



Advisory Report on Media Relations  
focusing to raise voice on forced disappearances

to



Humanitisch Overleg Mensenrechten/Humanist Committee on Human Rights

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## **Overview of the report**

This Media Advisory Report is prepared for the Humanist Committee on Human Rights (HOM) focusing on its program Linking Solidarity, which deals with the issues of forced disappearances. The central question revolves around *How to maintain media relations in order to help raise public attention on forced disappearances?*

The report explores a number of ways how to attract the attention of media and provides alternatives, essential to make a breakthrough in getting the message across to the public through connivance of media. It gives, essentially a set of advice to HOM for its effort to raise the awareness among the public on the issue of forced disappearances. It also points out the position of the organisation to reflect, and assesses how to reinforce the organisational capacity. Therefore, the report is laid out in six stages that give HOM abundance of choice to apply it either as a complete whole, or in parts, wherever deemed appropriate in its media campaign.

Public awareness on issue of forced disappearances is comparatively low than other forms of human rights violations in many countries. The idea of using mass media as a tool to rise has been slow to take off the ground. HOM wants to bring up this issue into the public agenda so that the newly reorganised United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights into UN Human Rights Council will be urged to accept the draft International Convention on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. In addition, HOM want to inform and link between the survived members of the forced disappearances and their organisations to promote international solidarity and end the occurrences of this human cataclysm collectively. The progress towards engaging media and achievements of its purpose will be the fascinating outcome of this report.

This report firstly explores the purpose for an external advice on media relations. It then analyses the situation of the organisation that reflects the predicaments that are related to its media relation's functions and its position at the operational level. This helps identify the shortcomings, and approach the problem. HOM does not have media relations department or a communication unit. It doesn't have a written communication policy. This report points out some of the benefits of having these organisational machineries. A bulk of literatures on media, media relations and forced disappearances are reviewed and relevant information incorporated in an effort to acquire suitable approach that help increase media coverage on forced disappearances. Then the question on the parties involved that play some role, both for the problems and solutions are distinguished and action points stipulated. It goes further to a stage in which HOM could look into ways for best practices for media relations and the lessons it can learn from its present and past efforts including what organisational adjustment it may require for efficient functioning of its media relations. Finally, this report puts forward some recommendations that are technically essential for operating media relations efficiently. In this way, this report provides HOM and its program Linking Solidarity with essential media relations advice supported by technical measures on how to manage media relations in order to give voice on forced disappearances. Given that this advice is used diligently and of course with adaptations according to the organisational directives and the fast developing media, information and communication technology, it will make a difference in addressing the issue of forced disappearances and help raise public voice for peace through media.

*(This advisory report follows other research reports on: 1, International aspects of communication facilitated to the Global Human Rights Defence, 2, Corporate Image and Identity maintenance for European Center for Conflict Prevention, and; 3, Communication Advice to ECCP).*

## **1. STAGE ONE: The Assignment**

This stage identifies the issues, problems and challenges in regard to media relations of Humanist Committee on Human Rights in general and its subsidiary named Linking Solidarity in particular, in their approach to raise public attention on the issue of forced disappearances. It will also explain the essential of this media advisory report and distinguishes the parties involved to furnish it.

Humanist Committee on Human Rights- Humanistisch Overleg Mensenrechten (HOM) is a human rights Non Governmental Organisation based in Utrecht, The Netherlands. It was founded in 1981 by three humanist organizations - Hivos, Humanitas and the Humanist Union. Its objective is to promote human rights from a humanist perspective; identities based on the humanist social movement and improve human rights for all people all over the world. At the moment, HOM is giving priority to the issue of forced disappearances. In order to deal with this issue it has established a program named 'Linking Solidarity' from the recommendations made by Amnesty International's worldwide campaign on enforced disappearances in 1992. Its aim is to eradicate the phenomenon of enforced disappearances. To do this, Linking Solidarity supports advocacy that raises public attention on forced disappearances and supports international solidarity between organisations of family members of involuntarily disappeared persons. Full information of the organisation is available in the website [www.hom.nl](http://www.hom.nl) and [www.linkingsolidarity.org](http://www.linkingsolidarity.org)

HOM and its program Linking Solidarity want to raise public attention on forced disappearances. They both want to involve various media to do this, as an effective and fastest way to inform maximum number of people in a shortest span of time. But the difficulty they found is how to attract the attention of media and sell their stories. In other words, how to maintain media relations particularly to raise public attention on forced disappearances has been a perplexing question for HOM and a biggest challenge for Linking Solidarity. In order to overcome this problem, HOM was in opinion to receive advice from external expertise. That is why the director of HOM invited me; a student for Master in International Communication Management of Haagse Hogeschool; to write a media advisory report<sup>1</sup>. I took the offer with confidence and did it as part of my major assignment for its final semester because I have done specialization on media relations as part of the major assignment for the previous semester (overview of it is attached in appendix 9). Besides, I have the knowledge and some years of experience in journalism that I could apply in this work. The director nominated the program manager for Linking Solidarity Mr. Dave Hardy as the contact person who invited me to his office on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2006 for writing this advisory report.

After discussing briefly with the director on this proposal, a thorough briefing began with the contact person. He has observed that public awareness on forced disappearances is comparatively low than other forms of human rights violations in many countries. The idea of using mass media as tool for tackling with forced disappearance in particular and peace and human rights in general has apparently been, and yet, slow to get off the ground!; he said. The media- television, radio and newspapers are channels through which most conflicts around the world are reported, analysed and explained<sup>2</sup>. But on the contrary, owing to the clandestine manner in which enforced disappearances are occurring, the information on this violations are rarely brought down to the public by media or any other sources. The contact person expressed the need to overcome this situation through media relations. He came up with a central question for this report, i.e.:

**How to maintain media relations in order to help raise public attention on forced disappearances?**

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<sup>1</sup> Email correspondence of the director of HOM on 24/4/06

<sup>2</sup> van Tongeren, Brenk, Hellema and Verhoeven. (2005). *People Building Peace II*. Lynne Reinner. P.175

After a short discussion, we both agreed with this central question and steered the briefing towards identifying predicaments of the organisation in its effort to raise public attention on forced disappearances at par with other forms of human rights violations.

At one moment the people's right not to disappear in silence or the issue of forced disappearances was high in public discussion but it is gradually descending to the point that there is danger of disappearing from history as quickly as it emerged<sup>3</sup>. Forced disappearances have been occurring in many countries continuously<sup>4</sup>. HOM feels necessary to continuously raise awareness on this issue and developments related to it. It has recognised the media as the fastest and efficient means for raising public attention. But according to the contact person, neither HOM nor the Linking Solidarity unit have explicit idea how to attract the attention of various media and make use of them to raise public attention. This is a general reason to furnish a media relations advice.

HOM and its partner organisations made concerted efforts to devise an internationally binding legal principle on forced disappearances and urge United Nations High Commission on Human Rights to approve it for promulgation worldwide. It succeeded to engage United Nations Inter-Sessional Open-Ended Working Group to draft International Convention on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on 22 September 2005. It is described as a historical achievement<sup>5</sup>. Unfortunately there occurred a reorganisation of the UN Commission on Human Rights into UN Human Rights Council<sup>6</sup>. Now what follows next for HOM is the challenge to raise the issue of forced disappearances again so that the upcoming Council would approve the above instrument. To overcome this challenge is a specific reason for furnishing this media advisory report.

The next reason is to help HOM give continuity on media coverage even after UN approve the convention on forced disappearances so that the state governments may ratify it in their legal system. In case UN fails to make such convention, it is imperative for human rights NGOs such as HOM to maintain media relations and garner support of the media in order to inform the public on blatant human rights violation viz. the forced disappearances. This report aims to help HOM with some techniques and alternative ways to deal with media and sell its stories. Therefore, this report identifies various ways and produces several answers to the central question- how to maintain media relations and raise public awareness on forced disappearances.

During the briefing it was given to understand that HOM has not embedded media relations as part of communication function, although the contact person is of the opinion that media can contribute a lot to their work. The contact person told me that maintaining media relations has always been difficult. There is no communication department. Media plays an intermediary role in many instances that help NGOs achieve their goals. The goal is to urge UN to frame international convention on forced disappearances and let the state governments ratify by their national laws. This is one of the ways to end the occurrence of involuntary disappearances. The objective is to understand how to approach in order to inform and link between the survived members of the forced disappearances and their organisations to promote international solidarity. That will be the outcome when public attention is raised through the connivance of media. The assignment is accomplished within the duration of 3 months beginning from April 2006.

<sup>3</sup> [www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/\(b00da486703\)751c12565a90059a227/b440d8cfa3b14e88c12566080050401b?OpenDocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/(b00da486703)751c12565a90059a227/b440d8cfa3b14e88c12566080050401b?OpenDocument) 7/5/06

<sup>4</sup> <http://www1.jur.uva.nl/aic/Enforced%20disappearances%20as%20continuing%20violations.pdf> 7/5/06

<sup>5</sup> M. Bacalso. (2005). *The Voice*. A publication of AFAD, Vol:V. No.2

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=17811&Cr=rights&Cr1=council> 7/5/06

## STAGE TWO: The situation analysis

Stage two focuses over the critical analysis of HOM in terms of its present communication pattern, and assess its internal capacity to garner the opportunities that media offers to organizations. Why media is important for HOM is also explored here including its problems and possible solutions. An interview with the internal staff and some inquiries via telephone and Emails with other staff including the director, observation of the organisation and analysis of its communication means form the object of study and source of information. This stage is intended also to provide HOM a momentum to see within; through the lens of external observer so that it can prepare to handle media relations efficiently.

**2.1. Organisational area of interest:** HOM has very broad mission. The organizational challenges enshrined in its mission are to contribute to the implementation of human rights instruments such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>7</sup> throughout the world, promote human rights from humanist perspective and assess the impact of policy in specific human rights situations<sup>8</sup>. This broad goal makes one difficult to clearly picturesque what HOM resembles practically. Many states fail to apply the universal standard of human rights. There are stark differences between the idea of universal human rights practices and human wrongs<sup>9</sup>. Its vision is to reflect the differences in practice of various human rights norms.

