



DIVERSITY IN ACTION PROJECT

**Race and
The Media Conference**

October 2007



In Partnership with NCCRI



INCORE – DIVERSITY IN ACTION PROJECT

INCORE (International Conflict Research), is an action-oriented peace and conflict research institute, based within the University of Ulster. INCORE received funding from CRC to undertake a 16-month 'Diversity in Action' project. The purpose of the project, which has a particular focus on the North West area, is to help build the capacity of Northern Ireland's minority ethnic sector. The project aims to:

- assist groups in developing the skills required to deal with bias and harassment through appropriate training
- promote ongoing collaboration between majority and minority communities, policymakers and community practitioners
- provide opportunities for focused interaction between majority and minority communities
- produce models of good diversity practice
- develop a forum to bring local minority ethnic groups together

NCCRI

The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) was established in 1998 as an independent expert body focusing on racism and interculturalism. The NCCRI is a partnership body which brings together government and non-government organisations to:

- Develop an inclusive and strategic approach to combat racism by focusing on its prevention and promoting an intercultural society
- Contribute to policy and legislative developments and seek to encourage dialogue and progress in all areas relating to racism and interculturalism
- Encourage integrated actions towards acknowledging, celebrating and accommodating cultural diversity
- Establish and maintain links with organisations or individuals involved in addressing racism and promoting interculturalism at national, European and international level
- Provide a national framework for responding to and consulting with key European and international bodies on issues related to racism and interculturalism.

RACE AND THE MEDIA CONFERENCE

City Hotel, Derry/Londonderry

CONFERENCE REPORT

3rd October 2007

The Race & Media conference was organised by INCORE's Diversity in Action project (funded by the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation within Measure 2:1, Reconciliation for Sustainable Peace, via the European Directorate of the Community Relations Council), in partnership with the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI). The theme of the conference was the representation of minority ethnic groups and individuals in the media.

Northern Ireland (NI) as in other parts of the UK, has been experiencing increased immigration of people from Eastern Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere. Most native born people have welcomed the new arrivals, however others have responded with negativity and bias. For many people in NI the media is their main source of information with regard to minority ethnic groups. The focus of the conference was therefore to discuss the role of the media in their portrayal of minority ethnic groups in the context of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The aim of the conference was to identify recommendations and action points to encourage more positive portrayals and more responsible reporting.

The conference began with a key-note speech followed by a series of panel discussions. It concluded with round-table discussions which were facilitated by a representative from the media or representative from a minority ethnic community group. Over 80 conference participants attended including representatives from the media, academia, minority ethnic community groups, minority ethnic individuals, government, and politicians.



WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Prof Gillian Robinson, INCORE Director welcomed all the participants to the conference. She introduced Alderman Drew Thompson, Mayor of Derry City Council.

Alderman Drew Thompson was elected to Derry City Council following the Local Government Elections in 2005. He served as Deputy Mayor in 2006/7 and was elected Mayor at the Council's Annual Meeting on 4th June, 2007 for a one year term. As Mayor, he is an ex officio member of the Council's Standing Committees and chairs the Civic Regeneration Forum, the City's Visitor and Convention Bureau and is a member of the Honourable Irish Society Advisory Committee. He has been actively involved in community work for many years and, up until his election as Mayor, was employed as Manager of Waterside Area Partnership. He is also Chairperson of the Caw/Nelson Drive Action Group.

Alderman Thompson welcomed the array of international and local media, human rights and equality experts to the city. He made reference to the Derry City Council area which, on the last count, has in the region of 48 different nationalities known to be resident here. He pointed out that exploring how the media can responsibly report on race and cultural diversity in the context of a changing society, and in consideration of the freedoms of opinion and expression, is a pertinent topic for examination. He also noted that addressing this topic is especially challenging given that Northern Ireland's two majority communities continue to read different newspapers along sectarian lines. The Mayor expressed his hope that the outcomes of the conference would provide constructive support for how everyone, and in particular the media, can use their voice to work towards a shared, inclusive society for everyone.

Prof Gillian Robinson introduced Steve Wessler, as the Executive Director of the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence (CPHV), located in Portland, Maine. CPHV develops and implements programmes in schools, colleges and communities to prevent bias, prejudice, harassment and violence and engages in advocacy to prevent bias motivated violence. Steve has conducted scores of workshops, lectures and keynote addresses on preventing hate violence for educators, students, police officers, correctional staff, health care professionals and community members in the United States, Canada, Northern Ireland and the Middle East. Steve originally trained as an attorney. He subsequently developed and directed the civil rights enforcement effort at the Maine Department of the Attorney General from 1992 to 1999.



