

press release, April 25th, 2012

More Media Responsibility during the Breivik trial in Norway

One declared aim of the murderer of 77 people on July 22nd, 2011 is to gain attention for his far-right cause. Following his confession to planting a bomb in Oslo and murdering politically interested young people on the holiday island Utoya, he now wants to use his trial to promote his ideologically induced hatred. His statement poses a dilemma for the media: On the one hand there is the necessity to provide information; yet in this case the media is used as a mouthpiece for the proclamations of a fascist.

Indeed, the media has so far played a rather precarious role in the case. Pictures the culprit carefully selected and published on his Facebook-page for example, were complacently reproduced and thus circulated among a wider audience. Last summer several Norwegian newspaper vendors had stacked their newspapers backside up whenever the cover featured the murderer's face - a flat refusal to comply with what they perceived as the criminal's obtrusiveness.

Given the current uncritical publication of the culprit's picture, the Media Responsibility Institute calls on the persons responsible in picture editorial offices to refrain from further publishing the face of the culprit!

We support the substantiated demand brought forward by the Alliance for Action in Winnenden (a parents' circle of the victims of a school killing in Winnenden): our shared request is to deny the culprits' macabre fame they gain by circulating their pictures.

At this point we are dealing with pictorial memories; hence it is easy for the media to refuse assisting the agenda of the criminal in Norway. The question of personal responsibility of editors will have to be raised elsewhere – we can only wish for clear-headedness and foresight when selecting editorial details for publication.

Yours sincerely,
Dr. Sabine Schiffer
Head of the Institute

The objective of Media Responsibility Institute is to raise the awareness of communication processes, of the potential risks and chances they present to us, and in that way to facilitate the communication between the mass media and the public. Apart from surveys and analysis of media products, the institute focuses on activities such as publications, workshops, lectures, seminars, lesson concepts and supporting material. The institute promotes a curriculum initiative for media education and provides know-how for journalists.