

Journalists can learn to make peace

By Rebekah Chevalier, WACC-North America Regional Vice-Chair

When you watch or read a news story about a violent incident or a war, are you getting the complete picture? Is there additional background material that would help explain why the conflict is happening or other sources that would provide another dimension to the story? These questions will be the focus of a series of workshops for journalists and peace advocates on "peace journalism" that will be offered during Congress 2008.

Peace journalism is a "deliberate, creative strategy to seek out and bring to our attention those portions of 'the facts' routinely under-represented," explains Jake Lynch in *Peace Journalism*, the book he co-authored with Annabel McGoldrick. Lynch will be the leader for the Peace Journalism Learning Stream (workshop series) at Congress 2008.

One of the world's leading proponents of this approach to reporting on conflict, Lynch says peace journalism restores parts of the picture commonly left out, reveals evidence that parties to conflicts may be hiding and exposes war propaganda. Some of its techniques include exploring how the conflict is formed rather than focusing only on what is happening in the "conflict arena" (war zones, riots, hostage taking, gang violence). It considers all the parties involved rather than portraying the conflict as a battle with only two sides, only one of which can win. Other hallmarks of peace journalism include giving voice to all parties—this means searching out sources other than government and military officials that are so commonly quoted by reporters—humanizing all sides, and focusing on ordinary people as peacemakers rather than elite peacemakers.

But how is peace journalism relevant in the North American context where there are no wars? The principles of peace journalism can give North American editors and journalists the tools to analyze the news coverage of conflict worldwide, recognize propaganda and ask about the larger picture of why conflicts are happening. Rather than accepting the analysis of government and military officials presented in news stories, they can use peace journalism techniques to research the larger context and search for the voices of civilians, civil society groups and others advocating peace or proposing peace strategies. Equipped with this information and analysis from the media, ordinary Canadians and Americans can urge their governments—which commit money and troops to resolving conflicts overseas—to advocate for moderation and peaceful resolutions to conflicts.

Peace Journalism is one of four Learning Streams on the Congress 2008 programme which also features keynote speakers from Brazil, Uganda and Canada addressing the conference theme *Communication is peace: Building viable communities*.

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