Guide for Practical Application

Speak Up, Speak Out: A Toolkit for Reporting on Human Rights Issues

Internews
Local voices. Global change.
NOTES

PHOTO CREDITS: Unless otherwise noted, all photos are drawn from Internews’ own image archives.

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Guide for practical application

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Guide to Section 3

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Story Assessment

Here we present two real news articles on the issue of child marriage covered from two different angles. Use the worksheet at the end to assess and compare the two stories.

NEWS – AUGUST 4, 2011

Polygamist sect leader Warren Jeffs convicted in Texas

FROM BBC NEWS — The head of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints made no reaction as the verdict was read. He faces up to life in prison.

He was found guilty of forcing two teenage girls into “spiritual marriage” and fathering a child with one of them when she was 15.

The charges followed a raid on a remote west Texas ranch in 2008. A forensic analyst testified that Jeffs, 55, was an almost certain DNA match to the child of a 15-year-old mother.

Prosecutors also played audio recordings in which Jeffs was heard instructing young women on how to please him sexually.

Jeffs conducted his own defence and claimed he was a victim of religious persecution.

The jury in San Angelo, Texas, deliberated on a verdict for more than three hours. They then went immediately into sentencing proceedings.

When police raided the ranch they found women dressed in frontier-style dresses and underage girls who were clearly pregnant.

Authorities brought charges against several men from the group. The 10,000-strong sect, which dominates the towns of Colorado City in Arizona, and Hildale, Utah, split from the mainstream Mormon church more than a century ago.

View this article at www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-14413855
Child marriage a scourge for millions of girls

NEW YORK (TrustLaw) - Child marriage, which steals the innocence of millions of girls worldwide and often condemns them to lives of poverty, ignorance and poor health, is one of the biggest obstacles to development, rights groups say.

A girl under the age of 18 is married every three seconds -- that's 10 million each year -- often without her consent and sometimes to a much older man, according to the children’s charity Plan UK. Most of those marriages take place in Africa, the Middle East or South Asia.

“This is one of the biggest development issues of our time and we’re committed to raising the voices of millions of girls married against their will,” Plan UK head Marie Staunton said in her introduction to “Breaking Vows,” a recent global report on child marriage.

From horrific childbirth injuries to the secret sale of “drought brides,” the consequences of child marriage are explored in a multimedia documentary by TrustLaw, a legal news service run by Thomson Reuters Foundation (childmarriage.trust.org).

“Young children have babies -- your life is ruined, your education is ruined,” said Kanta Devi, who was 16 when she married in Badakakahera village in India’s Rajasthan state.

“You become upset with everything in your life,” she told TrustLaw.

The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child considers marriage before the age of 18 a human rights violation.

But according to the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), there are more than 50 million child brides worldwide, a number that is expected to grow to 100 million over the next decade.

RIPPLE EFFECT

Rights activists say six of the eight U.N. Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015 are directly affected by the prevalence of child marriage -- the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achievement of universal primary education; promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women; reduction in child mortality, improvement in maternal health; and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

The ripple effect is devastating, experts say.

Girls forced into early marriage rarely continue their education, denying them any hope of independence, the ability to earn a livelihood or of making an economic contribution to their households.

The practice also reinforces the concept of girls as worthless burdens on their families to be jettisoned as soon as possible.

Girls who complete secondary school are six times less likely to become child brides than contemporaries with less or no education, according to the ICRW, a Washington-based think tank.

But distance from schools and a lack of school fees often preclude education for the poorest girls, who are twice as likely to marry young as those from wealthier homes.

In Niger, Chad and Mali, more than 70 percent of girls are married before the age of 18, according to ICRW analysis of demographic and health data last year.

Bangladesh, Guinea, Central African Republic, Mozambique, Burkina Faso and Nepal have child marriage rates over 50 percent, the data showed.

Ethiopia, Malawi, Madagascar, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Eritrea, Uganda, India, Nicaragua, Zambia and Tanzania are all above 40 percent.

The reasons child marriages occur vary with the country and are rarely simple.

