Conference Theme: Confronting adversity – Women in Media during conflict and crisis

More than 70 media women from 25 countries attended the 35th IAWRT Biennial Conference in Casablanca, Morocco 24-26th October 2013.

The theme, "Confronting adversity – women in media during conflict and crisis", was developed to address pressing issues around the plight of female journalists in North Africa. The participants included documentary filmmakers, radio and TV professionals, bloggers and women in other electronic media.

The conference was organized in collaboration with Le Réseau de Femmes Journalistes du Maroc and consisted of plenary sessions and workshops, and the final day was dedicated to internal organizational meetings and elections of a new International Board.
Nezha Mghari, President of Le Résau des Femmes Journalistes du Maroc (RFJ) welcomed the participants and said that one of the goals of RFJ is to network with female journalists worldwide building bridges between journalists all over the world. Nezha Mghari said:

IAWRT President Racheal Nakitare, Kenya pointed out in her opening speech that this was the first Biennial Conference to be held in the northern African region and also the first time the conference was streamed online.

- With the increase in attacks on journalists worldwide one of the issues the conference and IAWRT needs to grapple with is who bears the responsibility for the safety of journalists and how do we as journalists carry out assignments without risking our lives, she said.

IAWRT President stressed the importance of heeding Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action which calls for an increase in the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in, and through, the media and new technologies of communication, as well as promoting a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.

Mohamed Rayhane, Head of Regional division of Communication Ministry in greater Casablanca welcomed the participants on behalf of the minister, saying that with Morocco’s new constitution and a series of reforms in the last few years, the issue of gender is very important, especially given the strong presence of women working in media in Morocco.
Abeer Saady, Egypt talked about female journalists in Egypt facing dangerous working conditions in the Arab Spring countries:

- I have myself met the safety challenges when I covered events in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and Sudan. In additions to the threats of being killed and harrassed, there is also the economic crisis which has caused many media houses to close down, and the first to loose their jobs are female journalists.

- The truth is the victim of the uprising in the Middle East and a lot of hate speech is happening in society. People are finding new ways to hate each other and female journalists need to keep their own views separate from the stories they are covering, she said.

Abeer felt that while it might be more interesting as journalists to concentrate on the political, what is at the root of much of what is going on today is the economy, which is essentially about the lives of everyday people.

While many journalists want to talk to the elite, it is very important for the media to give voice to the voiceless. What people are going through now has been exposed and before it was hidden and many
want to blame journalists for exposing things. But, Abeer stressed, attacking journalists is not the answer, something that is very common in Egypt where just recently nine journalists were killed, and many were attacked. Gender-based violence, she said, is a reflection of the increase in violence in the society as a whole.

**Iffat Fatima, independent documentary filmmaker from India**, said those in her profession tended to report on the aftermath of violence that has often traumatized a people.

Having worked in Sri Lanka and Kashmir, Iffat said the generic term “conflict” had different meanings and associations and should be de-contextualized and de-politicized. She said when women embarked on making a documentary they needed to draw on their own subjectivity, experience and understanding of what they were trying to do.Referring to the previous speaker’s admonition to “give a voice to the voiceless”, Iffat said it was important to know with whom you were aligning yourself.

In her work in Kashmir, for example, she said it would be easy for her to align with power, i.e. the army. But in seeking permission from them, she said it becomes difficult to maintain autonomy. The networks you form when you go into a place affect your safety and people tend to judge you based on who they see you aligned with.

Iffat showed a clip from her film of women in Kashmir explaining that their land had been taken over by the military and had been polluted without any compensation, and because all the military’s washing and sewage goes into the fields, no agriculture was taking place. She said after filming these women, she had been detained for a day and a half and then taken to the police station where they erased much of her footage.

Iffat said it was also important to use the camera as a tool to shift power relations. Realize the power of the camera and seize it, she said, without dilly-dallying

**Benaz Batrawi, Director of MediaNet in Palestine**, said she was working with the Institute for Inclusive Security, a Washington, D.C. based organization working in several countries, including Palestine, to help women take positive actions to solve problems through team-building and conflict resolution.

She said they had helped form a network of 60 women from the intellectual elite to use media to contribute to a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One of their activities had been to write to US First Lady Michele Obama, inviting her to the Palestinian territories to see firsthand the Gaza Strip and the wall separating the Palestinian territories.

They were still waiting for a response from her.

A second project had been to write to Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, to get him to include more women in negotiations with the Israelis.

Inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian experiences, teams of young people were organizing in the Palestinian territories. There was concern about young people in these regions who are using social media to communicate and organize.

There was also concern about fragmentation in society because of security measures. Popular resistance continues, she said, and after Friday prayers people take to the streets.
Awaz Saleem Abdalla, a journalist with Radio NAVA, in Iraq, said women in both Iraq and Kurdistan were in a disastrous situation.

