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Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC)

UNESCO-IPDC Prize for Rural Communication

Speech

by

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to the award ceremony of the UNESCO-IPDC Prize for Rural Communication.

This prize recognizes the special contribution of individuals and organizations to improving communication in rural areas, mainly in developing countries.

Communication is not only about media. It concerns basic elements of human life such as freedom of expression, dialogue, empowerment, participation and access to knowledge and information.

This year the International Programme for the Development of Communication received a total of 28 candidatures from 20 countries across the world. The nominations submitted had to meet the specified criteria and be endorsed by the National Commissions of Member States or by relevant non-governmental organizations having consultative status with UNESCO.

I would like to thank the eight members of the IPDC Bureau who acted as Jury of the Prize. Following their recommendation, the Director-General of UNESCO decided to share this year's prize, consisting of a sum of US\$ 20,000 and a special diploma.

I would therefore like to express my warmest congratulations to the two winners of this year's Prize: The "Arid Lands Information Network" and the "Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists".

The Arid Lands Information Network, ALIN, is a Kenyan based-NGO created in 2000 with a mission to improve the livelihoods of arid lands communities in East Africa. This mission is achieved by providing access to information using modern technologies, through 12 community-based *Maarifa* Centers in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

"Maarifa" means "knowledge". A *Maarifa* centre is a room or 'fabricated shipping container' where communities can access computers with internet connection; photo and video cameras; and books and magazines. It is also a place where communities can document their local knowledge. For

example, in one of the *Maarifa* centres a group of local farmers was able to receive training in order to produce a video about their techniques on water harvesting, which was then screened within neighbouring communities.

The training provided at the “*Maarifa*” Centres, has also allowed people to learn a wide range of skills, ranging from how to create an energy-efficient bio-gas stove, to handling administrative tasks such as applying for an official identity card. Recently, a group of women received training to develop a natural pesticide, made using local plants, and they then created a song to raise awareness among their neighbours about it.

In most of the communities ALIN supports, agriculture is the single most important part of the economy, and is consequently of critical importance for the lives of the members of these communities.

The Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists, NEFEJ, was established in 1986 as an NGO for the promotion of environmental journalism in Nepal. Throughout its 25 year long journey, it has been actively engaged in raising public

awareness in favour of sustainable development through the creation of a vibrant community media sector.

In 1997, with the support of the IPDC, it created 'Radio Sagarmatha', the first community radio not only in Nepal but in the whole of South Asia. Some of us know it as Everest, the highest mountain in the world, but Nepalese people call it Sagarmatha, meaning the "Head in the Great Blue Sky", or for some people, the "forehead of the ocean", a legendary reference to a time when Nepal was under the sea.

Indeed, Radio Sagarmatha has opened the way to Nepal becoming covered by an ocean of community radios in the country, with community radio broadcasts today reaching approximately 85% of Nepal's 27 million people.

To enhance its role, in 2000 the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists established the Community Radio Support Centre which has since been actively involved in enabling, promoting and assisting community radios at all stages: from conceptualization to obtaining licenses, from setting up the stations to programming, from organizational

strengthening to human capacity building. It has become a hub of knowledge for community media in the country.

We are delighted that Mr. James Nguo, Regional Director of the Arid Lands Information Network, and Mr. Raghu Mainali, Director of the Community Radio Support Centre of the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists, are here with us in person to receive the UNESCO-IPDC Prize for Rural Communication.

The achievements of our two winners speak for themselves.

The issues they deal with are not only central for the development of rural communities. They are essential to exercising the human rights to freedom of expression and freedom of information.

Today we are celebrating enthusiasm and determination.

It is these qualities that have led the winners to be here with us at UNESCO today, to receive the UNESCO-IPDC Prize for Rural Communication.

Thank you