policy and the media also influence how we see and understand one another. For this reason, the KAICIID Board of Directors, which comprises high-level representatives of several world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism), called on KAICIID to focus on “The Image of the Other in Education” in 2013, and “The Image of the Other in the Media and Online” in 2014. Journalists play a fundamental role in shaping public perceptions. The news media, as well as online and social media, help form the images that people have of belief, religion and religious communities. KAICIID is therefore committed to engage with the journalism community and support its efforts to strengthen the practice of journalism, so that reporters and editors have the training and tools necessary to create reports that accurately and sensitively report on the religious Other.

KAICIID believes that it is important for religious voices that support peace and reconciliation to be represented in greater quantity and quality in the news media and online. These religious and dialogue leaders must be equipped with the knowledge and tools to counteract the loud messages of hate and violence that are so often associated with religion, but which, in reality, represent the views of very, very few people of faith.

It is our hope that this publication will serve as a useful tool for both journalists and interreligious dialogue experts in working toward more accurate and representative coverage of religion and belief. It is an early step in KAICIID's Media Programme, as we look forward to continuing our engagement with stakeholders on this issue.

INTRODUCTION

On April 12, 2014, over 40 journalists gathered in Cape Town, South Africa to talk about reporting on religion. KAICIID arranged this working meeting to find out how journalists see the issue of reporting on religion. Do the news media have certain responsibilities when portraying religious people and their beliefs, bearing in mind press freedoms? Are there best practices for covering religion in different contexts and in different types of news stories? Can secular and religious media organizations learn from each other? Can religious leaders and dialogue practitioners who promote peace and reconciliation do more to have their voices represented in the news media?

The participants' engagement with these questions was substantive and generated new insights. Beyond exploring the way the media reports on religion and religious people, the group came up with a number of recommendations for reporters covering these sensitive and important issues, and a number of recommendations for dialogue practitioners struggling to be heard. Their discussions were informative and based on day-to-day experiences. KAICIID decided to publish their recommendations in this report in the hopes that they will help journalists and dialogue practitioners working with media representations of religion and religious people.

THE KAICIID MEDIA PROGRAMME

The roundtable was held as part of the KAICIID Media Programme, KAICIID's new initiative built around the theme, “The Image of the Other in the Media and Online.”

KAICIID is a Vienna-based multilateral centre inaugurated in 2012 to enable, empower and encourage interreligious and intercultural dialogue among religions and cultures around the world. KAICIID Board of Directors, which comprises leaders from a number of world religions, asked the organization to focus on the media in 2014. The reason for such focus was rooted in the realization that religious communities often find that they do not recognize the news media portrayal of themselves, their beliefs and cultures, or their religions. There is

a view among many religious leaders that accurate and nuanced coverage of belief, religion and religious people would capture some of the meaning that faith has for them. It would also show that religion can be a force for peace and reconciliation—and that people need not fear the Other, but rather should engage in dialogue to build mutual understanding.

In shaping the KAICIID Media Programme, the organization sought to add value and complement rather than compete with existing work. There are multiple initiatives in this field, conducted by media support organizations, religious and interreligious support organizations, and policy-makers. Therefore, the first step for KAICIID was gathering input from media experts to identify strengths and gaps in the field.

A group of journalists, media experts and social media experts met at KAICIID's Vienna headquarters in March 2014. Participants in this Experts Consultation produced a number of solid recommendations including: the necessity for research on dialogue practitioners' needs in their interactions with media, sustained dialogue to share best practices, and different forms of capacity-building for journalists, dialogue practitioners and religious leaders. The KAICIID Media Programme is designed to address these recommendations.

THE NEED FOR ACTION

Religion is often portrayed simply as a social or political construct, although for millions of people, religion is a daily practice, and the very real framework of understanding that connects human lives to a spiritual reality. Their faith is the prism through which they view the world, and their religious communities are their central environments.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of faith in the lives of so many. It is evident that most people around the world would prefer to live in peace than in conflict. Yet, often the only religious voices on the front page are those speaking messages of hatred or violence, especially in stories about conflict or social tensions.

This occurs despite the best intentions on the part of the news media. It is clear that priority is given to certain kinds of stories: natural disasters, conflict, scandals, and actions or statements by organizations and public figures directly involved in conflict. Time and space are limited, so everyday realities like belief and religion or “good news” stories on these topics may not be covered prominently or at all. Newsrooms face shrinking resources and may not be able to allocate them to in-depth features about religious life. Conflict linked with religious identity makes the news. The grounding of such claims, the religious context, does not make the news. Media consumers are left unable to assess the validity or prevalence of trends attributed to religion. Distorted images of faith prevail. And the majority of religious people may feel they have become invisible.¹

The reality is that religious leaders and dialogue practitioners may not be equipped to properly understand and analyse news sources, or reach out to the news media and online and “take back” the conversation. They may not be aware of the process of newsroom agenda-setting, and may not recognize—as one participant at the Cape Town meeting put it—that journalists do not usually set the news agenda. Religious leaders and dialogue practitioners could benefit from training on how to represent themselves better to the press and online. They should not allow their messages of peace and reconciliation, or the fact they represent the majority of people of faith, to be overshadowed by media-savvy “religious” voices that deal in conflict and hatred.

Moreover, the internal diversity and grassroots nature of faith communities frequently eludes observation. There is more to religion than the set of leaders who officially or unofficially seem to represent it. Viewing religious communities as a constellation of institutions and leaders ignores the diversity of beliefs, opinions, political and social views and day-to-day experiences of faith among millions of people around the world. These realities are relevant to achieving accuracy in covering religious diversity and trends.

¹ For example, a 2007 report on the coverage of Muslims in the UK media, which was commissioned by the City of London, showed that of 352 newspaper articles that mentioned Muslims or Islam during one randomly selected week in 2006, a full 91% had negative associations, while only 4% had positive associations. „The search for common ground: Muslims, non-Muslims and the UK media“. Greater London Authority: London, 2007.

This is not to suggest that religion or religious communities should always be portrayed in a positive light. However, it is the view of many religious leaders and dialogue practitioners that more accurate coverage of “mainstream” religious voices help religious and secular communities to better understand one another because it would show that religious communities, although diverse internally and externally, nonetheless largely share a focus on peace and reconciliation.

Bearing this in mind, the KAICIID Media Programme seeks to promote more accurate coverage of belief, religion and religious people in a way that strengthens the capacities of journalists, religious leaders and dialogue practitioners, and does not infringe on press freedoms. All of the activities planned as part of the programme flow toward one overarching goal: more accurate representation of religious and cultural diversity in the media and online through improved self-representation. That is, by making sure that the voices of interreligious dialogue leaders are represented in greater quantity and quality in traditional media, social media and online.

THE CAPE TOWN ROUNDTABLE

As a second step in shaping and moving forward with its Media Programme, KAICIID cooperated with the Vienna-based International Press Institute (IPI). KAICIID hosted two events during IPI’s Annual World Congress, which was held in Cape Town, South Africa, from April 12 – 15, 2014. The first was the journalists’ working meeting, the results of which are documented in this report. Secondly, KAICIID moderated a panel discussion, entitled “Images of Faith: Clash of Perceptions?” the purpose of which was to put coverage of religious diversity and belief on the agenda of a group of international top-level media executives. The discussion probed the challenges journalists face when reporting on the intersection of religion, politics and social tension, and asked what religious voices of peace can do to have their stories heard.

At the journalist working meeting, entitled “Covering Religion: Making Best Practices Count,” over 40 journalists and media experts from over 20 countries, hailing from both secular and religious media, spent an entire day delving into the issue of religious coverage.

The meeting built on excellent previous efforts in this area. These included:

- *Most Americans say media coverage of religion too sensationalized*, a 2010 (published 2012) survey of Americans and American journalists conducted by Diane Winston, Knight Chair of Media and Religion at USC Annenberg, and John C. Green of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron.
- *Fighting Words: How Arab and American Journalists Can Break Through to Better Coverage*, a publication of the International Center for Journalists written by Lisa Schnellinger and Mohannad Khatib, which reported on the findings of a 2005 meeting of two dozen Arab and American journalists who met to discuss coverage of the Other.
- Best practices contained in *Getting the Facts Right: Reporting Ethnicity and Religion*, a 2012 publication of the International Federation of Journalists, European Federation of Journalists, the Media Diversity Institute and Article 19.
- As an example and starting point for discussion on the possible creation of indicators of quality religious coverage, KAICIID turned to some of the relevant indicators contained in UNESCO’s 2012 *Gender Sensitive Indicators: Framework of Indicators to Gauge Gender Sensitivity in Media Operations and Content*.