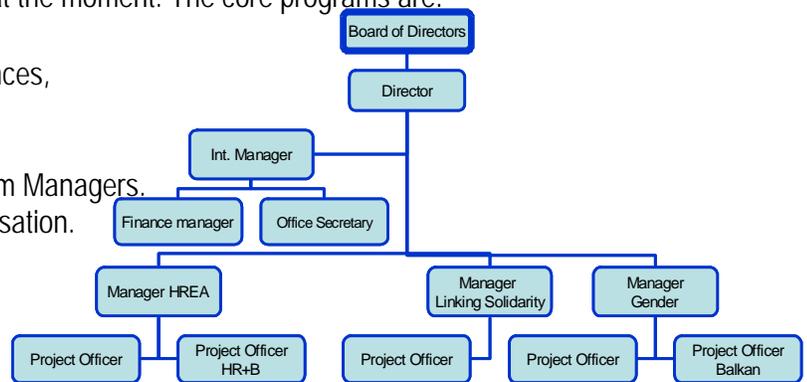
**2.2. Organisation Structure and Programs:** HOM has three core programs of action and three projects to address the issues on human rights at the moment. The core programs are:

- Human Rights Impact Assessment,
- Linking Solidarity for forced disappearances,
- Women's Rights and gender issues

Each of these programs are operated by Program Managers. They form the middle management of the organisation.

The projects are primarily focused on

- Human Rights and Business,
- Capacity Building for NGOs and
- Advocacy/policy influence



Organogram of HOM. Source: [www.hom.nl/org\\_medewerkers.php](http://www.hom.nl/org_medewerkers.php) and interview

Under every Program Managers, there are certain numbers of Project Officers responsible for different projects. They form the lower management. Above them, in the hierarchy is the Manager for Internal matters assisted by Office Manager and Finance Secretary. All of them are controlled by the Director on the top who receives advice from the Advisory Board. This forms the top management. There are 12 people working at the moment, most of them attached to their concerned projects. See organogram.

Departure of important communication messages, according to the contact person, goes out of the organisation only through the director, or under her supervision. Decision making process, to make press release for example, do not take long, unless the advisory board is to be consulted. "If for instance a press release has to be issued, than the staff of that programme will discuss it with the director and will ask advice from other staff members only if he or she deems that necessary," the contact person said. 'We

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.udhr.org/UDHR/default.htm> 7/5/06

<sup>8</sup> website of HOM: [http://www.hom.nl/english/about\\_mission.php](http://www.hom.nl/english/about_mission.php) 7/5/06

<sup>9</sup> Dunne and Wheeler. Article *Human Rights and Global Politics* available in [http://assets.cambridge.org/052164/643X/excerpt/052164643X\\_excerpt.pdf](http://assets.cambridge.org/052164/643X/excerpt/052164643X_excerpt.pdf) 7/5/06

work in bigger part on equal level as professionals', he added, indicating that there is only sporadic communication exchange between Program Managers.

This type of communication resembles wheel structure, i.e. one central person (director) exchanging information with various individuals<sup>10</sup>- the project managers, in the case of HOM. At the moment, HOM is giving more priority to the Linking Solidarity program in order to bring the issue of forced disappearance to the international attention. It has entered into a new phase of three years project (2006-2008) and focuses on the development of stronger organisations of family members, stronger and new regional federations and effective cooperation between organizations of family members around the world.

### 2.3. Some stakeholders of HOM and the nature of communication

HOM doesn't have subsidiaries. It participates in several national and international networks of human rights organisations. The exhibit hereunder shows the organisations categorised based on the nature of communication and relationship with HOM. HOM has collaborating relationship with some organisations that deal with the issue of human rights. It has financial relationship with various donators. It also maintains political or diplomatic relations with the policy makers and states. They are stakeholders too.

Stakeholders/membership Category	Nature of relationship	Nature of communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♥ Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearance –(AFAD)</li> <li>♥ Federation of Latin American Association of Families of Disappeared Detainees (FEDEFAM)</li> </ul>	Partnership	Project oriented, Sharing information Cooperative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Network of Dutch non-governmental Human Rights Organizations (Breed Mensenrechten Overleg, BMO)</li> <li>❖ EU Human Rights and Democracy Network</li> <li>❖ Euro Mediterranean Human Rights Network</li> <li>❖ Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)</li> <li>❖ Humanist Alliance Holland (Humanistische Alliantie)</li> </ul>	Collaborating, working relationship with similar objectivity	Sharing information, Supporting each others' objectivity, Consultative external communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>€ Platform for Theme-based Co-financing</li> <li>€ Organization for capacity-building in developing countries (PSO)</li> <li>€ Banks and Industries</li> <li>€ Donators</li> </ul>	Financial relations	Project cycle based communication, cooperative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>📰 Media organisations (in Holland and elsewhere)</li> </ul>	Abstract, Not regular	News and information related communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Policy makers: Officers, govt. representatives, politicians and diplomats in Holland, EU, UN and other countries</li> </ul>	Official, diplomatic	Advisory, consultative, diplomatic

Exhibit 1, Network of HOM. Source: [www.hom.nl](http://www.hom.nl)

In addition, HOM has Special Consultative Status with Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations<sup>11</sup>. This gives HOM benefit of making intervention on human rights issues and policies concerned.

<sup>10</sup> Vos & Schoemaker. (2001) *Integrated Communication*, Lemma. p. 85

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.hom.nl/english/about\\_network.php](http://www.hom.nl/english/about_network.php) 9/5/06

## 2.4. Organisational network, culture and activities extension

Working for human rights demand collective efforts of national, international and regional bodies such as NGOs, state parties and civil society in general. Therefore, for the organisation such as HOM, networking has been a trend and a necessary tool in addressing human rights issues collectively. HOM has to deal with newer organisations as the federation of its partner organisations accommodate new member organisations. Its network within and outside The Netherlands appear 'collaborative value driven' supporting each others' objectives either financially or by logical means. As a non profit making foundation, HOM depends with the financiers and co-financing organisations such as Dutch OXFAM or the ministry who are willing to support financially. As human rights NGO, it collaborates with the organisations that have similar goals and working procedures.

The role of HOM among its network of human rights organisations is rather 'consultative' because it develops, among others, human right impact assessment instruments useful for other similar organisations. It also helps other organisations build up their capacity, for example in Indonesia. Therefore, some degree of influence of each other's national cultures may occur in their working procedures. For example, Power Distance; Geert Hofstede's one of the cultural dimensions, plays significant role in decision making in organisations. Netherlands score 38 in the power distance index, while Philippines where a partner organisation of HOM is located, scored 94. Argentina scored 49 where another partner organisation is located. Thus Philippines has large power distance culture followed by Argentina and The Netherlands. Where superior maintain large power distance, subordinate tend to polarize dependence and counter dependence. On the other hand, where superior maintain smaller power distance, subordinates tend to prefer the consultative decision style<sup>12</sup>.

The medium of communication with the stakeholders located in The Netherlands is obviously Dutch language. Outside this, the medium of communication is English. All the staff members are Dutch. They are also very well conversed in English. Owing to their several years of dealing with the non Dutch counterparts and perhaps due to their frequent visit abroad, they are more or less accustomed to others' culture. This is because, almost all the staff members are specialized in their specific field of activities related to human rights and try to become pioneers in that field. In this type of professional organisational culture, Vos observed that, people identify themselves mainly with the kind of work they do and look further ahead<sup>13</sup>. This is confirmed from the internal interview in which contact person says that he is more concerned to Linking Solidarity project than other function of the organisation. How to keep up the media 'warm', he says; is a demanding challenge.

**2.5. Internal and External Communication:** HOM does not have explicitly spelt internal and external organisational communication policy. As of writing this report, there is no separate communication unit, neither an inducted communication expert. But it has very laudable communication approach and means executed by person-in-charge time to time. It publishes among others a newsletter on Linking Solidarity that can give good source of information for media outlets. It has a separate website: [www.linkingsolidarity.org](http://www.linkingsolidarity.org). Some booklets are published time to time. The recent one is *mensenrechten: doel, middel en maatstaf* (2004) and *Een andere manier van kijken* (2004). The access to its website ([www.hom.nl](http://www.hom.nl)) in Dutch and English gives a lot of information about its internal and external activities. HOM does not have Media Relations or Public Relations Unit yet.

<sup>12</sup> Hofstede, G. (2001). *Cultures Consequences*. Sage. p.86-87

<sup>13</sup> Vos and Schoemaker. (2001). *Integrated Communication*. Lemma. p.92

According to the contact person, staff of HOM doesn't have specialization to deal with media although the organisation emphasizes the importance of media coverage on various issues. No one is particularly designated to deal with media. This part of communication function is operated according to the demand of the situation, mostly by the director who is responsible to ensure that only the ideal messages depart out of the organisation. It has some contact with the media organisations but seldom succeeded to get their story covered in the Dutch media\*.

## 2.6. Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of HOM

This SWOT analysis is focussed on HOM in general with emphasis given to the central question-how can it involve media to help raise public attention on forced disappearances. Maintaining media relations is an external communication function with decisions taken internally. Vos and Schoemaker points out that, in the course of developing decisions, the management usually uses external studies into opportunities and threats in the environment and internal studies that are made into strength and weakness of the organisation<sup>14</sup>. In the light of this, five most important issues are stipulated for each category of studies. But these are time-bound and subject to change. With this analysis, HOM can determine from its current profile, a strategic profile gap, an indicator to see where the organisation is now and where it wants to be in future.

