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**ORAL REPORT OF THE CHAIRPERSON
OF THE COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION COMMISSION**

Mr Ivan Ávila-Belloso (Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of)

16th Plenary meeting, Thursday 22 October 2009

Mr President
 The Chairperson of the Executive Board
 Mr Director-General
 Excellencies
 Ladies and gentlemen

1. I am honoured to present to you an overview of the debates that took place during the session of the Communication and Information Commission. First though, I would like to express my appreciation to the Latin America and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) of UNESCO and to my country Venezuela for proposing me as candidate to chair the CI Commission, and to the General Conference for the trust it has placed in me by electing me to this position. The CI Commission is very dear to my heart, as a professor in Communication Strategies, former journalist and staunch believer in the value of Communication and Information for achieving the noble goals of this Organization.

2. I would like to acknowledge the collaboration of the other members of the Bureau of the Commission, namely:

- Mr T. Trier (Denmark)
- Mr E. Kuzmin (Russian Federation)
- Mr J. M. Adoua (Congo)
- Mr M. Razouk (Syrian Arab Republic)

The Rapporteur, Mr Martin Hadlow (Australia), deserves special mention for his outstanding work in recording both the content and the spirit of the proceedings.

3. I also wish to thank the representatives of the Director-General, Mr Abdul Waheed Khan and Mr Hans d'Orville, for their valuable participation in our discussions, as well as Mr Walter Fust, Chairman of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and Mr Karol Jakubowicz, Chairman of the Information for All Programme (IFAP) – for their useful insights into the activities of CI's two intergovernmental programmes. Mr Jakubowicz unfortunately could not attend the meeting in person for medical reasons but graciously sent us detailed written contributions. We wish him a speedy recovery.

4. This expression of gratitude would not be complete if I did not mention the excellent work carried out by the wonderful team of the CI Commission Secretariat, led by its Secretary Ms Cordula Gaschutz, in ensuring the smooth functioning of the Commission's proceedings. Finally, a note of thanks to the translators and interpreters, who made it possible for us to reflect the truly multicultural composition of our Commission, as well as to the technicians for their support.

5. Let me now present to you the main lines of the three days of rich discussions that animated the CI Commission session, which was structured around the following three items:

- Item 4.2 Consideration and Adoption of the Draft Programme and Budget for 2010-2011, Part II.A Major Programme V – Communication and Information (35 C/5),
- Item 5.9 Follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society (35 C/46), and
- Item 5.16 International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Multicultural Library Manifesto (35 C/51).

General introduction by ADG/CI

6. Before we began our debates, the Assistant Director-General of the Communication and Information Sector, Mr Abdul Waheed Khan, briefed us on the current global situation in the

communication and information field, and went on to explain the work of the Sector, its priorities and the difficulties and challenges it faces.

REPORTS FROM THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL COUNCILS

7. Attention was then given to the two intergovernmental programmes of CI, the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and the Information for All Programme (IFAP).

8. The Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC, Mr Walter Fust, gave an overview of the IPDC's unique place within the United Nations system as the only programme of its type with a mandate to mobilize international support for media development in developing countries. The financing of projects is the very backbone of its work, and it funded, to the value of US \$3.66 million, 133 projects from 71 countries during 2008-2009.

9. The IPDC has launched three other very important new initiatives, namely the Media Development Indicators (MDIs), Journalists' Safety and the Danger of Impunity, and thirdly, support for excellence in journalism education in Africa.

10. Mr Fust noted that the MDIs had already been acknowledged by some major actors in the media development field, such as the UNDP, the World Bank and the Council of Europe, and highlighted their relevance for the development of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF).

11. On the subject of the safety of journalists, Mr Fust pointed out that the IPDC Council had discussed a report by the Director-General on the killing of journalists and had, as a consequence, undertaken to function as an oversight body in this area.

12. In supporting excellence amongst journalism education institutions in Africa, UNESCO, having identified 12 institutions with the potential to become centres of excellence within the next four to five years, was now building the capacities of a number of them through IPDC.

13. Mr Fust acknowledged the financial contributions to the IPDC of 16 donor countries. He indicated that, while he was pleased to report that financial contributions to the programme had been steadily increasing, the IPDC was still under-resourced and he hoped more new donors would come on board.

14. Concerning the Information for All Programme (IFAP), the report by the Director-General was presented by his representative, Mr Abdul Waheed Khan, who highlighted the Director-General's support for IFAP's objectives and priorities, and his wish to see increased extrabudgetary funding for the programme. The importance of IFAP in addressing the digital divide was also stressed.

