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International Council on Human Rights Policy *Journalism, media and the challenge of human rights reporting* (2002)
154 pages; *Human rights after September 11* (2002)
75 pages

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The International Council on Human Rights Policy is an international 'think-tank' on human rights. Its membership includes Theo van Boven (UN Special Rapporteur on Torture), Bacre Waly Ndiaye (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) and Barney Pityana (member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights). The Council, meeting once a year, initiates applied research on matters of international human rights policy. It is strictly independent, international in membership and consultative in its approach. Founded in 1998, the Council functions through a small secretariat based in Geneva.

In line with its vision, the Council initiated a number of projects, which culminated in publications (reports). Some of these are:

- *Hard cases: Bringing human rights violators to justice abroad — A guide to universal jurisdiction* (1999);
- *Taking duties seriously: Individual duties in international human rights law — A commentary* (1999);
- *Performance and legitimacy: National human rights institutions* (2000);
- *Beyond voluntarism: Human rights and the developing international legal obligations of companies* (2002).

The Council's two latest publications are *Journalism, media and the challenge of human rights reporting* and *Human rights after September 11*, both published in 2002.

The first of these, *Journalism, media and the challenge of human rights reporting*, ponders on difficulties the media experiences in reporting human rights issues. This study exemplifies the stated 'consultative' approach of the Council. Numerous researchers (including journalists) contributed to this project, each preparing a paper. An international review meeting at which the preliminary research results were debated, was then organised. Present at the meeting was a wide and diverse range of experts. Two further consultations contributed to the report. A draft report was then sent to a range of journalists, media specialists and human rights organisations.

This wide consultation culminated in a very informative and balanced report. The crucial, but neglected role of media coverage of human rights is highlighted, emphasising that little is known even about the basic question as to the extent of coverage of human rights 'stories'.

A background to the 'professional environment' is sketched, both at the international and national levels. The extent to which technological change affects media presentation on human rights is further examined. This is followed by a very comprehensive overview of the editorial process, in which the report examines the concept 'newsworthiness'. Reference is made to Iraq (the impact of economic sanctions), Burundi (the 1995 crisis) and the events subsequent to the arrest of Pinochet (1998).

Bias, advocacy and precision in human rights coverage are then taken under review, after which the report reaches some conclusions and presents a number of recommendations. These recommendations underscore the importance of exchanges between journalists and human rights organisations and of the inclusion of courses on human rights issues in journalism curricula.

This report makes an important contribution to writing on human rights. Few, if any, publications provide such an incisive focus on and profound analysis of the role of human rights reporting in the media. *Journalism, media and the challenge of human rights reporting* should be widely read and taken to heart in media and human rights circles, and should be core reading in training programmes for journalists.

The second of the reports is entitled *Human rights after September 11*, and is also the result of a consultative process. It is based on an international seminar (organised in January 2002), attended by some 37 experts, at which ten background papers were presented and debated. The report raises a number of concerns to human rights organisations arising from the events of 11 September 2001. These concerns include the following (3):

- 'Multilateral and more diplomatic approaches to solving international problems may surrender ground to unilateral and more forceful approaches';
- 'Approaches to solving international problems based on the rule of law will give way to approaches that are security-driven'.

The report posits these concerns against the background of long-standing American exceptionalism and preferences for unilateralism. To a large extent, a distinction is drawn between *civil* rights (guaranteed in the American constitutional tradition) and *human* rights (which are international, and forms part only of foreign relations). US policy is therefore based on American constitutional values rather than an international consensus derived from a universalised understanding of human dignity. Global inequity is also introduced as an overriding concern, and its link to political violence (or sympathy for it) is examined.

The conclusions of this report, that human rights and human rights organisations, especially in the US, will increasingly become threatened, has been confirmed by subsequent events. One can only hope that the recommendation that 'military intervention should respect human rights and the framework of internal law' (61) will be respected in the conflicts of 2003 and thereafter.

Human rights after September 11 is a serious and considered attempt to take account of the impact of the events of 11 September 2001 on human rights and the human rights movement.