

Common Ground News Service Guide for Writers

The Common Ground News Service (CGNews) is an independent source of news and opinion that disseminates fresh, solution-oriented articles to promote constructive perspectives and encourage dialogue. We publish and promote articles by local and international experts on current Middle East issues and on the relationship between Western and Muslim societies worldwide. The service is a non-profit initiative of Search for Common Ground, an international non-governmental organisation headquartered in Washington and Brussels, whose mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict -- away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions.

CGNews is a weekly news service published in five languages – Arabic, English, French, Hebrew and Indonesian. It is distributed to hundreds of media outlets around the world and to 15,000 individual subscribers which include policy-makers, think-tanks, diplomats, journalists, activists, academics and students, among others. Launched in 2001, CGNews spans linguistic, geographic and political barriers to distribute articles to media outlets and individuals that may otherwise never benefit from such exchanges, much less cooperate by contributing to and reprinting from the same news service.

CGNews articles include both original, commissioned pieces as well as reprints sourced from a diverse set of publications, and our articles have been reprinted over 3100 times in a varied list of over 400 media outlets including *The Christian Science Monitor (US)*, *Al Hayat (Saudi Arabia/UK)*, *The Jakarta Post*, *Pakistan Link*, *The Daily Star (Lebanon/Egypt)*, *Al Arab Online (UK)*, *Al Wasat (Bahrain)*, *The Yemen Times*, *Al Jazeera Online*, *The Jordan Times*, *The Washington Times*, and *United Press International*.

The CGNews board of editors comprises individuals in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Europe and North America with extensive knowledge of the Middle East, issues relevant to Muslim-Western and/or Arab-Israeli relations, and a “common ground” orientation.

CGNews appears in two editions. One is *CGNews-Middle East*, featuring solution-oriented articles primarily on the Arab-Israeli conflict, published in Arabic, English and Hebrew. The other is *CGNews-Partners in Humanity*, which addresses issues pertaining to Muslim-Western relations and is published in Arabic, English, French and Indonesian. This brochure provides general guidelines that apply to both but was written specifically with examples for the latter.

The CGNews – Partners in Humanity Mission:

Today, with the exception of a small number of people around the world, there is little direct exchange of perspectives between Western and Muslim individuals, communities and nations. Thus, in our global community where news travels fast and radical elements have learnt to use modern media effectively, those like Search for Common Ground, who are working for peace, reconciliation and a more secure world, have adopted media as a major tool in their repertoire.

CGNews – Partners in Humanity seeks to distribute, as widely as possible, timely articles of the highest quality that help promote a shift to positive and constructive thinking about how to address deteriorating Muslim-Western relations. This initiative aims to bring about a paradigm shift in the thinking of readers of mainstream media on Muslim-Western relations by promoting thoughtful analysis of issues as broadly as possible.

CGNews-Partners in Humanity believes that the ability and willingness to deal peacefully and constructively with those issues distancing Muslim communities from their Western counterparts are not the domain only of policy-makers and bureaucrats. Grassroots projects and cooperative efforts abound globally, though they rarely make their way into mainstream media and onto the desks of decision-makers and interested individuals. Our subscription list includes thousands who stem from a long list of professions, and includes over a hundred media outlets.

CGNews Authors:

Anyone with an interest in Muslim-Western affairs is invited to submit articles to CGNews – Partners in Humanity through our website – www.commongroundnews.org, or via email – cgnewspih@sfcg.org. Regular contributors include scholars, religious leaders, writers, policy-makers, civil society practitioners, dialogue and reconciliation activists, economists, artists and musicians, amongst others.

We also encourage young writers – the thought leaders of the future – to submit articles for our ~Youth Views~ column. Each week, we select and distribute one article by a writer under 27 years of age.

Style & Format:

Word Limit: The word limit for all articles is 750 words in order to comply with the word limits of many major publications, making it easier for them to reprint our articles.

Language: We have the capacity to receive articles in English, French, Indonesian and Arabic. However for review and editing purposes, we prefer to receive them in English where possible. We edit all English-language articles in accordance with British language conventions for international distribution.

Style: Since we are aiming for widespread distribution, articles should be written in a journalistic style that is appropriate for mainstream consumption: for a reader who is intelligent but unfamiliar with your topic. We encourage writers to dig deeply into any given topic, addressing the complexities of issues and participating in meaningful dialogue. Articles should not read like essays but like op-eds, and paragraphs should be kept short.

Terminology: Keep jargon, clichés and technical terms to a minimum to facilitate translation into other languages. We recognise that many foreign words have no equivalent in other languages. In these cases, when you use a foreign word, please put it in italics and provide a brief explanation in English.

We have found that terms such as Muslim, Islamic and Islamist are frequently misused, causing confusion and misunderstanding about Islam and its adherents. To avoid this, we have adopted the following usage. Muslim (adj/noun) should be used to denote an adherent of Islam, and Islamic (adj) to denote the religion or its institutions. In other words, a Muslim country, a country whose citizens are predominantly Muslim, is not the same as an Islamic country, a country whose political system is based on Islamic law or shari'a.

