

# A few thoughts on the relationship between humanitarian agencies and the media

by Urs Hoegli

Modern conflict often takes place in a communication vacuum, and it is time that something were done to fill it.

Those engaged in war today appear to have ever less desire to make their voices heard, in most cases for good reason. In this post-Cold War era, the belligerents do not care as much as they once did about what the rest of the world thinks. They no longer live in fear of annoying or embarrassing their sponsors; indeed in most cases they no longer have sponsors at all, nor do they need them. It is no longer their dream to make speeches at the United Nations in New York, as it was for so many national liberation movements a few decades ago. Many simply care nothing about their international image, or about the outside world.

The other “key players” in such crises — today’s international activists: organizations like the ICRC, government representatives, and internationally mandated military officials — also usually prefer silence. Here too there are valid reasons. There is often something afoot, something involving a painstaking process of preparation, a fragile edifice that the slightest whiff of publicity could bring crashing down. If the ICRC is arranging a prisoner exchange between two mutually hostile States, for example, there is little point in a journalist telephoning about it ten days

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**Urs Hoegli** is head of the ICRC’s Media Services. He previously worked as a delegate and head of delegation in many conflict areas.

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