

The South African Experience

CHANGING MEDIA FOR A CHANGING SOCIETY

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An initiative of The International Communications Forum (ICF)

The ICF is a network of people of good will in the media determined to work to restore the public confidence in the media in all its forms.

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Prism to a world of challenges

THE International Communications Forum hosted what delegates agreed was a thought-provoking, open conference on Changing Media for a Changing Society in Cape Town in early April.

The conference, from April 5 to 9, drew heavily on the experiences of South African journalists, media owners and politicians, with many valuable contributions also coming from the scores of international delegates attending.

South Africa, a country wrestling with change since democratic rule was established in 1994, became the conference prism through which delegates examined issues of broader, international significance.

South Africa is now a society with a free media, though the value of this freedom is not always clearly understood by some of its people who were deprived of free expression under apartheid. Likewise, mutual understanding between communities separated under apartheid is sometimes limited. And South Africa is a society now struggling to extend to many millions of its people the social goods and amenities, particularly a quality of health-care and educational provision, earlier experienced only by the white minority. In these respects, South Africa seemed at times to represent both the First and Third Worlds in one country.

Delegates managed throughout the conference to debate issues in the spirit suggested at the outset by ICF president Bernard Margueritte: that is, as a conversation. Margueritte presented a set

of guidelines for the conference, which became known as the "10 Commandments". (See page 5)

The major themes that were taken up and explored by speakers and delegates included:

- *How journalists might report on poverty in such a way that they kept their readers' interest, helped the poverty stricken and satisfied their news organisations' commercial imperatives;*
- *The need to sensitise journalists to gender issues both in their news reportage and within their own news organisations;*
- *What technological convergence has taken place in the media since the arrival of the Internet and how this is working itself out in the marketplace;*
- *The desperately difficult circumstances under which journalists work in countries such as Angola and Sierra Leone, and what other journalists should do about it;*
- *Attempts to democratise access to the media, particularly in radio, in South Africa;*
- *How quality journalism in the print media can earn media owners healthy profits;*
- *The threat smaller cultures feel from Western, particularly Anglo-American, dominance of global cultural output, and;*
- *The quest for a national culture in South Africa.*



At the opening banquet given by Telkom, Franklin Sonn (left) paid tribute to the role of the media during apartheid.

Changing media for a changing society



Revolutionary ... Former ANC exile Victor Moche who played a vital role in securing the success of the forum.

MORE THAN 100 delegates and speakers from 27 countries attended the Cape Town conference on changing media for a changing society.

Delegates to the ICF's 23rd forum, since its foundation in 1991, found themselves in picturesque surroundings astride a saddle between mountains that divide two of Cape Town's most beautiful areas, Constantia and Hout Bay.

Delegates came from Angola, Australia, Botswana, Cameroon, Central African

Republic, France, Germany, Ghana, India, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Poland, Russia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovak Republic, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

There was also a further, sizeable interest from Telkom, South Africa's main telecommunications utility, which was the conference's main sponsor. Telkom's group was led by **Victor Moche**, its group executive in charge of regulatory and public policy. A number of the South African journalists present had known Moche since his days in exile in Zambia in the 1980s, when he was a particularly effective ANC spokesperson at a time when the ANC, now South Africa's ruling party, was still outlawed in South Africa.

Speakers at the Cape Town forum included **Peter Matlare**, chief executive of the South African Broadcasting Corporation; **Sizwe**

Nxasana, chief executive of Telkom; **Dr Frederik van Zyl Slabbert**, leader of South Africa's official parliamentary opposition in the 1980s until he resigned in disgust at the old whites-only parliament's inertia and irrelevance; **Franklin Sonn**, South Africa's first ambassador to the United States in the post-apartheid era; **Matthew Storin**, former editor of the *Boston Globe*; and **Connie Molusi**, chief executive of Johnnic Publishing, one of South Africa's main newspaper and magazine publishers.

The conference was broken down into five sessions over two days:

- What kind of journalism for what kind of democracy?
- The media in Southern Africa;
- The convergence mania and the business environment of the media;
- Broadcasting and serving the community;
- Media for an open society.

Debate was open, sometimes challenging — and always fell within the "10 commandments" outlined by Bernard Margueritte in the opening session of the conference (see opposite).



Peter Sullivan, group editor in chief, Independent Newspapers (right), talks with Swiss journalist, Jean-Jacques Odier.



Dr Frederik van Zyl Slabbert



Founding president William Porter talking to two of the delegates



PRESIDENT Bernard Margueritte and executive director Robin Williamson presented delegates at the opening session of the conference with a set of guidelines on how the organisation approaches its forums.

They did so in order to introduce the large number of delegates who had never before attended an ICF conference to the organisation's traditions of debate.

The codified set of guidelines, which soon became known as the '10 commandments', was:

- *An ICF forum is not a set of scholarly presentations in a classroom setting.*
- *It does not comprise long speeches without much interaction.*
- *It does not consist of paid-for presentations.*
- *It is not an occasion to show how good one is (or one's*

organisation is) – unless this is a useful example to others.

- *And it is not a one-time event without a follow-up.*
- *An ICF forum is, however, an open discussion among colleagues.*
- *It is a person-to-person, conscience-to-conscience dialogue.*
- *It comprises short talks by participants, with a maximum duration of 15 minutes per talk.*
- *It consists of presentations made out of inner conviction and personal commitment.*
- *And it involves the continuing building of people of good will in the media, with a strong emphasis on serious follow-up.*

Sources close to the president were adamant that the production of the 10 commandments had nothing to do with his pilgrimage up one of Cape Town's mountains on the morning before the conference started.