There is a lot of violence against women, including women who set themselves on fire. There is a Women’s Council which is trying to stop the violence but women fear going to the police and with an average of 15 car bombs a day, the violence has taken a huge psychological toll on women. Many journalists have also been killed.

Whenever women try to advance, society hinders them even though Islam gives great importance to women and the need to defend and recognize women’s rights.

Awaz said there are many organizations who house women who have experienced violence and keep the women’s names secret, as well as other solutions to help defend women’s human rights.

But there needs to be more cohesiveness in the efforts of these organizations and men need to be held accountable for crimes.

It is also important to raise social consciousness and fight attitudes that are hindering implementation of laws in support of women’s rights.

The discussion following the presentations underlined that IFJ, International Federation of Journalists has been setting rules for protection. Networking and sharing of experiences are also important. An issue for further discussion is how women can encounter decisions made by editors in news rooms when it come sto security and risk-taking.
Plenary Session chaired by Myriam Ezzakhragy, editor

www.mafamille.ma

SITUATION OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN MOROCCO

Panel:
Samira Sitael, Manager of News department@2M
Nadia Lmalili, Journalist and Editor of www.mdd.ma
Khadija Sabil, Editor in Chief of Nissae Min al Maghrib (Women from Morocco)
Benaissa Assloune, Orfessor and media Expert

Asma Lamrani, former journalist now with the High Authority of Audio-Visual Communication (HACA), told participants about the study conducted by Jamal Eddine Naji, the General Manager of HACA, which looked into, among other things, the legal status of women inside media organizations including vocational and technological training.

The study, she said, found that female journalists were marginalized within companies with no space to develop skills and this represented a major challenge for them. Many female journalists, the study found, feel that many of the problems they face in the workplace are related to their position in society.

At the same time, many do not see the need to belong to a union which could potentially resolve some of the problems they face.

The study, entitled Maghreb Journalism, found that there were similarities among Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco, especially when it came to female journalists making a decent salary. Among the figures cited in the study is that 31 percent of female journalists had the opportunity to supervise and manage pages inside their organizations. The study recommended publishing a list of journalists, a kind of “Who’s Who” in a specialized seasonal magazine in both Arabic and French and organizing committees of professional journalists for training abroad.
Samira Sitael, Manager of News Department @2M, said her own professional path had been a difficult one and she struggled with how to progress, despite a new constitution that speaks about equity and has created many advances for women.

At the age of 49, Samira explained she had been a journalist for 26 years, and has hosted programs and moderated political debates for the last 10 years.

Her station, 2M, is the strongest media in North Africa, the top media viewed in the Maghreb and is an important channel with a certain liberty of tone.

Though it has limited means, 2M is relatively powerful. One of the challenges she faces is becoming an enemy to someone if you won't hire the niece or nephew of someone or you have to deal with dishonest colleagues.

When you are young, Samira told the audience, you tend to be a bit skeptical about the feminist fight, but once you are in the workplace, the landscape is different.
You are attacked and you start to realize it is because you are a woman. While society seems to accept that we be journalists first, she often asks herself would things be different if her name were Samir and not Samira.

The same tone and same words used by a man are perceived differently when those words and tone are used by a woman. A woman is criticized and people suggest that she is indisposed, etc. Samira said she is a woman and proud to be one and she recognizes the progress women have made.

Ten years ago, a camerawoman went to film a debate in Parliament and she was denounced and insulted by some members of Parliament.

She said all roads have been open to women, except that of the press. She does not want to change her sex but wants women journalists to be considered for their value.

Nadia Lamlili, journalist and editor of mdd.ma, said based on the stories of female journalists, including that of the first Tunisian female journalist to cover the conflict in Somalia, there is still a long way to go for women.

Education, she said, is key to combating discrimination. In 1969, there were practically no female journalists, but today 69 percent of journalists in Morocco were women, and the profession is becoming more and more female.

While very few media houses use the media tax to provide training, she has done research showing that training of journalists is a union right even if women rarely indicate that they want training.

Kadija Sabil, Editor-in-Chief of Nissae Min al Maghrib (Women from Morocco), said the subject of women journalists in Morocco was a complicated one, with many incomplete initiatives.

She said a complete study with all the details had yet to be done.

For example, of the 3,400 press cards given by the Ministry of Communication 600 were given to women and she wondered where are the others.

She said the figures did not really indicate very much since some press no longer exist and there are lots of freelance journalists. On the other hand, press cards are not really used since one is not obliged to present it in carrying out your work.

Benaissa Assioune, Professor and Media Expert, said she had been in journalism for 20 years and it has allowed her to work but it is in no way an easy activity.

In Morocco, she said, female journalists are not considered like the ordinary female and it was sometimes necessary for female journalists to leave aside their femininity. Benaissa acknowledged that things have changed and the vision is now different, with more women in film and the written press.