A full bibliography for these resources is listed in the section “Additional Resources”. Selections from these works were distributed to participants in the form of handouts (see Annexes) at the beginning of each session.

The working meeting was divided into four substantive sessions (the full agenda is annexed at the end of this report). The first session challenged newsroom assumptions, and explored why coverage of religion looks the way it does today. As one participant said, accurate and nuanced coverage should not be limited to human-interest stories, but rather can be integrated into reporting on all kinds of news stories. The ideas emerging from this discussion are contained in Chapter 1.

During the next session, participants broke into groups to discuss best practices for covering religion and religious people in different contexts: when reporting on the internal affairs of a religious community, when reporting on religious minorities, and when reporting on conflict. These best practices are captured in Chapter 2.

In a slight departure from the original agenda, participants in the third session discussed best practices for identifying sources of quotations and information. Their recommendations are covered in Chapter 3.

Lastly, participants offered some advice for religious and interreligious dialogue leaders seeking to have their messages heard in the media, or seeking to correct perceived errors or misunderstandings. These best practices are found in Chapter 4.

These recommendations and good practices orient KAICIID's development of training curricula for religious leaders, interreligious dialogue leaders and journalists, and KAICIID will draw attention to them in future events and publications.

KAICIID is grateful to the journalists and experts who took the time to participate in the Cape Town roundtable, and looks forward to working with news media, religious leaders, and dialogue practitioners in this field in the future. KAICIID hopes that the best practices contained in this report serve as a guide and also a fresh starting point for further discussion on this important topic among religious leaders, dialogue practitioners and members of the media.



CHAPTER 1

CHALLENGES IN COVERING RELIGION



During its first discussion session, participants unpacked existing challenges to reporting about religion and belief, including editorial and business decisions. To begin the discussion, participants were provided with a summary of findings from a 2010 survey of American journalists and news consumers. The survey, *Most Americans say media coverage of religion too sensationalized*, conducted by the Knight Program in Media and Religion at USC and the University of Akron's Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, and published in 2012, questioned the way American news consumers and news producers viewed coverage of religion. They found a significant disparity between what news consumers want and what journalists tend to think their audiences want.

According to an article about the survey written by Merrill Balassone, “Two-thirds of the American public said religion coverage is too sensationalized in the news media – a view held by less than 30% of reporters [...]”. Other key findings:

- Less than one fifth of journalists said they are “very knowledgeable” about religion
- “A majority of both the public and reporters said the news media ‘does a poor job of explaining religion in society’”
- Americans view religion “in starkly polarized terms,” with nearly half believing that religion is “a source of conflict in the world,” while slightly over half see religion as “a fount of good.”
- Nonetheless, nearly 70% of Americans said that they are “interested in more complex coverage that looks at religious experiences and spiritual practice.” (For a full bibliography and link, please see Additional Resources section.)

When covering any broad, complex and nuanced subject—health, the environment and the economy are other examples—news media face a range of challenges. In many

ways, the constraints on in-depth reporting on religion are the same as the constraints on in-depth reporting on many other complex issues. Over the course of the hour, a number of these constraints were brought to the fore.

1. **Time constraints.** Time in the newsroom is limited. Journalists are working to tight deadlines, and there is limited space in publications and time on air to present key information to audiences in a way that is easily understandable. These constraints are especially present when it comes to breaking news. As one participant noted, it is hard for reporters to keep their focus on best practices when they “don’t have time to think.”
2. **Lack of knowledge and understanding.** Participants reinforced the findings of the Knight Program survey in their discussion. One said that his newspaper doesn’t always have the experts available to cover a minority religious issue. Another noted that reporters are not always “sufficiently armed” to do their work, because they lack appropriate training.
3. **Confusion between political and religious issues.** As multiple participants pointed out, reporting often reflects a blurring of lines between political or governmental issues and religious issues. For one thing, religion is often “politicized and commercialized,” as one person put it, leading to confusion between the religious vs. the political motives of religious and political leaders. Secondly, because religious affiliation is often a marker of identity much like ethnicity or language, conflicts between communities over issues of resource distribution or political representation can often take on religious overtones. One participant gave the example of political repression leading to discontent among a certain religious group. Journalists must describe resulting news events (e.g. demonstrations, attacks) in a way that is accurate but also sensitive and balanced.
4. **Drama and action sell.** News media rely on sales for survival, because their sales figures determine both their subscription and advertising revenues. What sells is hard-hitting news about dramatic, action-packed and emotionally charged events. As the saying goes, “If it bleeds, it leads.” That does not mean that audiences do not

react positively to in-depth features and profiles, but traditionally headlines are driven by hard news, including political, military and economic developments. This can make it challenging to find a prominent space for a nuanced piece clarifying the complexities.

5. **Reliance on common sound-bites and memes.** The stereotyping of religious people, beliefs and communities is not always intentional or even overt. Journalists sometimes rely on widely-used terminology without considering the broader implications. For example, referring to “Islamic terrorism” can make terrorism seem Islamic, just as referring to terrorists as “extremist Muslims” can make terrorists seem extremely Muslim.
6. **Religion is a huge, complex subject.** There are scholars who devote their entire careers to understanding even a single religious sub-tradition. There are different doctrines, beliefs, modes of dress and practice, institutional structures, leaders, alliances and disputes among individuals or communities that are opaque from the outside. Different communities within the same religion may have different interpretations of history and doctrine. For news media, training reporters so they can depict and report knowledgeably on religious communities may seem prohibitively time-consuming, expensive or difficult.

These are the cold, hard facts of day-to-day media operations. Nonetheless, as the rest of this report describes, there are best practices that reporters can follow to ensure that they make the most of their opportunities when covering religion and belief in specific situations—whether reporting on the internal affairs of religious communities, religious minorities, conflict, or when selecting sources.

Participants in the first session noted several broad concepts that reporters and editors should bear in mind when covering religion in general:

1. **Religion appears in all kinds of news stories.** While it’s not always possible to devote resources to in-depth features about (for example) the experience of faith, religion and religious people are touched upon in many different kinds of news stories, including breaking news. This means that there is always an opportunity to cover the issue accurately.

2. **Distinguish politics and religion.** Journalists should tease out whether certain actions and statements are religiously or politically motivated, and explore the connections between motives and justifications. Broadly, an effort should be made to distinguish the ostensibly religious from the political, and recognize when something ostensibly political is motivated by belief. A position attributed to belief may in turn be situational or political, and generally shared by only a subset of a group or population. Making clear the prevalence or proportionality of a view or position is an integral part of reporting on it. Journalists are always encouraged to dig deeper.
3. **Media should mirror the public and society.** The news media should reflect the diversity of the publics they serve, including the concerns and voices of minorities, including religious minorities. Again, these perspectives can be included in all kinds of news stories and need not be limited to special features.
4. **Countries are becoming more diverse.** One participant noted that religious diversity is growing in many places around the world, and this includes the presence of non-religious people. News media should be aware of the possibly changing demographics of their societies and be inclusive of all voices, even if only for their continued commercial viability.
5. **Do not simply cater to audience expectations.** The news media should represent and reflect the public they serve, but this does not mean that they should cater to audience expectations or stereotypes. Serving the public interest does not necessarily mean giving the public what it is interested in. Just as celebrity news should not necessarily be prioritized just because it sells, news media should not pander to fears and stereotypes or sensationalize stories just because these might be popular.

6. **Consider loaded language.** Journalists should be aware that even common terms and expressions might be “loaded” and have different meanings for different people. For example, referring to a violent attacker or someone inciting hatred as a “Muslim extremist,” “Buddhist terrorist,” or “fundamentalist Christian” could imply that people who are very Muslim, Buddhist or Christian support violence and hatred. Beware of accidentally stereotyping people, or assuming that religious identity is the relevant factor. The way group identity is defined and deployed is a choice that should follow best practice rather than mirroring common practices.
7. **Build knowledge and share ideas.** One participant noted that editors and publishers have an obligation to make sure that their newsrooms and reporters are “sufficiently equipped.” Proper training is important. Another participant highlighted the importance of platforms where journalists can share stories about belief and religion that may not make it in traditional news media channels, but which could nonetheless pick up significant traction among the public through social media.
8. **Report “good” and “bad” news.** As one participant put it, the good news should not oust the bad news, but neither should it be forgotten. A story should be, first and foremost, accurate. It should also be newsworthy. However, a news piece can be timely, proximate, impactful, necessary, interesting and meet other criteria for newsworthiness, without necessarily being “bad”.
9. **Provide context.** It is neither unusual nor wrong for news media to have an explicit editorial slant or a specific mission. It is also the right of journalists to exercise their consciences in their reporting. Nonetheless, it is important for these views to be placed in context so that audiences are presented with a fair depiction of all sides. Audiences may be able to judge an issue fairly, based on available facts.