Building a world of peace

HOW CAN the media use the resources and technology at its disposal to change the moral climate of society to build a world of peace and plenty?

This was the main question of the keynote address given by William Porter at the International Communications Forum being held at Constantia Nek.

Porter prefaced his talk by providing a heartfelt apology for Britain's colonialist and imperialist past.

"We are told that our generation was not responsible. But, when a debt is handed down from generation to generation, it should be repaid, and I apologise for my nation's role in robbing others of their freedom and dignity."

Porter also made a stunning revelation of corporate corruption and his role in it. "Criminality begins at the top," he said. "Not from the back streets and football terraces."

Porter admitted that he was

TREVOR OOSTERWYK

less than honest in his own business dealings: "I permitted deceptive advertising to be used to sell our products and my expense accounts were highly imaginative in my favour.

"It was criminal. Criminality begins in our company and institutional boardrooms," he said.

He decided to stop his malpractices and to apply complete honesty to his personal and company dealings. Now Porter is concerned about the low status of the media with the public and about the role of the media in relation to the state of society. He cited statistics that place journalists alongside politicians and used-car salesmen as the bottom three groups in public opinion. "We should have a good look at ourselves and ask 'where have we got it wrong?' and 'how we can get it right?'," he said.

Porter said that he strove for

balance in news reporting and presentation, because it is the essential link between freedom and responsibility. "I was given no grounding in these matters during most of my active professional, life. I was led to believe that what the public wanted from news and entertainment were the sordid, the sensational, the sexy, the criminal, the violent and the superficial." He said that the freedom to publish was often a flag to wave to avoid responsibility. "The state of society was no concern of mine. I just had to report on it and reflect it." Porter now rejects these "media myths", and believes that news must be presented in a balanced way. "Not a good-news-only view, because the bad has to be faced, but also the news of the constructive side of life and to do it in as interesting way as we do the bad."

From the *Cape Argus*,
Tuesday April 8, 2003

Call to realise Africa's potential



Digital divide ... Africa is awash with business opportunities, according to Telkom chief executive Sizwe Nxasana

JOURNALISTS have a crucial role in ensuring two preconditions for democracy: the circulation of information and ideas, and that ordinary people are active participants in this social dialogue.

This democratising mission is shared by South Africa's telecommunications utility, Telkom, according to its chief executive **Sizwe Nxasana**.

Addressing delegates to the Cape Town conference, Nxasana said: "Informed public opinion is a key element in a fair and open democracy. Democracy requires firstly that citizens have the right to know about governments' activities, especially about decisions that affect their lives and liberty, and secondly that they recognise the importance of their participation within the democratic system to make it work and flourish.

Preconditions

"This premise can only come to fruition if two preconditions are met," he said.

"Firstly, the right to freedom of expression and a human rights culture. In this regard, South Africa's constitution makes provision for, among other things, the freedom of the press and other media and the freedom to receive or impart information and ideas. The principles of transparency and accountability that characterise South Africa today make it much easier for the media to function, seek the truth and disseminate information.

"Secondly, the people are not regarded as consumers or markets or as passive recipients of information, but as empowered actors and participants in a multi-directional social dialogue. We look to the media to provide the framework for such a discourse and to act as a mechanism that allows citizens to develop their level of awareness," said Nxasana, whose Telkom was the major sponsor of the conference.

Nxasana said that developing countries like South Africa did not face a choice between spending money on, say, fighting HIV/Aids or

spending it on developing their telecommunications infrastructures. That was a false dichotomy. Rather: "Like other developing countries, South Africa needs information and communication technology (ICT) to achieve its national objectives. We need ICT for quality education and an exemplary health system. We need it to create jobs, the kind of jobs that utilise the application of knowledge to create a competitive advantage."

Equal access to information

There were, however, huge ICT deficits to be made up in South Africa and other developing societies. "The majority of the world's population do not enjoy equal access to information. It is the issue that lies at the very heart of the digital divide," Nxasana said.

"Africa, home to one in eight of the world's people, has just one in 50 of the world's fixed line [telephone] subscribers, one in 60 of the world's mobile cellular subscribers, one in 70 of the world's personal computers and only one per cent of the world's Internet users.

"It is very interesting to note that, when the World Bank interviewed 20,000 of the 'poorest of the poor', the number one issue, even before food, water and shelter was a lack of a voice.

This compels me to state unequivocally that, if Africa's potential is to be realised, if its citizens are to participate actively in the democratic system, the continent must be fully integrated into the information age," Nxasana said.

Access to new technologies

"It is therefore crucial for governments and private enterprise to implement policies and exploit opportunities that facilitate access to new technologies, thus increasing civil society participation in political decision making processes, and expanding the reach and accessibility of government services.

"If one takes into account that ICT cannot be implemented as a stand-alone, but that it must be supported by enabling infrastructure such as adequate banking and transport facilities, the statistics I mentioned earlier do not only portray a picture of doom and gloom. In fact they sends out a strong message: Africa is awash with opportunity."

Quality can deliver profits

IT IS possible for the press to make healthy profits out of quality journalism, former *Boston Globe* editor **Matthew Storin** told the Cape Town conference.

He said newspapers in many major centres across the United States had made good money by maintaining or even raising high editorial standards.

Storin said there were two drivers of quality in the press in the US. One was a tradition of good journalism whose value was widely recognised. This value had been most apparent during the black civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s, and later in the Watergate investigation that drove Richard Nixon from the presidency in 1974. There was also an appreciation of newspapers' battles to keep their independence of advertisers and powerful political interests.

