

***reporting for change:  
a handbook for local  
journalists in crisis areas***

institute for war & peace reporting

THE INSTITUTE FOR WAR & PEACE REPORTING supports local media in areas of crisis and conflict. Programmes include reporting, training and institutional capacity-building projects. IWPR is an international network of non-profit organisations.

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*Dedicated to the thousands of local journalists around the world  
working in challenging and often dangerous situations to report  
freely from the frontlines of crisis and change*

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# Introduction



*The journalist's struggle to deliver the news has always had to battle official efforts at control, restriction and censorship*

JOURNALISM HAS NEVER HAD A GOLDEN AGE, when the process of obtaining and transmitting the news was simple. And today is no exception.

From the first “war correspondent” who covered the Crimea, through the Vietnam generation to today’s intractable conflicts in the Middle East, the journalist’s struggle to deliver the news has always had to battle official efforts at control, restriction and censorship.

At the same time, journalists have increasingly become targets for attack. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 346 journalists were killed in the line of duty over the past decade. (Other journalist groups give even much higher figures.)

In conflict areas such as Iraq, where the death toll has spiralled, journalists are directly exposed to the line of fire; under repressive regimes they suffer attack and imprisonment; even in stable, democratic societies, they have been murdered for doing their job and reporting on crime and corruption.

And it is not just the increased physical threat that is taking its toll. In a globalised economy, when corporate multinationals are monopolising the media and, critics would argue, are “dumbing down” serious journalism, reporting budgets and foreign bureaux are being cut. International news is falling victim to insular and parochial perspectives. The focus is shifting away from serious issues of policy to personality journalism and headline grabbing trivia.

But amid these disturbing trends, there is some encouraging news. Clear opportunities are emerging for local journalists.

As some mainstream media organisations abandon serious international news, the opportunity for diverse local voices to make a difference at home and internationally is increasing. The shrinking world of instant communications is enabling local media to impact the international agenda as never before.

At the same time, a growing movement of international media development organisations is working, with support from private funding and western governmental development agencies, to strengthen local media to help create the conditions for peace, development and democracy.

The Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR) is one such organisation, now working in more than two dozen countries in Southeast Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East and Africa. Its task is to support training, reporting and the building of capacity in media institutions for local journalists.

Our experience has underscored the enormous obstacles faced by local reporters. Often they experience direct repression, a chronic lack of resources and a dearth of professional support.

But we have also seen the capacity of local media, when given the right assistance, to demonstrate extraordinary courage and achieve the highest international standards of accuracy, objectivity and impartiality. The many international journalism

## Introduction

*Developing democracy means an essential, and expanding, role for local journalists the world over*

awards won by IWPR recognise the accomplishments of local journalists working throughout our network.

The wider picture is also positive. According to the UN Development Programme, in the past two decades, “81 countries took significant steps towards democracy, and today 140 of the world’s nearly 200 countries hold multi-party elections - more than ever before.” Developing democracy means an essential, and expanding, role for local journalists the world over. This presents them with great potential and a huge responsibility.

New communications technologies are also helping to level the playing field. It is now cheaper, easier and quicker to obtain and disseminate information than ever before. The once very separate and diverse areas of the media are converging, so that text, audio and video are all available online, all the time (depending, of course, on computer access and bandwidth). These developments are immensely empowering for journalists and populations at large.

But new opportunities also highlight the need for increased training and responsible reporting. And that is exactly what this handbook is about - it is a practical, hands-on manual designed to help local journalists in societies undergoing major crisis and change.

It outlines the core internationally recognised standards of journalism and provides essential guidance on many of the basic techniques of reporting.

The handbook reviews reporting on general, political, economic and humanitarian issues. It provides guidance on safety and security and sensitive reporting in conflict areas, as well as libel issues. Developed as part of our practical training programmes, it also reviews particular requirements for reporting for IWPR. Each chapter provides exercises and discussion sections and further references. The handbook is designed to be used in coordination with an international trainer or can be worked through on its own.

The text is available in several languages (see [www.iwpr.net](http://www.iwpr.net) for further details). Pagination between language editions is coordinated to assist multi-lingual training workshops.

Journalism is about rights but also about responsibilities. In many societies, for the first time in a generation or more, local journalists have the chance to report freely on what is happening in their own country.

How they establish professional standards and quality will not only set the scene for succeeding generations: it will put their leaders under the spotlight, assist their communities to reconcile their differences and lay the groundwork for stable and democratic development. This handbook seeks to support them in that essential task.

**Anthony Borden**  
Executive Director

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