



Report on One-Day Seminar on Conflict Reporting,
Held at Pearl Continental Hotel, Peshawar, Pakistan
On Wednesday, July 16th, 2008

1. Introductions and Background

Intermedia, held a One Day Seminar, on Conflict Reporting and Resolution, under Pak-Afghan Journalists Fellowship (PJAF) project, funded by the FCO, UK, at Pearl Continental Hotel, Peshawar on Wednesday, July 16, 2008 from 9.00am to 05:00 pm.

2. Objective of the Seminar

The objective of the Seminar was to discuss and develop understanding about the Conflict Reporting and Resolution issues in Pakistan and Afghanistan with specific regards to conflict reporting in the print and electronic media and learn about the strengths and weaknesses of coverage of the conflict issues in the region, especially in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Besides that different approaches and strategies to resolve the regional conflicts were also discussed.

3. Program of the Seminar

The program included an Inaugural and two working Sessions. The first working session was comprised of a Panel Discussion, followed by a discussion and question-answers, while the second session included Presentations by the Fellows of the Pak-Afghan Journalist Fellowship. These Fellows, who have participated in Training on Conflict Reporting at LSE, London and recently in a Study Trip to Sri Lanka, shared their learning and experiences with the participants. The copy of the Program is placed at Annex 1.

4. The Panelists

The following Panelist participated in the discussion during the Seminar:

1. Mr. Rustam Shah Mohmand, Former Pak. Ambassador to Afghanistan
2. Brigadier (Retd.) Mahmood Shah, former Secretary Security in NWFP
3. Ms. Meraj Humayun, Chief Executive, Da Lass Gul, Peshawar
4. Mr. Rahimullah Yusufzai, Editor, The News, Peshawar

5. Participants

The participants included Journalists from print and electronic media – TV channels and radio, faculty members and students of mass communication and members of civil society, including NGOs and lawyers. Besides these participants, Intermedia team and 6 Fellows also participated in the Seminar. In total, 85 participants attended the Seminar, including 55 journalists and 30 representing civil society. List of the participants is placed at Annex 2.

6. Summary of the Proceedings of the Seminar

6.1. Inaugural Session

The inaugural session was opened with the recitation from the Holy Quran. Mr. Mohammad Zahid, a representative of an Italian international organization – ISCOS-CISL, recited a few verses from the Holy Quran. Following that Mr. Bashir A. Tahir,

Program Coordinator, Intermedia, welcomed the guests and introduced the panelists and gave a brief organizational overview of the Intermedia and discussed about its completed and ongoing projects and activities, like Election Reporting, Health Reporting, Media Clinics and Conflict Reporting. Then he highlighted the objective of the Seminar, invited the Panelists and requested Mr. Rahimullah Yusufzai, for starting the discussion.

6.2. First Working Session

Mr. Rahimullah Yusufzai, briefed about the Panel discussion method and requested Mr. Rustam Shah, for presenting his talk on the conflict reporting and resolution.

Mr. Shah discussed the concept of conflict and narrated various factors of the conflicts in the Pak-Afghan region. He also gave the historical background of the regional conflicts, starting from the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan and responses of the US-Pak and the local militant forces and rise of various conflicts during that period. He also referred to the rise of Taliban and US-led attack of NATO forces at Afghanistan and analyzed its aftermath, which resulted in a very complex situation in the region and created a number of conflicts, especially in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan. He discussed some resolution mechanisms for the conflict situation in Tribal Areas and suggested a combination approach, including reforms for the socio-economic development of the tribal area, institution building and promotion of the rule of law, negotiations with the tribes in conflict, and partial and limited use of force if required. Closing his comments, he addressed the media people and suggested that they should properly understand the background, factors, nature and outcomes of the conflict situation and for producing factual stories for the print and electronic media, they should use the primary information sources during their investigation, instead of relying on the secondary sources.

The second speaker was Brigadier (Retd.) Mahmood Shah, former Secretary Security in NWFP. He said that conflict understanding is like 'seeing an elephant by a group of blind people', who may not have a comprehensive view/picture of the real elephant and base their perception on the 'partial view' of the elephant, which they have by touching any part of the elephant.

He analyzed the conflict situation in the regional perspective and discussed the interests of various regional and international 'parties of the conflict' including Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, USA & NATO, former Soviet Union (Present Russia and Central Asia), China, and other Muslim countries. Besides that he analyzed geo-strategic, socio-political, religious and economic factors of the conflict. He emphasized that poverty and underdevelopment in the Tribal Areas and many parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan, were the main causes of the conflict and should be addresses on the priority basis to resolve the conflicts. Talking about the role of media he emphasized that it should play a positive role trough reporting facts and 'avoiding partial & selective reporting and biases' of the involved parties in the conflict. Media power should be used for promoting the proper understanding of the conflicts and not for 'creating confusion' about the conflicts.

The third Panelist of the Seminar was Ms. Meraj Humayun, Chief Executive, Da Lass Gul, Peshawar, who focused on the significance of role of NGOs and other CSOs in the conflict resolution. She said that we should define the concept of 'Civil Society' in a broad and comprehensive manner. The NGOs are not the 'only representative' of the civil society. There are many other groups and organizations, like lawyers, academia, media, trade unions, parliamentarians, political parties and a number of other social activist groups. She emphasized on the effective role of the media in conflict resolution and asked the journalists to enhance that role through promoting 'fact-based conflict reporting'. She said, 'since a number of conflicts are result of

injustice', so civil society is fighting against injustice to resolve conflicts. She proposed that a Qoumi Jirga – composed of various stakeholders and representative of civil society- must be launched to address the conflict issues and for peace building.

Mr. Rahimullah Yusufzai, Editor, The News, Peshawar, concluding the panel discussion, emphasized on the need of the training of the media persons working in the electronic and print media for the conflict reporting. He pointed out that most of journalists have become 'war and conflict reporters without any proper training' and they are working in print and electronic media. He suggested that besides training journalists should be provided with all appropriate facilities, more conducive reporting environment, security and protection, life insurance, etc. talking about the role of media and addressing to the participating journalists, he said that issues of national interest and national security must be taken into consideration in proper context and reported in the light of these interests. He said conflict reporting is a more sensitive form of reporting and should be done carefully and on the basis of all the relevant facts.

Concluding his comments, he also suggested that the large media houses of Pakistan, like Jang Group, Nawa -i- Waqt Group and Express Group and Dawn Group, should take initiatives for the training and capacity building of the working journalists of their respective organizations and should establish training institutions to promote the skills of the media persons.

6.3. Second Session

In the afternoon session, five presentations were given by PAJF program Fellows, including Ms. Sheher Bano, The News, Karachi; Ms. Humaira Sharif, APP, Islamabad; Mr. Haq Nawaz, The Nation, Islamabad; Mr. Rashid Chohan, Balochistan Times, Quetta and Mr. Tariq Chaudhary, Daily Jang, Islamabad. These presentations were based on Learning and Experiences on Conflict Reporting, based on Training at LSE, London and Study Trip to Sri Lanka. They highlighted that the training and study trip helped them to enhance their existing skills and to learn new skills for conflict reporting.

6.4. Concluding Session

In his concluding remarks, Chief Executive, Intermedia, Mr. Muhammad Najeeb, thanked the panelists and participants and briefly discussed the current and perspective programs of Intermedia and said that Intermedia is playing a significant role in the promotion and development of Media sector through capacity building of the journalists and by launching a number of other activities.