Key-note Speech – Mr Steve Wessler, Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence

Steve began his talk by putting forward the key question ‘why is race and the media important?’ Steve pointed out that this topic is vitally important for the following reasons:

- Racism is deeply embedded and intensely destructive in every one of our communities and every one of our countries. Since September 11th, July 7th and the train bombings in Madrid, racism has increased in the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK) and Europe in a number of different ways.
- Racism has existed in the US and other places for centuries and has now become intertwined with 3 other phenomenon.
 - (i) There has been a dramatic increase in anti-immigrant bias which is intertwined with racial bias, as many migrants are people of colour.
 - (ii) Racial bias has become intertwined with religious bias, particularly in relation to bias directed at the Muslim community as so many Muslims (especially those who have immigrated to the US or Europe) are people of colour.
 - (iii) Racism, anti-Muslim bias and anti-immigrant bias have become intertwined with a fear of terrorism.

These types of bias are like over-lapping circles and some groups find themselves right in the middle – they are subject to racial, religious, anti-immigrant bias and anti-terrorist bias.

Steve pointed out that there is another reason why racial bias has increased and it is connected to the immigration issue. In the work carried out at CPHV there are very few truisms and many shades of grey. The one truism that Steve sees through his work, is that whenever CPHV works in communities experiencing demographic change based on immigration and even more so when it changes the racial composition of the community, there will be tension and conflict. The question is what do we do about it? Racism is a huge issue and how the media reports the facts and how they editorialise their opinions either through radio or newspapers, and how they display the opinions of others, affects the level of racism in the community. The media can reduce racial bias and tension. Steve has been involved with the media in doing just that. The media all too often, without intention, inflame racial tension and prejudice. We need to examine some of the major areas where the media exacerbates racial tension and propose positive steps to make changes.

Steve is a civil rights and human rights advocate and he works with the press on a regular basis. He pointed out that it is also important to think about what the topic of race and the media is not about. It is not about freedom of expression or freedom of the press. Steve highlighted the well known example of a Danish newspaper having recently published cartoons which were extraordinarily insensitive and critical of Islam. Following this incident, there were numerous debates and discussions about the tension between freedom of the press and protection of communities. Steve remarked that he did not think that ‘tension’ is in fact the issue; the press has freedom of expression, and it is not going away. The media in the UK and US have the right to publish racially disturbing and even biased comments. It does not have the right to publish factually inaccurate information and we should challenge the right of the media to act in ways we think is reckless. So the issue is not one of media rights. The issue is rather how the media chooses to exercise its rights. It is therefore also about the media’s responsibilities and use of discretion.

Freedom of press should not confer the right to act irresponsibly. Trying to confront the press to say they don’t have the right to do something is the surest way to make sure that the press will do that something. The press wants to exercise their right to say what they want to say. We need to work with the press about what we think they should do, as opposed to what we think they can or cannot do.

The general public tend to believe what the media publish is accurate. The consequences of inaccuracies can be quite significant. For example, CPHV worked in a small city in New England which historically was 99% white and

approximately 70% French Canadian immigrants. In 2001 Somali refugees started to immigrate to this city – a group vulnerable to all those overlapping circles of bias discussed earlier. In 2002, the Mayor of the city issued a public letter, based on inaccurate facts, telling the Somali residents not to move to the city as they were draining the economy. This resulted in 2 organised hate groups deciding to come to the city and to support the expulsion of Somalis. About a year ago a man driving past a mosque threw a frozen pig's head through an open door during evening prayer. This was an incredibly disrespectful act. At that point, CPHV decided to conduct a study on local bias directed towards the Somali residents – and found an extraordinary high level of bias. Every single Somali woman and girl that CPHV interviewed was found to routinely experience public confrontation and violence on the street, as well as people yelling racial slurs to them on a daily basis.

At a school CPHV was working in, a group of white boys came over to a table where a group of Somali students were sitting and one of the boys dropped the remains of an Easter ham that he had brought in from home on to the table. This incident was recorded in the local paper. There is a website in the US called 'Associated Content' - which allows people to write parodies of associated press and other stories. Someone decided to write a parody of this particular incident misquoting Steve's response to it. Fox National TV News picked up the parody and reported it as news. Suddenly the Easter ham became a ham sandwich. The claim was made that the school and CPHV had created a new crime which was eating a ham sandwich close to a Muslim. This was a national news broadcast which reported that CPHV were working with the school to create an 'anti-ham response plan'. Steve was misquoted as saying 'Placing a ham sandwich in front of a Muslim person is an extraordinarily hurtful thing. They probably felt like they were back in Mogadishu starving and being shot at'. News members in Fox talked to each other on air saying this had to be a joke and had the facts been checked. Fox maintained that they checked their facts – but they hadn't. This incident fuelled a dramatic increase in anti-Somalian and anti-Muslim bias in the community. There was subsequent significant increase in the number of abusive emails sent by people in the community and nationally to the local newspaper, some of which included threats of violence. This was now a community in a serious racial crisis. The national news played a very irresponsible role in this – they did not check their facts nor did they apologise publicly. The media must work to a high standard to ensure their facts are right. By and large reporters do a good job but are not conscious at times of the words they use, for example, 'War Lords' is often used when referring to participants in the Somali Civil War – this is a highly charged term. The words we choose can end up tapping into deep stereotypes.