CHAPTER 2

REPORTING ON RELIGION: BEST PRACTICES FOR THE JOURNALIST

Reporting on the religious Other has always been a sensitive issue, because religion is a sensitive issue and never more so than now. Participating journalists agreed that reporters navigating this complex field need all the help they can get. The aim of the second session was to identify concrete best practices to address the problems and pitfalls journalists face when reporting on religion.

In arriving at these recommendations or best practices, the participants discussed one of three web articles, each of which was an example of reporting on religion under one of the following circumstances:

1. Reporting on the internal affairs of a religious community
2. Reporting on a religious minority
3. Reporting on religion in the context of conflict

These articles were chosen by KAICIID not because they were representative or the last word in reporting excellence, but because they each seemed to provide a starting point for discussion. Each seemed to be of a relatively high standard of journalism, avoiding the most obvious pitfalls of religion reporting and dealt with issues relevant to larger audiences.

The working group benefited from a wide range of professional and regional backgrounds and areas of expertise: the diversity and skill of the assembled participants ensured that in each case, they were able to look below the surface to the underlying nuances and subtexts in each story, yielding concrete recommendations for reporters covering religion.

Please note that there is some overlap between the recommendations and that all of these recommendations could be applied to any situation in which religion or religious people are covered.



REPORTING ON THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

These recommendations apply to situations in which every “player” in a news event is a member of a religious community, as well as possibly a minority group. Reporting on developments that happen within a religious community can be tricky. On one hand, the members of that religious community are part of the broader society that is served by the news outlet. On the other hand, journalists covering the story may not have knowledge or experience about the beliefs and traditions that govern everyday life within that community. These can be perplexing for outsiders--for example, many religious traditions have in place mechanisms for adjudicating disputes that adhere to their own standards and regulations, and which operate independently of the state legal system. The following guidelines are meant to help avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping members of the community or portraying them in a way that may not be understandable to those outside the community.

1. **Define the terms you use:** When discussing the internal affairs of a religious community, remember that while the issues you describe may be obvious to members of the community or to you as an expert, they may be unintelligible to external audiences. Do pay attention to ensuring that the terms and the issues you refer to are clearly explained and accessible to readers outside the community in question, and to secular audiences.
2. **Do your research:** Some terms or concepts may have multiple, loaded meanings, or may be used in different ways by different people, even within a certain religious community. Check with multiple sources to make sure you understand the processes or concepts you are describing. If you are using a word from another language, check with several reliable sources to make sure you understand its meaning or meanings.
3. **Avoid stereotyping:** Although it can be tempting to frame a story in line with audience expectations, strive for nuance. Beware of subjective descriptions and monitor the use of adjectives carefully. Labels such as “extremist,” “moderate,” “fundamentalist”, for example, can be used to stereotype the people to whom they are applied.
4. **Include multiple voices:** Represent as wide a variety of people and points of view in your story as possible. Even within a religious community, do not assume

homogeneity of opinions. Moreover, experts from outside the community, such as NGOs, lawyers, or academics, can often offer a valuable ‘neutral’ counterpoint or additional source of information. Find out whether there are experts or religious leaders engaged in the area of interest and seek them out.

5. **Consider privacy when choosing a story or angle:** A story should not only be true, but should also serve the public interest in order to be worthy of publication or broadcast. That said, it is the prerogative of individual media outlets to determine what is in the public interest. Consider individuals’ privacy when deciding whether to publish or broadcast a certain story or select details of that story. Are the actors public figures; are their actions relevant to many people? Will victims be harmed or embarrassed by the inclusion of certain details, especially conjecture or gossip? Wrongdoing and infringements of rights should always be exposed, but take time to evaluate what the impact of the story is likely to be for those involved, whether it is worth making an example of a particular case, and include multiple voices to avoid a single negative example coming to represent a whole community.
6. **Being neutral and objective does not mean lacking perspective:** Striving for neutrality does not mean that stories should not be infused with human interest, nor that journalists should ignore broader questions. Putting the subject matter in context is often illuminating for a wider audience. For example, how does a certain religious decision compare to alternative interpretations within the same religious community, national law and international human rights standards? Are facts and statistics available to ascertain whether a certain phenomenon within a religious community is more or less prevalent in society in general? Can helpful parallels be drawn between the practices of different religions? Give voices within and outside the community a chance to respond to those comparisons.
7. **Be aware of biases and actively combat them.** Ensure that all religious communities are treated with equal nuance and sensitivity. Religious communities whose traditions may be unfamiliar or frequently stereotyped by the public should nonetheless be properly researched and treated with the same level of respect and scrutiny as others.

REPORTING ON RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

The following guidelines were compiled to address stories that relate to the relationship between minority communities and the broader society. Audiences are likely to be more familiar with the culture and concerns of society at large than they are with those of the minority. Journalists face the challenge of having first to understand and then convey the context in which an event has taken place from both the perspective of members of the religious minority and members of the broader society, whether those are private individuals, business people, community leaders or political figures.

1. **Provide background and contextualize:** Sometimes presenting only the latest event can present a skewed overall picture. Make sure to include key context and background information.
2. **Use links and external references:** Space and time are limited. If there is not enough room in a story or package to present the necessary context, use hyperlinks or other references to point readers/viewers toward more in-depth coverage, perhaps on a website, or to reliable external sources.
3. **Use quotations from minority members:** Make sure to include voices from the community or communities in question, bearing in mind that there may be multiple viewpoints within one community, and that the most visible minority leaders may not accurately reflect the views of the community as a whole.
4. **Be careful of labels:** Be conscientious of the accuracy and implications of attaching potentially loaded labels to groups or leaders, even if those terms are in common use. For example, what are the implications of calling someone a “Buddhist nationalist,” “Muslim extremist,” or “Fundamentalist Christian”? Would the person call himself or herself this, or would other members of his or her religious community do so? Be aware of the origins and intentions of certain labels, regardless of whether the person or community chose to adopt that label, or whether it was externally imposed.
5. **Time constraints are no excuse for carelessness:** Space and time are tightly constrained in the newsroom, but it is nevertheless important to insist on professional standards and sensitivity.

6. **“We cannot satisfy what everyone demands”:** There is a saying that if no “side” is happy with your story, you have done a good job. It is clear that not everyone is always going to be happy with the story that is ultimately published or broadcast, especially about sensitive issues. There is not endless space or time available to fully flesh out the full history and every nuance of every breaking news event. Nonetheless, it is important to strive for professionalism, sensitivity, neutrality and fairness in every report.
7. **A picture is worth a thousand words:** The images attached to a story can have even more impact than the words used. Be extremely conscientious of whether the image is representative of the community in question, or contributes to stereotyping or sensationalism. Just as it is important to present a diversity of “voices,” be aware that there may be a diversity of images even within a certain community and try to reflect this.
8. **Fairness means giving voice to all sides:** The story is not “right” until all sides of a conflict have had their voices heard, including those that are often overlooked in conflict situations, such as women, members of civil society and lay persons in religious communities. Also be aware of the prominence given to different voices: Always allowing the same people to be heard early in a story, or giving them more airtime or column space, can also skew perceptions.

REPORTING ON RELIGION IN CONFLICT

Religious individuals or communities are frequently mentioned in the context of conflict reporting. In many conflicts around the world, religion serves as a “catch-all” marker of identity that can mask the true origin of the dispute. Generalizing about religious identities in such situations can oversimplify conflicts, give the false impression that all members of one religious group share the same views and goals and even exacerbate tensions between communities. The inaccurate or overzealous application of religious labels stereotypes members of those religions, and the overrepresentation of select voices leads to the inaccurate perception that those voices represent the true thoughts and feelings of all members of that religion. The recommendations below provide advice on how to avoid common pitfalls of reporting on religious communities involved in a conflict.