Islamism (noun) should be used to refer to political Islam. Islamist (noun/adj) should be used to denote a Muslim who seeks a formal role for Islamic ideas in a political system, and/or to describe those institutions or principles which uphold this end. The term Islamist is not synonymous with terrorist, militant, activist or fundamentalist.

Guidelines:

A common ground article:

- Provides constructive and solution-oriented perspectives and concrete steps for collaboration and understanding where possible
- Seeks areas of common ground or common goals and interests
- Promotes dialogue and cooperation
- Emphasises positive examples of interaction between Western and Muslim cultures
- Expresses constructive self-criticism
- Instills hope and optimism in readers that non-adversarial solutions to conflict are possible
- Highlights positive experiences between individuals that humanise the other and offer hope
- Contributes to understanding between Muslim and Western cultures

Examples:

Sample themes and approaches include:

- Highlighting organisations and people working for a better national, regional or global environment
- Interpreting information, events, polls and analyses in ways that encourage rational, moderate and positive thinking
- Educating readers on specific non-adversarial approaches of conflict resolution
- Illustrating to readers that “common ground” is not about settling for the lowest possible denominator but seeking a higher denominator
- Informing readers about unheard of dialogue projects around the world
- Elaborating on non-Western or Muslim conflict resolution perspectives and theories to contribute to understanding of Muslim-Western relations
- Encouraging policy-makers and international decision-makers to adopt more conciliatory approaches in their policies
- Accentuating the shared humanity and interdependence of humankind
- Dispelling myths and negative stereotypes, and sharing information on widely misunderstood or controversial concepts that serve as obstacles to respect, cooperation or understanding

Copyright & Permissions:

An author bears sole responsibility for his/her article’s content and is expected to show intellectual honesty (i.e. no plagiarism) and accuracy (i.e. fact checking), and to identify all information taken from other sources. We expect that all submitted articles are unique and have not been published elsewhere.

If your article is selected for publication in *CGNews – Partners in Humanity*, anyone is free to reprint the article so long as they attribute the article to both the author and to *CGNews*.

Submission Process:

Articles can be submitted through our website at www.commongroundnews.org, or by email to cgnewspih@sfcg.org.

Review Process:

In order to deepen our approach and ensure the best long-term results, the *CGNews-Partners in Humanity's* editorial board consists of 7 editors from 6 different backgrounds/cultures based in *Amman, Geneva, Jakarta and Washington*. Collectively, the team has extensive and nuanced knowledge of the points of contention in Muslim-Western relations. These individuals consult, via email, on all articles that are published by *CGNews-Partners in Humanity* to ensure the highest quality output.

We publish articles from a wide variety of authors, each requiring their own detailed review process:

Unsolicited Articles

All articles that have been submitted but have not been solicited for publication undergo a peer-review process by the team of *CGNews* editors. Submissions for *CGNews-Partners in Humanity's ~Youth Views~* column as well as regular articles are welcome. The review process usually takes one to two weeks.

Solicited Articles

- a) *CGNews* publishes multi-author series on special themes several times throughout the year. In these cases, the editorial board solicits articles from local and international experts on specific themes. The topic is often predetermined by *CGNews* editors.
- b) *CGNews* also requests standalone, non-series articles from specific authors on a topic within their expertise, and here the topic is often determined by the writer. Our *~Youth Views~* editor also approaches young writers and helps develop their topics where appropriate.

CGNews editors give feedback on submissions, and may offer suggestions on developing them further or ensuring they meet our common ground guidelines. Any editing - for length, content or clarity - is collaborative; we ensure that we have full agreement from the author on a definitive version before publication.

Distribution mechanisms:

There are three ways we encourage widespread distribution and readership:

- a) *Media Clients and their Multiplier Effect:* By making our articles available to all publications, including electronic publications and online media portals, we access their readers and an audience we may not otherwise reach. While it is impossible for us to track 100% of our reprints, since few outlets report back to us when using an article and since many outlets are not on the internet to facilitate our tracking process, our research nonetheless reveals very successful reprint rates.
- b) *Direct Subscription across Languages:* *CGNews - Partners in Humanity* is sent to thousands of individual subscribers around the world through e-mail, about a hundred of which are media outlets. Recipients include government officials, diplomats, academics, members of the defence community, journalists, civil society leaders and

others who have an interest in the West's relationship with Muslim countries and communities.

c) *Access through the Internet:* All issues of *CGNews – Partners in Humanity* can be found on the CGNews website www.commongroundnews.org. An archive of past editions is structured in an easy-to-navigate way with original material classified and highlighted.

About SFCG

Founded in 1982, Search for Common Ground (www.sfcg.org) works to transform the way the world deals with conflict - away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative problem solving. We work with local partners to find culturally appropriate means to strengthen societies' capacity to deal with conflicts constructively: to understand the differences and act on the commonalities.