<b>STRENGTH</b>	1.HOM has clear mission and vision, its work in the field of human rights is appealing to media/people ( <i>nwm.hom.nl</i> ) 2. Staff are well trained for their function. There are volunteers to help ( <i>interview</i> ) 3. Activities are financially supported by the state and other NGOs ( <i>Een andere manier van kijken</i> ) 4.Consultative status with UN body ECOSOC ( <i>Annual report 2005</i> ) 5.The activities of HOM are current, actual, results supported by research and thus newsworthy ( <i>observation</i> )	1. Communication policy including media/public relations not embedded in organisational policy ( <i>Interview</i> ) 2. No trained staff for media, no media relations unit inducted ( <i>Interview</i> ). 3. Irregular media coverage, little known on HOM by its target groups ( <i>Interview</i> ) 4. Failed to take up some of the issues ( <i>Interview :case of Tibet's Panchen lama and Bhutan's forcible exile in</i> ) 5.Limited capacity to handle media relations( <i>Interview</i> ) 6. Limited involvement of HOM in the areas forced disappearances are taking place ( <i>Interview</i> )	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	1.Network and partnership with other organisations increasing ( <i>Annual report 2005</i> ) 2.Media is inquisitive over conflicts and offers chances for coverage.( <i>observation</i> ) 3. Anticipates UN Council approve legally binding instruments on forcible disappearances ( <i>LS newsletter+interview</i> ) 4. Occurrence of human rights violations and forced disappearances increasing worldwide ( <i>observation</i> ) 5. Void of competitors ( <i>interview</i> ).	1. Void of media coverage that might lessen its popularity, funding commitments ( <i>Observation</i> ). 2.Risk of image and identity problem due to void of media coverage and profiling ( <i>Interview</i> ) 3. Difficult to bring theory into practice due to insufficient capacity to meet the demand of their working environment ( <i>observation</i> ). 4. Small workforce with big mission- development internationally is faster in pace than HOM could cope with ( <i>observation</i> ). 5.Dependent only on donators and subsidy ( <i>interview</i> )	<b>THREATS</b>

Exhibit 2, SWOT analysis of HOM

## 2.7. The desired situation of the organisation and program Linking Solidarity in relation to media

HOM, whether or not, desires to be a second Amnesty or Human Rights Watch, to maintain good media relations is inevitable to promote the human rights cause; as is the case for other human rights

\*Few Dutch newspapers (*Metro and Spits*) covered the demonstration on forced disappearances held in The Hague on 31 August 2005. According to the contact person, the presence of ANP photographer on that event was a lucky coincidence that boosted the work of HOM to appear in the media.

<sup>14</sup> Vos & Schoemaker. (2001) *Integrated Communication*. Lemma. p. 195

organisations. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, expressed his believe also that by giving voice and visibility to all people including and especially the poor, the marginalized and members of minorities, the media can help remedy the inequalities, the corruption, the ethnic tensions and the human rights abuses that form the root causes of so many conflicts<sup>15</sup>. Media has the vital power to help human rights NGOs solve many problems that HOM desires too. Thus the desirable situation of HOM is:

- To be able to make regular media coverage possible, once in a month at the minimum
- Make HOM popular and widely known to its target groups
- Expand its boundary

The target groups of HOM, for both external and internal communication appear congruent in terms of understanding the communication message mainly because the component of communication is related to concerned projects that follow certain standard of writing style and project cycle management. This occurs mainly between the beneficiary and benefactors of the project. Communication plays important role to promote cooperation within organisation. This is also true for the interaction with groups in external environment, such as the media. If the communication policy is embedded in the organisational policy, that will serve as a guiding principle for the functional areas of the organisation. This is because the organisational policies have consequences for all functional areas of the organisation<sup>16</sup>.

Framing specific communication objectives per project connected with the issue of human rights, or general strategies to deal with media incorporating within the organisational communication policy will enable the staff prepare the out-going message more promptly and consistently. This will also help staff save time in looking for solutions or manner in which the communication procedures must follow. Therefore, it is desirable for HOM to furnish communication policy embedded in its organisational policy.

One of the objectives of Linking Solidarity is to broaden the international network of associations of relatives by seeking contact with relatives in countries and regions who have undergone the grief of enforced disappearance<sup>17</sup>. The contact person responsible for the program said that very few victims of enforced disappearance know the existence of the Linking Solidarity and its parent organisation HOM. He described the work of Linking Solidarity and its network as a 'ring of conditioned activities' because the outreach of the contact and facilities has always been within the members and organisations that have joined the network. He expressed with desperation that it needed a mechanism to expand the boundary and incorporate all the people and their associations linked with the act of forced disappearance. He illustrated the prevalent circumstance of Kashmir form where only one organisation is linked to the federation. 'People went missing in other Indian states too, but neither their family knows us nor we have their information'. He exclaimed. Therefore the desired situation of Linking Solidarity is to be able to:

- Equip with technical know how and resources required to operate media relations
- Make use of the media as an easiest and fastest method to transmit the sense of solidarity and struggle in unity against enforced disappearance
- Have clear communication/media relations guidelines
- Be able to give satisfactory response and supporting materials to the media when they contact for media coverage
- To be able to make regular media coverage possible, at least once in a month

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<sup>15</sup> ECCP. (2005). *The Power of Media*. P.7

<sup>16</sup> Vos & Schoemaker. (2001) *Integrated Communication*, Lemma. p. 31

<sup>17</sup> Linking Solidarity. Newsletter 2005. p.6

## **2.8. The findings and the definition of problem**

Based on the briefings, observations, and inquiries and above situation analysis of HOM and its program Linking Solidarity, the following two problems\* are found as impediments in their effort to raise public attention on forced disappearances:

- (i) ***Inadequacy of Media Relations practices including policy guidelines for Media Relations***
- (ii) ***Void of communication policy or a communication unit***

## **2.9. Justification**

Inadequacy of media relations practices as a management discipline within HOM can be termed as a core problem. This is because; despite the fact that HOM is aware that media coverage of its activities will help alleviating public awareness on human rights issues it has to:

- Improve media coverage that remained seldom
- To get the attraction of media successfully when HOM have newsworthy activities
- Prepare adequately in order to provide information/materials when media people ask for
- Take initiative to link solidarity with organisations other than those joined with partner organisations
- Inform all the survivors of forced disappearances who are not connected with its partner organisation, e.g. the victims of other Indian states beside Kashmir
- Not fail in providing support for the victims who are known to HOM namely, Panchen Lama of Tibet and forcible exile case of Bhutan

These shortcomings as justification to the core problem were confirmed during the briefing.

The void of communication policy embedded in the organisational policy or a communication department can be seen as a general problem of HOM.

- When there is a mandate offered by the communication policy that offer also the policy guidelines for Media Relations, staff already specialized in their respective field can also manage media relations with some pre-orientation and launch media campaign on human rights issues,.

The other justifications for this inadequacy in organisational policy given during the briefings are:

- Inadequate human/financial resources to have a communication department
- Small size of the organisation

Owing to the lack of media relations as a management discipline, there incurred a lack of proficiency to make regular media coverage possible. The proficiency in other field of knowledge or having a large number of professionals alone will not suffice to operate media relations in par excellence. Although the point of departure of the messages of the organisation, for the media, in ideal case, is regulated by the external and internal communication policy of the organisation, successful media coverage lies in the proficiency of the management system. This was the indication of the result of questionnaire enquiries to a number of other human rights NGOs outlined in clause 5.2.2.

There are a number of NGOs who do not have written communication policy but media relations is maintained well on ad hoc delegation of responsibilities to the proficient staff members time to time. Besides, the mission statement of the organisation also forms the core of organisational policy and elucidates the task area where the organisation should focus on. But it is always ideal to have

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\* *The word 'Problem' is interpreted in this report as a situation of difficulty; perplexing question; a matter for deep consideration, as its meanings goes according to Penguins Dictionary.*

communication policy so that the communication procedures remain clear to the staff and help the organisation make a breakthrough even at times of crisis.

## **2.10. Policy goal and challenges**

HOM does have its own answer pertaining to the core and general problem. During the briefing, it was given to understand that it is at the moment considering for a communication plan. A few months later when asked if the communication plan is completed, the head of internal affairs showed a thesis entitled *Externe Communicatieplan* written as a study by a student of Inholland, Suzane Houtappel as part of her orientation at HOM last year<sup>18</sup>. This report does not explicitly typify the External Communication Plan contrary to what its title suggest but only exemplify the need for such a plan. Once the team completes the organisational communication plan, it may set a ground for solution to core and general problem. Now it is obvious that the organisation want to involve media in its effort to raise public awareness on human rights issues. The technical aspects on how to involve media in its work remain as a challenge.

HOM has recognized the need to raise public awareness on forced disappearances among the influential public groups. It want them to be aware of the consequences of forced disappearances in as much they are aware of other forms of human rights violations. The influential public groups are politicians, decision makers, human rights and environmental activists, industrialists etc. Influencing them is necessary because of the circumstances where the signing and ratification of the previously prepared draft on legally binding international instrument on forced disappearances is in question. This is further aggravated by the notion whether the reorganisation of the UN Human Rights Commission into UN Human Rights Council, which is in question or in progress, would recognise the previously draft instrument or not. Therefore, in order to succeed in this venture, the policy goal at the organisational level is to attract the attention of media as a convenient and swiftest way to make the situation of enforced disappearance as an important issue. Until HOM decides to frame an organisational communication policy, it has to continue its activities with faint concept of the media relations functions.

Therefore, this advisory report is designed in such a way that the various stages and relevant clauses can be useful to apply in various ways, namely:

- ✎ in the form of a whole, viable strategy or
- ✎ separately whichever stages/clauses are relevant to the activities chosen, and
- ✎ or as general guidelines useful for the Media Relations Officer to deal with media in all circumstances
- ✎ to obtain insight in to practical application of media relations for better decision making.
- ✎ to understand pre-requisite for launching media relations as management discipline.

Therefore, the relevant works of various authors are provided in appendix, in order to make this report, versatile. The general idea to segment this report into stages has been taken from the book; *Setting up a Communication Plan* by Vos, Otte and Linders<sup>19</sup>. But I have used my own expertise to give originality and form into a media advisory report.