“Very often people are sort of quick to demonise, in some ways, the family members and the people who make the decisions about the marriage of girls,” Jeffrey Edmeades, a social demographer with ICRW, told TrustLaw.

“But we’re finding, for the most part, that people are making these decisions because they feel it’s best for their daughters. Parents love their children and they do want the best for them. They’re just not sure what the best is.”

Edmeades, who has been working with aid agency CARE on a project to tackle child marriage in Ethiopia, gave the example of children in that country being betrothed before birth to cement strategic alliances between families.

In other cases, girls are married off early to ensure that their virginity, and thus their economic value as brides, is intact and the honor of the family is protected.

Meanwhile, debts and natural disasters, such as tsunamis and drought, can lead to girls being sold off as brides as families scramble for survival.

(continued)
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‘SILENT HEALTH EMERGENCY’

Girls under 15, their bodies still developing and their pelvises narrow, are five times more likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth than women over 20, the U.S. Agency for International Development estimates.

The vast majority of those deaths are in the developing world, where a lack of pre- and post-natal care and advanced procedures such as Cesarean sections makes pregnancy and childbirth far more risky than in rich countries. In Africa, for example, 60 percent of women and girls give birth without a skilled medical professional present, according to the U.N. World Population Fund.

Worldwide, 70,000 girls aged 15-19 die each year during pregnancy or childbirth, UNICEF says. The U.N. World Population Fund considers pregnancy the leading cause of death in that age group, citing complications of childbirth and unsafe abortions as major factors.

Children of child brides are also at risk. Babies born to mothers younger than 18 are more likely to be underweight or stillborn, Plan UK says.

Girls forced into early marriage are also at an increased risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS because they are unlikely to be able to negotiate safe sex with their husbands.

“Child marriage is a silent health emergency in the sense that it’s often overlooked as a root cause of maternal mortality and morbidity (illness),” the ICRW’s Edmeades said.

DRAWING MORE ATTENTION

While it is a subject still little known and rarely discussed in much of the Western world, the issue of child marriage is drawing greater attention from international aid and humanitarian organizations, as well as governments.

In the United States, where child marriage is rare, the U.S. Senate has reintroduced legislation aimed at curbing global child marriage that was unanimously passed in the Senate in 2010 but blocked in the House of Representatives.

The International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act would establish a strategy over several years to prevent child marriage in developing countries.

It would also require the State Department to report on child marriage in its annual human rights report and integrate efforts to prevent the practice into current development programs.

The bill will be reintroduced in the House this autumn, according to Betty McCollum, a Democrat representative from Minnesota, who is its lead sponsor there.

It was blocked in the House last December primarily due to Republican concerns that it would help organizations supplying abortions, which “couldn’t have been farther from the truth,” McCollum told TrustLaw.

“It has nothing to do with abortion,” she said. “It has everything to do with saving 12-year-old girls from being sold into slavery or sold to settle a family debt.”

Not only will it make aid dollars more effective, she added, but “it’s a win for the child, it’s a win for the community the child lives in and it’s a win for the international community.”

The Elders, an influential group of global leaders founded in 2007 by former South African President Nelson Mandela, gathered dozens of organizations for a two-day meeting in Ethiopia in June and have launched a campaign called “Girls Not Brides: the Global Partnership to End Child Marriage.”

(For more on child marriage, including info-graphics, videos, stories and blogs, visit www.trust.org/trustlaw/womens-rights/child-marriage/)

Author: Lisa Anderson. Source: TrustLaw, Thomson Reuters Foundation’s hub of news and information on anti-corruption and women’s rights.

View this article at www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/04/us-child-marriage-idUSTRE7734QI20110804

(continued)
FACTBOX: Child marriage threatens girls’ health and rights

LONDON (TrustLaw) – Every day, more than 25,000 girls under the age of 18 are married worldwide, rights groups estimate. For many child brides, a future of poverty, exploitation and poor health awaits.

Following are key facts on child marriage around the world.