There are still constraints, she said, including the fact that females are the primary target of violence. That violence had many aspects, some of which are symbolic and some physical.
In addition, in traditional societies, women are often stuck in their traditional roles, and the integration of women into the workplace has doubled the responsibilities of women. Women have to “find a way out” and have to be compensated for work in and outside the home. Even though Morocco has enacted many new laws to benefit women, there are none that enable women to combine their professional and personal lives.

In the Q & A – session following the presentations Samira Sitael spoke about the importance of public media reflecting reality and not acting as if they were press attaches of the government. She said female journalists were more sensitive to women’s issues.

She said it was important to bring to light issues of importance to women and cited the example of a young 16 year old girl in a remote village in Morocco who was being forced into a marriage to her rapist.

She said she and her colleagues presented the young girl’s story but were attacked by the government. The panelists also stressed how the situation in Morocco was different from other places, for example, contrasted with those living under occupation or in a crisis situation.

The afternoon was dedicated to two workshops

![Image of workshop sessions]

**Diagram:**

**Reporting on Women and Climate Change: Challenges and Innovations**

**Gender Mainstreaming - Project Case Studies by IAWRT Chapters.**
SAFETY FIRST: ONLINE AND OFFLINE – FEMALE JOURNALISTS ON THE RECEIVING END

Panel:
Mary Kiio, BBC Kenya: Secure online communications for Women
Yasmine Ryan, Al Jazeera: New Media tools for Social Change and Safety
Hannah Storm, INSI, Author of "No Woman’s Land: On the Frontlines with Female Reporters"
Fadwa Misk, Qandisha website: Get heard - start Blogging

Mary Kiio, BBC Kenya gave a background based on IAWRT experiences in Kenya. For example the hacking of emails is increasing and often the owner of a hacked email address is not aware of what has happened. One must always be aware that safety problems can arise while sharing and networking online. IAWRT Kenya has recently started training programs addressing self-protection online.
Yasmine Ryan, Al Jazeera, focused on technology. In Tunisia, from where she works, the government uses to intervene online communications and close them. In Libya similar technology was used to trace information. Documents collected and released by former CIA-employed Edward Snowden shows how US government is spying in different countries. There is computer software that easily can trace the whereabouts and conversation of leaders and journalists.

Be careful, Yasmine said, to use these online tools. The issue of gender; it doesn’t make any difference if you are a woman or a man when it comes to the right to protection, techniques and to be prepared. There are links provided online to help journalists to improve safety.

Fadwa Misk gave the background to why she felt it necessary to start the Qandisha website.
In Morocco the stories regarding women were not given space and for a woman who called herself a feminist the interpretation is that she is frustrated, divorced or lesbian. In Morocco there are also cultural aspects that marginalizes women despite the fact that they are talented.
The opening up for young women journalists to to cover topics like economy and corruption gave credibility to the Quandisha magazine.
The comments from readers came to 50 percents from men, generally very positive. According to comments controversial articles were not welcomed.
From the journalists perspective the magazine had helped to change the profile of women journalists, blogging is a protection to women as well as editorial independence.
She told her experience that safety of journalists on internet is fragile, since they have been hacked twice because subjects brought up. You could say that the best protection is not to write about anything controversial.
Panel:
Rana Sabbagh, Head of Arab reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ)
Maria Moukrim, Leader AMIJ (Moroccan Association of Investigative Journalists)
Hanane Hachimi, Investigative Journalist, Morocco

Rana Sabbagh, delivered her presentation over SKYPE and gave examples of how ARIJ can advice, train and monitor draft reports before publishing. She said the organization had bad experiences in Tunisia because of the political turmoil.
Maria Mokrim gave an example from Morocco – a journalist in Rabat, well known for critical online journalism was arrested recently, prosecuted for terrorism. He was given a lot of support from other journalists and AMIJ and finally released and welcomed back to work. Maria said that in Morocco and other Arab countries there are no techniques to conduct investigative journalism, in the arab world we are faced with intimidation and taboos but the responsibility of journalists is to use the democratic margins to get the truth out in a democratic way.

Hanane Hashimi disclosed how she worked with a story about a network in Morocco where newborn babies were sold to wealthy couples. The disclosure was done through investigations and research and she went to hospitals in Casablanca trying to adopt a baby herself. The organization working with this child trade is a syndicate with government officials, she said.

Following this a session about Media Ethics and Professionalism in Journalism was performed, followed by workshops focusing challenges for independent producers, Community radio and Citizen Journalism on the rise using iPhone video.
The IAWRT AWARD OF EXCELLENCE 2013 FOR RADIO DOCUMENTARY:

“The Silent Killer” made by Suci Haryati, Indonesia, of Radio Station Maya Persona FM in West Nusa Tenggara. This program in Bahasa Indonesian dealt with the increasing occurrence of breast and cervical cancer survivors among Indonesian Women. It did so in an engaging way and used the voices of two cancer survivors and two women who took care of their mother and mother-in-law who were suffering from cancer.