1. **Explain the words you use:** Loaded terms should be avoided. When discussing religion in the context of conflict, examine to examine words that many use unconsciously. For example, words like “retaliation” or “response” are often used when talking about violence. Be aware of the implications of using these words: for example, suggesting that violence was carried out in “response” to violence from another group may give rise to the assumption that it was carried out in self-defence.
2. **Avoid shaping your story to suit your audience:** This is particularly important in cases where the audience of a media outlet might have vested interests or identify more strongly with one party in a conflict than another. For example, if a religious media house is reporting on a conflict in which members of their own religion are also involved, it is nonetheless important to avoid simply shaping the story to meet reader expectations. Targeting a particular audience should not occur at the expense of neutrality, fairness, and sensitivity to the Other.
3. **Look for the middle ground:** Instead of casting the story from the point of view of one party in a conflict, includes quotations and perspectives from sources from another side. Quotations from external experts on the conflict are useful, but the expert’s interests and biases should also be made transparent.
4. **Proximity to a story should not blind you to larger questions:** Often journalists may be close to the story, or involved in some way (either through their own religious or cultural affinity, or through their country’s stake in the conflict). They may also be closer to one side of the conflict simply in terms of access and location. However, this should not lead to one-sided reporting. Make every effort to include multiple voices, perspectives from all sides and challenge the political narrative of each side.
5. **Independent witnesses are important:** Eyewitnesses are the key source of information about incidents in a conflict zone. Remember that quotes from human rights activists, civil society organizations and political spokespersons can all add value to a story.
6. **Eyewitness reports may not necessarily provide the full story:** Eyewitnesses are a key source of information, but a single eyewitness may not have the full story. Individual eyewitnesses to an event can tell you what happened (what they saw), but

- their explanation of why it happened may be incomplete—like anyone else, their views are shaped by their personal experience and their own sources of information and opinion. Simply repeating their opinions, especially accusations, without fact-checking or providing context can lead to stereotyping, over-simplification, or even inaccuracy. It is important to seek the story behind the story through multiple and diverse sources.
7. **Labelling a conflict can contribute to stereotyping:** Religion (like language or ethnicity) can be an important marker of communal identity in a conflict, but automatically applying religious labels can obscure true sources of tension, such as competition over access to natural resources or representation in government. Be specific about the leaders and groups involved in a specific conflict and what their goals are, in order to avoid stereotyping. Be wary of allowing a single individual or institution to speak on behalf of entire religious communities. For instance, one individual pastor or imam calling for violence does not represent all Christians or Muslims.
 8. **Provide background:** Audiences cannot be expected to have the same insights as a journalist who has been to the scene of a conflict. Remember that conflicts may be created by several factors and that your audience may not have the same perspective on a situation as you do. Take the time to explain to them the history of the conflict and the various interests involved, and do not shy away from providing links or references to further information. The background information necessary depends on your audience.
 9. **Beware of oversimplification:** Space and time are limited, but journalists should consider how they can report the news and provide context in such a way that they avoid pushing an agenda or providing a skewed version of the story.
 10. **Be specific:** The vague use of statistics and numbers can be misinterpreted as bias. Avoid the use of words like “many”, “numerous”, “few” or “several” in favour of accurate and specific statistics.

11. **“Standards should work any day, anytime, anywhere.”** Journalists covering conflict situations are under tremendous pressure to meet deadlines and break new information and may also face hostility and physical danger. Therefore newsrooms should establish very clear standards and guidelines for covering the religious or cultural dimensions of conflicts that can be clearly followed under any circumstances.
12. **Beware of relying on borrowed information:** The Internet has made it possible to draw information from many sources, especially where conflict is concerned, and first-hand sources may be difficult to acquire. However, be careful of the quality of external sources and attempt to verify where those sources got their information—ideally, it should be first hand. When quoting from other media outlets, consider whether they have sources on the ground or are also recycling information.

The Additional Resources section at the end of this booklet lists further publications about reporting on religion and conflict.



CHAPTER 3

REPRESENTATION AND A DIVERSITY OF VOICES

DIVERSITY IN THE NEWSROOM

Although many media outlets agree that their output should fairly reflect the diversity of society at large, how to achieve and measure success in this field remains undefined. Depending on who is asked, diversity can refer to gender balance, as well as the inclusion of different ethnic and social groups, sexual orientations, voices of people with disabilities and, of course, voices from different religions. Many news media seek to reflect diversity in their reporting and in their newsrooms, and indeed these goals may be explicitly incorporated into the reporting and even hiring policies of some public and commercial media.

Broadly speaking, the discussion among Cape Town participants revealed two approaches to ensuring that the news represents diverse voices. There is one view that says the best way for minority voices to be accurately represented is to hire reporters from these communities—they speak the language, understand the players and nuances, can add depth to their colleagues' work on these issues and are better situated to identify and access good sources. The perceived benefits of this approach are access, understanding and sensitivity. The perceived downsides are a heightened risk of conflict of interest or bias—to which the counterargument is that a professional journalist must remain objective and accurate regardless of personal beliefs.

It is this expectation of professionalism that is the basis for the other view that downplays the need for newsroom diversity in favour of proper training and high professional standards for all journalists. This argument says that a professional journalist should have the tools and skills to cover any number of subjects, including those that may at first be unfamiliar. A good journalist can therefore be expected to gather knowledge and display insight and sensitivity when reporting on a minority, regardless of personal background. A journalist should be able to use his or her skills and networks to find and include relevant and representative voices—including diverse minority voices—no matter what the subject. The perceived benefits of this approach are objectivity and independence, as well as affordability—there



are very few newsrooms that could afford to hire separate reporters for each ethnic or social minority, or engage reporters with the appropriate background to cover every foreign event as it occurs. The perceived downsides are superficiality and the subtle promotion of majority stereotypes and biases.

Participants of the working group shared variations of both these broad approaches, but were in broad agreement on a few key points. One noted that the diversity of newsroom staff should not be the result of editorial policy, but is rather a “governance question”: editorial staff of different backgrounds should be hired not to achieve a certain reporting goal, but because the media house is a workplace and, as in any workplace, human resources managers should ensure that the staff reflect the diversity of society. He said: “You don’t need one reporter for each faith. What you need is a representative, open and inclusive newsroom which reflects the society you are trying to serve.”

However, diversity policies should not limit editors’ ability to publish news in the public interest. Self-censorship should be avoided “at all costs” when deciding to whom a platform is given or which issues are covered.

It was also agreed that journalists, regardless of their background, should be scrupulously professional because no matter what efforts are made to employ diverse reporters, there is no such thing as perfect representation. One editor noted that there are 80 languages spoken in his country, and many religions. “What do we do with those? Is one Muslim enough—or one Sunni and one Shiite?” He added: “People should not say constantly, he wrote in this way because he is of a certain religion or ethnic group.”

A journalist cannot be expected to speak for all people of his or her background, either in a positive or a negative sense. One participant described it as a “huge burden” to be expected to represent her gender or race and also noted that this expectation carries the implicit assumption that “your identity distorts your judgement.”

Regardless of personal background or the story being covered, journalists should be

properly trained and professional. This is true for coverage of religion or any other issue. As one participant said, “In the end we come back to how to strengthen the craft of journalism as a whole.”

WHO SPEAKS FOR RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES?

In any one news item, only a limited number of perspectives can be represented because there is limited space and time for presentation and because reporters are working on tight deadlines. This fact makes it even more important for reporters to carefully consider to whom they give a voice when they are selecting sources of information and quotations.

When covering religious communities this becomes particularly tricky because of the broad array of beliefs, political views and responses that may be held by members of that community. In many cases, it is not even clear where a certain community begins and ends. There may be subgroups that differ and overlap on certain issues.

There may be theological or political disagreements even among those who appear like-minded, which is why no one voice should be taken to represent all voices—even in a small community. One participant gave the example, from his country, of interviewing militants who invoked religion. He noted that one person would cite one example of Islamic jurisprudence that a second person would immediately throw out. Even in this very narrow sample there are differences. The same participant also noted that different people use scripture from the Bible or the Koran in different ways to make different arguments. No one has a monopoly on what a religion has to say about a certain issue.

