



# Guide to Media Relations

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Global Communications Unit

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## Introduction

### Why a guide to media relations?

This guide gives tips on communicating with and through the media for

- IUCN communicators in IUCN headquarters and regions
- IUCN experts and members of IUCN Commissions

Together with the IUCN Media Policy, the guide aims to ensure that all information going out to the media about IUCN and its work is of high quality, accurate, timely, consistent and tailored to the needs of the media.

Strategic, coordinated communication with the media raises IUCN's profile with target audiences such as policy-makers and key donors, and gets IUCN's message out into media around the world. It can influence policy and increase support for IUCN's activities. By interacting with the media in a professional and consistent manner, we help ensure that journalists report correctly and objectively on IUCN's activities.

Media coverage that recognises IUCN's work furthers the Union's mission and is a great boost for our reputation. It is also a useful resource to include in donor packages and information kits.

### What's in it for me?

Although the Global Communications Unit (GCU) and regional IUCN communications staff lead on IUCN's interactions with the media, everyone plays a part in projecting the image of the organisation as a trusted source of unbiased, evidence-based information.

A media interview can **help refine your arguments**, making them more persuasive to a broad audience. Communicating effectively with the media can **boost your professional reputation**, increase your influence and help gain **support for your Programme**. Solid relationships with journalists can also increase your chances of being heard in the event of a crisis affecting IUCN and its work.

### Media relations – who does what at IUCN?

Relations with **international media are centralised and managed exclusively by the Global Communications Unit**. GCU is the first port of call for journalists who want to learn about IUCN and its work. When expertise from a programme is required, GCU asks programme communicators to liaise with experts to provide comment, which is then transmitted to the media by GCU. GCU also manages a database of some 1,400 international media contacts, maintains day-to-day relationships with key journalists, and issues press releases to international media.

IUCN Regional, National and Country Office communicators manage relationships with and issue regional press releases to regional or local media.

### Why do journalists approach IUCN?

Journalists turn to IUCN for **comment, analysis and evidence-based information** on topical issues related to nature conservation and sustainable development. They might be looking for background information, an interview or a written comment to use as a quote in their story.

IUCN enjoys a very good reputation with the global media who approach the Union's media team on a regular basis. The main reason for this is that IUCN's **worldwide network of experts** is a real goldmine for journalists. Journalists are attracted to IUCN's reputation as an evidence-based organisation which sticks to the facts.

Journalists also approach IUCN following a publication of a **news release** which has caught their attention. In such cases, they get in touch with us to dig a little deeper into the story or an angle that is particularly interesting to them, asking for more information about the news story and/or for an interview with relevant spokespeople.

#### Getting to know journalists

Journalists' prime objective is to ensure that the public is kept promptly, accurately and fully informed of issues of public interest.

#### Journalists are:

- Competitive
- Attracted by anything new or unusual
- Bored by anything old or self-evident
- Curious
- Usually working under tight deadlines
- Often new to the subject at hand
- Assertive, sometimes even aggressive

## Handling media queries: guidance for IUCN communicators

When responding to media queries, keep in mind **what journalist are looking for** when they ask IUCN for information, written comment or to set up an interview. This will usually be **relevant, concise information** or a **brief, clear quote** that they can use in their story. By working together to address media queries in a swift, helpful and coordinated manner, we help get IUCN's message out into influential media and maintain IUCN's reputation.

### Media queries – who does what?

If you are a **programme communicator** please pass any media requests you receive onto GCU staff, who will work with you to prepare a reply or find an expert available for interview. GCU staff will then get back to the journalist.

If you are **not communications staff** please forward the media query to [press@iucn.org](mailto:press@iucn.org) or a member of the GCU team, or copy us. If you are called directly by a journalist please ask them to go through [Media Relations](#) and let the media team know. **Do not be pressured into an interview on the spot or into putting the query directly through to a colleague.**

If **media requests come in person at an event**, ask for an email address and try to get email confirmation of the request to clarify what the journalist needs and to minimise the potential for subsequent misunderstanding. Then follow the procedure outlined above.

