



**Presentation by Sharon Moshavi, Senior Vice President, International Center for Journalists, May 8, 2017, Geneva**

Presented at the United Nations' first informal thematic session on *Human rights of all migrants, social inclusion, cohesion, and all forms of discrimination, including racism, xenophobia and intolerance*

Madame Secretary General Louise Arbour in her opening remarks defined success on migration as changing the optics, changing the narrative.

If that is to happen media must be engaged. By governments, multilateral organizations and civil society.

1. Media in all its forms can play an enormous role in creating -- and preventing -- social cohesion and inclusion. It helps dictate the narrative, which can drive public opinion and policy
2. Both social media and journalism have enormous impact. And one feeds off the other in a continuous loop. News follows what is happening on social media, and social media pushes out and expands conversation on stories from the news.
3. This dynamic has created many challenges that affect attitudes toward migrants:
  - A. Social media, for all of its power for good, has become an enormous platform for hate speech and far-right voices.

In the recent Macron email leaks that jolted the French election, just 5% of Twitter accounts promoting the hashtag #MacronGate accounted for more than half of all Twitter posts. It takes just a very small group of haters to push false and harmful narratives.

4. Much news is now consumed through social media channels, so people stay in their bubbles, their echo chambers. Political polarization goes part and parcel with media consumption polarization.
5. This polarization has led to the problem of fake news -- and people's willingness to take as truth only what conforms to their beliefs, regardless of the facts.

If people believe that migrant or Muslim populations, for example, are a threat, or are more likely to commit crimes, it is difficult for new information to change that.

Psychologists call it motivated reasoning.... Our tendency to come to conclusions we already believe in, regardless of facts or evidence. Or, as we are now calling it, alternative facts.

### **So where does this leave us?**

It means that independent, quality reporting on migration is more important than ever. It is one of the few avenues available to change the narrative.

Journalism has a number of attributes that make it a compelling force for narratives that improve social cohesion.

1. For one, it's more than the rational, dry delivery of facts and data. These are important, but we need to speak to people's emotions, their sense of shared humanity.
  - A. This is where journalism has the power to play an enormous role in changing the narrative -- the power of storytelling.

There are new technologies, new platforms, new formats that allow for deeper more immersive reporting. Interactives, visual fact-checking, 360 video, virtual reality. Things that can help you step into migrants' lives. This kind storytelling has impact, and it touches people and it engages

them.

2. Independent journalism is also finding new ways to tell the story of migration from new perspectives that helps reframe the debate. As Ben Lewis of the International Detention Coalition said earlier, many of us are the product of irregular migration. Almost everyone has been on the outside looking in at some point in their life.

A. In Italy, Il Post news outlet recognized that and created a new section on its website called “Natives” which features stories about people whose parents are migrants or who arrived to Italy when they were young. Explores social justice, religion, education, sports, etc. Reminding: personal connection to story.

3. Journalism also offers the power of one. The story of one person or family has more power than the story of faceless millions. The story of Alan Kurdi is case in point. Groups working with refugees and migrants can help journalists find those people to tell their stories, and the forces that shaped them.

4. The story doesn't have to be a tragedy. It's important to not just present migrants as victims. We need to focus more on telling the stories of survivors and not just victims. An example from German media is the story of Alex Assali, a Syrian refugee in Berlin who is giving back to Germany through a charity kitchen he runs for homeless people.

5. The language journalists use matter. They often take their cues from multilateral organizations, from governments: There is much debate, in journalism circles, on migrant vs refugee, illegal vs undocumented. Journalists are starting to slowly realize that other language is a problem and affects the narrative, words like “threat,” and “flow,” “flood,” “swarm.

6. Another challenge journalists face is the lack of data on the many issues of irregular migration. They need help in better understanding and using data that is available.

7. But it's important to remember that data is not enough to create a coherent narrative. Statistics and data need to be treated in context. Thrown around, they can become detrimental.

A. Case in point: the fact that the US will become a majority minority country in 20 years. Studies show that accurate data point has pushed people to vote for the far right.

B. Building context around that data point changes the narrative. A piece in the WSJ, for example, analyzed that US immigrants not only account for the largest percentage of patents and new companies, but that their presence increases other Americans' creativity and economic power as well.

8. And it's important to remember that the narrative of inclusion doesn't ignore people's fears about migration. Social cohesion doesn't happen by choosing not to cover a story that plays to people's fears or prejudices. Those fears need to be acknowledged and addressed. Sensitively, with context -- but not ignored.

In other words, journalists need to be able to cover the realities and complexities of migration – and to do so freely.

## **SOLUTIONS:**

But to do so, journalists need help from the international community. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Partner with quality, independent news media. Many groups are wary of journalists, and try to control the information narrative through messaging or supporting platforms that tell filtered stories and only reach the already converted. But that narrative doesn't reach the broader population.

We need to inject a cogent, reliable conversation into the media people watch and see. And mainstream media still drives the conversation, even on social networks.

It's also a way to reach migrants themselves. Three major European media houses, for example – French, German and Italian – received European Commission support to fund InfoMigrants, a platform that houses verified information for migrants and debunks falsehoods.

2. Another opportunity for collaboration is training on migration issues and on the problems of hate speech. Building awareness helps. Showing journalists how to find and use the data that does exist helps. ICFJ has seen firsthand that extended training on non-traditional beats encourages journalists to continue coverage of these issues even after the training is complete.
3. Improved access to migrant and refugee groups; Journalists need access to issues, data and people. Civil society groups can help with that.
4. Programs for employment of journalists from ethnic minority communities to strengthen diversity in newsrooms. Example: [The Refugee Journalism Project](#) in London. The initiative provides mentoring, journalism workshops, and internships to support refugees and exiled journalists and get their voices to the mainstream media.
5. Let journalists freely move and work in communities and across borders. These are issues that are not confined to a single country. Providing context helps create understanding.
  - A. And the act of cross-border reporting demonstrates how interconnected we all are.
6. Target those who advertise in media that publishes hate speech and “fake news.” Most advertising is filtered through ad networks, which means advertisers don't always know where their ads are. They need to be alerted, and as recently happened with You Tube, they will often remove their ads.

7. Put pressure on social media outlets. Not to censor, but to take down fake news and hate speech. Since the US elections, in particular, they are responding. And just last week Facebook hired 3,000 people to vet Facebook Live videos, in the wake of crimes being live streamed on their network.
8. Support media literacy efforts. In middle schools, high schools, colleges. Before our children develop habits about how and where they get their information. By getting children to think critically about their information sources, we can create a society that is much more open.
9. Lastly: recognize that news media is an ally. For social cohesion, we need good reliable journalism. We need truth-tellers.

Many journalists are keen to cover the issues of migration from all its angles. Contrary to some public statements, journalists are not the “opposition”. Our goal is transparency and accountability, and ultimately to give people the information they need to live better lives. Shining a light in dark corners builds better, more tolerant and inclusive societies.