

Inaugural Speech by His Excellency Ambassador Walter Fust,  
Director-General Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation  
and IPDC Chairman elected during the

26<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNESCO International Programme for the  
Development of Communication (IPDC) Intergovernmental Council

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me take this opportunity to thank you for the confidence you have shown in my abilities by electing me as Chairman of the Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC. My predecessor, to whom I pay tribute, has set a very high standard and I will do my utmost to maintain the same degree of professionalism and dedication. I am honoured to be given the opportunity to play a lead role in this valuable multilateral programme, which has made considerable achievements in the area of media development since its inception in 1980. Then, the Programme was created to mobilize the international community to discuss and promote media development in developing countries, and those endeavors did not lose their importance.

Allow me therefore to elaborate on the following points during my opening remarks, while noting that I would like to dedicate a few specific remarks on the crucial issue of the “Safety of Journalists” during my introduction of the thematic debate scheduled as Agenda Item 9 of the IPDC Council meeting proceedings. The issues I wish to highlight here are:

- The significance of media in the specific realm of development and poverty reduction
- The transformative impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on the media and media systems

- Elaborating on the specific role, potential and challenges of the IPDC programme within this changing environment

First, the importance of developing a free, independent and pluralistic media in developing countries must be placed high, as it constitutes a prerequisite for the progress of democracy and good governance. Within a multidimensional complexity of poverty going far beyond economic means and addressing issues of including the poor and marginalised into social and political processes that influence their lives, media plays a key role in

- Providing a platform for people to make their voices heard, to expose their ideas and concerns, hence encouraging civic participation in the decision-making process, thus contributing to ensuring democratic legitimacy.

Observing the activities of the governments and parliaments it forces them to be accountable for their doing

- As a disseminator of information, it empowers people to become better informed citizens.

In short, medias are powerful tools in the development process for reaching, engaging and empowering communities particularly those marginalised by poverty, conflict and illiteracy while ensuring accountability and transparency of governments.

Secondly, let me briefly highlight the potential and transformative impact Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have had on the media and media systems. ICTs have fundamentally transformed the media landscape through enabling an increased participation and interaction of those segments of society previously marginalised. While many challenges regarding accessibility and connectivity at affordable prices remain, I am convinced that we

need to embrace this opportunity to combining effectively and appropriately the new ICT-tools available. This will lead to increased interactivity and participation to wider inclusion and ownership of development processes. For instance in the broadcasting field, where broadcasting was represented in a “one-to-many” model, a paradigm shift might happen to a “many-to-many” broadcasting model. My conviction of the transformative potential of ICTs in development and media in particular has also been reflected in commitments by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) during my 15 years as its Director-General. Switzerland has supported efforts in the realm of media support in areas such as

- capacity building of journalists and support of media training institutions
- re-engaging in the IPDC with a specific focus on community media and the role of ICTs within the supported projects.
- supporting capital funds to finance media projects globally by innovative investments.
- supporting organisations such as the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC)
- engaging in a dialogue with the global national broadcasters on the role and responsibility in development at the World Electronic Media Forum (WEMF) with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of Southern Voices and perspectives

Increasingly, it will also become important to mobilise and strengthen local / indigenous knowledge for development, a process where media, influenced by the convergence of various new ICTs, can play a significant role.

Finally, let me come to the role and responsibility of the IPDC, which has over the years provided vital support to local media organizations worldwide working under difficult conditions to promote free and pluralistic media in their countries and regions. In 28 years, the Programme has channelled more than US\$ 93 million to over 1100 projects in 139 developing countries.

Although the Programme faced some serious difficulties in the late 1990s / early 2000s, with a significant drop in funding, it was able to rise again by undergoing an external evaluation and carrying out a series of reforms recommended by the evaluators.

The results achieved by the Programme in just a couple of years are remarkable and are clearly spelled out in the report of a second evaluation carried out in early 2006 by the same team of experts, who were invited to assess the way in which the reforms had been carried out and to measure their impact. The Programme has managed to improve its working methods, transparency, relevancy and effectiveness. As stated by the experts, “significant and impressive changes have taken place within the IPDC since the 2002 evaluation. All the recommendations that were proposed have been implemented.” The report also concluded that the IPDC “operates in a simple and efficient manner, compared to many other funding mechanisms” and described the Programme as “a catalyst with the possibility to produce significant change using relatively small amounts of money”.

As a result of these reforms, donor confidence has increased and in the last two years the Programme received a total of US\$ 4,263,000 from 15 donor countries, including several new donors. Of course, the Programme still faces a number of challenges. It must, on one hand, continue to work on improving the quality of projects that are submitted to the Bureau in order to ensure the greatest possible impact of its support in the field. And on the other hand, it must renew its fundraising efforts every year, and encourage donors to

commit themselves for several years, in order to make possible medium-term strategic planning.

Next month, I will chair the 52<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the IPDC Bureau, which will examine nearly 80 project proposals that have been submitted from local media organizations worldwide. We will use strict criteria to guarantee that the best projects get the funding they deserve. We will not only carefully verify the viability of the proposals and credentials of the project submitters; we will also make sure that these projects are likely to make a concrete contribution to one of the Programme's three main priorities: fostering free and pluralistic media; developing community media, and building the capacities of media professionals. These steps are essential to guarantee the highest quality of IPDC projects, which after all are the selling point of our Programme.

It is important that we keep in mind that as an extra budgetary programme, the IPDC "can never be more than what the donors decide it to be, and what they are willing to invest in it".

I thank you for your trust and your attention.