**IASC Event:**

**IRIN News and the Future of Humanitarian Reporting**

**24 September 2014**

**11:00 – 12:30**

The number of people affected by humanitarian crises has almost doubled over the past decade, reaching 76 million people in 2012. Climate change, population growth, volatile markets, water scarcity, sectarianism and the mushrooming of armed groups and extremists are pushing more and more communities to the edge.  The world is an increasingly troubled place.

Over the same period the cost of international humanitarian aid has more than tripled. According to the UN’s Financial Tracking Service, total appeals for funding through the UN-led Consolidated Appeals Process rose from $1.9 billion in 2000 to $11.3 billion in 2010.

And yet, time and again - in Syria, in Sri Lanka, in the Democratic Republic of Congo - the traditional international humanitarian relief apparatus has been unable to respond adequately. The emergency aid industry is worth $22 billion a year, but there is a growing recognition that it needs to become more fluid and networked, equitable and transparent, people-centered and grounded in local structures.

That change is underway.

But core to this emerging landscape is a new vein of communication, analysis and reporting. Like the humanitarian system itself, crisis reporting has to fit a turbulent world. Saving lives is messy, and often involves uncomfortable truths: politics skewing budgets, aid workers negotiating with tyrants; and good intentions paving the road to hell. Expectations for media coverage have evolved drastically since the 1980s famine coverage, the Live Aid generation, and the era of celebrity activism for Africa.

Yet, just as it is most needed, mainstream news coverage of international events is dropping drastically. According to the Pew Research Center’s Journalism Project, US front-page coverage of foreign affairs in 2004 was roughly half of what it was in 1987. The amount of airtime American network evening newscasts devoted to overseas reporting in 2013 was less than half of what it was in the late 1980s. A similar trend can be seen in the United Kingdom, where a study by Media Standards Trust found that the percentage of international news in UK newspapers dropped from 20 percent in 1979 to 11 percent in 2009. Even Thomson Reuters Foundation’s AlertNet has recently cut the number of editors from 21 to eight.

Journalists at mainstream news outlets struggle to get humanitarian stories into their newspapers. Newsrooms are shrinking and do not have the resources; journalists are expected to be experts in multiple beats at once; crisis zones are full of inexperienced freelancers having their first big adventure. Through social media and citizen journalism, local communities are increasingly reporting their own realities – but often without verification, professionalism and objectivity.

IRIN News was the world’s first humanitarian news service, founded by the OCHA 20 years ago, and it remains the leading source for credible humanitarian news, reportage and analysis from the frontlines of conflict and natural disasters. But IRIN, too, needs to change to take better stock of a humanitarian aid enterprise that now demands more scrutiny and accountability than ever before. As such, IRIN is spinning off from its historic home in the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to become an independent media non-profit in 2015, paving the way for a sharper, bolder IRIN in the years to come.

Please join us for a discussion about IRIN’s future, and that of humanitarian reporting more generally, with:

- **Ms. Heba Aly,** Middle East reporter and editor with IRIN and member of the management team behind IRIN’s Re-launch. Heba is a Canadian-Egyptian multimedia journalist with a particular focus on international development, counter-terrorism and human rights/humanitarian issues. Before joining IRIN, Heba worked with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Bloomberg News, the Christian Science Monitor, the Pulitzer Centre for Crisis Reporting and others. She has reported from conflict zones in the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia, including Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq and most recently Syria.

- **Ms. Gunilla Von Hall:**  Gunilla is a Swedish foreign correspondent and journalist for the Svenska Dagbladet newspaper in Geneva. Gunilla has covered conflict around the globe including in Iraq, Bosnia, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Based in Geneva for more than 20 years, her topics range from humanitarian issues, international politics to health and world trade. She has a bi-weekly column in Svenska Dagbladet about international affairs. Gunilla has been published in the Swedish anthology "The War & The Truth" and her stories have been selected for "Good Swedish Journalism." She was President of the United Nations Correspondent's Association in Geneva (ACANU) from 2011 until 2013.

- **Mr. Edward Girardet**: Edward is a journalist, writer and producer who has reported from numerous humanitarian and conflict zones in Africa, Asia and elsewhere since the late 1970s. As a foreign correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor, US News and World Report, and The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour based in Paris, he first began covering Afghanistan several months prior to the Soviet invasion in 1979. He has worked on numerous television current affairs and documentary segments on subjects ranging from the war in Angola to lost tribes in Western New Guinea and environmental issues in Africa for major European and North American broadcasters. Girardet founded the International Centre for Humanitarian Reporting (ICHR), later to become Media Action International. He is a co-editor of The Essential Edge and The Essential Field Guide to Afghanistan (now in its 4th fully revised edition) of Crosslines Essential Media Ltd (UK). He is also editor of Le News, a free English-language fortnightly for the Lake Geneva region. His latest book is Killing the Cranes: A Reporter's Journey Through Three Decades of War in Afghanistan.