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Best Practice Strategy: Speak with One Voice

Sabina Jalilova
Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action

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Best Practice Strategy: Speak with One Voice

In this article, the Public Relations Officer of ANAMA discusses how successful communication with the public has been critical to the success of the mine-action program in Azerbaijan. As part of its public-relations efforts in 2006, ANAMA organized a mine-action workshop for local journalists.

by Sabina Jalilova [Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action]

ANAMA's PR policy and procedures have been in place since 2003. They have significantly improved the agency's internal and external communication, raised public awareness and also improved the overall image of ANAMA.

"Speak with one voice" is one of the key strategies of the ANAMA public-relations efforts. Everyone involved in ANAMA activities is provided with relevant guidelines to ensure this strategy is followed. The ANAMA staff is given guidance about how to perform and provide information about their individual work and ANAMA's general activities, making it easier for them to speak with one voice.

The PR Support Group of ANAMA is comprised of one representative from each department designated to assist in organizing and highlighting major events. Introducing the group to the media during a special event for journalists proved to be a time- and cost-effective way to present newsworthy story ideas for distribution to the media.

A Web site Management Committee has also been established. A roadmap was developed and introduced to regularly maintain and update ANAMA's Web site. As a result, this has improved the coordination and interaction between departments

ANAMA's publicity successes are well documented, including:

- 88 press releases distributed
- 60 articles and interviews issued in local media
- More than 30 media site-visits organized
- A number of interviews with the Director of ANAMA and TV show appearances organized
- More than 50 events received wide mass-media coverage

ANAMA PR Project: Workshop for Journalists

It should be mentioned that close cooperation with journalists is one of the main tenets of PR. In fact, PR professionals are significantly less successful if they don't develop good relationships with journalists. The days of mailing or e-mailing a news release are long past. Few in public relations are successful with that technique anymore.

Therefore, ANAMA, in close cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Azerbaijan Campaign to Ban Landmines, held a workshop for local journalists to raise their awareness about the important role of the media can play in raising awareness to reduce the problems caused by mines and explosive remnants of war.¹



ANAMA Director Mr. Nazim Ismaylov talks with local journalists
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Mine action workshop for journalists

During the workshop, presentations were made on preventive mine action and mine-victim assistance, as well as on the International Standards² related to mines and ERW. Journalists also had an opportunity to witness mine clearance conducted by ANAMA, as well as to visit a mine-victim reintegration project in Azerbaijan and learn about vocational rehabilitation and an association of mine survivors.

Following the media workshop, Tofiq Yusif, Chief Editor of Yeni Terter newspaper, said, "During this workshop I became aware that [the] mine problem is a serious problem for [the] civilian population and attention

should be paid to this issue constantly. Apart from providing information to the public, which we did so far, we should educate people about safe behavior and how to be protected. We as journalists have a moral responsibility to support mine victims and therefore we have to present their problems to the society. As of today, I have decided that this issue should be regularly on the agenda of our newspaper bearing in mind the high level of risk existing in Terter region."³

Communication is Key

Creativity, initiative and the ability to communicate effectively are essential goals

of ANAMA's public relations. One of the main challenges of the ANAMA PR professionals is not only to pass information to the mass media but also to raise awareness, disseminate safe behavior rules and protect people from the threat of mines and UXO. These endeavors are being undertaken in accordance with objectives of the government of Azerbaijan.

Timely information sharing and openness of the Agency to cooperation with media and other social institutions not only allows ANAMA to publicize its activities but also serves as a sign of transparency. Transparency, in turn, is crucial to developing and maintaining an ethical image of an organization.

In public-relations terms, ANAMA has ideally positioned itself to be viewed as an ethical organization striving for a better world. Other mine-action organizations can do the same by following these best practices. ♦

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Sabina Jalilova has been working as the Public Relations Officer at the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action since June 2006. From September 2005 to June 2006, she participated in an internship in the United Nations Office in Azerbaijan. During the internship, Sabina provided aid to the Communications Manager and the Assistant Librarian working with the Web Coordinator of the Department of Public Information Web site. She graduated from the Azerbaijan University of Languages with a bachelor's degree in 2003 and earned a master's degree in 2005 from the same university.

Sabina V. Jalilova
Public Relations Officer
Azerbaijan National Agency for
Mine Action
65 Fizuli St.
Baku / Azerbaijan AZ1014
Tel: +994 12 4973 851
Fax: +994 12 4974 427
E-mail: sjalilova@anama.baku.az
Web site: <http://www.anama.baku.az>