Another issue which Steve discussed is the need to consider whose lives we value? The New York Times publishes the name of every service man and woman who dies in Iraq. Global newspapers publish 2 or 3 news stories on each death and funeral. There have been over 4000 deaths of American service men and women in Iraq according to a recent British Lancet article. But there are probably close to a million Iraqi's who have been killed during the war. In the US we don't hear their names. Steve questioned what the impact of this is in terms of confirming stereo-types - that we give faces to people from certain backgrounds and other people are faceless?

Steve went on to refer to opinions reported in newspapers, in particular opinions expressed through online editions where people can post email responses that are viewed on websites. He used the example of the ham incident he referred to earlier in the discussion. After this incident 44 pages of email entries were made and 90% of these were extraordinarily degrading – referring to Somali's as 'stealing American jobs'; or Somali's who 'do not use toilets'. Steve pointed out that this online facility has become a source of confirmation of racial bias. Every time there is a racial incident in the States and CPHV examines the online edition, the online community is constantly repeating messages that are degrading and humiliating and furthering racist and anti-immigrant stereotypes. The problem with this is that it escalates - if people start reading the online editions comments made by others that would never have been printed as letters (the standards with the online editions and the printed edition are very different) – people may think these comments and messages are acceptable, and if this is acceptable does it then become acceptable to throw a pigs head in the Mosque? Then maybe it becomes acceptable to assault or kill someone?

In terms of actions to address these problems, Steve suggested:

- Develop relationships with reporters – they will trust you and rely on you for stories, and will then listen when you are concerned about something they have printed.
- Meet with the editors when there is a problem.
- Create a Diversity Advisory Committee – to include various ethnic communities who can provide honest advice on what they like and don't like in relation to the media.
- Get the newspapers to promote the positive stories – focus on the positive work that NGOs are doing.
- Encourage the hiring of reporters and other staff from diverse communities.
- Provide training – to try to understand our own stereotypes.
- Newspapers should not permit online comments on stories to do with race – these are nearly always negative and very little screening takes place.

The media and all of us have freedom of expression. Those outside of the media must constantly challenge and work with the press. This work can become tiring and depressing, and can almost seem futile, but this work can lead to change so we need to keep on advocating and speaking out. Steve concluded that we must respect the freedom of speech and expression that the media has, but make sure they respect our similar right to vigorously advocate for change.



Panel 1: Theme: Portrayals and Participation

Chair: Philip Watt, NCCRI

Speakers: Mike Jempson, MediaWise Trust
Aidan White, International Federation of Journalists
Benedicta Attah, NCCRI

Mike Jempson is a journalist, author and trainer, with years of experience in print, broadcasting and public relations. He has been Director of The MediaWise Trust since 1996. MediaWise is a registered charity set up in 1993 by 'victims of media abuse' which helps people who face problems with the media. The core work of

MediaWise has been helping people to compose and present complaints about inaccurate, intrusive or unfair media coverage. Mike is also a Senior Lecturer at the University of the West of England, and in 2006 was appointed Visiting Professor in Media Ethics at Lincoln University.

In looking at the issue of 'portrayal and participation' Mike considered two groups who get a rough deal from the media - Refugees and Asylum-seekers, and Gypsies and Travellers. Mike put forward the question why have the human rights of these two groups, perhaps more than with any other, been trampled over - too often with the complicity of media professionals? Mike offered a number of linked explanations: first of all they are the 'strangers in our midst'. They are evident – we can see and hear that they are 'different'; but few of us know them as individuals or much about them as social entities. They represent a 'problem' because they do not fit the criteria expected of those who we recognise as part of our society. And they are statistically insignificant – in that they do not pose a threat to politicians because they are disparate, relatively thinly spread and they do not or cannot vote. In short they 'do not matter'. Acknowledging their rights is seen by a significant number of those who do vote as merely 'pandering to their needs' at the expense of the wider community. Their agenda is not seen as politically significant, except insofar as they impinge upon the interests of those who do not know, like or understand them. The real agenda setters are those who oppose their presence – they are the ones who know how to press the buttons of both the media and the politicians. Add to this the fact that, as a general rule, asylum-seekers and gypsies (itself a racist term) do not read newspapers or engage with the media in the same way that the settled community does. The mainstream print and broadcast media – driven by ratings, circulation and profit - do not belong to them.