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<sup>18</sup> *Email correspondence of 21 June in which Mr. Jan Perdaems sent a copy of Externe Communicatieplan*

<sup>19</sup> Vos, Otte and Linders. (2003). *Setting up a Strategic Communication Plan*. Lemma. ISBN: 90593123333

### 3. STAGE THREE: Review of theories and practices on media, media relations and forced disappearances

In this stage, the relevant theories that explain procedures to deal with media and how media relations contribute to raise public awareness on human rights issues such as forced disappearances will be analysed and discussed. Also some answers for different issues identified in the situation analysis will be illustrated in this phase.

#### 3.1. Methods and approach to reviews

In order to find out how HOM may operate media relations with or without the embedded communication policy within the organisational policy, and how to pursue media to cover human rights affairs the following informal methods are employed:

- **Desk research;** with critical perusal of books, reports, professional magazines and research articles and bulletins of various organisations related to media and human rights. This includes publications of HOM. Also analysed are the search engine based websites and articles, relevant to media relations and human rights reporting. This also includes E-magazines and E-bulletins.
- **Field research** involving interviews with the manager for Linking Solidarity project of HOM and correspondence with other staff.
- **Enquiry** via telephone and Email correspondence directed to related human rights and media experts /organisations on their media related observations and experience.

In addition to above methods, I have incorporated, in many occasions, my personal observations and practical experience as a journalist.

**Justification of the selected search process:** The essence of this informal research method is that the outcome is less controlled and subjective, but provides in-depth description of the chosen subject. This method uses random observation, facts & figures are inductively interpreted, validity is assumed and the outcome therefore is descriptive as is the nature of informal method stipulated by Stacks<sup>20</sup>.

#### 3.2. Understanding the Media and Media Relations

**Media:** Media refers to specific set of institutions and products. The process of communicating through a medium is also called media communication<sup>21</sup>. Mediums are for example, radio, TV, Internet, etc. Media can be categorised broadly in to three<sup>22</sup>. These are, firstly, the mass media. This includes print and electronic, used mostly for entertainment and information disseminations. Second category is the personal media- that help to create message, and thirdly the telecom media that connects individuals to each other or with the source of information. All of these mediums including Internet are described altogether as arms of media<sup>23</sup>.

**Media Relations:** It is a term that refers to the communication pattern between an organisation and those sections of the media which are interested in its activities<sup>24</sup>. The above definition appears too broad but at the same time fails to make the key component of media relations explicit. In my opinion, the definition should also incorporate those components such as editorial (news and programs), and the channels that

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<sup>20</sup> Don W. Stacks. (2002) *Primer of Public Relations Research*, The Guildford Press. P.6

<sup>21</sup> Jay Black and Jennings Bryan. (1995). *Introduction to Media Communication*. Brown & Benchmark. P. 32

<sup>22</sup> Jay Black and Jennings Bryan. (1995). *Introduction to Media Communication*. Brown & Benchmark. P.4

<sup>23</sup> Annie Gurton (1999). *Press Here*. Prentice Hall. P.12

<sup>24</sup> Judith Ridgway (1996). *Practical Media Relations*. Gower, p-5

carries messages to the public. The management of some organisations tend to view the press or media relations unit as a buffer between the media and the organisation<sup>25</sup>

This statement clearly pinpoints the place of media relations lying within the communication unit of the organisation. A media relation is sometimes operated as a part of Public Relations or Public Affairs. This subject is now gaining popularity. Nowadays, in some organisations, it has been operated as a separate faculty or management discipline apart from Public Relations.

### 3.3. Exploring the role media can play for HOM

The current generation of information technology, that is converged with the communication technology which deals with transmission of information; and Computer technology that deals with processing of information, has become not only a better way of doing things in the companies but commodities and sources for productive and power. The electronic media- particularly the radio and television- are the most significant global media today. Television is the medium that has the most dramatic impact on people's awareness and perception of the worlds beyond their direct experience<sup>26</sup>. In the western world, the pattern has been newspapers, radio and television. In Africa and much of Asia, the first contact the ordinary men have with any means of mass communication is the radio<sup>27</sup>. These developments in the media give the organisations such as HOM more chances to garner support from its target groups and strengthen its network, some of which are mentioned in the clause 2.4.

The use of media is inevitable, particularly for the human rights organisations especially when it has to opt for advocacy, opinion forming, opinion building, and lobbying or to raise public awareness on specific issues. This is discussed further, taking 'enforced disappearances as a case in the next clause.

### 3.4. Knowing reporting system on forced disappearances

In this era of round the clock news programs, up to the minute Internet news services and rapidly changing methods of reporting the news from anywhere on earth, the media relations and communication people need to be ahead of trends in news coverage<sup>28</sup>. Similarly, any effort to resolve conflict that ignores the media as an opportunity in itself is incomplete. Media is a two edged sword. While reporting on human rights issues, both the edges of the sword must be examined to avoid any misgivings<sup>29</sup>. The discrepancies in news reporting occur, perhaps from the way people define criteria for the 'News'. There is no rigid standard for this, accept the writing style, which must describe why, where, when, what

#### Forced disappearances?

*[d]isappearances are not new in the history of human rights violations. However, their systematic and repeated nature and their use not only causing certain individuals to disappear, either briefly or permanently, but also as means of creating a general state of anguish, insecurity, and fear, is recent phenomenon. Source: Inter-American Court of Human Rights*

*Pursuant to the working definition of the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances, any act of enforced disappearances contain deprivation of liberty against the will of the person concerned, involvement of government officials, at least indirectly by acquiescence, and, refusal to acknowledge the detention and to disclose the fate and whereabouts of the person concerned. Source: E/CN.4/2002/71 supra note 70, p.30*

*According to FEDEFAM, the disappearance is defined as an international crime, a crime against humanity. See Enforced Disappearances in International Protection of Human Rights.*

**Exhibit 3:** Source: A dissertation by M.F.P. Solla (2003)

<sup>25</sup> Judith Ridgway (1996). *Practical Media Relations*. Gower. p-2.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Dickens (2004). *Global Shift*. Sage. p.89-106

<sup>27</sup> Hachen, W.A. (1974). *Mass Media in Africa*. National Press Books. p.99

<sup>28</sup> David Henderson (2005). *Media Relations: From a Journalist's Perspective*. iUniverse. P.6-18

<sup>29</sup> ECCP (2005). *The Power of the Media*. Drukpartners Amsterdam. P.21-40

and how factors of the reported story. The style must also include the brevity, clarity and accuracy<sup>30</sup>. But the most important in news selection for the media depends on the 'news criteria' of what the news is all about. According to BBC, the news is about 'controversy'<sup>31</sup>. In the light of these news criteria, and the way the enforced disappearance is defined (see box), every stories on enforced disappearances can be the story of untold conflicts that can qualify for the media coverage. By comparison, medical reporters do not just report on person's illness. They also report on what caused the illness and what may cure it<sup>32</sup>. News reporters can have the same skill when it comes to reporting on enforced disappearances or human rights violations. In such event, it is the media relations officer's influence and competence to bring the reporter in good book of the subject matter of what the organisation want to disseminate through the media. The current trend in the media and the way the forced disappearance is seen within the overall human rights issue needs special attention. The general concept is that the issue of forced disappearances is only a part of bigger human rights violations. If it is not occurred in masses, neither media nor state parties pay heed on it. For example, The Dutch government, at the moment, do not have a policy to set preconditions with its grant aid to countries where forced disappearances are reported; as a roadmap for a possible solution<sup>33</sup>. It neither has specific official position on forced disappearances<sup>34</sup>. It is rather a condition of modernity that the authors of such a policy- as with any policy pursued by any government- base their actions partly on a media strategy<sup>35</sup>. Through the collective and cooperative efforts of both the media relations person and the reporter concerned, persuaded by the former; some of the organisational activities mentioned in the clause 2.4 and the desired situation of HOM and Linking Solidarity stipulated in the clause 2.7 can be achieved to some extent. The strategies of Linking Solidarity have a challenge to make a breakthrough in changing this notion with the connivance of media.

### **3.5. Agenda setting on forced disappearances**

In this media savvy world, many researchers observed that the press may not be very successful in telling its readers what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. Citing these findings of Cohen, Jim Kuypers asserts that the press has the power to set our government's agenda, even at the highest level<sup>36</sup>. It is an independent force whose dialogue with other elements of society produces the agenda of issues considered by political elites and voters. This statement truly substantiate the fact, e.g. how Bhutan's king enforced ethnic cleansing and yet remained successful to keep the country's image as a Shangri-la, who also denied the record of forced disappearances contravening the reports of Amnesty International<sup>37</sup>. Press serves as a source of information for major decision makers. Through its winnowing of the day's major events, concerns and issues, the media inadvertently plays an agenda-setting role. Often, the longer an issue remains in news focus, the more the public perceives it as a crisis. Study shows that the policy makers will address issues only when these issues are perceived as crises by the public. Jim illuminates that it is in this manner, then, that a conversation develops among the press, its sources, and the public audience that determines what is accepted as the public agenda. Taking account of such effects of media coverage, enforced disappearances stories can be alleviated into an issue until such an issue urges the governments to make a favourable decision. This can be possible through agenda setting

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<sup>30</sup> Braden and Roth (1997) *Getting the Message Across*, Houghton. p. 27-32

<sup>31</sup> BBC website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A395363> 25/5/06

<sup>32</sup> ECCP (2005). *People Building Peace II*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. p.175-184

<sup>33</sup> Peter de Klerk, *Human Rights Ambassador, Dutch Ministry for External Affairs, in a telephone inquiry on 24-5-06*

<sup>34</sup> *Annual Report 2005 of Linking Solidarity*, p.3

<sup>35</sup> Jake Lynch (2002) *Reporting the World*, p.10

<sup>36</sup> Jim A. Kuypers (2002) *Press Bias and Politics*. Praeger Series. P. 3-18 and 197-260

<sup>37</sup> Amnesty report 1994, *Forcible Exile*. AI Index: ASA 14/04/94

because the more prominent the issue remains in the national information stream, the greater its weight in political judgement. Therefore, through consistent media coverage on the issue of forced disappearances, public awareness can be raised that will generate an agenda among the policy makers to come up with policies that can address the problem systematically. Proficiency on media manipulation will help overcome the problem of Linking Solidarity as well as HOM's general problem. Some of the components of media relations management are mentioned hereunder with procedures elaborated in the appendix, as theoretic measures to overcome the problems.