CHOOSING SOURCES

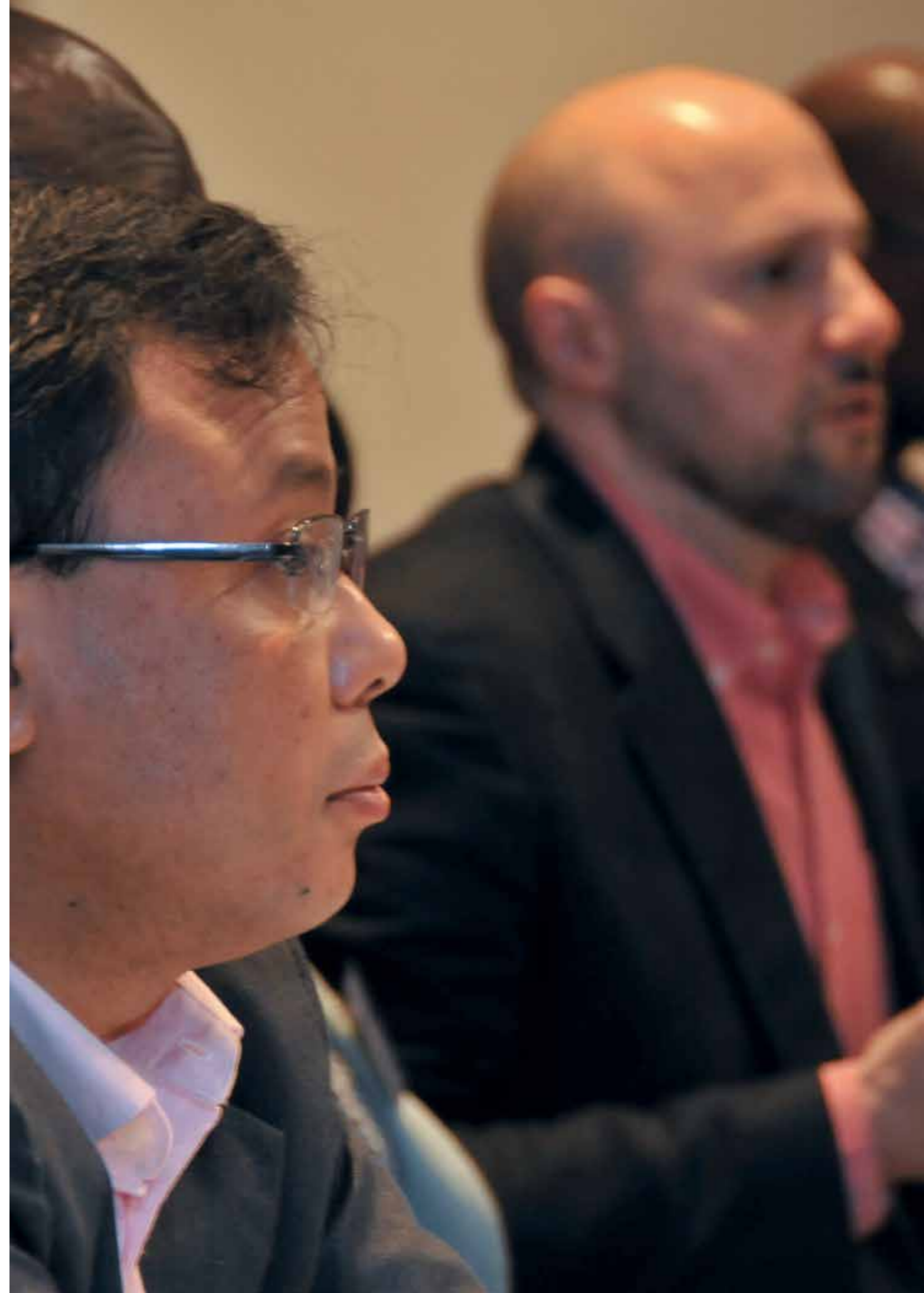
1. **Look for more than one source.** Do not just seek out “a source”. Seek out multiple sources in order to represent the diversity within a particular tradition. Remember that members of a certain community, including its leadership, may hold beliefs, opinions and political views as diverse as those among any group. Just as it would be inaccurate to assume that all German citizens or all men or all school teachers have a certain worldview, it is inaccurate to assume that one person can speak for the views of all members of one religious community.

2. **Leaders of interfaith initiatives can be a valuable resource.** Dialogue practitioners, like other people, have their own perspectives and priorities. However, they can be very helpful in providing background information about the array of views present in different religious communities and can help point reporters toward further sources.
3. **Do not just look to externally assigned authorities.** In many countries and in many religious hierarchies there may be leaders who are appointed to represent and speak for a certain community. While they may be one valuable source of information, do not forget to look to less official authorities, such as local community leaders. Do not assume that because the official leadership says something, it reflects what people in the community feel. Beware of allowing the government or even an official religious body to determine who speaks for “mainstream Christianity” or “mainstream Islam,” etc. When the media repeatedly turn to the same individuals, they become the face of a certain community, even if they do not share the opinions of everyone they are meant to represent. This can perpetuate a narrative that may not be accurate.
4. **Look for scholars and academics.** Scholars and academics from within a certain tradition, or even external experts who specialize on that tradition, are valuable sources of information and context when trying to understand the beliefs, views and actions of a certain community or its leaders. Universities, seminaries and think tanks should all be able to provide sources that can speak to a certain religious issue. Just remember, again, that also in this case it is valuable to have multiple sources.
5. **Do not forget to interview lay people.** Do not forget to seek out the voices of non-leaders in a certain community, for the same reason that it is important to include the voices of non-leaders when reporting on any issue: leaders don’t always reflect the views of all members of their communities. Always interviewing the same official religious leaders, and experts, especially those who have a stake in the news story, can make members of religious groups seem one-dimensional and give the impression that they all support or agree with the views promoted by those leaders or experts.

6. **Be honest with your audience.** If it is difficult to find sources, or to find sources that seem representative of a certain community, be honest with your audience and explain that it was a challenge. Someone in the audience may have a solution. It may be the case that interviewing one source in favour of another, officially sanctioned source, results in problems for the reporter, editor or media house that limit their ability to cover a certain issue further. Make these limitations clear to your audience; such restrictions, whether official or unspoken, say as much about a certain situation as the opinions that the restrictions seek to silence.
7. **The quality of the sources is important.** In addition to having multiple sources, seek quality sources. Understandably, reporters often prefer sources that are readily available and can speak clearly and knowledgeably. Depending on the context and the story, however, it may be worthwhile to spend more time with a source that is not as “media-friendly” but nonetheless offers substantive and nuanced information. Taking the time to seek out less visible sources also helps prevent the perpetuation of stereotypical narratives or superficial reports.
8. **Reporting on belief and religion is like reporting on any issue.** Religious people and communities should be treated with the same sensitivity and respect for privacy and personal opinion as any other individuals. Religious leaders and institutions should be subjected to the same level of scrutiny as any other figures or organizations in the public sphere. In all cases, knowledge of the relevant issues, institutions, leaders and—in this case—beliefs are a necessary part of the journalist’s toolkit. Generalizing or stereotyping about members of a certain community should be avoided. When covering the religion-related aspects of a story, apply the same professional standards that would be applied to any complex, nuanced issue.
9. **Be wary of perpetuating voices of hate:** News is news and media outlets must independently determine which information is important for their audiences. Does the shock value of covering a certain story contribute to stereotyping and undermine interreligious relations? For example, American pastor Terry Jones received international media coverage for his announcement that he would burn copies of the

Koran on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. He was the leader of a tiny, fifty-person community and many American and Christian leaders condemned his views. Nonetheless, this story contributed to an existing narrative that says Americans and Christians hate Islam. Be aware of what happens when an individual radical voice is given space. Above all, be sure to contextualise sensational statements or actions. Remember proportionality: How large a community does this person or do these persons speak for? What do others, including other members of the community, think about this issue?

10. **Remember the role of the media.** It is the job of news media to respond to the needs of the public by providing news and information in the public interest, reflecting the diversity of opinion in the society it serves. While news outlets only survive if they sell, journalists should avoid sensational stories that perpetuate stereotypes, misrepresent groups or individuals, or otherwise present a skewed view of people or events.



CHAPTER 4

SELF-REPRESENTATION—ADVICE FOR INTERRELIGIOUS AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS FOR ENGAGING WITH THE NEWS MEDIA

It is easy for success stories and religious messages of peace and reconciliation to get lost in the news. Breaking news stories about dramatic events, conflicts, mistakes, scandals and disasters are always given prominence, because they are the latest events that people need to be informed about. A story about a functioning bus service is almost never going to have the same traction as a story about a bus that crashed on Tuesday, injuring several people and causing a four-hour traffic jam. The same principle applies to stories about interreligious dialogue and religious peace initiatives that compete with sensational breaking news headlines about hate or violence executed in the name of religion.