HONORABLE MENTION 1: “Breaking the Silence” by Maya Friedler and Marilyn Campbell, USA in the series The Feminist Lens produced by the Women’s Media Group Chicago. The program used arts to give women who have experienced violence a voice. Instead of “facts and figures” the producers said, they centered their show “on the personal”. Poetry, music, a letter from a woman working with women survivors of sexual violence in the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and good use of sound, kept the jury engrossed for the entire 30 minutes duration.

HONORABLE MENTION 2: “Forest Women in Exile” by Indu Ramesh, India, produced for WINGS (Women’s International News Gathering Service) related the experiences of Indian tribal women who had been displaced from the forests. The producers invited us into their process by chatting with each other, describing the difficulty of getting women to talk about their lives and sharing their reaction to an interview. The voices of the tribal women and their songs were a wonderful way to give a voice to the voiceless.
The IAWRT AWARD OF EXCELLENCE FOR WEBCAST AUDIO DOCUMENTARY:

“Entrance Number 13” by Anne Vinding and Beate Riiser from Norway produced by Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation. The documentary tells the story of 9-year old Selma and her family who live in Oslo in a rundown public housing filled with drug users, and mentally ill people who are often violent. Selma describes how she has to navigate the hallways and stairs of her apartment building, and how she is often awakened at night from the noise of shootings or drug-related quarrels.

The story is an innovative entry in the webcast category that fuses several media: photography, sound and text. The use of photographs helps the radio listener to visualize the life of Selma, her family and their troublesome neighbors. There are 15 audio-slides and clicking on each one allows the webcast user to see even more photographs, including some of the documents verifying the family’s application for a different apartment and photos of an abandoned playground.

The variety of media gives the visitor to the website several options, including reviewing the story only through the photographs, or listening to concentrate on the words of the story. This new use of old and new media works well to highlight this important social issue in Norway.

The IAWRT AWARD OF EXCELLENCE FOR TV DOCUMENTARY:

"Gulabi Gang" directed by Nishta Jain from India and produced by Piraya Film Norway, for a captivating story of women's courage and self-empowerment leading to social change. The film follows a group of women from the poorest communities who have been drawn together by a charismatic woman leader in a drought-prone region of India. The women realize the power of their unity and exercise it by taking on the police, oppressive landlords and others to oppose discrimination and violence against women. The filmmaker has succeeded in depicting the actions of these women in intimidating circumstances and has shown how women's empowerment can lead to dialogue and change.

HONORABLE MENTION 1: "My Stolen Revolution" directed and produced by Nahid Persson Sarvestani from Sweden for an exceptional work based on personal memories, which reflect the experiences of many who suffered political persecution. The film tells the story of the filmmaker who visits a part of her own past which she had avoided for many years. Through a series of conversations with friends from her activist youth in Iran of twenty years ago, we come to know of the great price paid by young women who opposed the Iranian regime. Their experiences of torture and how they kept their spirits alive despite extreme circumstances are the main narrative of the film. The film maker-narrator also faces her own guilt for having escaped to freedom abroad when her own brother was executed and so many friends are dead. Archival footage, works of art made by former prisoners, staged sequences and intimate conversations are interwoven with skillful editing and music to make a well-integrated work.

HONORABLE MENTION 2: "Accsex" by Shweta Ghosh from India, produced by the Public Service Broadcasting Trust, New Delhi, for bringing out an issue that is rarely discussed publicly, the sexuality of disabled women through the voices of outspoken young women with different disabilities who face daily discrimination with strength and a positive outlook. Each of them is eager to work and earn their own living and to have an independent and social life with intimacy and relationships. Dynamic editing, creative graphics and an overall good humored approach on the part of the women interviewed all contribute to make an outstanding film which should be subtitled and shown internationally to raise awareness on essential aspects of disability.

The IAWRT AWARD OF EXCELLENCE FOR WEBCAST VIDEO GOES TO: "The Price of Freedom" by Eleanor Mortimer from the UK. The video tells the story of a Tunisian mother's quest for a missing son, fleetingly seen on a news bulletin as part of a group of illegal immigrants arrested by Italian police. The mother travels to Rome, seeking traces of her son in detention centers, clubs and potential places where he may be. The film echoes the story of so many mothers in the same situation in many countries and the tragic fate of those who migrate illegally in search of a better life. The filmmaker was able to narrate the story well with imaginative camera work and unobtrusive editing.
IAWRT International Board 2013 – 2015
elected at the members meeting in Casablanca
26 October 2013

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