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This House Believes that the Media's Reporting is Detrimental to Humanitarian Crises Around the World

First Proposition: Francesca Ebel

Ms Ebel has reported on the Ukraine crisis as a freelance journalist since 2014. The media has mis-reported on the crisis, misleading the public and harming the people directly affected. Further, the media has failed to continue reporting on the crisis because Ukraine is “no longer sexy”, which has allowed Putin’s intervention in Syria to distract from Ukraine – “we are essentially playing his game”.

First Opposition: Dame Barbara Stocking

Dame Stocking is currently President of Murray Edwards College, and was previously CEO of Oxfam UK. “We are all global citizens and yet we are remarkably ill-informed about what is going on in the world”. Stocking spoke of how it was the media coverage of 9/11 which first informed her of Bin Laden, and likewise for the American people. Social media has alerted the public to the activity, positive or negative, of aid agencies. The major benefit of media coverage of crises is the resulting funding aid agencies receive.

Second Proposition: Dr Emma Briant

“Our timeline has shrunk...the crises we are talking about are now brought to us immediately”. Dr Briant, a sociologist studying Anglo-American relations, stressed the media bias towards crises of public interest: “a starving child in Aleppo is one thing”, but it is a crisis far from home. The British media have failed to discuss British arms deals with Saudi Arabia.

Second Opposition: Richard Spencer

Mr Spencer, Middle East Editor for *The Daily Telegraph*, began with the Chinese famine of 1958-61 as an example of the dangers of no media reporting, as the crisis was prolonged without international pressure on China. Photography and reporting of crises within China, such as the collapse of schools, are now spread online, alerting the world’s press. “The world becomes much more conscious of itself...I’ve no doubt the world today is better [for the media].”

Third Proposition: Greg Barrow

Mr Barrow was a BBC correspondent but now heads the London Office of the World Food Programme. In response to Mr Spencer, Mr Barrow stated that famines are more scarce seen on television because they are happening more infrequently. “Extremes are sometimes known as humanitarian pornography”. He commented on the media’s “formula”, which reports negatively on “why we’re too late, why we’re uncoordinated, and why we’re underfunded”.

Third Opposition: James Riseley

Mr Riseley, a former Cambridge Union Debating Officer, first stressed the weakness of the opposition in arguing that media reporting on crises is too brief when, he argues “people [are] not accessing the media as much”. The media needs to maintain its audience’s attention, which necessitates moving between crises and focusing on local issues.

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For footage of the event go to <https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc>

Thursday, 14 January 2016