### **3.6. Understanding media relations processes**

There is no convenient term to describe people's relation to media. Different media are associated with different activities-communicating, viewing, reading, listening, writing, playing etc<sup>38</sup>. There are a number of procedures to operate the media relations so that people's relations with their choice of media remain attractive<sup>39</sup>. The best method, however, depends upon the situation. Then the processes of media relations can be geared up, to mention, a few are:

- 3.6.1. **Networking:** This is one of the main processes of media relations. Responsible person has to know the media it can reach to, and who is who in the media and advertisement agencies<sup>40</sup>. A large network with various media must be maintained and develop a working relationship with them.
- 3.6.2. **Meeting requirements:** One of the important processes for media relations is to meet the requirements of the editorial board or the journalists. Practitioners must know what editors and journalists want to print or broadcast. He must be prepared with all the accessories to help media professional's work make easy and fast. These include timely release of press articles, news release and launch press conferences. There are ground rules for dealing with media as well<sup>41</sup>, (see appendix 1). This will help media relations officer to know what a media professional expects to work together.
- 3.6.3. **Respecting deadlines:** The Media Relations Officer has to respect the deadlines of the news reporters and editors, and help them meet their deadlines. Releasing a press kit at a particular time serves to meet the deadline of journalists. A press release must constitute the element of news and must be written with clarity, brevity and accuracy<sup>42</sup>. It requires special writing techniques for the press releases<sup>43</sup>, see appendix 2. In addition, there are standard and specific techniques that the media relations practitioners have to be in good book of 'writing for the media'<sup>44</sup>, See appendix 3. When distributing information package to the media companies, the time difference for embargo for different countries must be very carefully noted.
- 3.6.4. **Establishing credibility:** The media relations must try to enhance the corporate image, identity, reputation and credibility of its company. Also, the credibility of the media must be taken in to consideration while supplying information to them. Success is to tell the part of the truth and put the 'best face on the situation and 'emphasize the positive'<sup>45</sup>. This is important because the media relations practitioners should not lose its objective to cultivate favourable beliefs and opinion among public. Media influences at the cognitive level and shapes public beliefs and opinions<sup>46</sup>, see appendix 4.

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<sup>38</sup> Sonia Livingstone. (2002). *Young People and New Media*. Sage. P.8

<sup>39</sup> Howard and Mathew. (1985). *On Deadline*. Waveland Press. P.4

<sup>40</sup> Braden and Roth. (1997). *Getting the Message Across*, Houghton, p. 231

<sup>41</sup> Jim Macnamara. (1996). *How to Handle the Media*, Prentice Hall. p.63-78

<sup>42</sup> Braden and Roth. (1997). *Getting the Message Across*, Houghton, p.2-27-45

<sup>43</sup> Judith Ridgeway (1996). *Practical Media Relations*, Gower, p.37-61

<sup>44</sup> Haberman & Dolphin. (1998). *Public Relations- The necessary art*, IS; p. 208-225

<sup>45</sup> Haberman & Dolphin. (1998). *Public Relations- The necessary art*, IS; p. 72

<sup>46</sup> Barrie Gunter. (2000). *Media Research Methods*, Sage, p.203-207

3.6.5. **Feedback and quality control:** Every company needs feed back and hints to control quality of its products and services. That will give the company a stepping stone to make improvements where necessary. A media relation is a 'watch dog' for the company and has to give feed back and communication advice to the management, for example, to deal with crisis of the company.

In times of corporate crisis, it will be the responsibility of the media relations to act strategically. In such situation the presence of media adds another degree of complexity because exposing 'liars' or pointing at the 'villains' is the holy grail of journalism, looking for who owes the blame<sup>47</sup>. Media relations professional must know the methods, how to handle media in times of crisis see appendix 5.

3.6.6. **Adjusting with the changes in media.** In the light of the growing media and digital technology, that is offering varieties of complex options for people to exchange information, the working procedures of media relations need continuous adjustment with the changes in media. The 21<sup>st</sup> century promises radical shift in media relation operations. This has begun already with the digital information and communication superhighway. The key feature for us is the way the communication infrastructure will alter the process to engage ourselves in information processing. Trend studies in media shows that the target group of media relations professional are moving into a generation of, not audiences alone, but as the addressable users of multimedia and the information superhighway<sup>48</sup>. People will be increasingly drawn to view the computers and screens and thus they have chances to loose the essence of being personal. This is being further aggravated due to the growing use of voice and pictures in the Internet, substituting the traditional use of telephone services. As a result there will be more computer mediated communication taking place. Therefore, how to package the message and address them, and on what time and circumstances, will be a challenging scope for the media relations professionals to focus on. Attention is also required to identify the degree of efficiency and profitability of such communication flow.

The next to gauge is the confidentiality of the message and the receivers' privacy concern. This is connected with the question; Is Internet reliable to preserve the confidentiality of message uploaded? Of course, not every target groups can be treated as the sovereign consumer of the information age; some will obviously remain as the audiences of the media. They may, however be moving from alternatives to alternatives such as cognitively filling themselves with information provided by various media, some of which will be interactive and some alterable by themselves. The media relations professionals have to; in addition, find a midway approach to their target audiences while furnishing information and communication.

A media relations professional have to build up favourable working relationship with the media professionals. Media professionals may also seek to maintain the same in view of the media trends changing from traditional rigid journalism to cooperative phenomenon. But the media relations professional has to be aware that harmonious relationship with media does not mean that everything will always go smoothly. Sometimes there will be conflicting opinions. In that event, the power of diplomacy of the media relations will be tested in full. The journalist will try to probe critically. Then your job is to present the facts in the most favourable light of your organisation, well in time, because the journalist is already competing with others on promptness of coverage. Obviously, due to digital revolution and changing dynamics of the way media organisations are dealing with press, a media relation professional have to fight the war of media professionals to let him win with your message and adjust the working methods with the changes in media.

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<sup>47</sup> Schenkler and Heerling (2004). *Guide to Media Relations*, Pearson, p.93-117

<sup>48</sup> Black and Bryant. (1995). *Introduction to Media Communication*. Brown & Benchmark. P. 42

#### 4. STAGE FOUR: Parties involved and target group for recommendation

The question on how to attract the attention of media in order to let them cover the issue of forced disappearances so that the awareness of the general public can be raised depends on proficiency to manage media relations. In this stage, the stock of the parties involved and what role they play in connection to the core and general problem illustrated in clause 2.8 is taken and analysed.

##### 4.1. Analysis of the parties involved

**Program managers:** The different levels of management of HOM have been described in the clause 2.2 and their roles, internal and external. In view of the task of media relation that has to divulge the decision of the organisation, parties connected to core and general problem are identified based on the decision making procedures followed by HOM. According to the contact person, the program managers make decision to release a press but he/she has to consult with the director for approval. Managers of other units are also consulted when the director or himself feels necessary. Therefore the program managers who from the middle level management of HOM are concerned with the core problem. Their ability to convince the media for the coverage lies in their expertise. Among them, the program manager for Linking Solidarity is directly connected to the core problem the issue of raising public awareness on forced disappearances.

**Action point:** Among all the Program Managers of HOM, the one responsible for Linking Solidarity, need to know the technical know how of media relations management. This includes, among others, the media relations procedures briefly described in stage 3. In addition, he needs to be ahead of the trends in media. In order to identify media trends, he has to be constantly aware of the development in the media including the development in communication technology and information system. This can be done by keeping eyes and ears very close to all forms of media. Some of the trends in media relations current at the time of writing this report (see appendix 6) show new challenges and working methods for the media relation officers and demands some adjustment of the organisation<sup>49</sup>. He has to take proactive role to make breakthrough in all the demanding changes and challenges pertaining to media relations.

**Director and the Head of Internal Affairs:** There are instances that the program manager will not be able to furnish information that the media might require, such as the information concerning policy, diplomatic protocol, or internal affairs of the organisation. In such event the management at the executive level, have the power and proficiency to present such information to the media. Their voice contains the elements of authenticity and the importance of the disclosing information. In this regard, the top management of HOM are indirectly or indirectly connected to the general problem. Beside this, the top management have the power to bring organisational changes because they form the policy makers for the organisation. Therefore they are summoned for recommendation concerning organisational changes and policy making, whether such changes pertains to core or general problem.

**Action point:** Top managers need to be in good book of the benefit and implication of media and the organisation's relation with it. They also need to prepare to appear in the media in special occasions. International journalists do prefer the head of the organisation portray their organisational information. The inefficiency in handling or undesirable divulgence of the information that is sensitive to the organisation policy might repose adverse effect to the organisation such as damage in organisational identity or diplomatic relations. Such dangers are prevented by formulating communication policy that specifies the role and procedures for communication. Because they have the authority to decide on formulating a suitable communication policy and guidelines for media relations, they need to take a proactive role in steering the organisation and

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<sup>49</sup> Gautam, N. (2006). *A research manuscript on media relations with reference to ECCP. P.5-9*

make necessary changes, both at the organisational and policy level. At the organisational level, they need to make consideration to adjust media relations as a management discipline. At the policy level, they are to recognise the need for a communication policy including policy guidelines for media relations. They also need to emphasize bottom-up and top-down flow of information and facilitate the work of the program managers in managing media relations. This help media relations give swift response to the call of the media. Nowadays, mainly for TV, swiftness in responding is more demanding and important than accuracy<sup>50</sup>.

**Lower management staff:** The people in the middle and lower management (project officers and secretaries) have to facilitate the upper and middle management staff in order that the story of the organisation will be interesting for the journalists. Therefore, the employees on the lower level of management are indirectly connected to the core problem.

**Action point:** The round the clock news services saga of the media has no time to wait for any delay in information gathering. Much of the mode of communication such as mobile connects the sender and receiver of the message directly. But other modes such as fax and surface phone and sometimes emails, memos and letters come via some other person. Often the lower management staff is the first person to give first response to the call of the outsider. Their role to connect with the right person on demand immediately is very important. Every levels of management are in many occasions facilitators of communication process both for the staff working in higher or lower level of management and to the outsides. They have to pay immediate attention in the event media professionals' contacts for the coverage.

