

## 12. *Journalist Conference Calls*

As an alternative to holding a news conference, advocates are increasingly utilizing media conference calls with expert speakers to brief journalists. Over two decades ago, RESULTS Educational Fund was one of the first advocacy organizations to pioneer this media outreach strategy. Through the ACTION project, the use of media conference calls has become even more refined and targeted. Some examples include:

- **Curtain-Raiser Calls.** Prior to a major global event, journalists can be interested in hearing from high-profile, reputable spokespeople who can help “boil an issue down,” and identify “what to watch for” and “what’s really at stake” at that event. For example, days before the 2005 G8 Summit, ACTION arranged for economist Jeffrey Sachs, director of the UN Millennium Project, to brief journalists by phone about the relevance of the Summit to global efforts to fight AIDS, TB and malaria.

- **Breaking-News Calls.** Journalists are often most receptive to being on a call when a story of obvious news value is rapidly unfolding and they are provided access to knowledgeable authorities who can provide new and relevant information. For example, a media briefing call was organized to highlight significant implications of USAID’s re-organization, just days after it was announced. Carol Lancaster, former Deputy Administrator of USAID, was one of the main speakers on the call which highlighted potentially negative repercussions of the new plan to reform the agency.

- **State Level Media Calls.** For World TB Day 2006, separate conference calls were organized for journalists in six different US states of strategic policy making importance. Local spokespeople were joined by global specialists to dynamically present the linkages of local and global TB control efforts. This six-state media phone blitz – plus an additional call for national media – helped generate over 230 media placements within a couple of weeks.

- **Foreign Journalist Calls.** When the World Health Organization and African Ministers of Health declared an African TB Emergency in August 2005, a conference call was organized to brief journalists and foreign correspondents based in Africa. This kind of media outreach is an incredibly useful tool not only to generate media, but also to reverse the historically “north to south” flow of global health and development reporting.

- **Editorial Board Member Calls.** On a number of occasions, a media conference call has been organized exclusively with editorial page writers. These calls are usually timed for a day or two following the anticipated news coverage on an issue. With recent news coverage serving to place an issue on the radar screen, editorial board calls can more specifically address what particular action decision makers need to take in response to the issue.

### Tips & Suggestions

1. North American and African journalists tend to be more interested in participating in telephone press briefings than their colleagues in Europe, who prefer one-on-one briefings.
2. Be sure to use a reliable conference call service and an operator who is well-briefed on how to run the call, mute the journalists’ phone lines (but not the speakers!), moderate the question and answer session, and screen questions to prioritize key journalists.
3. Avoid planning a call on a Monday, as the weekend limits outreach opportunities to get journalists on the call.
4. Journalists working for media based in low-income countries will typically not have a budget to make international calls, so having the operator call out to them or, if possible, providing a toll-free line will be important in encouraging their participation.
5. Reach African journalists on their mobile phones rather than on less-reliable landlines.
6. Ideally, each call should feature no more than two or three speakers (in addition to the moderator), each of whom makes a statement of just a few minutes.
7. Just as when conducting a news conference, a good moderator (distinct from the operator) is essential. The moderator should begin the call by briefly introducing the issue and the speakers. Once all of the statements have been made, the moderator should facilitate questions and answers and tie up loose ends.
8. Many conference call companies will prepare a written transcript of your call. This can be a useful resource when following up with journalists who were unable to participate, as well as helping journalists who were on the call fact check quotes, spellings of names, and data.

## Example of an Advisory for a Journalist Telephone Briefing

The power to end hunger.  
**RESULTS**

For more information or to join this call, contact Kolleen Bouchane  
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### You are invited to a Telephone Press Briefing: **World Health Organization Expected to Call for Emergency Action to Address Africa's Catastrophic TB Epidemic**

A conversation with **Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Fr. Helene Gayle**, Director of HIV, TB, and Reproductive Health at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and **Dr. Mario Raviglione**, Director of the Stop TB Department at the World Health Organization

**WHAT:** A press briefing by conference call sponsored by RESULTS Educational Fund on why TB is a health emergency in Africa, and the latest news from a WHO-sponsored meeting of African Health Ministers in Maputo, Mozambique.

**WHO:** Journalists can hear from, and ask questions of, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, who himself suffered from TB, Dr. Helene Gayle, Director of HIV, TB, and Reproductive Health at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Dr. Mario Raviglione, Director of the Stop TB Department at the World Health Organization.

**WHEN:** **Friday, August 26 10:30-11:15 ET; 3:30 - 4:15 in the UK; 4:30-5:15 in South Africa**

**WHERE:** You can take the call from any phone at no charge by providing a number in advance where you can be reached or calling the toll free U.S. number below.

**HOW:** To sign up for the call free of charge, please provide a number where you can be reached at the call time to Kolleen Bouchane at RESULTS Educational Fund, (202) 783-7100 x107, or [kbouchane@results.org](mailto:kbouchane@results.org). Or to dial-in toll free from the U.S. call 1-800-260-6066. To dial-in from outside the U.S., call (312) 461-9606.

While TB kills nearly two million people a year globally, in much of the world, TB rates are actually declining. In Africa, however, TB is exploding, fueled by HIV/AIDS and poverty. Africa now has the fastest growing TB epidemic in the world and is driving the global epidemic. Someone dies of TB every minute in Africa, despite the fact that TB is a curable disease. Parts of Africa have seen a four-fold increase in annual new TB cases since 1990 and Africa has the highest TB rates in the world. AIDS and TB operate in deadly synergy and TB is the leading killer of people with AIDS.

In Africa:

- Number of TB deaths annually has doubled since 1990.
- Number of new TB cases annually has tripled since 1990.
- Some countries have seen 4, 5 or 7-fold increases in new TB cases annually since 1990.

On August 22 - 26, 2005, Ministers of Health from across Africa, and other health experts, will gather in Maputo, Mozambique for the WHO Regional Committee for Africa Conference. One key agenda item will be Africa's massive TB epidemic and Ministers will consider extraordinary action to address the TB emergency in Africa. Africa is now the frontline in the global TB fight and the donor community must act with Africa to mobilize the leadership and resources needed to stop TB.

For more information about RESULTS/RESULTS Educational Fund, go to [www.results.org](http://www.results.org).