### Media queries – useful tips

If you are a programme or regional communicator, when asking IUCN experts for information or whether they can take an interview

- **give the expert information about the journalist**  
Whenever relevant, provide brief information on the journalist and the media organisation they are working for to the expert. This will give them useful context. This information can include:
  - overview of the media outlet (and the relevant section of that outlet)
  - the kind of topics the journalist usually covers;
  - the quality of their journalism;
  - anything sensitive about their work that needs flagging to the expert

- **Highlight to the expert that providing comment is usually in their and IUCN's interest** (see *What's in it for me* above). The media team screens interview requests and monitors media coverage, and will let you know of any signs that the journalist is looking for a story that might be damaging for IUCN.
- Do not forward the journalist's contact details to experts – GCU will put them in touch
- When you do exceptionally engage with journalists directly, always copy [press@iucn.org](mailto:press@iucn.org) – this is essential for consistency in our exchanges with the media.
- **As a general rule, please remember that no media enquiry should ever go unanswered and that no media enquiry should ever be answered 'No Comment'. This kind of answer puts IUCN's reputation at risk and damages IUCN's relations with the media.**

## Interviews: guidance for IUCN spokespeople and communicators

Speaking to a journalist directly has the advantage of projecting an image of IUCN as an open and transparent organisation, and can be more effective at building a good relationship with the journalist. This is especially true of in-person interviews, followed by phone interviews. But there are times when providing written comment is more appropriate. IUCN's media team will provide guidance as to the best approach on a case-by-case basis.

### Written comment

#### When do we comment in writing?

The media team may suggest a written response instead of a phone interview in the event of particularly sensitive topics, when there is cause to believe that a story could be damaging for IUCN. A journalist might also ask IUCN to answer questions, provide comment or a response to criticism in writing.

#### How do I draft a written comment?

*"Invariably, when I approach an expert, I am usually within an hour or two of my deadline, and looking for a **straight two-three sentence quote**. I want someone who can tell me what the scale and nature of the problem is, what can be done about it, and why the reader should care" – Arthur Neslen, the Guardian*

IUCN communicators work with IUCN experts when drafting comments in response to journalists' queries. The comment can be drafted by the expert and edited by a communications colleague, or drafted by communications staff based on a conversation with the expert. The finalised comment must be approved by the expert. Remember that the finalised comment should

- **answer the journalist's question**
- be **succinct and to the point**
- **use clear language** that the publication's target audience will understand, i.e. avoid all jargon; you will need to find a compromise that is both accurate and clear to a non-technical audience
- **sound like something someone might actually have said**
- where appropriate, appeal to the reader's emotions while keeping to the facts; use colourful, evocative language

For the best chances of the comment being used by the media outlet, it should outline the problem or phenomenon, its consequences (why should we care?), and any solutions we can point to. Of course, sometimes what we can say is limited, for example when the data at hand is incomplete or the results

of a study inconclusive. Do not be alarmist or exaggerate findings. But you *can* use evocative metaphor that can reasonably be considered justified, e.g. say of a fishing technique that it “bulldozes through reef ecosystems,” or that poachers are turning a region into “killing fields”.

## Interviews

**This section is addressed mainly to IUCN experts and other spokespeople**, as IUCN communicators are not authorised to give media interviews. When you speak to the media in your role as an IUCN expert it is important to focus on your objectives for the interview – such as conveying a key message. But it also helps to be aware of how journalists work and their needs. When interviewing experts, journalists are looking for:

- News
- Responsiveness
- Objective perspective
- Clear opinions on topical issues
- Sound bites
- A human being
- Openness and honesty

### Ahead of the interview

When you are arranging an interview in your role as an IUCN expert, agree to a time that gives you enough time to prepare. Don't feel pressured into giving the interview on the spot, but do respect the journalist's deadlines and keep in mind that the later you provide an interview or comment, the less likely it is to make it into the media in question.