**The intermediaries- Journalists and NGOs:** The essential obligation of a journalist engaged in gathering, editing and commenting news are, firstly, to respect truth whatever be the consequences to himself, because of the right of the public to know the truth<sup>51</sup>. Journalists and media professionals form the important intermediary agents to raise public awareness on forced disappearances. Press serves as a source of information for major decision makers. Various media plays agenda setting role while collecting and disseminating news over the events of the day. Often, the longer an issue remains in news focus, the more the public perceives it as a crisis. Study shows that the policy makers will address issues only when these issues are perceived as crises by the public. Community radio, local newspapers, internet at the local level and other press at the national level form the important information sources on human rights abuses. On the higher level, the political parties, unions and ministries are also the source of information on this issue on policy making level. All of them are basically a bunch of intermediaries and influencers who influence the work of HOM and the policy makers in general. These intermediaries are immediate and important facilitator to the solution pertaining to question on how to raise public awareness on all forms of human rights violations. As such, they are direct or indirect parties concerning how to raise public awareness on any human rights issues.

HOM's sporadic contact with media professionals forms the part of the core problem however the press are independent to make their own choice on what to cover. The external target groups for communication described briefly in clause 2.3 has much bearing on the role they can play for each other. The communication with media in particular, appear 'abstract and irregular', because their role in raising public attention on forced disappearances are rarely put in to use. Therefore, HOM need to build up working relationship with the media professionals and facilitate their work to make media coverage possible.

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<sup>50</sup> David Henderson (2005). *Media Relations from a Journalist's Perspective*. iUniverse. P.17

<sup>51</sup> RSF. (2001). *The practical guide for journalist: The Munich Charter*, 1971.

**Action point:** HOM and its network of organisations briefly noted in clause 2.3 are some of the sources for information on forced disappearances. In most cases journalists are taken away by major events taking place anywhere. In the process they forget to cover issues that have been affecting fewer numbers of people or issues that might not sound worthy for the coverage. They need to look in-depth of the issues affecting any number of people. Human rights NGOs need to develop relationship with journalists who are interested on human rights issues. A Media relation is all about personal relationship with media professionals and journalists<sup>52</sup>. Develop it.

## **4.2. Communication goal**

The communication goal of HOM in general is to:

- i. Alleviate the awareness and attention of the general public on the issue of forced disappearances in equally important terms as other forms of human rights.
- ii. Inform UN on the severity of forced disappearances so that it may adopt an internationally binding legal principle on forced disappearances.
- iii. Inform state governments over the severity of forced disappearances and the legal principle so that it may ratify the principle in their legal system.
- iv. Inform the victims of enforced disappearances and bring them to the main stream for redress

## **4.3. Target groups for recommendation**

### **4.3.1. Primary group:**

The head of Program Manager for Linking Solidarity and his subordinates are the immediate target group to address the core problem. This report aims to help them; however they have to summon the management for recommendations that need their decision. In general, all the other Program Managers namely Human Rights Impact Assessment, Women's Rights Watch, Human Rights and Business and Advocacy etc. described in the clause 2.2 are concerned with human rights issues. They form indirect primary group. The other staff at the middle management may also apply this report in their work, whenever raising public awareness or winning their support through the connivance of media relations is essential.

### **4.3.2. Secondary group**

With regard to the general problem, i.e. inadequacy of communication policy including policy guidelines for media relations, top management officials are identified as the secondary target group. This group includes the director and the head of internal affairs. This group has the authority to make organisational changes, frame policy for the organisation and involve external specialists when desired.

## **4.4. Communication objectives**

In view of what HOM want Linking Solidarity achieve through media relations, emanated the following communication objectives:

- Make regular media coverage on forced disappearances, at least once in a month in the international and local/national press, either in print media or electronic.
- Make public, mainly the policy makers, pressure groups, politicians and human rights supporters aware of the act of forced disappearances
- Make HOM and Linking Solidarity widely known to the public, particularly the victims and survivors

The ultimate goal of communication is to end the occurrence of forced disappearances worldwide.

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<sup>52</sup> Annie Gurton. (2001). *Press Here*. Prentice Hall. P.143-46

## 5. STAGE FIVE: Approaching the public

This stage identifies some of the media coverage approach and instruments that are useful to attract the attention of media and approach different stakeholders.

### 5.1. Methods and approach to this stage

One of the ways to generate key ideas how to approach public on forced disappearances ordeal is by learning lessons from the past activities and looking at the best practices including that of other organisations. There are rational and emotional, direct and indirect ways to approach public groups<sup>53</sup>.

### 5.2. Rational approach: Looking for key ideas and best practices

#### 5.2.1. Maintain good corporate image of the organisation

The media have an intermediary function in communication with the public and are very important to the corporate image<sup>54</sup>. Corporate image means the image of the organisation as perceived by various public<sup>55</sup>. The experience of European Centre for Conflict Prevention (ECCP) is incorporated here, that reflected in a research of having a gap between its corporate image and identity. This gap stood as one of the setback and resulted to void of media coverage<sup>56</sup>. Among a 100 journalists put forward with questions structured into identifying their primary impression, perception, familiarity, position and preferences according to corporate image measurement

model<sup>57</sup>, (see exhibit 4). 41% of the respondent show that they needed contact from the organisation. 58% of the respondents want to cover the story if the organisation has stories involving people in the field. The same percentage of the respondents stipulated that they want that the organisation provide a contact person for them and distribute them the news items

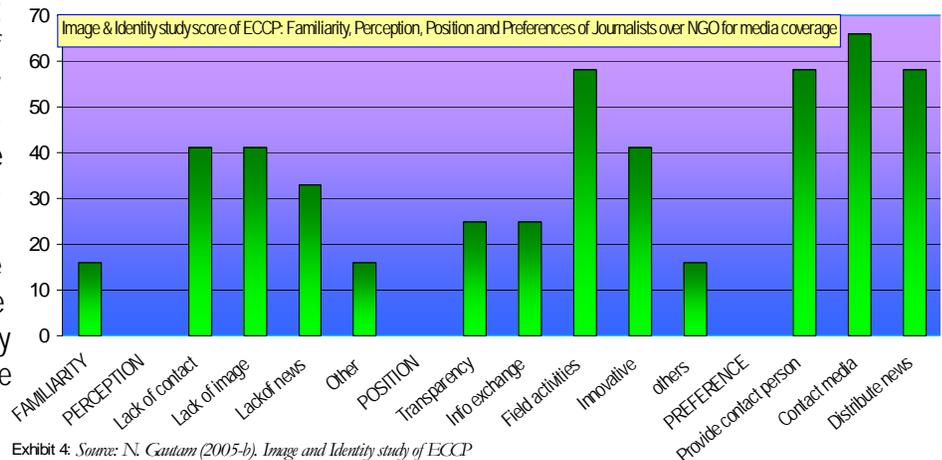


Exhibit 4. Source: N. Gautam (2005-b). Image and Identity study of ECCP

regularly. Above all, 66% of the respondents preferred the organisation to contact them in the first place. Image and identity of the organisation plays significant role to attract media attention and the public trust.

How to maintain good corporate image of the organisation is not only determined by the communication activities in the first place but rather by all kinds of acts performed by the organisation. Improving the organisational activities alone is not enough; public groups should perceive it too<sup>58</sup>. Care should be taken on how to imprint corporate image of the organisation among the public groups. This can be done by study and adjustment in external and internal communication, increase familiarity, improves position, preferences and perception of the organisation among its stakeholders.

❖ **Improve corporate image → expose field activities → contact media → distribute news items**

<sup>53</sup> Vos, Otte and Linders. (2003). *Setting up a strategic communication plan*. Lemme. p-76.

<sup>54</sup> Vos, M. (2001) *Integrated Communication: Concern, Internal and Marketing Communication*. Lemma. p.71

<sup>55</sup> Vos, M. (2001) *Integrated Communication: Concern, Internal and Marketing Communication*. Lemma. p.48

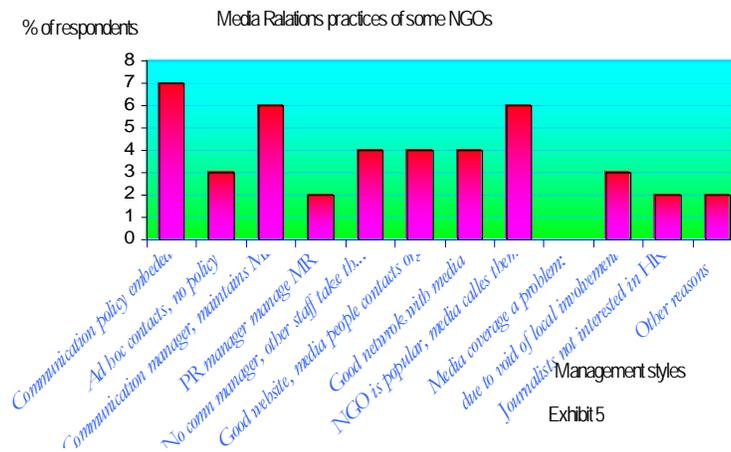
<sup>56</sup> Gautam N. (2005). *A research manuscript on Image & Identity of ECCP*

<sup>57</sup> Vos, M. (2001) *Integrated Communication Concern, Internal and Marketing Communication*. Lemma. p.49-63

<sup>58</sup> Vos, M. (2001) *Integrated Communication: Concern, Internal and Marketing Communication*. Lemma. P.60

### 5.2.2. Incorporate communication policy within organisational policy.

Questionnaires to about 20 different human rights organisations revealed some useful media practices, significant for the work of Linking Solidarity. 70% of the respondent organisations have their communication policy imbedded in the organisational policy (see exhibit 5). They could carry on their media relations activities too without any setback even at times of difficult circumstances such as change of their national government or natural disaster taking away media attention, for example earth quake in Pakistan. 60% of the respondents reveal that some of the best practices are by deploying a communication manager with responsibilities of media relations. As a result of this, the network and relationship with media organisations are maintained that help make regular coverage. 60% of the respondents say their NGO is made popular by profiling and various means so that media organisations are keeping contact with them and covering their stories. One of the ways is to maintain the company website, incorporate various options and features and keep updated. Finally, this study show that, incorporating communication and media relations unit as a management discipline with responsible person in it will facilitate better media relations and generate frequent coverage of the organisations story.



