

Lesson Series 13: Use of Communications for protection of people and promotion of rights

Lesson I

A Questionnaire

This questionnaire was used by the participants at a seminar Held at Trichur, Kerala , a workshop joint organized by Jananeethi and Asian Human Rights Commission in April 2001.

The lesson can begin with the participants answering this questionnaire.

Do you make a record of the stories of victims of human rights violations?

- ◆ Do you use the tape recorder and transmit the story later?
- ◆ Do you use any other method of recording?
- ◆ Do you use the camera for making necessary photos?
- ◆ Do you use computer?

What is your capacity in reducing a story into writing?

- ◆ In your language?
- ◆ In English?
- ◆ If you have difficulties in writing do you have anyone in your organization to assist you?

Do you share this story, and if so how? What is your network? How many persons and groups in your network?

- ◆ By word of mouth?
- ◆ By post?
- ◆ By e-mail?

Do you have access to e-mail? On your own, through a friend, through an organisation?

- ◆ Do you know how to use it?
- ◆ How often do you use it for human rights purposes?

Do you have an access to a centre in your locality or in your country- which will help with the communications; documentation, sending to networks, making reports to national and international bodies?

- ◆ What facilities does such a center provide you with? scanning, preserving documents, sending documents to networks, organizing fed-backs.?

Do you have access to such centres in the region or internationally?

- ◆ How often do you contact them?

Do you have access to human rights websites?

Lesson II

A Reading

Modern communication facilities can be useful in developing solidarity action against torture. Unfortunately, most human rights organisations in Asia have not yet learnt the use of these facilities in an efficient manner for quick dissemination of information on torture and other abuses of human rights; the typewriter culture still prevails. This lack of communication skills and reluctance to use these facilities needs to be overcome if proper services are to be provided for the victims of such violations. Through the application of modern technology, Asian groups can use worldwide networks such as OMCT and Christians Against Torture to eliminate human rights violations.

The role for modern communications in promoting the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment

In Asia the chief mode of communication has traditionally been oral. However modern communication systems provide hitherto unimaginable possibilities for human rights monitoring and lobbying, including activities for elimination of torture. Modern communications are typically written. Vast lobbies can be activated with properly recorded information, and the time required for this communication is becoming less and less with the increasing speed of technology. Thus any well-documented studies on torture can reach a vast audience within a very short time: required are the skills for writing and using communications.

For effective written communication, one has to understand and be convinced about its uses for practically influencing people. Most activists have trained themselves to use oral communications and most NGO organisational patterns are also geared towards facilitating oral communication. With the possibility of influencing much larger sections of population through written communications – as compared with small numbers that may be contacted through oral communication – activists and NGOs need to review their work habits and programmes with a view to evaluate their actual effectiveness. Written communication skills require not only new habits relating to the use of technology but also new psychological habits.

Today activists cannot avoid being computer conscious. Use of computers is no longer a matter of access to this technology; it is a matter of consciously taking advantage of it, as it offers

tremendous possibilities for communication. Computer consciousness requires the acquiring of skills: on the one hand, the need for technical use of computers; on the other, the need to develop writing skills. Activists are generally reluctant to engage in “quiet” activities such as writing, however under modern circumstances writing is also part of activism. In fact, without such skills activism may turn out to be ineffective. Today activism and the use of written communication have become intertwined. If transmitted into writing, the enormous amount of information that becomes available daily on torture can be very effective tool in the fight to eliminate it. To allow acts of torture to be forgotten after perhaps a few days of protest is one of the reasons for the lack of success so far in the fight against torture. If every event had been properly recorded and used there would have been far greater social movements against torture that states would not be able to ignore.

Modern communication is no longer the patrimony of big companies. A private individual or group using their own computers can now reach a vast audience: network upon network is available, but in Asia this private power has not yet been used to any satisfactory degree. Hopefully the greater use of this capacity available to individuals can be used in an Asia-wide campaign for the elimination of torture.

The use of such private communication reduces hindrances associated with publications in the past. It cuts down costs enormously. It is also free from dependence on printed media controlled by owners and marketing agents and cannot be controlled by legal restrictions over the publication of printed matter. Even in times of censorship private media can be effectively used to counter the aims of censorship.

(Taken From *Torture: Mother of All Human Rights Violations*, An AHRC publication)

Lesson III

A discussion on the reading text

Do you agree with the views in the above text? If so or if not why?

What are the difficulties you have with regards to reducing your stories into writing?

- Language skills / or lack of habit in doing such things?

What are the problems you have relating to resources (example: access to computers, computer skills and the like) regarding reducing your stories into writing?

What are the suggestions you have as solutions to above problems?

What is the resolution on your part for the coming month to improve reporting and passing reports to others?