

27th session of the Intergovernmental Council of the
International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC)

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Introductory Speech by new Chairperson

Distinguished Delegates, Outgoing Chairman Mr. Walter Fust, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured by the confidence reposed in me by a majority of the Council is electing me as Chairperson of the IPDC Intergovernmental Council. I am indeed grateful for this trust and I can only assure the Members that I will try and live up to your expectations to the best of my abilities.

The process of holding an election for the post of Chairperson is perhaps unprecedented. However, when one of the mandates of the IPDC is to foster democracy and transparency through the media, it is not a bad thing in itself that the Chairperson has been elected through a transparent and democratic process.

To introduce myself very briefly, I am presently working as the Secretary in the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting in the Government of India. As Secretary, I am the administrative head of the Ministry. The Ministry has the mandate to formulate policies and programmes in the areas of print media, broadcasting media, films, inter-personal communication, advertising and any other media related subjects. The media in India is totally free and the Government primarily acts as a facilitator and enabler for its orderly growth and expansion.

I am conscious that I have a hard act to follow by stepping into the shoes of my distinguished predecessor Mr. Walter Fust. The IPDC has made very visible and significant strides during his stewardship of the Council over the last two years. On behalf of the Council of IPDC, I would like to thank him most sincerely for his commitment, professionalism and leadership in taking forward the whole gamut of media development activities, particularly the role of the media as a vehicle for poverty reduction, empowerment and good governance. I, of course, will hope to benefit from his advice and guidance in the discharge of my duties and hope to be a recipient of his experience and expertise.

Distinguished delegates, thirty years is a memorable milestone in the life of any institution. As we reach this landmark in the journey that IPDC began in 1980, it is a time to celebrate the many successes that have been achieved in various fields of media development through the projects and programmes of IPDC over these last three decades. It is also, perhaps, a moment to look back and critically, but constructively, analyze the areas in which the results have been less successful or even complete failures, so that we are able to assess the reasons, implement appropriate course corrections where required and formulate programmes in a manner that can overcome any roadblocks in the future.

The IPDC has always emphasized the importance and necessity of the media in fostering development and alleviating poverty, so that people have access to information, have opportunities to participate in an interactive process of decision making and can act as a watchdog to ensure transparency and accountability. To this, I would also like to suggest giving high importance to ‘inclusiveness’ as a major objective. The development and growth of a free media must encompass all sections of society and should not be limited to small pockets, particularly pockets of affluence or pockets of already informed and empowered people. The spread, reach and coverage of the media has to be ‘universal’ – in a broad sense – so that in a country no citizen is excluded. Media impact has to bridge the rural-urban divide, reach geographically remote and economically under-privileged communities and all those people whose voices are so muted as to be rarely heard. ‘Inclusive’ strategies continue to be relevant, despite the process of globalization gaining ground.

The concept of inclusiveness, apart from the reach and coverage of the media, also implies that the ultimate beneficiary – who is the common citizen – has the access to receive and react to the information that the media provides. This further implies that while new technologies are re-defining the parameters through which information is shared, it has to be relatively simple, inexpensive and affordable so that the advantages do not by-pass those who need it most. Access is ultimately hugely dependent on cost.

The approval of various media related projects is the primary activity of IPDC. The implementation of these projects require funds and the importance of adequate resources for IPDC is paramount. It would be a tragedy if the objectives of the programme flounder on account of lack of resources. We would have to find out appropriate ways and means to generate greater resources and the contributions of Member States would continue to be high on our agenda. The importance of these projects can hardly be over stated as they have a tangible spin off effect in generating policy initiatives that serve a larger purpose.

Finally, a personal word. The Chairperson is a product of the Council on a whole and does not have an independent existence. I will be heavily dependent on the wisdom, knowledge and experience of many distinguished experts and professionals who constitute the IGC and I earnestly seek your support, cooperation and advice at all times. The power of the media to usher in positive change in multifarious ways is well recognized and well established. I would hope and trust that the IPDC can take this objective forward effectively and rapidly so that we are able to fulfill the mandate that was given to this Programme in April 1980.

Thank you very much.
