

FACTSHEET

Involvement with the media

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Prisoners Abroad receives many enquiries from journalists, asking for information about a specific arrest, wanting an interview regarding a particular issue or wanting to contact a prisoner or family member about their situation.

Media contact helps us to raise public awareness about the issues facing British prisoners overseas. It also enables us to demonstrate the importance of our work, giving us credibility and helping to attract funding.

1 The pros and cons of telling your story

Before you agree to get involved with the media it is important to weigh up the consequences and benefits of talking to the media.

PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It may persuade influential people such as MPs to get involved• It helps Prisoners Abroad to highlight issues such as poor health in prisons• It highlights the consequences of getting in trouble overseas• Media interest will help ensure that your case is not forgotten• To highlight your conditions or treatment• To gain support of your case e.g. to help with an appeal• Publicity can help in cases where there has been a miscarriage of justice or unfair treatment• Many people feel that getting attention in the media is beneficial, as publicity has helped in other cases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It will not get you out – it may even attract negative attention in the country where you are held• You will have no control over the amount of media coverage you receive, or who knows about your situation• Your situation/case may not be portrayed how you wanted. People have found that they have been misquoted and their story sensationalised• Your family may be subjected to media attention and their situation will become public knowledge in the community• You may be disappointed with what actually gets printed – you may have been expecting a full page article and only a couple of lines appear. Sometimes the interview will not even be published/broadcast

2 How to get involved

When a journalist wants to do a story about our work they will often want a 'human interest angle' which involves an interesting story or a specific situation (e.g. someone who was arrested whilst on holiday). It is in these situations that we may contact certain prisoners and ask them if they would like to get involved. We do not pass on names or details without your permission. The member of staff responsible for press enquiries will liaise between you and the journalist.

In many prisons it is unlikely that journalists will be able to contact you directly. In these cases the journalist may want to talk to a relative or friend about your case. If this happens, you will have less control over your story and it may bring unwelcome attention to your family or friends. The casework team can talk to your relative about this and PA has a factsheet for families about dealing with the media. If a journalist contacts you directly and you would like some advice regarding their request please feel free to contact the casework team.

3 Some further tips

- Unless there is something unusual or shocking about your case (i.e. 'woman facing death penalty'), journalists may not find it "newsworthy".
- UK local press are always keen to cover a story of a local person in prison abroad, particularly where conditions/treatment are harsh or there is a miscarriage of justice.
- Be warned that nothing is "off the record". The journalist is able to print anything that you say, whether you want them to or not
- Keep a dated record of all conversations.
- There is no copyright in ideas - only in the written words or pictures. If you write the story yourself or with help, make sure you keep copyright.
- Insist that the final version requires your written approval before publication.
- There may be difficult questions – remember you do not have to answer them.
- Do not part with tapes, photographs or original documents until the terms of your contract are agreed. Ensure that the contract includes satisfactory arrangements for the return of all materials including personal photographs.
- Try to negotiate the right to approve the manner in which the material is published. If you are not happy about how it is to be presented you should be willing to forgo the fee rather than risk sensational or misleading coverage.
- Don't be bullied into terms that you are not comfortable with. It is YOUR story, and you will have to live with the consequences if it is handled badly.
- You are under no obligation and can change your mind at any time.

4 Other organisations that can help

The MediaWiseTrust provides assistance to those with complaints about inaccurate, intrusive or sensational coverage in UK press and media.

MediaWise

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Canon Kitson
Oldbury Court Road
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Provides advice and support to those affected by unfair or inaccurate media coverage and to anyone considering selling stories to the press.

If you require this leaflet in a large print format, please contact us. Our details are below.

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