For centuries, the press has cast itself as the champion of understanding and enlightenment. And yet, even as the press has become more international, it has often left a trail of misunderstanding in its wake. But if the media have sometimes been part of the problem... then the media can also be part of the solution. The same media which serves to distort or discredit old cultures, can also be used to re-validate them, and to help explain them to others.

Invariably, what the pursuit of short-term media profit means is the near-term pursuit of the largest possible audience - the highest ratings, the best demographics, the most impressive circulation and advertising numbers. Inevitably, it seems designing products with instant mass or sectarian appeal - focusing on what is divisive or dramatic or diverting or sensational - at the expense of what is in the interests of society or truly significant.

Good journalism requires the best we can muster in terms of disciplined learning, intelligent analysis, prudent judgement, and nuanced expression. Most particularly, it requires people who can write clear and compelling prose.

[Another media challenge] is the need to balance concerns about press freedom with a greater emphasis on press responsibility. In my view, we are sometimes too preoccupied with the rights of the press as an independent social critic - and we pay too little attention to the obligations of the press as an influential social leader. The problem comes, of course, when Freedom of the Press is used to shield the press - not just from government interference, but from any sense of social accountability.

The media increasingly tell audiences what they want to hear rather than what they ought to hear. And what too many people want is not to be informed, but to be entertained.

[The] results of the questionnaire showed conclusively that the average reader in Kenya wanted a more serious newspaper than his counterpart in Europe or America. He wanted, in other words, to be informed and educated and not just to be entertained. The public, at least in many Third World societies, is not as voyeuristic as some may assume. It is, however, immediately sensitive to sectarian views or news and the converse seems to hold true overall for Western societies.