The other dynamic driving the press towards quality was the calibre of reader that high-grade content attracted to a publication. He or she was usually a higher-earner with significant disposable income: the reader was usually from the category of consumers that advertisers most wanted to reach. A newspaper offering a high concentration of these readers was likely to attract healthy advertising revenues and, unless it was mismanaged, the newspaper was destined to make healthy profits.

"So this is the theory by which quality pays in [print] journalism. But, unfortunately, from all the evidence in the US," Storin said, "going for quality does not pay for broadcast television or radio. Appealing to the wide-ranging masses does. I don't know if it's impossible to change that. It has been tried now and then, most recently with one of Chicago's major TV

stations which tried to do a serious nightly newscast. The experiment was not successful."

Storin cited Jack Fuller, president of Tribune Co - owner of the *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and other newspapers and television stations - to argue that a newspaper's editorial approach and market position were interdependent determinants of its success or failure.

In his book *News Values*, Fuller wrote: "To have the wherewithal to succeed in the marketplace of ideas, a newspaper has to succeed in the economic marketplace."

Storin added: "Fuller links the business and journalistic missions of a newspaper with some challenges. He notes that a good newspaper must stand for some principles, but it must not simply be a mirror of attitudes in the society it covers. It must lead and challenge, both in its opinions and its news coverage.

"Fuller says: 'A newspaper that reaches people with information they want and need will attract advertising and, unless otherwise mismanaged, will turn a nice profit.' But Fuller adds: 'A newspaper that pleases its writers and editors, but is not a vital part of the community's life will be a commercial failure because it is a rhetorical failure.'

"In other words," said Storin, "journalists can't just be doing what they think is right - though that must be part of it - they have to be aware of what will interest and serve the community."



High calibre ... quality journalism can still produce quality profits, according to former *Boston Globe* editor Matthew Storin



With appreciation

Special thanks go to Telkom, who underwrote the logistics, the opening banquet and many costs associated with the conference.

Substantial financial contributions came from the Open Society Budapest, the Open Society Southern Africa and the Ford Foundation. They were joined in their contributions by Johnnic Publishing, Independent Newspapers and the Western Cape Tourist Board. Official recognition on behalf of the national and local government was offered by the Minister in the Presidency at an evening banquet and the Mayor of Cape Town, Nomandla Mfeketu (left), in an official welcome to delegates.

Ethnic cleansing call shames Angolan press



Opening up ... Rafael Marques took a crowbar to some Angolan media, exposing their shameful role in instigating 'ethnic cleansing'.

ANGOLA'S government-owned media is calling for ethnic cleansing and the crushing of the political opposition despite the fact that the country has supposedly embarked upon a peace process, the conference heard.

The targets of these calls are members of the Ovimbundu tribe, who make up about a third of Angola's population. The Ovimbundu have traditionally provided the support base of the Unita movement, which led guerrilla opposition to Angola's MPLA government since the mid-1970s. The recent death of Unita leader Jonas

Savimbi helped open the way to peace moves between the two main parties.

Rafael Marques, the country director in Angola of the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, told delegates that a front page editorial in Angola's only daily newspaper, the state-owned *Jornal de Angola*, on March 2 had called on people to take to the streets to "beat up or kill either slowly or at speed" members of Unita who commemorated Savimbi.

The same editorial demanded that the government end its programme to disarm civilians so that civilians could participate fully in slaughter.

Three days earlier, Marques said, the same newspaper had lamented that the ruling MPLA had "allowed extensive and shameless integration of Ovimbundu people in the government" and it criticised the Angolan Episcopal Conference because its president and a number of its bishops were from the Ovimbundu ethnic group.

Marques alleged the state-owned Angolan media, and particularly *Jornal de Angola*, had played a similarly shameful role in the late 1970s. "This is just a replay of the state media's role in fuelling the massacres throughout Angola on May 27 1977 which claimed the lives of between 30,000 and 60,000 people."

He said the role the state-owned media was now trying to play in Angola was also "reminiscent of the media's role in the Rwandan genocide" of 1994.

"Yet the government has so far maintained its tacit approval of the editorials I have mentioned by failing, at least, to distance itself from the content. Those in power exercise tight control over the state media and determine what to publish and what not to publish," Marques said.

Marques suggested this unacceptable behaviour by the state-run daily was part of a

Stern call on the Angolan Government

Delegates to an International Communications Forum held in Cape Town on April 5-9 have learned with horror of the Angolan government's use of the state-controlled media to instigate genocide and ethnic cleansing against the surviving members of the UNITA rebel movement.

Delegates were appalled when they were told that on March 2 the state-run daily, 'Jornal de Angola', called on the Angolan people to take to the streets to "beat up or kill either slowly or at speed" the remaining members of UNITA who dare to remember their slain leader Jonas Savimbi.

The delegates called on the Angolan government immediately to put a stop to this reprehensible activity. They also called on the member nations of the Southern African Development Community – of which the Angolan government

holds the presidency – to call the Angolan government to account and to consider the imposition of sanctions on that country to force it to end these attacks.

Delegates also noted with strong disapproval the continuing repression, frequently violent, of dissenting journalistic voices and pointed out that this unacceptable activity is in conflict with the African Union constitution and the SADC's adoption of the freedom of expression principles contained in the Windhoek Declaration. They called on the Angolan government to abide by its commitments to the free flow of news and information and to end this activity. They further called on the government to work for peace and reconciliation for all its peoples.'

Resolution of the Cape Town conference

broader crisis in the media and civil society in Angola. There was disappointingly little sign that institutions of civil society were willing to stand up to the government.