- Every three seconds, a girl under the age of 18 is married somewhere in the world, mostly in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.
- The practice affects a third of girls — and some boys — in developing countries, according to UNICEF, which describes child marriage as “perhaps the most prevalent form of sexual abuse and exploitation of girls.”
- The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child says 18 years should be the minimum age for marriage.
- Child rights activists say marriage at a young age violates a child’s basic human rights because they are too young to be able to give “free and full consent” — a right enshrined in Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Child marriage is most common in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.
- In many developing countries the practice is illegal but the law is often not enforced or it operates alongside customary and religious laws.
- Girls younger than 15 are five times more likely to die as a result of pregnancy and childbirth than women in their 20s. If they are 15-19, they are twice as likely to die.
- Girls under the age of 18 are more likely to develop obstetric fistula, which causes severe incontinence. This condition occurs during childbirth when a hole develops between the vagina and bladder or rectum.
- Girl brides are more likely to be infected with the HIV virus by their older husbands. A study in Kenya and Zambia by University of Chicago researchers found that among 15- to 19-year-old girls who are sexually active, being married increased their chances of having HIV by more than 75 percent.
- A girl bride is more likely to be beaten or raped by her husband and experience abusive relationships with her in-laws.
- The babies of child brides are 60 percent more likely to die before the age of one than children of women older than 19.
- Child brides are rarely allowed to go to school. Many are expected to bear and raise children and carry out domestic work for their in-laws.
- Girls from poor families are nearly twice as likely to marry before 18 than girls from wealthier families.
- The number of child marriages often increases during conflicts or natural disasters.
- Some families use marriage to build and strengthen alliances, to seal property deals, settle disputes or pay off debts.

(Sources: The Elders, International Center for Research on Women, International Planned Parenthood Federation, Plan UK, UNICEF)
Assess the articles

It was easy for TrustLaw to cover the verdict handed down to Warren Jeffs as a human rights story, because the accused himself used human rights – his right to freedom of religion – as a defense.

Because the Jeffs case was in the news, it was the right time to publish a feature story exposing child marriage as a widespread human rights violation.

Can you identify all the human rights issues involved?

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In your view, has TrustLaw done a good job of identifying the rights and contextualizing the issues?

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What do you think TrustLaw could have done differently, or better?

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If your newspaper wanted to run the feature article, noting that it comes from an NGO (a foundation), how would you attribute the story?

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What are the controversies and the possible risks of carrying stories about young girls getting married in your community? How would you avoid causing unintended harm or offending sensibilities?

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**Write a story step-by-step**

The following step-by-step guide will help you write a human rights news story or feature, and get it published or broadcast.

**STEP 1 Finding a newsworthy story**

Human rights affect every level and area of life, and there are stories around us all the time. At the level of power, there is what governments do and what they do not do. The quality of government shapes and guides human rights, and government actions affect the human rights of individuals and groups. Is the government ruling properly? Are human rights protected? Is there respect for the rule of law? Is the economy being managed in ways that protect our ICESCR rights? Are the elections being properly managed so that everyone can exercise the right to vote? Are prisoners treated fairly? Are the courts independent and fair?

Corporations also affect human rights in the way they treat workers and affect the environment.

Journalists are also concerned with local and everyday issues and interests. Is there discrimination in the community? Are criminals violating people’s human rights? How are children treated? Are the schools adequate and open to everyone? What are the levels of poverty? Do people have access to health care? Who is excluded? Are local businesses and industries treating workers fairly? Are there any groups who feel unjustly treated?

Incorporating human rights angles into stories can make ordinary issues more newsworthy and more interesting. Potentially, knowledge about human rights issues can make you a better reporter.

Think of a story idea that involves human rights. Write down a few notes about the story.

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STEP 2  Check the story idea for news value. Make notes:

What is the likely impact – how relevant is this story to people's lives?
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Public interest – do people have a right to know more about the issue or event? Do people need to know? Will telling the story prevent harm or save lives? Will it inform the decisions they make?
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Timeliness – does the story include information that people need to know in order to make better decisions about their lives?
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Proximity – Is the story close to home? If not, can you draw links that will make it more relevant to your community? Does the story fit into a regional trend that has been studied by others?
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Currency – is it a “hot” topic? What’s “hot” about it?

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Novelty – is it unexpected, unusual, surprising?

