

# Foreword

In June 2003 the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, in cooperation with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), convened the Aspen Institute Roundtable on the Impact of Media on Global Peace and Conflict. The roundtable brought together influential executives and journalists from American media; prominent religious leaders from the Catholic Church in the United States, as well as the Jewish and Islamic faiths; and leading scholars and analysts of international affairs to examine how the news media contribute to peace and conflict. This inquiry is well-timed, particularly in light of the globalization of the media, the current state of world affairs, and the perennially shifting perspectives on truth and propaganda.

The roundtable coincided with the Catholic Church's 37th annual World Communications Day and the 40th anniversary of the encyclical letter from Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, which was issued just two months after the Cuban missile crisis. *Pacem in Terris* is notable for its explicit recognition of the increasing roles and power of communications media throughout the world. In it, Pope John XXIII called for "fairness and impartiality" in the use of "instruments for the promotion and spread of mutual understanding between nations," and he denounced "ways of disseminating information which violate the principles of truth and justice, and injure the reputation of another nation."

Few Americans dispute the right of journalists and publishers to exercise their discretion in matters related to their profession. It is a basic tenet of a free society that governments not interfere with the freedom of the press, though in every free society there are some restrictions at the edges. Nevertheless, those who do write, edit, report, and publish are guided by certain ethical and moral principles. At times it would appear that the principle of reporting the facts can come into conflict with other ethical concerns. For example, if there is a riot underway, does live coverage of that event encourage others to join in? Is that a concern that journalists should harbor?

The Roundtable on the Impact of Media on Global Peace and Conflict explored the tensions inherent in the media business with regard to reporting and publishing information and opinions that can relate to global peace or conflict. In this report, rapporteur Frank

Walton offers a synthesis of the discussion. The reader should note that this report is written from the perspective of an informed observer at the conference. Unless cited to a particular person, none of the comments or ideas contained in this report should be taken as embodying the views or carrying the endorsement of any specific participant at the conference or their employer.

### **Acknowledgments**

We would like to thank the USCCB for its involvement with the project; our own Director of Journalism Projects, Amy Garmer, for her expertise in defining the topics at hand; Geoffrey Cowan for moderating the dialogue; and Tricia Kelly, assistant director, for working behind the scenes to bring the conference and this report to fruition.

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May 2004