That said, there are ways for religious leaders and interreligious dialogue leaders to make their activities and messages newsworthy, and to better attract the attention of the news media.

Participants in the final session, all journalists with backgrounds in secular or religious media, acknowledged the need to strengthen coverage of stories of interreligious dialogue and peace. They recognized that leaders from these communities may not come to them and one participant urged media to go the extra mile in seeking out positive role models or youth initiatives and tell their stories. As one noted, it is more work to seek out a story that is already there, as opposed to a breaking news story, but the results can be worth it. Journalists should have the networks and skills to seek out interesting stories and should use their resources to find them. Participants noted that the media have “a role beyond the transportation of facts from one place to another,” and should proactively provide background, analyses helping people understand the world around them.

That does not mean that religious leaders and dialogue practitioners should wait around for a call from a journalist in the expectation that the news media will come to them.



Participants in Cape Town came up with a number of suggestions for religious leaders and dialogue practitioners seeking to be proactive.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM JOURNALISTS TO RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND DIALOGUE PRACTITIONERS

1. **Counteract negative messages with positive messages.** Prominent active leaders in religious communities should speak out when they disagree with the messages or actions of other leaders. No one should expect the public (or news media) to read their mind or come seeking their opinion. Leaders must learn to counter hate speech with peace speech and acquire the skills to help combat a narrative of hatred or violence.
2. **Know what is newsworthy.** Be aware of what angle of your story, event or statement is most likely to capture the public's attention. What aspect is surprising, or new, or contrary to stereotypes or expectations that the public might have? A common communications tactic is to link a story to an on-going issue of interest, thus benefiting from the media's interest in that issue. For example, religious leaders and interreligious dialogue leaders can use the fact that a negative message is receiving a lot of attention as a reason to highlight a positive message.
3. **Be available to journalists, provide further sources and do not be afraid:** Participants noted that some religious leaders are much better at this than others. One cited Pope Francis as an example of someone who is successful at sharing his vision of Christianity. Leaders should not fear engaging the media or responding to interview requests. Most journalists will take pains to present their interviewees' views fairly. While no one can guarantee that coverage will be positive or to your liking, the only way to receive publicity is to engage with journalists. Be prepared to provide information or contacts to other relevant sources—whether those are community leaders, experts, activists, laypeople, or others. Remember that you can provide contacts to people other than official leaders or spokespersons who may have interesting views to share.

4. **Do not call, email.** Have important words in the subject line. Make clear who is sending the email but also make clear what kind of help is on offer. For example, "I have an expert available to speak about this issue," etc.
5. **Get social media savvy and develop communications skills.** Journalists are increasingly being reached on Twitter. Be savvy with this and other social networks. Understand how information is communicated and become familiar with these tools. Leaders don't necessarily have to participate in the conversation, but they do have to monitor the conversation. Make sure to follow relevant policy-makers, other religious leaders, and journalists interested in this issue—including those who do not share the same opinions. Try to leverage the networks of international policymakers and high-profile personalities working in your field.
6. **Involve the media:** Invite the media to attend events and involve them in activities, for example on humanitarian trips. Seek critical media engagement.
7. **Press conferences:** To draw attention to a certain event or statement, hold a press conference. Make sure to attend it personally. Importantly, do not only invite "friends" – invite everyone. Accept that there are different views and try to engage them all.
8. **Identify the target audience.** Remember that community or religious media, as well as private secular media, can also help reach the target audience.
9. **Tap into existing news programmes:** Be aware of columns and radio or television programmes that regularly cover social or religious issues and find out who the reporters, columnists or producers are. News media have column inches or time slots to fill and the chances of having your story covered increase if you know whom to contact.
10. **Journalism is about stories.** Audiences are interested in stories, and some of the best stories are about people. As participants noted, religious communities can be great repositories of these stories, and leaders should strive to tell them. If an initiative is trying to help a certain group, then help give voice to those people—help them to tell their stories.

11. **Directly promote your message:** Dialogue practitioners can write articles and blog posts. They can also live their message in a public way, for example by attending the events of other religious communities. One participant said that, for example, Christians can attend Eid festivals and Muslims can attend Christian festivals to promote an interfaith message.
12. **Know how journalists work.** The news media is under pressure to produce content that will sell every day, or even multiple times a day. Journalists are going to report on news that they feel is relevant to the public—and that includes scandals within a religious community or sensational statements or actions. As one participant noted, this is not a reason to become defensive. Religious leaders and dialogue practitioners cannot expect journalists to stop doing their jobs, but they can provide their side of the story and expect that it will be covered.
13. **Know how the news cycle works.** In the era of online news and 24-hour cable news coverage, breaking news is continuously being broadcast and published. While many news media work around the clock, individual journalists and teams work on shifts and to specific deadlines. Religious leaders and dialogue practitioners seeking to have their messages heard need to be aware of these. For example, a press release sent at 7 pm is not going to make the 8 pm news, and a press release sent late on a Friday afternoon may be buried deep in an editor's inbox by Monday morning, when they are back at work—thus decreasing the chance that it will be noticed.
14. **Do not expect reporters to share your faith or views.** Religious and interreligious dialogue leaders should welcome the fact that journalists—no matter what their own views—are allowed and expected to cover everything. One participant cited an example of an incident in which a religious group awarded a certain journalist a prize for his coverage of religion. However, when they found out that he was not of their faith, they ostracized him. Such attitudes are counter-productive.

It is critical for religious leaders and dialogue practitioners to reflect on their engagement with the news media and other sources of information, such as those found on the Internet. Knowing that journalists operate under resource and time constraints with imperfect

knowledge, should lead all people—including members of religious communities—to critically assess the way that they form perceptions about the Other. The media both shapes and is shaped by the audience it serves. With this in mind, dialogue practitioners and religious leaders who are tackling hate speech and misinformation through counterspeech and positive messages should feel able and empowered to directly engage with the news media.

The tips provided in the section above should give interreligious dialogue leaders some basic information about how they can reach out to journalists.

Additionally, KAICIID is working to develop two full training curricula targeted at religious leaders and dialogue practitioners specifically designed to help these target groups improve their engagement with the media and others through the Internet.

The first training course, on Media and Information Literacy for Religious Leaders, is being developed on the basis of an existing UNESCO curriculum on media and information literacy that was designed for teachers.

The second training course, on Social Media Literacy and Communications for Dialogue Practitioners, aims to empower leaders who are already implementing dialogue activities in their efforts to get their messages out via social media and through traditional communications efforts with the mainstream media.

More information about these programmes is available at the KAICIID website: www.kaiciid.org, or by contacting the KAICIID Programmes Department at programmes@kaiciid.org.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

KAICIID is grateful to all of the journalists who participated in the Cape Town working meeting for generously offering their time and expertise. KAICIID recognizes the great work that has been done and is being done in this field in several regions, and aims to contribute to strengthening reporting on religion and religious diversity.

This publication is not the final stop for the tips and guidelines generated during the Cape Town meeting. They are in use for training that KAICIID is offering to religious leaders and interreligious dialogue leaders as part of its Media Programme. KAICIID will continue to engage with journalists and journalism support organizations to ensure that its work in the field of media complements existing initiatives, upholds press freedoms, and helps to strengthen the craft of journalism.

News media do not operate in a vacuum. While KAICIID will continue to engage secular and religious journalists in their efforts to improve reporting about religion and religious people, KAICIID recognizes that it is also the responsibility of religious and interreligious dialogue leaders—who share KAICIID’s view that faith and dialogue are tools for understanding, reconciliation and peace—to better represent their vision, mission and activities. While many groups are doing excellent work, more could be done to capture the public imagination. Thus KAICIID also plans to assist interreligious dialogue leaders to more proactively and fearlessly engage the news media and make themselves heard through social media and online - counteracting the messages of hatred and violence that are heard so loudly, but which represent so few.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Winston, Diane and John C. Green. *Most Americans say media coverage of religion too sensationalized*. USC Annenberg and University of Akron: Annenberg and Akron, 2012.
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ANNEX I

CAPE TOWN WORKING MEETING AGENDA



COVERING RELIGION: MAKING BEST PRACTICES COUNT

KAICIID-IPI Working Meeting

April 12, 2014, Cape Town, South Africa

There is a perception among many religious leaders that religious communities and religious beliefs are misrepresented in the news media and online.