Angola's Catholic bishops had recently sent a letter of apology to president Jose Eduardo dos Santos after the church's radio station, Radio Ecclesia, had carried comments from Angolans highly critical of Dos Santos and his government's performance. Such criticism was deemed insulting, said Marques.

Meanwhile the government whipped up hysteria about the criticism on Radio Ecclesia, called it "antenna terrorism" and promised threateningly that "in due time people will know what position to take" on the station.

Elsewhere, in the Benguela province in the south, journalists had not protested at all recently when the governor forbade the local media from publishing anything not favourable to the government.

Marques said the way forward out of the crisis at the media level was "to press the government until it loses its grip on the state media". Foreign governments and institutions had a significant role to play in trying to achieve this.

He said: "Unless the government is pushed hard to stop using the media as a tool to stimulate violence, maintain a state of fear and cover up its maladministration, freedom of the press will remain hostage to the whims of those in power."

Members of Angolan civil society were proposing:

- The setting up of the means to monitor the media and its contribution to reconciliation;
- Ensuring that political party membership was no longer a factor in appointing or promoting media staff or managements, and;
- Developing a programme to subsidise the development of independent media organisations.



Delegates attended a reception at the South African Presidency in Cape Town where they were addressed by the Minister in the Presidency, Essop Pahad, (left) after he had been introduced by Bernard Margueritte, ICF president (top).

Must globalisation mean no national cultures?



Sandile Memela

THE ABSENCE of a national culture in South Africa poses a massive complication for journalists in the post-apartheid era, delegates heard from Sandile Memela, one of the host country's most outspoken commentators.

The same difficulty may be shared by other societies elsewhere in the world but the absence of a national culture was particularly stark in South Africa. This was a result of, among other things,

the systematic distortion and fragmentation of black cultures under apartheid, and the reality that a sizeable and powerful representative chunk of "global culture", about five million whites, were resident in South Africa.

The dynamics of South African society, including whites' economic power, mean that "the media create and perpetuate this one culture: the western, Eurocentric social and cultural experience", Memela said.

"The African cultural experience," on the other hand, said Memela, "exists independently of the mainstream media and white culture. While it has managed, miraculously, to survive, it is the Anglo Saxon cultural experience that continues to be reflected [in the media]."

But, said Memela, "the peculiarities of the South African socio-economic and cultural structure, and the position of the African majority within it, make the role of the media a special one.

"The media must deal intimately with the white power structure and the cultural apparatus and the inner realities of the African experience at one and the same time.

"In order to function successfully in this role, media professionals must be acutely aware of the legacy of apartheid and how it impacts on coverage of cultural issues in the country."

Memela added: "As long as economic power relations have not changed, the [South African] media will continue to reflect what is defined as a 'global experience' – that is a white American and European experience – instead of a national culture, which is more African.

"The media must not be condemned for forgetting the existence of a thriving African culture but be reminded that the integrated global world, or Anglo-Boer culture, is not representative of 'national culture'.

"Indeed, the African experience is currently left stranded, strangled and impoverished in the rural areas, beyond the fringe of absorption." But Memela argued that separatism would be an inadequate African response to this cultural marginalisation. A more adequate response would involve developing a far clearer sense of African cultural and national identity, as well as the mobilisation of considerable resources to promote cultural expression in a conscious process of cultural reawakening. African culture, Memela said, "can be pushed into the centre if the African government and the black middle class galvanise its potential through patronage, sponsorship and financial injection."

Until or unless those processes were well underway, Memela said, there would be "no national culture in the reality of South African circumstances. Perhaps our culture will remain that there is no 'national culture' in a globalised world."



Members of a South African group perform the traditional gum-boot dance.

Old attitudes bedevil media-state relations

THE SOUTH African media is still struggling with how best to operate in the freedom it has enjoyed since the onset of democracy nine years ago, delegates were told.

Tony Trew, deputy head of South African government communications, said these difficulties included apparently habitual media suspicion of the government, debates over the extent to which the media should reflect what he called the "national agenda", a lack of capacity in government communications and the media, and imbalances in access to the media.

Trew said the media seemed still to be deeply suspicious of the government. Its behaviour appeared to be governed by a belief, developed during the apartheid era, that "any government whatsoever, including a democratic government, is on the whole bound to do wrong and in particular is disposed to limit freedom of expression".

He suggested this attitude was unjustified and was "something that has clouded some debates" in South Africa on relations between the media and government.

Trew said the "national agenda" comprised "the essential elements of [South Africa's] founding settlement that are inscribed within our constitution – the recognition that South Africans should seek to constitute themselves as one nation, within a democratic system, on the basis of a common effort to eradicate the legacy of poverty and racial inequalities as a necessity for the social peace and stability required for progress".

Research showed that these issues were "at the top of the list defining what the public wishes to hear from the government", he added.

"The question is whether this agenda for development should inform the news agenda, and to what extent it does have salience in practice. This is not to say that the media should deal with the issues as government sees them, nor only when there is progress to report – but that they are dealt with as matters of relevance and that, when there is criticism, it is based on substance.

"It is not a question of limits on the freedom

of expression," Trew said, "but of how the media decides to use that freedom to promote positive change."

Trew acknowledged that capacity problems existed among people working in government communications whose job it was to liaise with the media. These deficiencies impacted negatively "on the ability of the media to report on government in an informed way".

But he suggested that some media professionals trained during the former apartheid era had not caught up with the demands of the new democratic environment: they themselves needed to develop "capacities to contribute to the work of the media in a democratic society".

Crucial challenge before the media and the government . . . broaden and democratise access to the media for all South Africans.