15. In the absence of Mr Karol Jakubowicz, Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Council of the Information for All Programme (IFAP), the delegate of Hungary presented the Council's report on its activities. IFAP is currently implementing its strategic plan, has revived its online Information Society Observatory and has developed an extensive National Information Society Policy template. Mr Jakubowicz noted that IFAP has adopted five priority areas for its work, namely information accessibility, information for development, information literacy, information ethics and information preservation. He reminded the Commission that close cooperation between IFAP and the Secretariat was essential. IFAP faces a shortage of resources for its projects and activities, and Mr Jakubowicz, while thanking donors, called for assistance from the CI Sector in fund-raising activities.

DEBATE 1

Item 4.2 Consideration and adoption of the Draft Programme and Budget for 2010-2011 – Part II A Major Programme V – Communication and Information (35 C/5) and examination of draft resolutions

16. The Commission's first debate related to the adoption of the Draft Programme and Budget for 2010-2011.

17. By way of introduction, the Assistant Director-General of the Bureau of Strategic Planning (BSP), Mr Hans d'Orville, reminded us that UNESCO's overall budget was \$653 million and that Major Programme V, the programme managed by the CI Sector, had an allocation of \$33 million, in other words 5% of the total budget. He emphasized the various programming principles underlying document 35 C/5, while also underscoring the strengthening of UNESCO's contribution to the follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and noting the CI Sector's "very prominent" intersectoral work.

18. The Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, Mr Khan, then provided an outline of Major Programme V, which is structured around three Main Lines of Action (MLAs): (i) promoting freedom of expression and access to information; (ii) strengthening free, independent and pluralistic media and communication for sustainable development; and (iii) fostering universal access to information and knowledge and the development of infrastructures.

19. Turning now to the comments from Member States, many delegates expressed their satisfaction with the overall thrust of the Programme and what one delegate called a "well-focused document". However, some delegates still believed that items were too general and that it would be hard to assess progress in delivery of outcomes, while comments were also made that more targeting of funds allocation was needed to ensure the best effect.

20. Universally, delegates expressed their concern over the limited resources at the disposal of the CI Sector. Regarding the Sector's extrabudgetary programmes, calls for donors to provide more support for IFAP and IPDC (the latter often referred to as a "flagship") were constant. One delegate suggested that Member States might make available fully-funded consultants to be utilized by the Organization as it saw fit in carrying out these programmes.

21. Altogether, some 56 delegates took part in the debate and, in my summary of our discussions, I have selected a number of recurring key themes which resonated time and again during the sessions. For ease of reference, I have clustered these comments in the framework of the priority programme areas within the Sector. In other words, how they relate to (i) freedom of expression, democracy and peace; (ii) communication development; and (iii) information and knowledge society issues.

Freedom of expression, democracy and peace

Freedom of expression and freedom of information

22. There was consistent support from delegates for UNESCO's work in the area of freedom of expression. It was often pointed out that a free and independent media plays a vital role in a democracy. One delegate, while supporting the ongoing work being achieved, asked that UNESCO play a more proactive role in the field. It was suggested that freedom of expression become, along with Africa and gender equality, one of the chief priorities of the Organization. "Freedom of expression and freedom of the press belongs in the tool kit for development" was how it was put by a delegate. Another said "In the beginning was the word: democracy".

23. Several delegates pointed out that the concentration of media ownership can be a problem in ensuring plurality and diversity, and asked that this issue be factored into UNESCO's discussions on freedom of the press.

24. While recognizing the right to freedom of expression, one delegate believed that it must come with accountability and social responsibility. The delegate was of the view that the right to freedom of expression “is not absolute and is subjected to some form of measures in the interest of national security and public order, distortion of racial harmony, disintegration and disunity of society”. Others, however, warned against the risk of interpreting social responsibility as the right to censor and put limits on freedom of expression.

Safety of journalists

25. The protection and safety of journalists was another consistent theme of concern expressed by many delegates in Debate 1.

26. A suggestion was made that the murder of journalists should be marked by one minute’s silence in newsrooms (and other places where journalists gather) around the world. During the Commission’s later hearings, inspired by this suggestion, all delegates stood in silence for one minute. One representative also called for a special international court of justice for conducting trials of those accused of perpetrating crimes of violence, such as murder, against journalists.

World Press Freedom Day

27. The commemoration of the work of the independent media through the holding of World Press Freedom Day (3 May) events was applauded by delegates. Awareness raising of freedom of expression and freedom of information issues was seen as a valuable outcome of World Press Freedom Day activities. A request was made by one delegate for an allocation of resources from UNESCO to assist Member States to hold individual World Press Freedom Day activities in conjunction with global events.

