

## MEDIA AND PUBLIC PRESENTATION TIPS

### A GUIDE FOR SPEAKING WITH THE MEDIA & ENGAGING IN PUBLIC EVENTS

The **Institute of International Education's Scholar Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF)** generates media attention from newspapers, television, and radio. IIE-SRF scholars are often approached by media outlets, especially when other world events highlight concerns for academic freedom and threats to scholarly activities. Media attention can be an excellent way to educate the public about threats to scholars and academia worldwide, while bringing attention to your personal story and professional endeavors. However, there may be consequences for you, your family, and colleagues. We encourage all IIE-SRF scholars, no matter their past or current situation, to consider all positive and negative results of being in the media. IIE-SRF will never share identifying information about a scholar without prior permission.

#### A. POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF BEING FEATURED IN THE MEDIA

##### Positive:

- **Networking:** You may want to share your experiences through on-campus or local events, travel to other locations to give talks, and meet with public officials. Participating in programs and events is an excellent way to network and make contacts for the future.
- **Education:** Public awareness is a first step to building international support and pressure for change at home. Each scholar has a powerful and unique story to share, and these stories can be eye-opening to audiences and can spur people to get involved and to work for change.

##### Negative:

- **Security Concerns** It is important that scholars understand and make others aware of security concerns. You must decide:
  - what information your host institution can share with others
  - if speaking publicly would cause security concerns for you or others
  - what the limits are to any discussions or interviews, as you have the right to choose not to be identified or discuss your experiences as a threatened scholar

Setting such limits should not be embarrassing or make you feel ungrateful. In most cases, your hosts, colleagues and acquaintances will want to know about these concerns but may not understand the seriousness of them or in some cases may not even think about them at all.

## Consider the following questions:

- Can your host institution identify you as an IIE Scholar Rescue Fund Fellow?
- Can your host identify your home university and the circumstances of your visit?
- Are you interested in doing interviews?
- Will a photo be used in the story or event publicity and what impact could this have for you?
- Will event publicity or a story and / or photo be published online or in print media or both?
- How will the story or event publicity be distributed? Even if the story is published in the university press, the link can be sent to many networks to reach far beyond the university campus. Print and online newsletters can reach wide and international audiences.
- How will the interview story or event be publicized? Consider social media outlets that are often used to promote stories, such as Facebook and Twitter.

## B. BEFORE TAKING PART IN MEDIA INTERVIEWS OR PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

### Personal Information

- **Providing biographical information:** Based on information you have provided IIE-SRF staff through the application process, IIE-SRF will have written bios on file. Unless you have provided permission to use identifying information (most often for specific IIE events) IIE-SRF will offer abridged, ambiguous bios that may look like this:

*Visiting Scholar Rescue Fund Fellow from [country]\**

This scholar is a respected biologist from [country]. He researches and publishes extensively on the sustainable utilization of plant diversity in southern Africa and has received numerous awards for his work. Due to difficulties in his home country, he was unable to continue working safely there and fled the country in 2003. He is currently a visiting fellow teaching two courses in plant biology in a University's Department of Agriculture. His visit is made possible with support from the Scholar Rescue Fund which provides assistance to scholars experiencing threats in their home country because of their work, prominence, or exercise of their basic human rights.

*\*Name withheld at the request of the scholar. For more information about this scholar, please contact the Scholar Rescue Fund at [srf@iie.org](mailto:srf@iie.org).*

- **Providing contact information:** Contact information including your name, title, office mailing address, telephone, and email may also be included in the university or departmental directory. If you are not comfortable being identified, or you prefer to be identified in a certain way, talk to your advisor and administrators about what will work for you.
- **Anonymity?:** While journalists or other interested parties prefer to identify sources of information, generally they will not do so if there is a clear and pressing reason to protect anonymity, such as the dangerous circumstances in which certain scholars or their families

may be living. If you would like to share your story, but prefer to remain anonymous, you should talk to IIE-SRF, university colleagues, or reporters about any security concerns you may have before the interview is held. Generally, journalists will explain in the article why there is a need for anonymity and may independently verify facts if necessary.

## Content

You must decide what kind of information about yourself you are comfortable sharing. Talk to your IIE-SRF staff, university colleagues, or in the case of the media, reporters, beforehand to confirm how you will participate and what you will talk about so that there are clear expectations.

- **Knowing the purpose of the interview or public event:** Understanding the organizer's objectives and why your perspective is important to the event or interview will help you decide what kind of content will be expected. When you know what the event is all about, you can know what to expect from an interview or tailor a presentation most suitably.

Ask the event sponsors or journalist what they have in mind and what they expect from you. If you are asked to take part in an event, will you participate in a panel discussion or give a public lecture? Do they expect you to talk about your research? Academic freedom? Your personal journey? Politics in your home country? If you are asked to speak at an IIE-SRF event, feel free to make suggestions to IIE-SRF staff about what you think might be appropriate and what you would enjoy talking about.