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If you can answer most of the above questions positively, the story is newsworthy.
STEP 3  Search your conscience

This is a crucial step and the one that sorts out good journalists from bad ones. It is where you begin to consider some of the ethical issues.

Before you finally decide that your story idea is a good choice, search your conscience:

- Is this story really in the public interest? Will further investigation result in positive outcomes for the general public? Or are you just satisfying curiosity or a need for sensation?
- Who are the people in the story? Will the story cause them any harm?
- How much is your interest just to impress your news editor? Besides impressing your news editor, is the story likely to do any good?
- How are the public / your community / readers / audience likely to react to the story?
- How do you feel about the story? What are your own attitudes towards the people / events? Are they positive or negative? Do they matter? Will they affect your judgment?
- Final question – is it “doable”? Is it realistic and possible? Think about time, budget, skills, the languages spoken, and any other logistics.

STEP 4  Prepare your pitch

If after all this, you still think the story is newsworthy, prepare to pitch the story to your news editor.

“Pitching” simply means arguing that your story is newsworthy. To do this successfully, you make the case that the story idea has news value. You will have to make a strong argument, because you will be competing for space and airtime with many other story ideas.

In most news organizations, decision-making happens at editorial meetings. The main people at these meetings are the news editor and reporters. They develop the daily news diary; select stories and angles and allocate tasks. They set the news agenda and decide what news and information the public is going to receive.

The people at these meetings will also decide whether to follow-up and publish a human rights story, or to take a human rights angle in a story.

If you attend these meetings, this is where you will “pitch” your story idea. Alternately, you may pitch your idea directly to a news editor or editor, who will either immediately agree or disagree, or who will represent you at the editorial meetings.

Based on your answers to the questions under Step 2, draft your argument here:

I believe my story is newsworthy because:

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STEP 5  Analyze what you know

Well done! You have the go-ahead. Your news editor likes the story and has added it to the news agenda. Ideally, the news editor or other colleagues will have made some suggestions to strengthen the story or added to your idea. Take note of them.

Now analyze the story. Write down everything you know. What is fact and what is opinion? Which facts are you confident about? Which facts need checking and confirmation? Are there any assumptions in the story?

List what you already know; the facts you feel confident about:

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List the facts that you are unsure about; analyze why you feel uncertain.

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What are the assumptions in your idea? Why are they assumptions rather than facts? Can you convert them to facts? How?

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What are the opinions? Whose opinions are they? Are they important to the story?

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How can you make sure you are putting facts in the correct context? Whom can you speak with to help you understand the bigger picture surrounding the issue?

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STEP 6  Background research

What are the wider issues — the issues of public interest? This is very important when working with human rights. One of the main criticisms of the way in which journalists cover human rights issues is the lack of context and accurate human rights information. Which rights are involved; is there any particular treaty protecting them? Is your country a state party? How are the rights reflected in the laws of your country? If the story is about a violation, is the violation widespread? What kinds of people are involved? There are many, many questions....

You may not have a lot of time, but if there is anything you can research and read that may help you, now is the time to do it so that you are properly prepared for your first interview.

What sources are you going to use for your research?

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Make notes of important points from your background research.

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**STEP 7** Draft a list of potential interviewees and informants

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**STEP 8** Analyze your list of interviewees and informants

What are their strengths and weaknesses?

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**STEP 9** Decide whom to interview first

This is an important step, because it will shape the future of the story. It is usually best to try to interview someone who will give you the most information. Ideally, your first interviewee should be able to give you information that you can publish. But sometimes, it may be strategic to interview someone for background information that is confidential or off the record or simply provides context and recommends other sources.

The information you get from your first interview will guide you in deciding the order of future interviews and point you to new sources.

Whom am I going to interview first?

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Why is s/he the best person?

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STEP 10 Plan and conduct your first interview

For this interview, and all the interviews that come after it, you should consider: What information am I likely to get from the interviewee? This means doing background research about the interviewee.

It is important to try not to ask questions that the interviewee may be unable to answer, for two reasons:

Firstly, doing so might anger the interviewee, or scare them off;

Secondly, the interviewee may begin giving opinions or information they aren't sure about.