By means of communication, organisation continuously tries to create favourable preconditions for its functioning. In governmental organisations nowadays communication knowledge is used in early stage of the policy process; already in the phase of orientation on the problem and finding solutions. Creating a shared vision of the function of communication is essential in organisation and the priorities in the communication policy can be based on that vision. This involves among others, the house style and the extent of openness and ethical point of departure of communication message<sup>59</sup>. The internal group is of the opinion that a clear and uniform communication procedure will help HOM to have a clear image to the outside world; this may make life easier when attending meetings on behalf of the organisation<sup>60</sup>. All of these sources suggest imperative for HOM to frame a written communication policy that forms the basis to regulate all the domains of communication. The communication policy may also include policy guidelines to operate media relations. This will address the general problem and will fill emptiness of such regulations. and help attain the desired situation discussed in clause 2.7.

- ❖ **Communication policy → employ communication/media relations → build relationship → popularize organization.** This process will enable more media coverage

### 5.3. Learning from the past

#### 5.3.1. Of events and press

During the briefing, the contact person has given to understand that the program Linking Solidarity has attempted to make media coverage on some of its activities. Every year on 30<sup>th</sup> August International Day of the Disappeared is observed in many countries in different themes. In The Netherlands it was observed as 'manifestation day' in 2005 with a display of some portraits in The Hague. This was covered by few Dutch

<sup>59</sup> Vos and Schoemaker. (2001). *Integrated Communication*. Lemma. P.36-40

<sup>60</sup> Response to questionnaire, received via the contact person on 10-7-06

newspapers on 31 August 2005, which the contact person described as a 'lucky' event due to the unexpected presence of ANP photographer and a Dutch politician<sup>61</sup>. Another activity named 'Appeal Tour' was also organised in the same year. Dutch media did not cover about it. The contact person described the reasons being the press release 'too long', about three pages. The other reason is the lack of contact with interested journalists/media and lack of personal relationship with interested journalists. The lesson from these past experiences on the attempt to make media coverage must be tuned in to building opportunities for future and try to overcome weaknesses. In view of the above ups and downs in press coverage on every thematic activity, HOM need to:

- Sort out the basics and procedures of media relations
- Formulate a press plan

Formulating a press plan includes the kind of coverage the organisation wants to, namely radio, TV, or newspapers, knowing who you want to influence and how to reach them with what message<sup>62</sup>. They have to be well informed and convinced of its worth in publishing. This depends much on the activities of the organisation and the prevailing circumstances.

### **5.3.2. On responding to press**

According to the contact person, a television company- RTL contacted Linking Solidarity on the event of the visit of Dutch royal family to Argentina in March 30, 2006<sup>63</sup>. One of the RTL reporter asked for information on forced disappearances occurred in early 1980's which is described as 'dirty war of Argentina'<sup>64</sup>. Neither HOM nor Linking Solidarity could provide RTL any material useful for TV coverage on forced disappearances.

The contact person described this failure as 'shortcoming' of the organisation on how to keep 'media warm'. In order to give adequate response to the press, preferably with some information brochures, video footage and a contact with a person affected by the toil of forced disappearances, for eventual interviews, HOM need to consider to:

- Train one of the staff, the head of Linking Solidarity; when priority to forced disappearances is given
- Incorporate media relations as a management faculty
- Develop audio-visual products on human rights issues and archive
- Prepare to respond to press calls adequately or facilitate the coverage

Obviously these initiatives will help overcome the weakness including those mentioned in SWOT analysis and steer the organisation towards popularity, dynamism, and satisfaction among the internal groups and the stakeholders.

### **5.3.3. On holding opportunities**

Give the media a story, even if the story is about adverse incidents of your organisation. For example, the mysterious deaths of the Chairperson of AFAD, Mr. Munir Thalid on 6 September 2004, and Aasia Jeelani of Kashmiri Women's Initiative for Peace in the same year are also the opportunities to make media coverage of the organisation, however it is very sour. When studied as a case on the issue of media coverage on this adverse incident, it is found that other organisations took more opportunities to appear in

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<sup>61</sup> Spits (31-8-2005)

<sup>62</sup> Linda Fairbrother. (1993). *Your Message and the Media*. Nicolas Brealey. P. 10-20

<sup>63</sup> [http://www.vrtnieuws.be/nieuwsnet\\_master/versie2/english/details/060619\\_royals/index.shtml](http://www.vrtnieuws.be/nieuwsnet_master/versie2/english/details/060619_royals/index.shtml) 17/7/0

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/argentina.htm> 17/7/06

the media than HOM did. The press release of HOM was published more than a month later in its website<sup>65</sup>. What has been done to alert the Dutch media is not clear although the dead body of Munir landed in Schiphol could be worthy of coverage for the media. Human Rights Watch brought out report on the death of Munir twice<sup>66,67</sup>. There was no press release over the death of Jeelani although her organisation is a member of AFAD. Another organisation- *Volhardend in Vrede* took that incident as an opportunity<sup>68</sup>. No further reinforcement is done over the process that followed after the death of these two colleagues who are described as paragons of human rights advocacy<sup>69</sup>. In the light of opportunities escaping out, Linking Solidarity should be very vigilant at:

- social trends & happenings over the issue of human rights & changes in concerned countries, and
- be prompt in action to inform the network of journalist, preferably in advance
- act as a catalyst, a facilitator for media

Do not think that the journalist is sitting at their desk waiting to hear from you. They will be very busy and you will have to sell the story with the most interesting, current thing first<sup>70</sup>. For example, whenever the king of Bhutan or his ministers visits Europe, it will be an opportunity to make coverage on the issue of forcible exile, the latest method of ethnic cleansing taking place in Bhutan under his leadership. Media over here need to be informed of by the human rights NGOs over such issues and facilitate the coverage.

#### **5.4. Working in parallel with other's approaches**

For successful media relations approach, the organisation needs to create a momentum with some kind of events steered by its management. This can be done collectively with other managerial unit of the organisation. Previously, the Linking Solidarity launched a few momentums one of which attracted media attention, namely the 'manifestation program. The other momentum- Europe tour was not covered by the media. Momentum may or may not occur either from within or from its surrounding in a routine, therefore momentum must be created that should contain news elements or human interest stories. But for the forced disappearances issue, creating a momentum will be effective to elevate public awareness so that UN and states recognize the need for a binding principle within a short span of time. There are special days reserved for significant events to raise public awareness on certain important issues such as the day for victims of forced disappearances (30<sup>th</sup> August) every year. Similarly Women's day is observed on 8<sup>th</sup> March every year, and Human Rights day on 10<sup>th</sup> December every year. There are many such special occasions to raise public awareness on issues the organisation can decide with a theme of event. On such special occasion or other days of choice, events may be organised to inform the people in various ways, through:

- 🎵 music,
- 🎭 theatre show,
- 🎭 drama,
- 📖 literary and cultural events etc.
- 🎓 workshops, seminars etc.

The approaches, namely emotional; involving humour, fear, surprise and pleasure of the public groups, and direct and indirect approach involving communication messages passed to the target groups either directly-

<sup>65</sup> [http://www.hom.nl/nieuws\\_actueel.php/archives/2004/11/12/32/](http://www.hom.nl/nieuws_actueel.php/archives/2004/11/12/32/) 17/7/06

<sup>66</sup> <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/09/07/indone11688.htm> 17/7/06

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/indone12273.htm> 17/7/06

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.ikv.nl/docs/200502081559153075.html> 17/7/06

<sup>69</sup> AFAD. (2004). *The Voice*. Vol. IV, No.2 Oct. 2004 <sup>69</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Annie Gurton. (2001) *Press Here*. Prentice Hall. P.122

person to person, or via intermediary groups, stipulated briefly hereunder is to be taken as examples that can go in parallel with media relations approach. For example, music is dear to everybody. It is an entertaining tool to influence people with the knowledge the organisation desires to impart, change attitude and behaviour in its favour. Songs and music touches the feelings of people and share their emotion when it is composed with certain sensitive subject such as forced disappearances. A variety of mass media products can be employed to make the musical and theatrical show personal. It is wise for the Program Linking Solidarity to pursue various artists with different themes for the composition of songs, dances, music, drama etc. in various countries where violation of human rights are taking place and produce audio-visual products on that subject. It will be lucrative and informative too. People communicate with music just like we do with language. It is also used to change the way people think about important issues<sup>71</sup>.

Similar to the above program, literary events such as poetry, quiz, story telling, writing stories and comics under various themes connected to human rights can be organised among youths, interest groups, schools and clubs either independently or in consultation with their organisation. This can be done in different themes in different places either in series of events or on special occasions such as national festival or celebrations. Reason and emotion are typically combined<sup>72</sup>. This combination will drive people to forge solidarity given that people are appraised with the program they are interested in and brought together to exercise their talent and interest in entertaining ways. The entertaining engagements are cultural and sports events that can be diverted to raise public awareness on human rights issues.

Media relations function can be utilized in various ways in different phases of the event. Organising above programs or creating an event may be seen as the task of other faculty of management such as Public Relations of the organisation, but they can be supported by media relations function to further elevate its effect. Media relation's activities can be operated in parallel with various approaches to public relations and human rights activities. In doing so, the media relations' part of the task is to:

- ✎ Prepare information package on every event
- ✎ Prepare press kit
- ✎ Make press release for each events
- ✎ Contact media organizations, journalist, photographer etc
- ✎ Launch press conferences
- ✎ Conduct press briefings
- ✎ Conduct audience impact research of the events
- ✎ Give feedback of the response of the public groups to the management for further improvement

If the significance of the event is quite high- at the national level, national media of the country such as the national newspaper, TV, radio etc may cover the event. If its is highly significant, and conducted at the international level, international media such as BBC, CNN and Reuter may take interest, say for example, UN framing legal instrument on forced disappearances. Small events taking place at the local level may get into local media such as local newspapers, FM radio and local TV. Media coverage will give impetus to raise public attention on the selected issue for the event.