At a consultation held in Vienna in March, news media and social media experts said that KAICIID can address this issue by providing capacity building for interreligious dialogue practitioners (dialogue experts and select religious leaders) so that they are better able to promote their messages of peace, and provide information about dialogue activities via social media and to the news media. KAICIID also plans to develop, in coordination with media experts, indicators for quality reporting on religion. The results from this working meeting will serve as inputs into these programmes.

DRAFT AGENDA

9.00 - 9.30: Introduction of KAICIID and participants

9:30 - 10.45: Challenging newsroom assumptions. What are news consumers really interested in, and what kind of news about religion serves the public interest? Research conducted in the United States in 2012 shows a disparity between what kinds of religious news consumers are interested in, versus the kinds of religious news journalists think is necessary (See Handout 1). Do the report's findings perhaps apply in other regions of the world, or to religious media? Is in-depth reporting on religion or religious



communities a “niche” product? To what extent do media have an obligation to report on religion in a way that reflects the religious composition of the society they serve?

10:45 - 11:00: Coffee Break

11.00 - 13.00: Beyond best practices – context specific practices. A great deal of work has already been done to identify best practices in covering religion and the Other (See Handout 2). What about covering religion in specific circumstances? Are there more specific best practices that we can identify?

- Representing the internal affairs of religious communities. What are participants’ experiences and best practices for reporting on events that happen within a specific religious community?
- Religious minorities. What are best practices for reporting on relations between members of religious communities and the broader society, or relations between religious communities?
- What are best practices for reporting on religion in conflict? How are political, social, economic and religious dimensions of identity-based conflict illuminated?

13.00 - 13.30: Lunch

13.30 - 15.00: Beyond Best Practices – Indicators of Quality Religious Coverage. UNESCO has developed a number of “Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media.” What are some indicators of quality coverage of religious issues and communities? (See Handout 3)

15.00 - 15.15: Coffee Break

15.15 - 16.45: Best Practices for Interreligious Dialogue Practitioners. The “Getting the Facts Right” report suggested kinds of support that journalists could seek from civil society organizations (See Handout 1). As members of civil society, how can interreligious dialogue leaders proactively seek to make their voices heard in media, respond to reports they believe unfairly represent religious and interreligious issues, or otherwise make themselves available to journalists as a source of information about religious developments?

16.45 - 17.00: Summarize findings and close.

ANNEX II

PARTICIPANTS



PARTICIPANT LIST FROM THE KACIID WORKING MEETING,
APRIL 12TH 2014, CAPE TOWN

“COVERING RELIGION: MAKING BEST PRACTICES COUNT”

	NAME	ORGANIZATION	COUNTRY
1	Waseem Abbasi	The News International	Pakistan
2	John Allen	AllAfrica Global Media	South Africa
3	Saleh AlShawi	Doha Centre for Media Freedom	Qatar
4	Amare Aregawi	Horn of Africa Press Institute (HAPI)	Ethiopia
5	Khaled Batarfi	Saudi Gazette	Saudi Arabia
6	Endy Bayuni	Jakarta Post (Board Member and co-founder of the International Association of Religion Journalists (IARJ))	Indonesia
7	Melissa Chea-Annan	Vice President Press Union of Liberia	Liberia
8	Tara Nath Dahal	Freedom Forum	Nepal
9	Isaiah Esipisu	Freelance journalist, isaiahesipisu.blogspot.com	Kenya
10	Barbara Frazee	Catholic News Service	USA
11	Ananthakrishnan Gopalakrishnan	The Hindu	India
12	Mohammed Haruna	Citizen Communications Limited	Nigeria
13	Ismaila Isa	New Africa Holdings	Nigeria
14	Nayana Jayarajan	KAICIID	Austria
15	Peter Kaiser	KAICIID	Austria

	NAME	ORGANIZATION	COUNTRY
16	Yazeed Kamaldien	International Association of Religion Journalists	South Africa
17	Burcu Karakas	Daily Milliyet	Turkey
18	Kenneth Adewale Kupolyi	ABEOKUTA, Federal University of Agriculture	Nigeria
19	Daoud Kuttub	AmmanNet	Jordan
20	Tsedale Lemma	Addis Standard Magazine	Ethiopia
21	Bisan Liftawi	KAICIID	Austria
22	Zainah Loulou	Qatar University /DCMF	Qatar
23	Wada Abdullahi Maida	Finlay Communications Ltd	Nigeria
24	Robert Marquand	The Christian Science Monitor	USA
25	Abdelgadir Mohammed	Nidaát Press Centre, Altareeq.info	Sudan
26	Soe Myint	Mizzima Media	Myanmar
27	Constantine Odongo	Vision Group	Uganda
28	Churchill Otieno	Nation Media Group	Kenya
29	Dikarabo Ramadubu	Botswana Guardian	Botswana
30	Frances Rose	KAICIID	Austria
31	Mohannad Sabry	Managing Editor of Spec. Rep., The Ground Truth Project	Egypt
32	Nazeeha Saeed	Radio Monte Carlo, France 24	Bahrain
33	Mary Saliba	Al Jazeera English	Qatar
34	Makhudu Sefara	The Star	South Africa
35	Garba Shehu	People's Daily	Nigeria
36	Osama Suliman	Ultramarine, Doha Centre for Media Freedom	Qatar
37	Ahmed Versi	The Muslim News	UK
38	Mike Waltner	KAICIID	Austria
39	Aidan White	Ethical Journalism Network	UK
40	Wade C.L. Williams	FrontPageAfrica	Liberia
41	Elias Gebreselassie Woldegabriel	New Business Ethiopia	Ethiopia
42	Bilkisu Yusuf	Citizen Communication, Daily Trust	Nigeria

ANNEX III.A.

HANDOUT 1



ARTICLE FROM UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA NEWS

Most Americans say media coverage of religion too sensationalized

By Merrill Balassone

April 5, 2012

Two-thirds of the American public said religion coverage is too sensationalized in the news media – a view held by less than 30 percent of reporters, according to the results of a survey released today.

And less than one-fifth of journalists, or 18.9 percent, said they are “very knowledgeable” about religion. Most reporters in that minority said they are mainly familiar with their own religious traditions, not the wider array of faiths and practices, the survey showed.

The results come from a first-of-its-kind survey of both reporters and the audiences they serve by the Knight Program in Media and Religion at USC and the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron.

“News organizations are rightly worried about creating smart business plans and developing cutting-edge technology. But they’re overlooking their most basic resource: knowledgeable reporters,” said Diane Winston, holder of the Knight Chair in Media and Religion at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. “News consumers want more reporting on authentic religious experience and a lot less on polarizing religious politics. But reporters can’t do that if all they know about religion is what they hear in church or – ironically – what they read in the news.”

A majority of both the public and reporters said the news media “does a poor job of explaining religion in society,” with 57.1 percent and 51.8 percent in agreement, respectively. Both the public and reporters ranked TV news lowest in the quality and quantity of religion coverage compared to other media, with 28.1 percent of the public and 8 percent of reporters responding that broadcast news provided “good” religion coverage.

The report was based on two surveys conducted between Feb. 15 and May 11, 2010 by the Center for Marketing and Opinion Research in Akron, Ohio.

The first was a telephone survey of a national random sample of 2,000 American adults with a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. The second was an online survey distributed to a random sample of journalists with 800 usable responses and a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

“Religion figures into American politics, popular culture, foreign policy and even the economy more strongly than ever before,” said John C. Green, director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics, who managed the study. “But the disconnect between news consumers and producers suggests that current news media coverage isn’t making the importance of these overlapping relationships clear. This situation presents the news media with both a challenge and an opportunity at a moment when innovation in the profession is paramount.”

Among the study’s other findings:

- The American public sees religion in starkly polarized terms. Nearly half, or 43.6 percent, believes religion is a source of conflict in the world, while a narrow majority, 52.6 percent, sees it as a fount of good. Most reporters, 56.1 percent, consider religion to be a mixed bag, offering both benefits and drawbacks for society. But only 3.8 percent of the public shares this more circumspect angle on religion.
- Not surprisingly, then, most reporters believe their audiences want personality-driven religion news related to specific institutions and events. But despite the aforementioned polarization, 69.7 percent of Americans said they’re interested in more complex coverage that looks at religious experiences and spiritual practice.
- A strong majority of the public, 62.5 percent, said religion coverage is important to them, but nearly one-third of the rapidly growing cohort of those with no religious affiliation said they aren’t interested in religion coverage.