As individuals, Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Gypsies and Travellers are unfamiliar with and unfamiliar to the mass media and to individual journalists. They haven't even got a door in which to stick their foot and make a difference. And their lack of representation is most significant where it matters most – in the newsroom. Mike believes all this undermines our claim to be a liberal democracy.

Mike presented some headlines as examples to demonstrate how thoughtless and inaccurate reporting can have (possibly unforeseen) consequences which make matters worse, rather than, as most journalists would prefer, contributing to positive solutions:

UK NATIONAL NEWSPAPER FRONT PAGES

Monday 20 Oct 1997

Daily Express:	Gipsy scam grows: Thousands on the way seeking benefits cash
The Independent:	Gypsies invade Dover, hoping for a handout
The Times:	Dover overwhelmed by Gypsy asylum-seekers
Daily Mail:	THE DOVER DELUGE: Pleas for action as port is flooded by gipsy asylum seekers

The content of these headlines led to members of the British National Party taking to the streets of Dover and elsewhere, police raids on asylum hostels, attacks on asylum seekers, more negative stories about Roma immigrants, and eventually to the imposition of visa restrictions on all people travelling from Slovakia to the UK. All of which made things worse for Roma in Slovakia – they got the blame at both ends.

MediaWise have monitored the media coverage on refugees, asylum seekers, Gypsy and Travellers issues. There has been a steady flow of sensational and often inaccurate stories. Mike pointed out that inaccurate coverage breaches the human rights of asylum-seekers, refugees and Travellers, poisons public discourse, encourages xenophobia, racism and inappropriate political responses.

Mike informed participants of two initiatives which were set up - the Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Media (RAM) Project and Information Centre on Asylum and Refugees (ICAR).

These initiatives sought to:

- Link up all those people willing to take up cudgels on behalf of refugees and asylum-seekers – individuals, church groups and others – in different parts of the country, and provided them with advice and training so that they felt more confident about challenging inaccurate or unfair coverage.
- Organise a series of events designed to bring journalists into direct contact with refugees and asylum-seekers – from discreet meetings with editors to more public events, all of which have resulted in more positive stories appearing, especially in the local press.
- Produce (with the UNHCR, the NUJ and the IFJ) a leaflet containing guidelines and contacts to help journalists to get things right. It was distributed to newsrooms throughout the UK and is currently being updated.
- Take up issues with the media regulators – eventually persuading the Press Complaints Commission to issue warnings and guidelines to newspaper editors about the use of accurate language.

Mike recommended that we should make sure that:

- The voices of Gypsies and Travellers are heard, as a matter of human rights;
- Journalists know how to contact legitimate representatives of Travelling families;
- Travellers and their support groups have clear media strategies and policies, describing why they are dealing with the media, what they hope to achieve, how they are going to achieve it and who is going to handle the media;
- Journalists are fed facts and other information that will improve their coverage – and that includes the next generation of journalists – so we need to communicate with Trainers in Journalism too;
- Sympathetic journalists should be identified and supported;
- Gypsies and Travellers are made aware of how the media regulators operate, and are prepared to challenge inaccurate and unfair coverage.

Mike concluded by pointing out that we lack the resources to take such initiatives forward – no-one seems keen to fund an organisation that is prepared to take the media on – but in the age of mobile phones, wi-fi and laptops, Gypsies, Travellers and their supporters are now much better equipped to demand that the media reverse their hostility and, at last, give them a fair crack of the whip.

A full version of this particular presentation is available from INCORE on request.

Aidan White joined the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) as General Secretary from The Guardian in 1987. Today he campaigns for the rights of journalists and has written extensively on the social and professional conditions of journalism. Under Aidan's leadership the IFJ has grown into the largest organisation of journalists in the world with a range of projects and solidarity programmes that cover the globe. The IFJ represents more than 500,000 journalists in 117 countries.

Aidan began by pointing out that the media cannot suppress the concern that exists within local communities. Aidan urged that we can't and should not automatically label all concerns as racism. There is a need to understand the complexity and each particular context. If we label all concerns as racist and intolerant we can bottle negative opinion up and prohibit and inhibit. The impact of censorship will not suppress the yearning for change. Censorship can give a false impression of stability.