Trew said a crucial challenge before the media and the government was to broaden and democratise access to the media for all South Africans. "It is difficult to over-estimate this," he said.

"This challenge, which South Africa shares with other developing countries, is a matter of making a reality for all citizens of the rights to freedom of expression.

"It is a necessity for the achievement of the vision of a nation of informed citizens who are active participants in changing society and their own lives for the better.

"It is fundamental to the topic of the conference: changing media for a changing society.

"Rightly, the ambitions of this conference extend beyond South Africa to building a better media for a better world.

"What is crucial is to ensure that, in the current global order, sight is not lost of the imperatives of building an international system that helps address the historical imbalances from which our continent of Africa and the rest of the developing world are striving to extricate themselves. A better media for a better world implies a global media informed by a global agenda for development," Trew said.



Suspicious minds ... South Africa's media can afford to have more confidence in their government's commitment to democracy, delegates heard from state information official Tony Trew.

Island of pain and chains

DELEGATES were deeply moved by a visit on the eve of the conference to Robben Island, site of the former maximum security prison off Cape Town's coast that was used by South Africa's old apartheid rulers to imprison its most determined opponents.

The visit helped delegates appreciate the changes South Africa has undergone, and the distance travelled, in the nine short years of democratic rule since 1994.

The island, which lies about two miles off the picturesque shores of Table Bay, was "home" for decades for Nelson Mandela, as well as for thousands of other less well-known members of his African National Congress (ANC) and other liberation organisations who had been convicted under apartheid's security laws.

Among the island's other celebrated prisoners was Robert Sobukwe, a leader of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), formed as a breakaway from the ANC in 1959. When Sobukwe completed a three-year sentence for agitating against the identity documents (known as "passes") that blacks had to carry which determined where they were allowed to live and work during apartheid, he was re-detained under a retroactive parliamentary enactment passed specifically for him. He was confined under this provision to a bungalow on Robben Island. After his eventual release, Sobukwe was kept under house arrest in the

diamond-mining city of Kimberley until his death in 1978.

Mandela, Sobukwe and imprisoned members of the Black Consciousness Movement (the third significant strand of militant opposition to apartheid) managed to turn their prison experience on Robben Island into a symbol of freedom and personal liberation. The island, now a national monument and museum, has come to represent the triumph of the human spirit over enormous hardship and adversity.

Delegates visited the lime and stone quarries, and learnt of the brutality warders meted out to prisoners, particularly in the 1960s and early 1970s. Political prisoners worked regularly with pick-axe and spade in hand in these quarries. The harsh white light in the lime quarry affected the eye-sight of many prisoners. And the effects of the lime dust also made it impossible for some to cry – even today. The fine dust blocked their tear ducts. The prison was apartheid's hell-hole.

But the quarries also provided opportunities for prisoners to communicate – particularly valuable for those held in isolation, such as the ANC leadership around Mandela – and to educate younger and illiterate prisoners.

The island's history as a place of hardship, banishment and isolation, however, goes back far further, back almost to the days when the Dutch and English first settled at Cape Town in the 17th century. Robben Island was used as a leper colony for many years and as a place of banishment for various political opponents. Among the latter were early objectors to white minority domination in South Africa. They included princely forebears of Mandela and others. History was less kind to them: they lost, and died, some on the island itself, others in the cold water around it as they tried to escape.



From Soviet to South African gulag ... Russian journalist Yuri Reshetnikov tries out a bed in the notorious Robben Island prison that held many militant opponents of apartheid between 1960 and 1990.

How to enrich journalism on poverty

JOURNALISTS need again to grapple with how best to report on the world's most prevalent and enduring social condition – poverty – the conference heard.

Guy Berger, professor of journalism at Rhodes University, said journalists were capable of developing new approaches to reporting on poverty that could indeed help ease the problems in their societies. It did not follow that because earlier approaches to reporting on poverty had proven ineffective and were now widely discredited journalists should separate themselves from efforts to help end privation.

Berger urged journalists to develop editorial strategies that treated poverty as an issue that obtruded within almost every specialised area of reportage in their news organisation. There was no sense in setting up a single "beat" of the traditional kind to cover poverty. Rather, reporters should be able to link developments within their specialised areas – be they finance, business, politics, labour, agriculture, municipal, social welfare or crime – to poverty as an issue.

An integrated reporting strategy of this kind was consistent with journalism in its more conventional shape; it did not depend on some new doctrine of journalism.

But making this integrated strategy work effectively would require passionate backing from editorial managements, Berger said. It was quite within the power of journalists and their managements to mobilise this passion.

Berger said credible journalism along these lines could have "enormous consequences" for the societies in which it was undertaken and that it could radically upgrade the value of journalism to the broader population.

"These [consequences] may be debates on government policies, exposés of poor implementation, heartbreaking reports of the voices on the frontline, or inspiring and educational stories of successes. Then," said Berger, "and only then, can we begin to speak of journalism as a full part of the rich resources in our society."

Berger said journalists should draw lessons from the weaknesses of earlier approaches to reporting on poverty, notably the "development journalism" of the 1960s and early 1970s.

"Post-colonial journalism in much of Africa and elsewhere was re-fashioned away from

serving the ends of nationalism, towards reconstruction and development ends. In theory, at least. This anti-poverty pitch prescribed a form of journalism that would educate, enlighten, uplift and promote national prosperity. In practice, however, it ended up ineffectually reporting on what government leaders and the international 'development industry' were allegedly doing for a passive citizenry."

"Did this 'development journalism' understand the causes of poverty?" Berger asked.