As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the homes, offices, recreation centres, virtually every space is being transformed into the site of a multimedia culture, integrating audiovisual, communication and information services. In addition, the integration of sound and images for computer and video games, music, digital

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.why.org/education/denycegraves/musicemotions.html> 18/7/06

<sup>72</sup> Trompenaars and Turner (2004). *Riding the waves of culture*. Nb. P. 69

television and internet is increasing. One can no longer imagine living without media and communication technology<sup>73</sup>. Possibilities are opening to influence various public groups with the use of various communication and information technology. Worthy to mention is the possibilities opened by Internet services enabling people to scan information, download information and store and also enjoy audio and visual presentation of the event. Both Media and public relations play an important strategic role in managing organisational relationships with those external and internal stakeholders groups whose support may be crucial to the achievement of the organisation's goals<sup>74</sup>. Many researchers postulated that the media do more than tell the public what to think about; they also tell the public how to think about any given topic<sup>75</sup>. This power of media, when used properly, is very essential for the human rights NGOs such as HOM. Emphasis should be given to unified approach to collection and processing of information on forced disappearances and accordingly distribute to media. The intermediary agencies, mainly the media, are effective in raising public awareness. These are actually the senders of messages to the public. Journalists are the vibrant intermediaries. Therefore, the organisation could decide to ensure that the intermediaries are well informed or to involve them in solving the problem<sup>76</sup>.

### **5.5. Message for the target group**

The key message for the target groups is to emphasize exploring various approaches; rational, emotional, direct and indirect, and other alternative ways depending on the circumstances. The combination of various approaches will yield better results. The rational approach demands HOM to better position itself so that the target groups develop confidence in the message delivered by the organisation. The efficacy of the approach depends on the creativeness and persuasion ability of the primary target group.

The target group ie, the media relations practitioner of HOM should look for interesting people, interesting places, and interesting subjects when important message has to be delivered. These three elements can increase the possibility of coverage of your event<sup>77</sup>. Some people are media stars. Inviting a celebrity to speak out your subject of interest for media publicity will be more effective if there isn't any one within the organization who can attract press attention. Build relationship with such people and involve them in your issue. Similarly, whenever possible, hold your event somewhere that will reflect your message. A proper selection of place to deliver your message to the public will raise enthusiasm for coverage. Delivering a message on forced disappearances in a theatre hall will have less effect than in a place built in memory of someone who disappeared in silence. Similarly, create a symbol that will represent the subject or make visible what you are trying to communicate. The best visual is the one that requires the fewest words to explain. A picture really can be worth a thousand words. Use attractive quotes, give a lead to the story, use appropriate terms and avoid language ambiguities. Such initiatives to present your story will attract media attention than verbal communication alone.

The manner in which media giants are covering the issue is not merely on the magnitude of the disaster but on the amount of deaths occurring in the region of their interest. For example, the death of one Western European equalled 3 Eastern Europeans equalled 9 Latin Americans equalled 11 Middles easterners equalled 12 Asians to get the attention of media<sup>78</sup>. Human rights NGOs need to try out

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<sup>73</sup> Sonia Livingstone (2002). *Young People and New Media*. Sage. P.1-20

<sup>74</sup> Kitchen P.J. (1997). *Public Relations, Principles and Practices* Thomson. P.7

<sup>75</sup> Jim A. Kuypers (2002) *Press Bias and Politics*. Praeger Series. P. 3-18 and 197-260

<sup>76</sup> Vos, Otte and Linders. (2003) *Setting up a strategic communication plan*. Lemma. p. 46 s

<sup>77</sup> <http://www.tenant.net/Organize/media.html#18> 26/7/06

<sup>78</sup> Herbert John. (2001). *Global Journalism: Exploring Reporting issues Worldwide*. Focal Press. P.1

reversing this type of reporting phenomenon so that all forms of human rights violations get equal public attention.

## **6. STAGE SIX: The recommendations**

Several methods and alternatives have already been provided in this report to overcome the inadequacy of media relations practices of HOM in its pursuit to raise public attention on forced disappearances. Importance of having a written communication policy has also been outlined in clause 5.2.2. This stage aims at providing some technical recommendations essential to build up its institutional capacity for information processing and distribution of the communication message. One of the ways is through human resource and infrastructural development that HOM may need to consider the following area:

### **1. Train staff on media relations**

Training on media relations is however an obvious option to accelerate the media activities, HOM needs to make prudent choice as to whether all the program managers should be given a training on media relations or select only one person who may be deemed appropriate. Should HOM decide to give training on communication/ media relations to one individual person, then it is essential to look for an appropriate training institution. The alternative for this is to look for a good trainer and invite him/her to give in-house training to all the managers who are in many ways dealing with human rights issues in different forms. The benefit of this alternative is that a number of staff will get trained with approximately the same amount of money required to send one person to a training institution. In addition, there will be more interaction at the same level of knowledge between the trained staff and foster faster communication output. HOM may then nominate one of the managers to handle the responsibility of media relations and ask all other staff assist him where necessary. In this case, even the director may wish to take part in the training so that the core business is understood that foster cohesive relation and prompt flow of information. This will help meet their respective deadlines that maximises the coverage. An appropriate institution that produces tailor made training for organisations, for in-house or in the institution is Media Academie in Hilversum, <http://www.media-academie.nl/> and Emma Robson of Mediawise in Amsterdam. [www.mediawise.nl](http://www.mediawise.nl)

### **2. Incorporate media relations as a management discipline**

Analysis of the desired situation for Linking Solidarity as well as for HOM has found the necessity to have media relations as a management discipline. There are a number of procedures to operate the media relations. The best method, however, depends upon the situation<sup>79</sup>. The prime requirement to begin depends on the fulfilment of structural progression of the organisation, because, media relations is one of the communication processes that have to fit within the perimeter of communication policy of the company. The company has to come up with the resources to setup the media relations unit and provide stationeries and equipment to operate successfully.

The benefit of having a media relations unit within HOM is that media relations expertise will add new dimensions in working for the human rights, namely the forced disappearances. With the establishment of media relations either independently or in combination with communication or public relations unit, it will serve the purpose pertaining to media for entire organisation. This will help consolidate the efforts of the partner organisations by utilizing the information they produce or obtain from the local environment. It will make HOM popular among the public thereby creating positive image as having openness. It will also help solve reputation problems in times of crisis through timely information flow and management of the crisis. It will also help improve the outlook of the publications and website. Media relations can be operated by

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<sup>79</sup> Howard and Mathews. (1995). *On Deadline*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. p.4

communication/public relations practitioners or by any other professionals provided training is done. It will be an asset for the organisation.

### **3. Improve website of HOM: [www.hom.nl](http://www.hom.nl) and its subsidiary [www.linkingsolidarity.org](http://www.linkingsolidarity.org)**

More than 15% of world's population use website everyday and it is increasing<sup>80</sup>. Based on the outcome of the questionnaire (see exhibit 5) to some influential human rights organisations and observation of their websites, it is imperative to suggest HOM and its Linking Solidarity to improve their website. 40% of the respondents say that their website has been instrumental to get media coverage. Because of their attractive website, the media professionals do contact them for stories. Another 60% of the respondent say that their website, among others, made their organisation popular making media coverage possible.. Through content analysis and observation, the website of Human Rights Watch, [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org) appeared excellent because of its diverse features essential for journalists/press. This organisation could also get their stories in the media regularly; once in a month at the minimum. The website of HOM lacks current information, updates, various features and options essential for the work of journalists. It also does not provide possibilities for the victims of forced disappearances to contact the organisation electronically such as forum, email, chat, etc. Therefore it is advisable to HOM to consider improving its website so that it will be usable by variety of people and link with the organisation to help redress the problem.

### **4. Establish audio-visual/ documentation unit**

Film and pictures have immense power to capture people's emotion<sup>81</sup>. This will also attract the attention of journalist and help them make the story interesting.

Media professionals sometimes ask archive materials that supports their material for media use. The contact person has also mentioned that when the Dutch Royalties were visiting Argentina, some TV producers approached for archive materials related to forced disappearances in Argentina. A good documentation and archive of electronic, print and audio-visual products related various human right issues will enrich the media relations with more chances for coverage. It will remain as a historical record and might have lucrative market in future. Therefore, it is recommendable to incorporate for Linking Solidarity and other human rights work, an audio-visual documentation and archive unit within the management of HOM. Then various documentary products may be collected from other human rights NGOs, partner organisation. Every piece of documents that can be produced by the staff of HOM or collected, need to be properly kept with database system, making it handy to let media professionals use it when necessary or exhibited time to time to the public by organising an event.

**Conclusion:** Owing to the speedy development in broadcast, print, communication and Internet technology that has been influencing media and journalism, media relations practices has to adapt with the changes in them in order to make the process compatible to each other. Therefore the media relations practitioners have to embrace new techniques in dealing with media and information processing. Technology might also render new forms of human rights violations. The media relations practitioner of the human rights organisation such as HOM has to be aware of this and must remain ahead of such trends. But, whatever trends in media relations may arise in future, the basic procedure to operate and raise public attention on human rights issues may remain same as stipulated in this report. Although this report addresses the program Linking Solidarity to help raise public attention on forced disappearances, other program units of

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<sup>80</sup> [http://www.globitec.com/articles/importance\\_of\\_having\\_a\\_website.htm](http://www.globitec.com/articles/importance_of_having_a_website.htm) 27/7/06

<sup>81</sup> Linda Fairbrother. (1993). *Your Message and the Media*. Nb. P.209

HOM may also find it useful and can apply this report as a whole or in part according to their choice of media campaign.

\*\*\*\*\*end\*\*\*\*\*

See further the appendixes

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