Aidan pointed out that the circumstances today are changing - the media industry is in crisis – there is panic within the industry to try and continue to sell as many newspapers as possible and the media recognize that sensationalism sells papers. Aidan also referred to the difficulty of trying to continue to be part of the media market without sacrificing quality and standards – this adds to the layer of problems we are experiencing. Aidan quoted the words of Rupert Murdoch 'readers will choose quality' and made the following recommendations:

- We need to engage in useful dialogue with the media and community.
- More ethnic minority faces needed in the Newsrooms.
- Ethical journalism – we need to promote this more. Journalists are currently under intense pressure, badly paid and in unsafe jobs.
- Confidence-building measures are required.
- Build confident ethical journalists – expose bad journalists and promote ethical writing.
- Politicians, community groups and the media – to come together to formulate and implement an action plan.

Benedicta Attoh is the Development and Awareness Officer, National Consultative Committee on Racism & Interculturalism (NCCRI) responsible for raising awareness of cultural diversity and networking with NGOs and other local driver organizations working on the ground on anti-racism, discrimination and intercultural issues. She is a Director of several organizations including the Africa Centre, the Refugee Information Service, the Louth African Women's Support Group and the Integration of African Children (IACI) in Ireland, a multicultural youth club and Founder/Chairperson of Women from Minorities Network in Ireland.

Benedicta began her presentation by focusing on the portrayal of minority ethnic communities in the media. She made reference to the advertisements often used by NGOs and aid organisations which portray Africans as poor, hungry and sick. As a result of these images, the public response is often one of surprise or misunderstanding, as to why Black people can look 'nice' or are 'well off'.

Benedicta described the term 'non-nationals' as the newest condescending term for minorities. Benedicta pointed out that there is no need to mention a person's race at all in an article, only if is specifically relevant. With regard to participation of minority ethnic community members in the media, Benedicta highlighted that the main TV station in Ireland, RTE, has no minority ethnic reporters or presenters. In addition, immigrants who wish to start up their own newspapers have problems securing advertising from Irish businesses.

Benedicta pointed out the need to enforce NUJ guidelines on an all-Ireland basis to increase the minority representation in the media, and the need for journalists to undertake cultural diversity training. Benedicta concluded by making reference to the headline in The Sun as illustrated during Mike Jempson's presentation – 'Asylum Seekers Eat Donkeys'. She noted that in her experience, readers do often assume such stories are true because they have read them in the paper. There is a need for the media to realise the impact that negative headlines can have.



Panel 2: Theme: Responsible Reporting**Chair:** Philip Watt, *NCCRI*

Speakers: **John Horgan** – *Press Ombudsman, Press Council for Ireland*
Bob Collins – Chief Commissioner, Equality Commission
Jilly Beattie – *The Mirror*
Elly Omondi Odhiambo – *Giving a Voice to New Voices, University of Ulster*

John Horgan is the Irish Press Ombudsman, appointed by the Press Council of Ireland in September 2007. He has had a varied career in journalism (notably with *The Irish Times*), in politics (as an Independent, and later a Labour Party member of the Irish Dail and Seanad and of the European Parliament) and in academia (in Dublin City University, where taught from 1983 and was Professor of Journalism until his retirement in 2006). He is currently also Emeritus Professor of Journalism at DCU and a Life Member of the National Union of Journalists.

John began by discussing responsible journalism. John felt that this term has ambiguous overtones. He referred to the wave of decolonization which swept through Africa in the 1960's, particularly in the wake of Harold Macmillan's famous 'winds of change' speech at the beginning of that decade. This was an era in which the colonialists, in dignified or sometimes headlong retreat from empire, could often be seen searching frantically for the people they described as 'responsible Africans'. These 'responsible Africans' were by inference sharply distinguished from the motley assortment of revolutionaries and soreheads unable to disguise their glee at the departure of their erstwhile overlords. They were almost a race apart: neat, and clean, and well advised, and, above all, biddable. They could be trusted to protect colonial interests even after independence, insofar as this was possible, and especially insofar as these related to the commanding heights of their countries' often faltering economies. There are not many of them left now, and this is a good thing. John pointed out that the phenomenon was so pervasive and so corrosive, that even today it is difficult to combine the words 'responsible' and 'journalism' without considerable hesitation.

John discussed the media and whether or not to identify the race or skin colour of the people who were the subject of news stories. John pointed out that some argue it is important to identify people by race because it was true, because it helped to create a fuller, more accurate picture in the reader's mind's eye, or because readers 'wanted to know'. On the other hand, the argument against identifying people by race maintained that it was unjustified because it played to or reinforced stereotypes, or because it pandered to readers' baser instincts.

