

# IRIN marks its first decade

by Joanne Clark

**IRIN** 1995 - 2005 10 ans au service de la communauté humanitaire

*The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) has come a long way from its initial coverage of three countries. A decade later, IRIN is a multimedia news service producing daily and analytical reports, news footage and radio broadcasts spanning Africa, Asia and the Middle East.*

Many are surprised to learn that IRIN is a UN service. Housed within the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), IRIN offers editorially independent coverage of humanitarian situations. Ten years ago the creation of IRIN marked the start of an information revolution that has transformed the humanitarian community's ability to respond to crises, improved access to information by crisis-affected communities and assisted international media in their reporting. "Few people back then could envisage how IRIN would evolve into the humanitarian news service it is today," said IRIN coordinator and founder Pat Banks.

Humanitarian agencies regularly indicate increased interest in their work as a direct result of IRIN coverage and in crisis affected-countries IRIN reporting

also helps bring urgent needs to the attention of those who can intervene. The Iraqi Red Crescent Society in Kirkuk said it started receiving donations from other NGOs following an IRIN story that highlighted critical medical needs. Four companies contacted the Baghdad AIDS Research Centre and offered assistance, following an IRIN story about drug shortages. There

are many other examples. IRIN also receives regular requests for its photos, news footage and documentaries. The footage is utilised by news services like BBC, CNN, CBC, TV2 and numerous others. One IRIN documentary, *Our bodies ... their battle ground*, is now part of standard staff training packages for numerous NGOs and is also used to sensitise local military and peacekeeping personnel.

While the initial service was aimed at informing the humanitarian community, over the years IRIN has also tried to reach affected populations and more recently audiences in donor countries through their respective medias. Increased awareness and use of IRIN services among local and international media services and the general public will be a key focus in IRIN's next decade.

## Reaching local populations

The media offers the most effective vehicle in crisis-affected countries for reaching thousand of vulnerable people. However, as thousands of Americans stranded by Hurricane Katrina - in a country endowed with the most advanced technology and resources - can attest, the people most in need of information during a crisis are the least likely to be able to see, hear or read about it. In developing nations the impact of crises is often worse.

In many countries served by IRIN, there is little access to newspapers, television or the internet. Conflict also interrupts media services and repressive press laws - or the threat of imprisonment - can result in superficial, censored or biased reporting. IRIN is committed to assisting local media and sustaining their capacity to provide quality reporting to their populations during these critical times. The provision of IRIN news feeds offers them access to reports and photos they could not afford or access elsewhere. IRIN hires local journalists to provide daily reporting and, consequently, employment when local media revenues

IRIN journalist  
in Burundi.





IRIN listeners in Burundi.

are at their most scarce. Moreover, IRIN's international status enables it to report openly and factually where articles attributed to local reporters would result in retaliatory action.

Furthermore, an IRIN Radio service supports local partner stations in Afghanistan and in a number of countries in Africa. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, IRIN Radio works with local stations to enable information exchange between radio stations in both government and rebel-held zones, thereby building understanding between communities.

### Reaching international media

International media services have a finite budget. Over the last decade, diminishing returns and the high cost of reporting on Afghanistan, the Iraq war and the Indian Ocean tsunami have led to bureau closures and cutbacks in international media coverage. As a result, some wire



services and TV networks have dramatically cut their coverage of Africa and Central Asia. More and more journalists and editors are turning to IRIN reports from which they extract stories to share with their readerships. News services such as the BBC, *Le Monde* and the *New York Times* have all used IRIN as source material.

*Joanne Clark is IRIN Senior Information and Liaison Officer. Visit the IRIN website and/or subscribe to the free email service at [www.IRIN-news.org](http://www.IRIN-news.org). IRIN's refugee/IDP section is at: [www.irinnews.org/frontpage.asp?SelectTheme=Refugees\\_IDPs](http://www.irinnews.org/frontpage.asp?SelectTheme=Refugees_IDPs)*

Editors can contact [Joanne@irinnews.org](mailto:Joanne@irinnews.org) to find out more about services to media.

### PlusNews:

[www.plusnews.org/](http://www.plusnews.org/)

IRIN also operates PlusNews, the largest HIV/AIDS news service in sub-Saharan Africa. PlusNews provides a one-stop information service on the struggle against HIV/AIDS. Its stories are helping local papers and radio stations inform their communities. PlusNews articles are regularly carried by local radio and print services from Gabon to Uganda and are included in media training manuals and university curricula. In addition, each week in 'Hayden's Diary', PlusNews journalist Hayden Horner writes about his experiences as a young HIV-positive South African. The aim is to contribute to the de-stigmatisation of HIV/AIDS by providing it with a human face. Testifying to its success, the diary is appearing across the web, in newspapers and even in school newsletters.