"Given its obsequious character, and unwillingness to generate debate, the answer is probably, No. Did it show how to address poverty? The answer here is that, apart from buttressing corrupt and thieving governments, it sometimes actively promoted underdevelopment through uncritical parroting of inappropriate ideologies of 'African socialism' or 'structural adjustment'. In short, 'development journalism' was a highly impoverished kind of journalism, with minimal effect on changing poverty but a real role in perpetuating and even exacerbating it," said Berger.

"In the 1990s," said Berger, "things began to change in regard to this discredited form of journalism. There was more emphasis on bottom-up development (for example, participation via community radio) and on a strong political edge that was premised on the view that democracy was a precondition for development.

"In the process, a price was paid... The role of professional journalist has been marginalised in the first ['development journalism'] emphasis, and overly politicised in the second."

Berger argued that a fundamentally important question was overlooked in this doctrinal battle between different kinds of journalism. It was: what could "journalism in its more conventional shape" do about covering and combating poverty?

"The baby," said Berger, "had gone out with the bathwater."

Berger added: "The mainstream media and its journalists are still challenged to respond to poverty."



Poverty of journalism ... Journalism can help end poverty, according to Guy Berger.

Gender is litmus test for media



Gender agenda ... a democratic media is sensitive to women's position, Lizette Rabe told the conference.

GREATER gender sensitivity was necessary among people working in the media if they were to promote democracy in their societies, according to Lizette Rabe, professor of journalism at the University of Stellenbosch. The need was particularly acute in Africa, including South Africa, she said.

"We need a change in consciousness [in the media], and a change in coverage," Rabe told the Cape Town conference.

Gender sensitivity was an intrinsic requirement of democracy, she said. "Without a gender sensitive media, we cannot have a democratic media. Without a democratic media, there will be no democracy," she said in her presentation to the session on "What kind of journalism for what kind of democracy?".

The challenges before journalists included: adequately reflecting the serious and widespread violence being perpetrated against women, particularly in Africa; ensuring able women rose, like their male counterparts, to the highest levels in media companies; ridding the news agenda of old stereotypical depictions of hard-soft and male-female news categories; ending sexual objectification in media; ensuring women appear proportionately as sources of news and comment; and removing gender references from descriptions.

"Especially in Africa, women are not only treated as second class citizens, but the objectification and commodification of women as non-citizens are perpetuated undisturbed and, in too many cases, unchallenged. Yet no alarm bells are ringing. Stereotypes of women are perpetuated daily - as objects to be raped, beaten, mutilated, misused as non-humans. And the media is not doing its civic duty to make the right decisions, in the first instance, and, in the second, to report on these

human rights atrocities," she said.

She cited a study showing that, although more than half the students in some South African journalism departments were women - and had been for some years - only 25 per cent of editorial employees in media institutions were women, and that they were located mainly at the lower levels. Statistics elsewhere, including in the United States, did not challenge this pattern.

Another study monitoring gender issues in the media in southern Africa had found that women made up only 17 per cent of news sources and that only 8 per cent of politicians quoted were women.

Rabe said she saw a particular role for journalism schools in correcting these distortions. "Once journalists start working in a newsroom environment, it will be difficult to find the time to train for gender sensitive reporting. It is therefore desirable that this foundation is laid in the lecture rooms of journalism training institutions.

"To include gender in journalism curricula will not only empower future journalists to report sensitively on gender issues, but will empower Africa's women - and therefore Africa as a whole - to have their voices heard, and to fulfil their role as the majority of the population on the continent."

Rabe noted in her presentation that many people entered journalism because they saw the profession as an agency for change. She concluded: "It has rightly been asked: 'While we are preparing our students for the 21st century, who is preparing the 21st century? Let's not prepare students to live in the 21st century. Let's prepare them to create it.'"



Delegates enjoy a break in the beautiful setting of Silvermist Lodge.

Impact of technology overestimated

SOUTH AFRICAN media are recovering from the mistaken belief, once also common in more developed countries, that the Internet would absorb or overtake all old media, the conference heard.

Most South African media companies could now see that the impact of the convergence of technologies in the information, entertainment and telecoms industries had been misunderstood and overestimated. Companies had spent vast amounts of money betting that the Internet would rapidly subsume other media and technologies, and some had got burnt as a result, delegates were told during a panel discussion on "The Convergence Mania and the Business Environment of the Media".

"Brutal facts"

One of the panellists, **William Kersh**, chief executive of Primedia, one of South Africa's largest media organisations, said the Internet was, indeed, "real and growing". But there were "brutal facts" which made commercial exploitation of it difficult. One was that, whereas there was unconditional access to the Internet, the radio and television environments were usually subject to forms of government regulation. Second, it was a mistake to try to build brands in a medium with unconditional access; unconditional access made it almost impossible to realise commercially the value of Internet brands. And, third, in the South African case, access to the Internet was still limited and expensive, which meant a small local market.

Connie Molusi, chief executive of Johnnic Publishing and convenor of the panel, said he had "no doubt" that convergence of technology would happen.

He added: "Telecommunications operators will increasingly look to content owners to generate traffic on the network. However, the key question still remains around the revenue models. Key stumbling blocks to convergence include the integration of disparate types of information in a rapidly closing technology environment and creating a sustainable revenue model."

Key issues

He said the key issues were: What the revenue potential was in the online world; how media companies could realise value from publishing online; and how to create an enabling environment for convergence without compromising business imperatives.

Peter Matlare, chief executive of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, said he expected the South African government to introduce draft legislation later this year which took this technological convergence into account. "It is possible that only one licence will be issued to cover involvement in both broadcasting and communications technology," he said.

Matlare said the public service broadcaster would prefer to partner organisations in media in which it was not involved, such as the Internet, rather than get into a new medium itself.