There has also been a response to these challenges by and on behalf of journalists. The NUJ Code is clear on this issue. It notes that a journalist can only mention a person's race if this information is 'strictly relevant' and he/she must not 'originate or process material' that encourages 'discrimination, ridicule, prejudice or hatred'. John referred to the new Code of Practice of the Press Council of Ireland, which states simply:

"Principle 8 – Incitement to Hatred - "Newspapers and periodicals shall not publish material intended or likely to cause grave offence or stir up hatred against an individual or group on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, colour, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, illness or age."

Perhaps by accepting this code there is an indication that journalists, might see themselves as bound by ethical rather than strictly legal obligations, and that the Code might, therefore, be more effective than the law.

John pointed out that judgement on whether or not reference to an individual's race or religion is 'relevant', will now, if necessary, come under review by the Ombudsman and, in certain circumstances, the Press Council itself. This is an important development, which should not be under-estimated.

John referred to earlier presentations and references made to the tabloids and pointed out it is important to recognise that of all our media the tabloids have a direct relationship with their audiences, and when they get it right, it can be incredibly powerful.

John concluded by referring to the Bloggers sphere – the bloggers sphere has its value. It exists in part as a corrective for bad journalism. John finished by saying that traditional media will continue to be the benchmark in our society because it endorses values of truth, accuracy and timelessness. He challenged the notion that we are all journalists. None of us are professionals in the field of journalism unless we ensure adherence to quality and traditional values.

Bob Collins is the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Equality Commission. He had previously been Director-General of RTÉ until his retirement from the post in October 2003. He joined RTÉ in 1975 as Secretary to the Authority, was appointed Deputy Controller of Programmes (Television) in 1980 and served as Director of Television Programmes for RTÉ's two national channels from 1986 to 1993. He was appointed Director of Corporate Affairs in 1993 which post he held until his appointment as Assistant Director-General in March 1995. He was appointed Director-General in April 1997.

Bob began by referring to the term non-national, the use of which he believes is unforgivable. He pointed out the fact that racism exists, and in NI – because of 'the Troubles' – we lived in cosy isolation and we thought we were able to cope with new people. Yet we only have to look at how the Traveller community has been treated. We didn't have to wait for tabloid journalism. Journalism is not the cause, it is a reflection of racism and reinforces it.

Bob made reference to NI and the prospect of a shared future. He pointed out that people can live closely but far apart, like people sharing a railway carriage – intimacy that excludes affection. People outside the world we live in as the majority can become invisible.

Bob referred to the point made by previous speakers that Journalism is in crisis. He believes that professionalism in journalism is threatened by a thirst for 24/7 news, and that professionalism needs to be preserved. Facts used in journalism need to be sacred. Accuracy is important but not enough – it is not truth. Statements can be selective at times to suit a particular portrayal. Bob stressed the importance of the correct use of images. Images are chosen because they are easy but they can be chosen at random or deliberately – images are not neutral or silent – they speak volumes.

Bob pointed out the positive initiatives in Journalism e.g. the Ethical Journalism Initiative which promotes quality media for diversity and pluralism, and the Association of Community TV (ACT)

Bob recommended the need for a three-way relationship between the media, public policy and the Government. They reinforce and influence each other and it is important for these three groups to engage.

Bob stressed the need for responsible editorial leadership. The media industry has a responsibility to hire trained and professional journalists. Journalists must provide contexts to stories like the Sports Journalists – there is never a 'kick kicked without reams of context'.

Bob recommended engagement with the media. The Equality Commission have a role to play, this is fact. The Equality Commission recognises the need to use their powers more frequently and visibly. The practices of the past are no longer a guide to the future.

Jilly Beattie is Features Editor for Mirror Group Ireland with responsibility for features and in-depth investigations in the Daily Mirror editions for Eire and Ulster. Jilly has a wide range of experience in journalism having worked for many weeklies, regionals and national newspapers in England. She is a regular contributor on radio and was recently a panelist on UTV's L8&Live Friday night show. She has recently spearheaded the joint newspaper initiative on suicide prevention in Northern Ireland which received nation-wide coverage.

Jilly began by pointing out that stereo-types are wrong. Stereo-types of ethnic minorities are wrong. Stereo-types of majorities are wrong. Stereo-types of journalists are wrong. Jilly described NI society as living in ignorant bliss

– a lack of knowledge of new people. We didn't know and we weren't interested. We didn't have race issues, just the battle between Billy and Brendan. We were safe from reality. Denial was our best friend. Change and embrace is not what we were familiar with.