If you ask questions that go beyond the knowledge of the interviewee, the information you get (if any) becomes harder to verify.

Always ask interviewees whom else they suggest you speak with.

Draft a list of appropriate open-ended questions, consider the best approach, and do the interview. For guidance, refer to Section 2, page 82.

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STEP 11 Conduct three or four more interviews

For guidance, refer to Section 2, page 82

STEP 12 Assess the information, find the key issues

Time for a reality check. Based on the information that is emerging from your first few interviews, is this really a story? Is it really newsworthy? What are the central issues that are emerging, and can you build a story around them? Based on good news values and good journalistic ethics and standards, should the story be published? Is it in the public interest? Will anyone be harmed by it? Is the value to the public more important than any harm done?

STEP 13 Structure and write your story

The best way to structure your story is around the central issues, keeping your audience in mind. As you write, reconsider all your facts.

Which facts are essential to the story?
Which facts have you verified?
Which have you not verified?

- Are they essential? Could you leave any of the unverified facts out?
- If not, what do they add to the story? Will they cause any harm to anyone? How will they influence the readers? How can you let your public know that you are uncertain?

Have you given the context? Have you included enough information about the relevant human right/s?
Have you included unnecessary detail that could hurt the victim or make the story too sensational?
STEP 14 Final eye

Once you have completed your draft, check for quality and check your facts again. Here is a very thorough checklist based on the Society of Professional Journalists’ “Accuracy Checklist”:

Check your emotions
Start with your emotions. Human rights stories always create emotional responses. So check your feelings and your conscience. Ask yourself:

- Am I feeling too passionate about my story?
- Is anything troubling me?
- What are my doubts?
- What parts of the story make me feel uncertain?
- Am I feeling confident – or perhaps a bit overconfident?

Ask someone who is less involved for help
If the answer to any of these questions is yes, and you have doubts and worries, ask a colleague or senior who is more detached to read the story. Discuss your concerns.

Then double check
With your completed story and all your notes in front of you, work through the questions below. You can do this alone, or you can do this with a colleague or senior.

1. Do I have a high level of confidence about the facts in my story? Am I confident about my sources?
   - If not, can I tell my story in a more accurate manner?
   - If I have doubts about my sources, can I replace them with more reliable, trusted sources?
2. Have I attributed all facts to sources – either documents or humans?
   - If not, can I find someone/somewhere to attribute them to?
   - To what extent would deleting the unattributed facts weaken the story?
3. Have I double-checked the most important facts?
   - If not, double-check them.
4. If asked, can I provide the properly spelled name and accurate telephone number of all my sources?
5. Am I highly confident that all the factual statements in my story reflect the truth?
   - If not, can I get closer to the truth; be more accurate?
6. Would I be able to defend my facts publicly? Would I be able to convince others that I had checked my facts and taken all possible measures to verify my story?
7. Have I presented the quotes in my story fairly and in context?
8. Am I quoting anonymous sources? Why? Are they essential? In the event of a challenge, would I be willing and able to defend publicly the use of those sources?
9. Am I using any material (documents or pictures) provided by anonymous sources? Why? How confident am I that this material is valid and real? Would I be willing and able to defend publicly the use of that material?
10. Have I described people, minority groups, races, cultures, nations, or segments of society, for example, business people, women, workers, soldiers, using stereotypes? What is the possibility that I will offend people? How can I rework the descriptions to avoid stereotypes?
11. Am I using potentially offensive language or pictures? Is there a compelling reason for using such information? Would the story be less accurate if that language or picture were removed?
12. Do my headlines or broadcast promos accurately present the facts and context of the story?
13. Is my story balanced? Have I fairly reflected different viewpoints?
14. Is the information I have included about human rights accurate and properly contextualized? Am I referring to the correct rights and treaties?

—Based on the Society of Professional Journalists’ “Accuracy Checklist” (www.concernedjournalists.org/accuracy-checklist-society-professional-journalists) and other sources.

Finally, Revise/Rewrite your story
Based on the answers to the questions you ask yourself and a careful review of your draft, you may want to revise or rewrite the story to put in additional details. Reporters rewrite their stories a few times before moving to the next step.