#### Setting the ground rules

The IUCN media team will specify the type of interview a journalist is requesting. It is important to agree this ahead of the interview. If it is not specified, you can assume that the interview is 'on the record'.

- **On the record:** anything you say can be used in the article or broadcast, and quotes can be attributed to you / IUCN.
- **For background:** the journalist can use the information you provide but you / IUCN cannot be identified as the source of the information.
- **Off the record:** the information you provide cannot be used in the article or broadcast, but the journalist can try to confirm the information with other sources. Where possible, avoid speaking off the record.

### Preparing for the interview

- The communications colleague arranging the interview should give you some **information on the journalist and media outlet**, to give you a sense of their audience, their credibility and their agenda.
- Communications colleagues should also tell you which **areas the journalist wants to cover**, or the **line of questioning**. If you are in touch with the journalist directly, for example at an event, ask for this information yourself.
- When you know the areas the journalist wants to cover, note down the points you want to make.
- Write down **three key points** that convey the essence of what you want to communicate, including
  - What is the problem? Use examples / data
  - Why should the reader care? Use colourful, evocative language
  - What can be done? Use analysis and give policy recommendations if possible. The journalist may follow up on these by asking policy makers or others to comment.
- If the topic of the interview is controversial or if you have other reasons to expect a challenging line of questioning you should work with GCU to prepare answers to difficult questions.

### When being interviewed

- Make sure the journalist has your correct IUCN title.
- If the interview is face-to-face, try to maintain eye contact with the journalist - it helps build trust and authority.
- Listen to the questions and try to fit your key messages into the answers; craft your answer so you **say what you want to say**: stay on message.
- Be succinct and to the point. Focus your answers and keep them concise – it is best to try to make no more than 3 to 5 main points in the course of an interview.
- Be careful not to lecture the journalist instead of engaging in dialogue. Avoid answering questions that were not asked.
- If asked difficult questions, treat the journalist with respect, but not fear. Try to answer questions as clearly and directly as you can. But if you do not feel comfortable answering a question, or feel it does not fall within your area of expertise, do not answer it.
- Use everyday, accessible language and avoid jargon – there is little point giving time to interviews if the journalist and their audience can't follow your answers (see the [IUCN Style Manual](#) for tips).
- Avoid using lots of statistics, especially if it is a broadcast interview, as these are difficult to follow. If possible use proportions and give comparisons that help the audience understand, e.g. the size of x-number of football pitches, instead.
- Adapt your language and tone to the media outlet / programme in question – e.g. an informal afternoon radio panel discussion on a general theme like the sixth mass extinction will require a different tone and level of detail to, say, an interview on the implications of the decline in blackwood species for musical instrument makers to be included in a documentary.
  - **Interviews for print / online publications**  
Remember the journalist wants to understand the issue, but is also looking for quotes. Try to speak naturally, clearly and succinctly, and avoid excessively long sentences.
  - **TV interviews**
    - If you are interviewed on camera, look at your interviewer, not at the camera.
    - If you are interviewed on skype or FaceTime, look at the camera; try to find a uniform backdrop with some IUCN branding visible if possible.
    - If you have been asked to film yourself with a mobile phone and send the clip, send it to GCU who will share it with the media outlet.
    - Dress in a way that will not distract from what you are saying.
  - **Radio interviews:**
    - Use shorter sentences and take extra care to speak slowly and clearly. If the interview is over the phone, make sure you choose a quiet location, that the signal is good enough. Contact GCU if you have any doubts.

### After the interview

- Ask the journalist for their card / contact details and pass the details to GCU so we have a record of the journalist.
- Ask the journalist to share the article or report with you when it is published or broadcast and then share it with GCU.
- Review the interview to see how it went and whether you can improve your technique for next time.
- If you notice any inaccuracies, please signal them to GCU who can contact the media outlet if necessary.