Leading South African media barons . . .



Peter Matlare



William Kersh



Connie Molusi

Dreamers who move the world

It was appropriate that the ICF had carried its spirit to South Africa – a country led by men like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu who had realised their dream – **Bernard Margueritte** told the conference.

Margueritte, president of the ICF, said members of the ICF might also be called “dreamers”. But, he said, “it is dreamers who move the world: it is exactly what Mandela and Lech Walesa did when fighting against apartheid and Communism – and we know the result.”

He added: “Does this mean we are naïve dreamers? Yes, we are dreamers; maybe we are naïve. But if we want to achieve the possible, we must aim at the impossible. Isn’t that what [ANC President] Mandela and [Nobel Peace laureate] Tutu did? Who could have believed that freedom would arrive in South Africa in the way that it did?”

Margueritte said his own and the ICF’s dream is that journalists:

- recover their dignity and regain public confidence;
- see their role as being to serve their fellow citizens and give them what they need to be

full citizens in a living democracy;

- reject the pseudo-civilisation of materialism, consumerism, hatred and violence in which many now live, and;
- develop media “promoting a civilisation that affirms the dignity of people, a civilisation respectful of other people and cultures, a civilisation of love and social justice”.

He said he was sure these dreams would be “the realities of tomorrow, as more and more people of good will in the media are together carrying the light”.

Margueritte said there was an urgent need for a wake-up call to journalists. “This can only come through person-to-person dialogue, each one addressing his or her own conscience and the conscience of the other.

“We have to allow our readers, listeners and viewers to know, understand and respect the dreams, problems, cultures and civilisations of far-away peoples, replacing hatred and violence with mutual understanding and love.

“This is our task. The future of our societies is at stake. This is what the ICF is about,” Margueritte said.

Cell phone ‘revolution’ in Africa

CELL or mobile phones are offering immense opportunities for the dissemination of news in societies with weak communications infrastructures and often repressive political regimes, the conference heard. The scale of the change being wrought in Africa by the cell phone amounts to nothing less than a “revolution”, according to **Judy Sandison**, who heads the special news services department of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. In that role, she is leading the SABC’s exploitation of the cell phone’s potential as a news provider.

Sandison said there were now about 38 million cell phone subscribers in Africa (and rising fast) and that mobile connections now exceeded fixed lines in many African countries.

This explosion in cell-phone use has resulted from a number of factors, she said. But significant

among them was the failure – perhaps inability – of some African governments to provide land-line-based systems.

More general weaknesses in communications infrastructures in many countries have also often meant that the reach of their radio and television services has been weak and, as a result also of high illiteracy rates, that newspapers have tended to serve only a small proportion of their populations. Moreover, owing to the political systems in many African countries, the form in which news has got through to their populations via these internal media organs has often had little credibility.

The SABC has developed a strong brand on the continent, according to Sandison. The core of that brand is believability. This, she said, is helping the SABC market itself as a major supplier to cell phone service providers of dial-in products giving breaking news, sports news, weather reports, financial indicators, and examination and election results. Sandison suggests that the social and political effects of these developments could be significant.



Ringling in the changes ... mobile phones have become an important source of news in developing countries, with profound economic and political knock-ons, says Judy Sandison.

Responses to the Cape Town conference

I want to express my profound gratitude for being part of the ICF in Cape Town. I felt there were some openings which I am sure will be of vital importance and help to our Development Broadcasting Unit (DBU) at the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC).

— **Hassan Nkata, Malawi**

I thank you so much for the great opportunity you have given me to speak about Angola and for the forceful statement made by ICF on my country. Please, let me have both the statement and the letter to widen its circulation among media organisations and practitioners.

— **Rafael Marques, Angola**

The gender presentation by Prof Rabe was riveting, and I was especially moved by the trials and tribulations suffered by colleagues from Angola and Sierra Leone. It is crucial that more people hear their stories and struggles against media oppression. Thanks for an amazing interactive experience.

— **Judy Sandison, South Africa**

Cape Town was a valuable experience. For the first time I met foreign journalists in a large gathering and shared experiences. I found it very constructive. African journalists have a lot of problems because of the interference of governments. We also have difficulty managing sources of information and in training journalists. The forum gave me a lot.

— **Gregoire Ndjaka, Cameroon**

What struck me most was Bill Porter's self-revelation of where he'd gone wrong, switched gears and found a more compelling motivation. I think we need such honesty among media professionals to win back public confidence. Much of what Bill said I'd heard before, but he went deeper this time and doubtless touched many cords among listeners.

— **Bob Webb, USA**

What stands out was Bernard Margueritte's question at the end as to whether participants felt more inspired to improve journalism. The positive response was more than politeness. The occasion did stimulate our journalistic and humanitarian consciences. Everyone gained some insights on the problems with

journalism, and how we can address them. That is valuable growth.

— **Guy Berger, South Africa**

Thanks for the opportunity to participate in the conference in Cape Town. I spoke there to colleagues from Africa and we all believe the ICF should be more involved in Africa where new democratic states are evolving after years of war and instability. This could be in the form of training, advocacy or institutional development.

— **Ivan Thomas, Sierra Leone**

The reception that the topic "gender" got was on the one hand amazing – on the other gratifying. Maybe there is fertile ground out there for things to start happening in terms of gender and media – in every respect.

— **Lizette Rabe, South Africa**

I was impressed that in Africa, particularly in South Africa, the relationship between quality media and quality democracy was understood as a first principle and a matter of common sense. In more affluent countries like my own, this is too easily lost from sight.