- Christians from ethnic minorities constitute more than one-third of news consumers who said they generally are very interested in the news and have a particular interest in religion. In contrast, white evangelical Protestants tend to care specifically about religion news but less about the news in general.

The Ford Foundation provided funding for the survey.

See more at:

<http://news.usc.edu/#!/article/27025/most-americans-say-media-coverage-of-religion-too-sensationalized/>

ANNEX III.B.

HANDOUT 2



EXISTING BEST PRACTICES FOR COVERING RELIGION AND THE OTHER

1. **“Getting the Facts Right: Reporting Ethnicity and Religion,” 2012. An initiative of the European Federation of Journalists, the Media Diversity Institute, and Article 19.**

This report resulted in a number of recommendations. The below are taken directly from an article on the Article 19 website, accessed April 2, 2014:

What can journalists do? The study has generated a list of things journalists could do to improve the way they report on ethnicity and religion. They should aim to:

- get to know anti-discrimination legislation
- use a dialogue-oriented approach
- use a broader network of expert sources
- provide background information
- put facts in context
- investigate documents in the public domain (archives, libraries, local offices etc)
- interview people with knowledge
- portray people as human beings instead of representatives of religious or ethnic groups
- avoid negative labels
- separate facts from opinion but treat opinion as relevant
- What can editors do? Editors can improve overall media performance by:
- organizing in-house training for journalists



- inviting members of religious and ethnic groups to come to the newsroom
- encouraging more senior journalists to support younger colleagues in these matters
- supporting best journalism practice
- creating a culture of tolerance within the newsroom
- working with human resource departments to take into consideration newsroom diversity
- developing internal editorial guidelines that take in consideration national and international codes of ethics
- What can newsmakers expect from CSOs? Civil society organizations who highlight anti-discriminatory practices could support newsmakers by:
 - providing regular updates on activities in the field
 - giving professional advice and background information in matters of disputes
 - providing support in finding sources for information
 - functioning as an advisory panel for the most contested issues
 - providing ideas for stories that highlight the issues of religious and ethnic groups

See more at:

<http://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/3093/en/getting-the-facts-right:-reporting-ethnicity-and-religion#sthash.QWaKSq0h.dpuf>

2. **“Fighting Words: How Arab and American Journalists Can Break Through to Better Coverage,” 2005, International Center for Journalists.**

According to ICFJ, “This manual is an outgrowth of a 2005 conference of two dozen Arab and American journalists who gathered to talk about how they cover each other’s worlds, with the goal of improving coverage on both sides.”

Recommendations for Journalists (taken from the report by KAICIID):

- Keep a careful watch on our use of adjectives.
- Include both details and context in stories, which helps avoid stereotypes and sensationalism.

- Educate ourselves about culture and religion and how it affects our societies.
- Hold religious leaders accountable for their statements and opinions, and separate religion from politics.
- Make the effort to include a range of voices, especially in polarized issues such as suicide bombings and religion.
- Be aware of and honest about our own biases of coverage, so that we can watch out and, when possible, correct them.
- Understand why stereotyping and negative thinking happens.
- Make important stories interesting: connect with the audience by showing the story’s relevance; humanizing the groups of people involved; and presenting good news, profiles and features about culture.
- Remember that “Everybody Knows” is not the name of a person. Information has to come from reliable sources

Recommendations for Newsrooms (Selected by KAICIID):

- Agree on our mission, professional standard standards and ethics in reporting and writing and use them consistently.
- Set and keep guidelines for images and review these guidelines periodically.
- Define loaded words and set policies for using them.
- Explain to our audiences what we are doing and why.
- Guard against the dehumanizing of victims that leads to moral disengagement and justification for more violence.
- Resist “group think” and “herd mentality” that leads to insufficient or sensational coverage. Do not underestimate our audience in our news judgement.
- Diversify newsrooms so that our staffs are a better reflection of our audience.
- Enhance the diversity of how we cover culture, even if we’re news reporters.

See more at:

http://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/Fighting_Words.pdf

ANNEX III.C.

HANDOUT 3



DEVELOPING TENTATIVE INDICATORS OF QUALITY COVERAGE OF RELIGION

Are there indicators of quality religious coverage, by which is meant coverage that accurately represents religious and cultural diversity? The tentative indicators below are based on the indicators in the UNESCO report, “Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media: Framework of Indicators to Gauge Gender Sensitivity in Media Operations and Content,” 2012.

Category A: Fostering religious diversity within media organizations

For many reasons, it would be inappropriate to directly translate gender equality indicators these into religious diversity indicators. Nonetheless, it would seem important to include some members of different faiths in newsrooms, in order to reflect the diversity of society at large. What kinds of newsroom policies make the most sense in this context, bearing press freedoms in mind?

- Is religious identity treated as a bias, like a political affiliation?
- Is there a conflict of interest if someone of a certain religion covers a story about members of that religion? What if someone of a certain ethnicity covers a story about others of that ethnicity?
- What happens when journalists from religious media apply for jobs at secular media?
- Are journalists who are open about their religious affiliation assumed to be able to exercise the same professionalism and objectivity as their secular colleagues?



- Does a journalist who admits she holds certain religious beliefs face discrimination in terms of promotions or the assignments she receives?

Category B: Portrayal of religion and religious communities in media content

UNESCO lists dozens of indicators of good gender portrayal, as well as means of verification. The list here is much shorter and, for obvious reasons, does not correspond one-to-one with their indicators. However the two main “objectives” and much of the language is the same or similar.

Objective 1: Representative presence of religious people – reflecting the composition of society, and human experiences, actions, views and concerns, in media coverage of news and current affairs *when that news touches on religious individuals, communities, beliefs, neighbourhoods or conflicts.*

1. Proportions of religious voices seen, heard and read about in news and current affairs content (excluding images) over a random selection of one week.
2. Diversity of religious voices interviewed/quoted in news and current affairs content as sources of information and/or opinion about relevant efforts
3. Diversity of religious voices appearing as 1.) Spokespersons; 2.) Experts; and 3.) Ordinary citizens/vox pop in relevant news and current affairs content
4. Diversity of religious leaders seen, heard or read about and/or interviewed/quoted as community leaders in news and current affairs content about societal or political issues (in this case, reports that are about issues that do not directly deal with religion)
5. Diversity of religious leaders interviewed/quoted as sources of information or opinion when disaggregated according to whether they represent mainstream or minority communities of belief (size of communities)
6. Diversity of religious leaders interviewed/quoted as sources of information or opinion in content differentiated according to country/region of the world.

7. Diversity of religious sources seen, heard or read about and/or interviewed/quoted as sources of information and opinion in news and current affairs content differentiated according to thematic areas such as 1.) Politics & government; 2.) War & conflict 3.) Local neighbourhood or community affairs 4.) Science & technology 5.) Other
8. Percentage of stories focusing specifically on religion or issues of special relevance/concern to religious communities (such as dialogue, religious rights, achievements of religious communities, etc.)

Objective 2: Fair portrayal of religion and religious people through the elimination of stereotypes and promotion of multi-dimensional representation/portrayal

1. Proportion of stories that mention religion that contain stereotypes of religious people or communities as violent or abusive
2. Proportion of stories that contain other stereotypes, including stereotypical images, of religious people or communities (for example, as wearing stereotypical clothing, lacking education or perspective, being “ghettoized”, being impoverished, etc. there by reinforcing the misconception that “normal” people are not religious)
3. Proportion of stories that present different religious communities as victims of conflict (as having no agency)
4. Proportion of stories that present different religious communities as perpetrators of conflict (as being the source of violent people or ideology)
5. Proportion of stories that present different religious communities as being survivors (as having active agency)
6. Percentage of stories that present multi-dimensional representation/portrayal of religious people or communities (indicating journalistic effort to counter stereotypes)

Objective 3: Coverage of religious rights and equality issues as an important and integral part of the media's role as a watchdog of society

1. Percentage of stories focusing on issues of religious rights and issues in different geographical contexts, or in conflict vs. peaceful areas
2. Percentage of stories highlighting active religious opinions and actions in the context of events and issues (conflict, government, crime, the economy, poverty, gender equality, etc.)
3. Percentage of time or space and prominence of stories (in respect to prime time, front page or feature story, etc), as compared to other stories, about religious issues and communities, or drawing out the role of religion in events and issues.