## Writing a press release: guidance for IUCN communicators

Newsworthy, clear IUCN content ready to be shared with media well in advance of publication is key to effective media relations.

### Do I have material for a news release?

The main ingredient for a news release is news. Is your proposed story **new, of public interest, and important enough to have consequences**? Is it unusual or **surprising**? If yes, it might make a good press release. One of the most important decisions in media relations is determining whether a story is suitable for the type of media you want to reach. To decide, you can **ask yourself the following questions**:

1. What exactly is **'new'** (i.e. not previously known) in the story?
2. **Who** do you want to reach with this story? What is the best **media outlet** to reach that 'target audience'?
3. What do you want this audience to **do with the information** we communicate to them?
4. What do you see as the **headline** of a potential press release and resulting media coverage? Will the average reader of the media you are targeting find this interesting? Imagine seeing your story as a member of the audience of that media outlet. Is your story likely to make them stop and read?
5. Does it have a **strong IUCN message**? If it doesn't, then you are probably promoting someone else's work. All media material issued under IUCN's logo must be directly identifiable as IUCN news.

If your 'news' is something your chosen media outlet might be likely to cover, you might have material for a press release. If so, **contact GCU with a brief overview of your proposed news release, based on your answers to the above questions.**

According to IUCN's [Media Policy](#) the final decision on whether or not a story should be communicated via a press release lies solely with the IUCN Media Manager and/or IUCN Director of Communications.

### Researching the release

Before you draft the release, you need to find a **news angle** – a way of telling the story that will make your 'news' relevant to your readers. You must also gather the key information that you will want to include in the draft.

#### This means finding out about

- the general topic; previous coverage of this topic in the media
- other organisations' stance
- any potentially **sensitive issues** around the topic
- any **legal or policy consequences** of the news you are announcing
- possible **solutions to any** problems highlighted in the story (avoid focusing on problems without also mentioning possible solutions)
- the **wider context**: does this story demonstrate IUCN's relevance on the international stage? How does it relate to sustainable development, climate change, the water crisis or deforestation? If it does, make sure you make the connection.
- **any unusual facts or situations**, which might grab the attention of the media and the public? does the story carry strong arguments for or against something, which might prompt debate? If your story is weak on 'news', **controversy or originality** is important.

#### You can do this by

- reading IUCN and other organisations' publications and online information
- if the release is based around a report or scientific paper, carefully reading the publication, then speaking to colleagues involved in drafting it

- reviewing past media coverage of the topic
- speaking to IUCN experts

Think about **how the release might be received by the media and what extra questions they might ask** - then go and find out that information. If you are not familiar with the topic, prepare a Q&A for yourself and clear it through your policy staff. Make sure that what you are planning to say is coherent with IUCN's positioning.

### How should I structure the release?

You should use a **classic news story structure**: your headline and first one or two paragraphs should convey the 'news', answering the '5 Ws' – **What, Who, When, Where, Why?** Include less important information lower down. A journalist should *never* have to read past the first couple of paragraphs to find out crucial information. Try to **keep the release to one page**. There is no set length, but make it concise.

- **Headline:** Imagine a radio presenter introducing your story – "[Could banning or boycotting palm oil actually cause more environmental damage in different parts of the world?](#)" Think about what the **one thing is you want someone to know about your story**, and try and say it in **one sentence**. This is your headline. Most media are inundated with very similar stories, so try to be original with your idea, look for an angle, and whether you can add a unique selling point. You have to give the editor a headline that that will make her or him open the email, not discard it.
- **First paragraph:** Once you have captivated the editor with your headline, you need to have a paragraph that will tell him **what the whole news release is about**. This first paragraph should explain exactly what the news is. *Do not* make this a long paragraph. It has to be enough to keep the editor interested, one to three sentences max, but it must convey the crux of the story clearly and be easy to follow. For example:

*"Banning palm oil would most likely increase the production of other oil crops to meet demand for oil, displacing rather than halting the significant global biodiversity losses caused by palm oil, warned an IUCN report published today."*

