

## Advice for media representatives working with *medica mondiale*

**„A good interview is determined by the victim, not by the journalist“**

**ORF Journalist Christoph Feurstein,  
interviewed Natascha Kampusch**

The basis of *medica mondiale*'s public relations work is not to reduce people to victims, rather to show how they deal with what happened to them.

In view of the sensitive and tabu subject matter, *medica mondiale* exercises extreme caution in providing interview partners. Unfortunately, experience has shown that despite a caring and sympathetic journalistic approach, the research and filming has led to the women involved reliving their trauma.

A negative response from *medica mondiale* or local project leaders to requests for interviews does not indicate mistrust of the press in general or a journalist in particular, it should be seen as protection and part of the healing process for those concerned.

*medica mondiale* and local project managers do everything in their power to offer the best possible assistance to the local media by providing necessary information. Our organisation therefore expects the responsible media representatives to unreservedly respect the assessment of project staff regarding methods and approach to research and interviews.

Most importantly, interviews will only be permitted with women when the project leaders are convinced that no further damage or traumatisation will occur after the conversations. It is to be remembered and noted that the risk of reliving the experience is very high in the early days and weeks after the traumatic events and as long as the woman didn't have the chance to stabilise herself.

### During the reporting of the traumatic situations and the people involved, we would ask you please to consider:

- Direct confrontation in inappropriate circumstances, particularly immediately after the experience leads inevitably to reinforcing the trauma or reawakening it.
- Meaningless and hackneyed phrases about “never recovering from a particular occurrence” reduce the survivors to helpless victims and ignores the strength which can be mobilised even under the most extreme adversity.
- Pictures of people in emotional situations (for example crying), humiliate and portray survivors as victims.
- Considerate language evokes respect whereas inconsiderate words can re-traumatise, give the public a false picture and trivialise. Some examples: Practising “paedophiles” don't love children, but torture them, when more appropriate would be criminal paedophiles. “Child pornography” is less about pornography, more accurately it would be to talk about documentation of the torture of children. Sexual and sexualised abuse implies that there is normal abuse instead of rape or sexual ill-treatment. The expression “honour killings” justifies the perpetrator's point of view, the victim on the other hand has a different opinion. The crime and its perpetrator should be unequivocally named to prevent trivialisation.

### Understanding „sexualised violence“:

Rape is not an expression of sexuality, it is a sexual expression of violence, and this violence has been sexualised (Sociologist Dr. Ruth Seifert). Sexualised violence has nothing to do with sexuality. Neither for the aggressor, nor for the victim. It is the use of power, to control and subjugate others. Sexualised violence is not trivial, it is an appalling disrespect of human rights.

## Checklist for dealing with survivors of sexualised violence

In order to deal in a trauma sensitive way with those concerned and to not further humiliate or harm them, it is useful to ask yourself the following questions.

### *Before the interview:*

1. Is the interview with the person really necessary for the report?
2. Have you allowed enough time for a difficult process?
3. Have you formulated the request respectfully?
4. Have you introduced yourself (and if necessary your team) sufficiently well?
5. Have you described your intentions clearly?
6. Have you explained why you want to do the report or story?
7. Have you informed the interviewee about the questions you will probably ask?
8. Have you informed the interviewee about the duration?
9. Have you indicated that the situation could become difficult for the person being interviewed?
10. Have you given the interviewee enough time to think?
11. Has the interviewee clearly agreed to be interviewed?
12. Have you agreed a signal with your interview partner for "stop" or "no" (in case words are no longer possible)?
13. Are you as well informed as possible about the subject matter and the woman concerned?
14. Have you chosen the location for the interview carefully? (does the interviewee feel comfortable there) – or has she been allowed to chose?
15. Have you offered your interview partner the possibility to be accompanied?
16. Have you thought about the manner of questioning and sensitive formulation of the questions?
17. Have you cleared with your interviewee and/or the person responsible for the project that the interview could disqualify a possible witness statement before a Court of Law?

### *During the interview:*

18. Is it clear that in the interview you cannot challenge the experiences of your interview partner, to avoid triggering feelings of guilt and shame and retraumatisation?
19. Are you aware that you shouldn't ask questions about a situation when you could not possible answer yourself?
20. Are you clear that it is tabu to press for a display of feelings or to demand details of the traumatic events?
21. Have you written down the name of the interview correctly, practiced saying it properly so as not to insult the interviewee?
22. Are you clear that you have to repeat and summarise the interviewee's statements in a supportive manner?

### *After the interview:*

23. Have you given the interview partner the opportunity, even after the conversation, to forbid the publication of particular statements and expressions of emotions?
24. Have you discussed with the interviewee the pictures you can use?
25. Have you discussed possible anonymity – also in the pictures?
26. Have you considered alternatives for the production – for instance having a speaker read the quotes for television and radio reports?
27. Have you considered what you can offer your interview partner after the production, as an acknowledgement of the interview? Photos, a copy of the article perhaps, a DVD of the report, - even if there is a language or technical problem – this can be an expression of respect for your interview partner.