

STATEMENT "PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING TODAY AND TOMORROW"
adopted by the participants to the workshop on Public Service Broadcasting
organized by UNESCO in the framework of the World Electronic Media Forum
Geneva, 11 December 2003

The participants to the Workshop on Public Service Broadcasting, having exchanged their views and experiences on a number of highly significant topics, have decided to supplement their Recommendations to the World Summit on Information Society with the following Statement on Public Service Broadcasting Today and Tomorrow:

- State broadcasting and decision makers should be encouraged to transform it into an open public service broadcasting;
- Where PSB has been established but has been surrounded with obstacles from meeting its objectives, its independence should be safeguarded and its performance upgraded;
- PSB should be made adaptable to the technological, social and cultural changes constantly developing within the information society.

A public broadcasting system detached from state influence is absolutely essential to disseminate impartial and diverse information. An independent and well-performing public broadcasting system examines public issues with an incisively critical eye by providing programmes that include public debate, cultural expressions and educational programming aside from entertainment. PSB should unfailingly render service to individuals, communities and societies in order to contribute to a shared political, social and cultural frame of reference and bring about social cohesion among different peoples. This form of PSB, which meets its audience not only as consumers but as citizens, binds democratic societies and develops national identity and cultural preservation.

PSB must be taken as an indispensable force in the enlightenment and education of the general public and therefore, it should contain a high proportion of original domestic production boasting of local content, be adequately funded and publicly accountable. Radio and television at the service of the public are the nation's largest educational, societal and cultural institutions and their reliability should be maintained at all costs. With this in mind, it is compulsory for PSB to appeal to both mass audiences and special interest groups, to serve national interest while keeping its institutional independence and integrity.

It is important for PSB to be flexible and adaptable to the new demands of the rapidly-evolving information society. This includes dealing with the future of the electronic media and the various changes it presents in the fields of technology, market and consumer behaviours and regulation. New audiovisual and information technologies should be integrated in any PSB system, particularly in this era of digitalisation. If PSB remains static in the midst of the digital revolution, it will cease to exist not only in its form but most importantly, in its function as a public service. Public service broadcasters need to reorganise themselves to suit the emerging environment and adjust to the new ways of working in their productions, especially in the growing use of multimedia. It is rather imperative that public service broadcasters be strongly supported in this context by endowing them with legal, technical and financial security to remain stable against competitive pressures from private broadcasters. PSB should not, however, use public funding to distort competition, from which it also reaps substantial profits.

At present there is the urgent need for a futuristic media policy, especially in freeing PSB from market isolation. Commercial entities dominate more and more information delivery networks and digital gateways. It is only pragmatic for PSB organizations to commence alliances and cooperation with them for the sake of holding important segments of the audience, without compromising its own entity of being a non-commercial institution.

Although PSB should be adjusted to the media environment today, it remains crucial for it to retain its identity and distinctiveness of rendering public service. This should be the most essential cause of our fight for the continuous existence of public service broadcasting tomorrow.