**STEP 15** Submit your story
If there is anything to which you need to alert your news editor or colleagues, do it before the story is published or broadcast.

Human rights stories are always controversial. Everyone needs to be aware of possible consequences. Your news editor and editor will be in the frontline to respond to criticism and questions about your story.

**STEP 16** Consider what other stories you can write based on this one.
In particular, consider a human rights angle. Is this the beginning or part of a trend that you could revisit periodically?
Review: Good human rights reporting is simply good reporting

Reporting about human rights issues makes use of the same principles you should apply in all of your reporting.

Overall approach

Good human rights reporting is simply good reporting
In general, your normal journalism skills simply need to be at their best.

Be neutral and fair
Human rights journalism should be fair. Being fair means presenting as many sides of a story as possible, or at least trying to. It also means using the same criteria when you report on atrocities, no matter who committed them.

Some media interpret “watchdog” to mean watching only governments and exposing human rights abuses by governments. As a result, journalists may be more lenient when it comes to reporting the violations of government opponents – rebels, protesters, guerrilla groups, insurgents – who are also capable of violating human rights. Many freedom fighters have attacked civilians, intimidated, raped, occupied villages and murdered people.

Is compassion a compromise?
Compassion is a normal human response: we all feel for people who suffer. If you are tempted to help victims, consider carefully whether you are compromising your independence. Try to get someone else to help.

Pay extra attention to details (there is often only one chance to ask)
Ask everything several times and ask everyone to repeat.

Be thorough, methodical and detailed in your documentation. Video and photos are good, but you won’t always have a camera. So make very careful notes, describe what you see; writing down what people say, sticking as closely to their words as possible; draw little maps or pictures if necessary.

Be careful not to disturb physical evidence in situations where there has been violence.

Don’t look at rights violations as a national grievance
A human rights violation is not one ethnic or political group complaining about another; it is a human issue.

Consider the possibility of – and the ethical issues around – fueling ethnic tensions.

Remember: just by calling something a “human rights” investigation, you have taken sides in the eyes of many people
Many opposition groups use human rights conventions as a political tool: watch out for propaganda.
“Always tell colleagues where you are going and when you expect to return. If possible, work in a team.”

Human rights perpetrators will resent international conventions and human rights monitoring, and you will be at risk.

Human rights standards and instruments may contradict national laws. Be aware of this and point out the contradictions in your story.

Human rights standards and instruments often contradict religious customs, culture and traditions. Be aware of this too, and make sure you accurately present what others believe.

Give extra attention to your own safety in sensitive situations
Always tell colleagues where you are going and when you expect to return. If possible, work in a team.

Be extra careful with your notes and recordings
Do not let your notes fall into the wrong hands.

Take care what you write down and record: anonymity and confidentiality may be life and death issues. If someone says “don’t use my name,” evaluate the level of threat to the person. If it is high, don’t even write the name down.

Try to interview each person alone
It is difficult to concentrate when too many people are around.
For broadcast journalists, it may be hard to record interviews and get good quality sound when there is a lot of background noise.
Human rights abuses cause emotional responses, and group pressure may cause people to change their story or cause interviewees to exaggerate.

Human rights abuses are political. There may be police spies or others who do not want the story to be exposed in a crowd. This is a risk to the interviewee.

BUT – in some circumstances, you may not be able to be alone

Be extra careful and alert
If you are in a crowded place, be aware that there may be people present who do not want the information reported, for example, friends or relatives of perpetrators, people from opposing political parties, spies.

Do not perform the interview in a situation that may put any of the parties at risk of serious harm.

Translation
You may need a translator present. This may be a problem if the interviewee wants to remain anonymous or give you information that is off the record. There are different ways to get around this:

Avoid asking for sensitive or private information in the presence of a translator, including the interviewee’s name, if necessary.

Try to find someone who understands the situation and who respects the interviewee – perhaps a friend or relative who will be concerned about the interviewee’s safety and privacy.

Explain to the translator the risks of divulging in-confidence information and the principles of respect for anonymity and off-the-record information before starting the interview

Hire a translator in advance and draft a contract committing the translator to confidentiality.