Jilly described her grandparents and the difference in their behaviour towards members of the Travelling community. Her Grand-mother gave the Traveller children food and collected them to ensure they were schooled; whilst her Grand-father protected his belongings and would chase them away. Jilly pointed out her Grand-father would be termed a racist today. Jilly felt that people who feel threatened act without reason or logic, and they have to be challenged publicly.

Jilly described personal experiences from the early 1990's of working for a Fleet Street paper and being told not to write about the 'darkies'. Jilly pointed out that this racism still exists today in the guise of jokes.

Jilly pointed out how wrong racists are, and how it is often the case in press coverage that the white person can be more valued – she compared the case of Maddie McCann who went missing at the same time as a girl called Margaret, from a mixed race background, was snatched. In this case the white person undoubtedly received more press coverage.

Jilly suggested that we can and must change this. Readers need to challenge the media. At the same time, readers must engage with journalists and, in turn, not stereotype them.

Elly Omondi Odhiambo – Giving a Voice to New Voices, University of Ulster

Elly Omondi Odhiambo is Research Associate in Migration at the Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages, University of Ulster. Elly has worked in community development mainly in the field of promoting corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Kenya where he co-edited Corporate Concern. As a freelance journalist Elly has written topical and cultural commentaries for local newspapers in Northern Ireland and in East Africa. Elly has a particular interest in race relations, migration and corporate social responsibility. He also chairs the African & Caribbean Association of Foyle.

Elly referred to a report that he had written entitled 'Out of Africa' which analysed Race and Politics in NI. The report did not please people but was accepted by a newspaper for publication which was a positive development. Elly questioned the perception that Protestant newspapers are more anti-immigrant than Catholic newspapers. Elly felt this was not true.

Elly pointed out the media's reluctance to print certain stories, for example, the issue of a racist attack in Rutland Street in Belfast. Elly pointed out that the newspapers are failing. They are not reporting race issues and certain stories. They are not custodians of morals – they should be but they are more concerned with selling their papers. We should not leave out the stories, but deal with them. The media being concerned with sales is not an excuse. It is better to deal with race issues than keep them under the table.

Elly pointed out how pictures within newspapers can actually take up more space and this leaves less space for critical analysis e.g. newspapers have featured pictures of racist graffiti without context. Elly discussed how headlines and the wrong use of language can lead to biased reporting. For example, the headline 'Polish Drink Driver' was printed in a newspaper. If we look at the enlarged font size and the position of this headline, it can be seen as biased reporting as it is effectively pigeon-holing a group of people. Media is the prime source of information for the white majority. If we confuse them with stereotypes then the media is doing an injustice. The sensationalism of the media can influence public reaction.



ROUND-TABLE ACTION PLANNING

Participants took part in round-table discussions to answer the following questions.

What steps need to be taken to promote positive portrayals and responsible reporting of minority communities?

1. By Government officials

- Promote acceptance of difference through in-house training
 - There was a broad consensus amongst participants that whilst there are proactive anti-racists within the statutory agencies, there is also a worrying level of institutional racism within the statutory agencies.
 - It was noted that the issue of how the PSNI brief the press is critical as it is important that any racially-constructed stereotypes are not exacerbated.
 - The power of Government officials and political representatives, the way in which they engage the media, and their own attitudes and opinions will have a significant effect on how minority communities are portrayed in the media eg comments like 'Travellers torch site like Iraq' with no explanation of the cultural reasons as to why caravans are burnt when a traveller dies.
- Work towards and support dialogue/mediation to deal with our fear of the other.
- Work towards integrated schools and integrated education.
- Promote prejudice awareness programmes.
- Work towards a statutory code of conduct by an Independent Agency with powers of enforcement. Other codes referred to included that of The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and NUJ which eg provide guidance on use of terminology such as 'refugee' and 'influx'.
- Implement accredited training programmes around race and diversity for trainee journalists, journalists in employment and civic leaders.
- Work towards building community capacity and providing sustainable funding to support inclusion of minority ethnic groups and to enable groups to engage more with the media.
- More political leadership from government on matters concerning race and diversity.

- Provide support for media education initiatives to help people understand/use media opportunities eg web portals, schools etc.
- Providing more open access to official sources of information.
- Support alternative forms of media.
- Ask and also listen to the community as to what their wants and needs are, and inform communities of their rights.
- Support some sort of ethnic/diversity panel which will help minority communities to promote themselves.
- Work towards banning the term 'non-national'.
- Work towards being role models in society.