- **Second paragraph:** Your second paragraph should give more information and background on the story. It should cite facts, the title of the report, etc.
- **Third paragraph:** Your third paragraph should be a quote **from an IUCN expert or Executive such as the Director General**. Speak to the expert to find out about the importance of the findings and their own reaction to what they found – this can provide the basis for your quote. If you cannot speak to an expert, think of a quote for them and see if they will accept it. Read through newspapers to see what kinds of quotes journalists like. Remember it should sound like something a person would say. The quote should also be snappy and should contain a hard-hitting point. It should also make sense on its own, if it is taken out of the context of the text of the news release. Punctuation should fall within quotes.

*"When you consider the disastrous impacts of palm oil on biodiversity from a global perspective, there are no simple solutions," said IUCN Director General Inger Andersen. "Half of the world's population uses palm oil in food, and if we ban or boycott it, other, more land-hungry oils will likely take its place. Palm oil is here to stay, and we urgently need concerted action to make palm oil production more sustainable, ensuring that all parties – governments, producers and the supply chain – honour their sustainability commitments."*

- **The rest of your release** should come in a logical order with the most important information high up in the release, and the supporting information lower down. Each paragraph should have a strong, unique message that adds to the overall story.

- If you like, you can **end your release** with another quote - either from the same IUCN expert, or if it is appropriate from another figure of authority, such as a government official, an academic etc.

#### What language should I use?

- Keep the **style fluent and in line with the issue** or event you are trying to publicise.
- **Avoid jargon.** Ask someone from outside your area of expertise to read the release to make sure it's clear to a non-expert.

#### To finalise, make sure you

- **clear quotes** with the person you attribute them to. Never re-use previously published quotes or parts of quotes.
- **check all facts**, and **keep a record of the source** you used. Make sure your sources are **recent and reliable**. You may be if asked to provide sources of the information in the release at short notice, for example by a journalist.
- **proof-read the release thoroughly**; ideally this should be done by someone who has not worked on the text
- get **sign-off** for your news release, usually from the relevant experts, and if they are not available, from the head of your office.
- **compile a list of spokespeople**, with their direct phone numbers, emails, IUCN titles, languages and availabilities.

***Remember IUCN's credibility is our most important asset - make sure that nothing that you are saying can bring the organisation into disrepute.***

#### What else should the release include?

- **Embargo time** (with timezone specified), day and month if the information is embargoed. The date always goes at the top of the release. Make sure you use an EMBARGOED watermark - journalists often work fast, and we must make the fact that the release is embargoed as clear as possible to prevent embargo breaches.  
E.g.: **Embargoed until 00:01 GMT on 15 November 2010**  
Or: **For immediate release - 5 February 2002** if not embargoed
- **For more information contact section**: name and phone number of the **press officer** and sometimes the name and number of the **policy expert** that you have quoted and who will be available for interviews. Make sure that the people listed under the 'for more information' section are available at this phone number for at least 48 hours after you send out the release.
- **Photographs**: these are very important to the success of a release, and will sometimes determine whether your story is published, so it is worth investing time into finding images that illustrate the species, situations, places that are key to telling the story. A clearly visible link to a folder of images, with copyright and caption information for each, should go at the top of the release. Make sure you have permission from the photographers to share images with the media.
- **Notes to Editors**: This section should include extra information, such as background and extra quotes, and should not be too long.
- Link to translated versions of the release, if available
- You should use the news release **template** (available [here](#)).