Be sure that the translator is not someone who might put the interviewee at risk.

Trauma support
Some victims – especially of sexual crime – may need support before they can bring themselves to speak freely.

Many traumatized victims of rape or torture will not divulge their experience to a stranger. A friend or counselor may be a necessary companion.

Interviewing victims and witnesses

Understand the stress in the interview
People who have suffered human rights abuses may be traumatized. During the interview, take breaks if possible; offer water or tea if you can.

People who perpetrate human rights abuses may also be traumatized. Be sensitive to their needs too.

The story may also be traumatic for you as a journalist. Make sure you seek counselling or other help and support afterwards if you feel you need it.
If possible, never interview a child alone. Always be sure a trusted relative, carer, guardian, healthworker, teacher or friend is present.

**Clearly identify yourself as a journalist**
Say which newspaper, TV or radio station you are reporting for. Explain what audience the story is likely to reach. Say why you are following up on the story. Explain the context to the interviewee.

Explain that you are a journalist and that you do not represent a human rights organization or any other organization that might bring redress or help. Be careful not to make any false promises or encourage false hope in the victim. Tell the victim that you cannot ensure any particular outcome from the coverage of the story. Never offer payment or compensation of any kind for an interview. This compromises the integrity of the story and the victim’s ability to make a rational decision about whether to make his or her story public.

**Explain why you are covering the story and the risks involved**
Explain that you are covering the story because it is important to expose the abuse or violation, to tell others what has happened (or is happening).

Explain the risk: there may be revenge or retribution against the interviewee if the story is published or broadcast. Explain this to the interviewee; warn them.

If the interviewee does not want to be interviewed and have the story published, respect that choice.

**Offer the option of remaining anonymous**
Ask the interviewee if you can use his or her name. Respect their choice.

**Be thorough**
Confirm basic details, for example, the name and age of the interviewee. Assume this is the only time you will ever see this person; you have one chance only.

Be especially careful in situations of war or conflict, as people move around and get moved around a lot in conflict situations. Get clear descriptions of places, including the names of all those present when the human rights abuse occurred and positions and ranks of members of the army or police.

Ask interviewees to describe uniforms perpetrators were wearing or any other identification. Ask for descriptions of weapons seen or used.
Ask people to repeat their story. Be especially careful about timing and the sequence of events.
What was said? By whom? When?

Allow the interviewee to tell their story as a story, from the beginning to the end. It may be both easier for the interviewee and easier for you to tell the story afterwards.

Ask them to describe the incident or incidents from the beginning.
Ask them to repeat the story so that you can be clear about events.
Avoid leading questions that put words into the interviewee’s mouth.
Avoid questions that suggest answers or look for confirmation of other information.

In addition to the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of good journalism, there are two very useful open-ended questions for journalists working on stories about human rights violations.

How do you know?

What happened next?

Go to different sources, especially if the allegations are serious. Do not rely on one source. Is there anyone else who saw what happened?

If someone has died as a result of a beating or shooting, check with the mortuary and try to get an autopsy report. There may be other public records.

Think critically: victims and perpetrators will have agendas and interests when they tell you the story.

Think about your source’s motives
Witnesses, victims and perpetrators may have been offered money to lie, or they or their families may have been threatened with punishment if they tell the truth. They may have political motivations. Witnesses and victims may be tempted to exaggerate to ensure the perpetrator is punished or to emphasise their own innocence.

Interviewing the accused (the alleged perpetrator)
NOTE: The same principles apply as when you are interviewing a victim or witness.

- Prepare thoroughly for the interview by researching the interviewee, the crime(s) s/he is accused of committing and the circumstances in which they occurred.
- Try to interview the accused perpetrator alone and in a secure location. Take any precautions you feel you need to feel safe.
- Be forthcoming about your position as a journalist and the purpose of the interview.
- Do not promise anything in exchange for the interview (e.g. compensation, favorable coverage, understanding, etc.)
- Be polite but direct; remember that you are in charge of the line of questioning.
- Offer the option to remain anonymous: like victims, perpetrators who tell the truth may also be vulnerable to retribution.