— **Martin Flanagan, Australia**

It was the right event in the right place in the right time. I could compare media problems in the new political environment in Africa after apartheid with a similar situation in central and eastern Europe in the post-Communist era. The problems are comparable. The conference was a marvellous opportunity.

— **Pavol Mudry, Slovakia**

'May I add my congratulations to the ICF for organising such a stimulating discussion about the progress of journalism in Southern Africa and to acknowledge the progress we have made since the dark days of apartheid. It was timely and emphasised the need for all journalists and the owners of their publications to concentrate on the need for excellence and constant vigilance against inroads on press freedom.'

— **Raymond Louw**



**Ivan Thomas,
Sierra Leone**

Media 'must better serve humanity'

PEOPLE have forgotten what it was like being a journalist under apartheid – it is very different now.

This sobering reminder was given by Raymond Louw, editor and publisher of the *Southern Africa Report*, at a conference near Hout Bay.

Louw, who spoke about the role and history of the media under apartheid, reminded his audience of the very recent history of enormous media repression and the maze of laws that rendered most writing and reporting almost impossible.

The conference, "Changing Media for a Changing Society" is being held under the auspices of the International Communications Forum at the Silvermist Mountain Lodge, Constantia Nek.

In another address Angolan journalist Rafael Marques gave a chilling account of how journalists and journalism continue to suffer even a year into "the great Angolan peace".

In a special message to the conference, founder William Porter – a leading British journalist and media owner – said: "War is always the result of a failure. We are concerned for the Iraqi people, the Iraqi families, who have suffered so long under a despotic leader and cruel regime and are now suffering from the war."

He said today's failure was also the failure of the media. "It shows once again that we, in the media, are not fulfilling our task of bringing people together."

He called on the media to better serve humanity, to build a better media, that can help bring about the "civilisation of love" that should replace "the pseudo-



Raymond Louw

civilisation of hate and violence".

The chief executive officer of Telkom, Sizwe Nxasana, delivered the welcoming address to the delegates representing 26 countries. He said that a key element in a democracy was an informed public and this can only be achieved under conditions of freedom of expression and a culture of human rights.

It was also important that people not be regarded as consumers or markets or as passive recipients of information, "but as empowered actors and participants in a multi-directional social dialogue".

Stephen Wrottesley, Independent Newspapers Cape editorial chief of staff, delivered a thought-provoking paper on the problems facing journalism trainers.

He shared with the conference the results of an audit done in 2002. The report concluded that journalists had poor reporting skills, a lack of concern with accuracy, poor writing skills, weak interviewing skills, weak

knowledge of ethics and poor general, historical and contextual knowledge.

He concluded that this problem could only be resolved when all educators, including journalism trainers and the entire communication industry work together.

Professor Lizette Rabe, chairwoman of the Department of Journalism at Stellenbosch University, spoke passionately about the need for gender sensitivity in journalism training. "Journalists can be sensitised, educated and trained to recognise inequalities, and to have the tools to report on it."

But she said that without the support from media management nothing will be achieved.

Matthew Storin, vice-president of Notre Dame University in Indiana and a former editor-in-chief of the *Boston Globe*, spoke about the American example of publishing quality newspapers and yet showing profits. He said that the journalistic tradition of independence and quality readers has driven the print media to produce quality media.

The Forum describes itself as a "world-wide network of media people who recognise that they have the power to influence society for good or ill and who want to play their part in building a less corrupt, less grubby-minded and infinitely more compassionate world".

It regards its key assets to be its experience, reputation and the community of people who share its ideals and objectives.

From the *Cape Argus*,
Tuesday April 8, 2003

What is it?

AS EACH delegate registered for the Cape Town conference, he or she was given a large brown paper hold-all. At the bottom of it, under all the things one usually gets at the start of a conference, lay an intriguing contraption.

It was about the size of a deep and generous box of chocolates. And it weighed about as little. But it was made almost entirely out of wire – wire bent this way and twirled that way to fashion its frame and body. It had a handle, made out of spiralled wire, that worked. And it had a couple of dials, also of wire, that turned. It had a battery. And, yes, you could see its innards and identify them as a few pieces of electronics.

No, it wasn't bomb.

So what was it?

It was a uniquely South African radio, made in a local art form called wireart, that developed among young black children in the country's rural and urban areas over many decades. These children fashioned intricate toy cars, trucks, bicycles and the like out of coat hanger wire and waste materials. Their creative genius overcame their poverty to give them the toys they craved.



Is it a bomb? Is it an aeroplane? No, it's a wireart radio.

There are now many hundreds of wire artists across South Africa satisfying a growing local and overseas demand for the form. The range of work has also expanded. It now includes radios, hi-fi speakers, CD holders shaped like anything from guitars, saxophones, waste paper baskets, candle holders, chameleons and other animals – you name it.

The radio each delegate received was a gift from conference sponsors Telkom, the South African telecommunications utility. Telkom is among a few South African companies to see advantage in getting its branding on this ingenious product.

Our radios were built by Streetwires, a social upliftment and community development project. Started three years ago as a contribution towards reducing South Africa's serious unemployment problem, it has since grown from just four to 75 people, all formerly unemployed. It is striving to make it as a competitive business.

Its project manager is Jeff Mwazha, a formerly unemployed person eking out a living selling his wireart to shops and craft markets. And its design and development manager is Winston "Professor" Rangwani, among wireart's leading exponents who has been exhibited in galleries across South Africa.

See www.streetwires.co.za



Wired... Winston "Professor" Rangwani, head of design at Streetwires, at work in his studio

For further information on the activities of the International Communications Forum, please refer to
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