- **Sharing your personal experience:** Decide if it is appropriate to share your personal experiences and know what you intend to share. It may be eye-opening but also inspiring. While you should not feel compelled to share sensitive information, you should clarify with the journalist or event sponsor what you intend to talk about or have included in anything that is written about you. This approach should help to keep others from asking questions that may make you uncomfortable.

## Prepare in Advance

- **Consider sample questions:** Try to figure out what questions will be asked, and prepare what you want to say. These answers may be particularly useful when you have difficulty with language or have other concerns. Write down a few points that you would like to get across. If the interview is unscheduled, take a few minutes to gather your thoughts and prepare yourself.

### *Sample Questions from Reporters*

- What persecution did you experience in your home country?
- Why do you think you were targeted for persecution?
- Under what circumstances did you flee your home country?

- Was it easy adjusting to live in a new country and new academic community?
  - How is life for you and your family today? How has it changed?
  - How has your professional work changed?
  - What are your current academic projects?
  - How are your students different here? How is teaching different?
  - What do you hope to accomplish during your IIE-SRF fellowship?
  - How is your visit funded? Who is sponsoring your visit?
  - What is the political situation in your home country?
  - What are the prospects for democracy in your home country?
  - Do you hope to return to your home country or region?
  - What are your post-fellowship plans?
  - Do you think programs that help threatened academics are important? Why?
- **About IIE-SRF:** Some reporters might ask you for information about your fellowship and IIE-SRF. The following short paragraph can serve as a brief overview of IIE-SRF's work. More information can be found at [www.scholarrescuefund.org](http://www.scholarrescuefund.org) or by contacting [srf@iie.org](mailto:srf@iie.org).

***IIE Scholar Rescue Fund:** The Scholar Rescue Fund (IIE-SRF) is a program of the Institute of International Education (IIE) that is the only global program that arranges, funds, and supports fellowships for threatened and displaced scholars at partnering higher education institutions worldwide, including inside their home regions. Since 2002, IIE-SRF has provided short-term academic fellowships to over 1,000 scholars from 60+ countries at more than 480 host institutions in 55 countries around the world. IIE-SRF awards fellowships for scholars from any discipline and any country who suffer violence or other threats because of their work, prominence, or exercise of basic rights. Generally, these fellowships require matching support from the host institution, meaning that if you received an IIE-SRF fellowship then you also received financial support from your host institution.*

- **Know your audience:** Who is the audience? Why are they there? What do they know about your subject? What do they know about you? Are they students or senior scholars? Are they IIE-SRF friends or prospective contributors to the IIE-SRF? Knowing your audience is the most effective way to prepare for a presentation.
  - **Don't assume too much knowledge.** What may seem obvious to you about your country's politics and culture or your own background may not be obvious to your audience. Make sure you give basic background information so that everyone understands your point of reference.
  - **Focus:** Decide what your message should be and how best to convey it to your audience. Sharing your personal human experience is certainly something your audience will remember. Decide how best to share your story and the key points of your talk.

## C. DURING INTERVIEWS

- **Pre-interviews:** Some reporters spend up to 30 minutes prior to an interview to provide you some “warm-up” time, but others will just take a few minutes. Use the opportunity to find out what the reporter is looking for and set the tone for the interview.
- **On the Record?:** Talking with reporters is different from other conversations, and it is important to know how to work effectively with them. Unless there is a clear agreement, you should assume that all conversations are “on the record.” “On the record” means that anything you say could appear in the newspaper exactly as you said it during the interview. For this reason, it is important to know exactly what you are prepared to discuss. You can also prepare for an interview by thinking about the purpose of the interview and likely questions. Having a few prepared answers beforehand may be helpful.
- **Off the Record?:** If you say, “can we go off the record?” and the reporter agrees, then you are both party to an informal agreement that whatever you say during that period of time cannot be used for media purposes. Generally, reporters will honor this agreement, but sometimes they do not. For this reason, it is best to assume that nothing is off the record. In other words, don't say anything to a reporter that you're not comfortable with showing up in the media. Off the record conversation should be used extremely carefully.
- **Clarifying and emphasizing your answer:** First of all, if the question contains incorrect information, correct it. Don't let the reporter move on until you are confident the point has been clarified. If you are unsure if your answer was clear, reformulate your answer or repeat it. If you repeat a point several times for emphasis, this demonstrates its importance to you and helps the reporter understand what issues can be expanded. Direct quotes are often results of repeated answers (when you say the same thing twice, usually it is more clear and succinct the second time).
- **Providing background:** If you are asked questions that you do not feel that you know enough about, let the reporter know. For example, a reporter may want to include information about your fellowship sponsors and how the IIE-SRF fellowship selection process works. They may also be interested in historical information about your host institution that you may not know. Typically, if you are not certain about the accuracy of such information, you can say to a reporter, “I can talk to you about it to an extent but it might be best if you get in touch with (person).”

## D. AFTER THE INTERVIEW

IIE-SRF would love to read and amplify your interview. Send a link to the finished product to your program officer or [srf@iie.org](mailto:srf@iie.org). We will confirm with you whether you are comfortable with us sharing it on our website, social media, or email newsletter.