2. By the media

- Welcome more responses from the public by printing the email address of the reporter in local newspapers so that people can contact the reporter directly.
- Positive feedback is very important and more support should be shown for progressive journalists eg recognition and prizes to highlight quality journalism.
- The media need to take into consideration how headlines often negate positive coverage.
- Work towards trying to get closer to the community and building relationships with local people thus creating more access to reliable information.
- When dealing with communities and printing their stories, there is a need to explain what will be written and reported about them.
- Appoint a specific person to be responsible for reporting on ethnic minority issues in order to ensure more stories and features are included from minority ethnic communities.
- Not allowing the opinions of reporters or journalists to be included in features or factual articles.
- The need to address the power balance in the newsroom and the struggle between journalists who are proactively anti-racist and those who have showed some racial prejudice.
- The need for more leadership to challenge colleagues if required and to accommodate change.
- Proactive anti-racist journalists should develop a support network under eg the auspices of the NUJ, as it seems there is no network like this in existence.
- Limit sensationalism.
- Feature more stories about minority ethnic community contributions to society and community life.
- Involvement and endorsement of Independent Agency.
- Recruit more media colleagues from minority communities.
- Organise and support specific media for minority voices.
- More investment from the media industry into good editorial work eg through training and investigative journalism.

3. By minority communities

- Challenge prejudicial reporting by the media – eg in the reporting of suicide, relatives of victims have repeatedly challenged the media in their use of language whilst reporting suicides and this has resulted in a change in reporting practices.
- Provision of reliable sources of information in order to supply media with relevant, reliable and interesting information.
- Support dialogue initiatives with journalists' unions and media organizations.
- Encourage young people to use the media and to join discussion groups and to consider journalism as a career.
- Work in partnership with other community sectors to encourage a stronger voice.

- Build relationships with professional journalists to encourage inclusion and the opportunity to tell your story.
- Issue more press releases rather than letting reporters take the lead.
- Monitor newspapers and the media.
- Self-promote more – eg produce leaflets/handouts with background information for media.
- Approach the media with lots of positive stories.
- Lobby the NUJ as well as journalists.
- Shouting ‘racism’ may not always be the best way to combat prejudice.

4. By general public/other

- Support media and journalists striving to improve quality of media reporting.
- Encourage better and more integrated education, and getting involved in social networking with minority communities.
- Encourage solidarity – we need to challenge discrimination whenever it comes.
- Be a responsible reader – ie don’t just read the headline and assume it is a fact.
- Contact Editors of newspapers or relevant media representatives to inform them if there are inaccuracies in their reporting.
- More acknowledgement that Ireland is changing dramatically both in terms of population and journalism.
- We need to promote inter-culturalism and end discrimination – zero tolerance.
- We need to have the confidence to challenge the media, as people have power too.
- The importance of schools and parents as educators in teaching children what is right and wrong.

How do you think these steps should be taken forward?

- Through advocacy.
- Through lobbying.
- Through empowerment of minority communities via capacity building to enable effective engagement with the media.
- Feedback from this conference should be disseminated to all participants.
- Joined up thinking/doing is required - we all have a duty and responsibility to affect change in our society.
- By having more bi-lingual columns in newspapers.
- More asking and listening to the community.
- Recruit more journalists from a minority ethnic background.
- Establish an action plan including all the above partners to set targets and realistic objectives and to establish indicators to monitor the progress being made.
- Establishing a statutory code of conduct through an Independent Agency, with powers of enforcement.
- Establishing a forum which brings together minority ethnic representatives, media representatives, policy-makers and politicians.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the high level of attendance and the focused discussions which took place at the Race and Media conference that the role of the media in the portrayal of minority communities is a very important one.

The conference speakers were from a wide range of backgrounds, all of whom brought a wealth of experience and expertise in race and media issues, to the discussions. The conference therefore provided a great opportunity for exchange of knowledge and good practice. However this event was not without limitations. Despite much effort to contact local media representatives there was a lack of conference participants from a media background. It proved difficult to convince media representatives to spare the time and staff to attend.

The conference report will be disseminated to all who attended the conference and will be made available on the INCORE website. This will prove to be a resource for anyone carrying out research within minority communities and the discussions and recommendations from the conference will help towards advancing media guidelines on reporting on minority ethnic issues and racism in NI.

PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS

'Whole event very professionally organised and presented. High quality presentations representing both sides of the dilemmas'

'Very helpful for own role in promotion of good relations on a local level'

'Many ideas for future strategies that may well reach below the surface for longer term benefit/impact'

'Overall the day was very useful and learned many new things'

'I learned a lot and I am very thankful for the opportunity – wonderful'

'Excellent speakers and thought provoking content'

'Excellent and informative conference with a wide variety of speakers.'

'..excellent experience as we learnt a lot about (our) own views and has given me an insight into how to move forward multi-culturally as a Journalist'.

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**Project part financed
by the European Union**

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