### When is the best time to issue the news release?

The timing for the release is decided between the GCU media team and the programme communicator. If based on a report or assessment, timing will be determined by when the information is finalised. **Things to ask yourself:**

- **Is the release tied to an event or other time-sensitive ‘peg’?** A peg is a link to an international or IUCN event, such as a conference, an announcement by the government, a new report. Journalists will need to receive it ahead of time.
- Is the information embargoed? E.g. ahead of a report with a fixed publication date
- **Are other IUCN press releases planned on your preferred date?** Check the IUCN Global communications calendar on Outlook to make sure we avoid issuing two releases on the same day if possible.
- **Any major announcements** that might compete with you for space in the news? E.g. NGOs issuing major reports; if you become aware of any, let the GCU team know. Generally, Friday is a bad day for news, and Monday leaves limited space for media pitching.
- **Will your spokespeople be available to answer media queries** in the days surrounding the release?
- **Will the release be translated** into French, Spanish, or any other languages, depending on the story and its target audience? If so, you need to plan for both budget and time to finalise translations.

### Before issuing the release

Work with GCU to compile a **list of target media contacts** you would like us (GCU) to send the release to, bearing in mind your key target audiences. You may be targeting a particular region, or media specialised in a particular area, e.g. business, economics, mining, etc.

- For example, with the IUCN Congress planned for Marseille targeting French media such as [France Inter](#) is of particular interest, and if an important donor is based in Japan then your target list should include influential Japanese media such as the [Asahi Shimbun](#).

Allow for time for GCU staff to phone the key media contacts to sell the story in advance. This can make all the difference and ensure quality, in-depth coverage.

#### **A good press release should have:**

- **Strong news**
- **Short, catchy title** (more informative than creative)
- **Clear layout:** big text font, highlight first paragraph and quotes and an easy-to-find section on additional materials
- **Title and first paragraph** should give short **summary** of the release.
- **Additional materials:** Provide access to **photos** (plus audio and video material where appropriate and if possible). Good photos are key to grabbing attention!
- **Statistics/facts and figures:** best in bullet points
- Easily contactable **spokespeople** and **contact details** for more information
- **Good timing:** timed with relevant events, avoiding days when competition is high
- Embargoed news: “Tantalise but don’t give the full story”

**Few quality press releases are better than many irrelevant ones**

## Organising a media event: guidance for IUCN communicators

A press conference can facilitate media coverage in cases where considerable interest from the media can be expected. It can be organised by IUCN or jointly with other organisation(s). GCU coordinates media events – please contact us for more detailed guidance on a case-by-case basis.

IUCN holds press conferences

- to launch new reports or assessments
- to announce new partnerships
- to announce future events, such as the IUCN Congress

### Preparing the press conference

**If you decide to hold a press conference, you will need to determine**

- **the budget** (unless provided by a partner organisation)
- **the venue:** this should be somewhere that is easy for journalists to get to; press conferences are also often held at related events attended by journalists. In the case of joint announcements, the partner organisation may propose a venue.
- **the panel:** spokespeople will include author(s) of a report and other IUCN experts, and possibly also external spokespeople (whether to invite external spokespeople needs to be carefully considered on a case-by-case basis – it can add interesting perspectives and credibility, but could also result in an external organisation ‘stealing the story’).
- whether **simultaneous translation** is necessary
- **the timing:** the embargo on the news you are announcing should lift an hour or so after the press conference, to allow journalists to file their stories; also see ‘When is the best time to issue a news release’ above

You will also need to

- **Send media invitations**
  - Include what / where / when / who information; make it concise; make sure you do not give away your news in the invitation!
- Reach out to relevant media contacts individually to promote your press conference
- Prepare name plates for spokespeople (using IUCN name plate templates, available from GCU)
- Bring any branded materials such as banners to include as the backdrop

### During the press conference

- Compile a list of journalists who attended for follow-up and reporting purposes.
- The conference usually lasts around 30 minutes, with 5-10 minutes for the spokespeople to briefly present the report / announcement, and the rest of the time left for questions.
- The presentations should include some easily quotable ‘soundbites’ that journalists can use in their stories.
- The Q&A session is the most important part of the press conference, so plenty of time should be left for this.
- During the Q&A session, make sure journalists identify themselves and their outlet, and that time is not taken up by audience members who are not journalists and/or who comment rather than asking questions.