Communication development

IPDC

28. Many delegates spoke in support of the IPDC’s innovative move to initiate Media Development Indicators (MDIs). There was a call for them to be widely communicated and their use strengthened at United Nations level. “Results-based management of media programmes needs statistical tools and indicators” said one delegate in support of the introduction of the MDIs by UNESCO.

29. Several delegates congratulated and supported the IPDC function as an oversight body for the safety of journalists, seeing it as an important way of ensuring that the spotlight continues to be shone on those who seek to cause harm to professionals going about their work in the cause of press freedom and democracy.

30. The IPDC’s major role as a funder of small-scale development projects was recognized in several interventions, especially support for capacity-building through training activities. Universally, the IPDC, as a body, found favour with delegates although, as has been mentioned previously, its modest funding base was cause for concern.

Radio

31. In the rush to embrace new technologies, several delegates mentioned that radio broadcasting was still the medium of choice in many countries and societies, especially where high rates of illiteracy were prevalent. The strengthening of radio to ensure universal access by listeners was sought, as was UNESCO’s assistance in further developing community radio stations and for the training of media workers.

Capacity-building

32. A delegate from the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), representing 17 other countries, challenged UNESCO to provide assistance in a range of areas, not least in training in fields such as climate change, disaster management and the media, and HIV/AIDS prevention.

Information and knowledge society issues

Digital divide

33. The digital divide was a recurrent issue in the interventions of delegates. Several who enjoy more enhanced information infrastructure in their country offered to share their knowledge, while a call was made that in seeking to ensure access to the Internet for all, consideration must be given to enabling a diversity of cultures and language communities to find a place on the Internet.

Free and open source software

34. The use of free and open source software in computer applications was discussed, with UNESCO seen as being able to play an important role in areas such as standard setting.

Access

35. A number of delegates were pleased that UNESCO had brought the ‘human dimension’ to the ICT revolution and was involved in content issues rather than merely technology. Calls were made for training in ethical and human values, rather than just technical training in the use of computers and the Internet.

Support for the disabled

36. One delegation expressed the view that not enough attention had been given to the requirements of access by disabled people in the draft. Special access to literature and the Internet for the blind and visually impaired through the use of synthesizers and other technological tools was suggested.

Media and information literacy (MIL)

37. While generally the benefits of the application of ICTs were seen as being positive, it was brought to the attention of the Commission that negative aspects of ICTs, especially among young people, exist and that attention should be paid to overcoming these through more media and information literacy training efforts.

Memory of the World

38. The Memory of the World Programme was universally favoured by delegates who spoke on the subject, at least one indicating that it was their highest priority. The delegate of ICOM reminded the Commission that “Museums and Memory” is the theme of International Museum Day in 2011 and that ICOM will collaborate with the Memory of the World Programme in its implementation.

39. Indigenous knowledge was the concern of a delegate from the Caribbean who pointed out that while the creation of new knowledge was important, the preservation of old knowledge was equally important. This was especially so in the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the Memory of the World Programme played an important role in this regard.

Libraries

40. A number of pleas were made to support the establishment of libraries, which are considered community resources of great value and should be accessible free of charge.

IFAP

41. A donor supporter of IFAP underlined the importance of voluntary extrabudgetary contributions to the IFAP Special Account and suggested that all elected members of the IFAP Intergovernmental Council should make a yearly financial contribution to the Account.

Audiovisual heritage

42. A number of voices were heard expressing concern about the conservation and protection of the audiovisual heritage. One delegation noticed that while UNESCO recognizes the World Day of the Audiovisual Heritage, no mention is made of the importance of audiovisual documents in the draft programme.

43. The FIAF representative drew the attention of delegates to the fact that film archives had doubled in number in recent years and that the current principal FIAF archival project was the protection and preservation of films from Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen

Distinguished delegates

That brings me to the end of my report on Debate 1.

44. I will not cover in this report the discussion concerning the adoption of the 20 draft resolutions submitted with suggested amendments to the Draft Programme and Budget for 2010-2011 (35 C/5) as the outcomes of this debate are already detailed in the written report of the Commission.

45. I will simply draw your attention to a point raised by Cuba, which was explicitly asked to be put on record, concerning the importance of UNESCO stepping up progress in the development of appropriate approaches, standards and practices for the information society, which ensure a balance between freedom and social responsibility.

DEBATE 2

Item 5.9 Follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society (35 C/46)

46. The Commission's second debate related to an examination of the Report by the Director-General on the follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society.

47. In his opening remarks to the debate, the Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, Mr Khan, gave an overview of the technology revolution now in progress. He drew the attention of participants to the cluster of new electronic services, such as social networking, blogging, Internet streaming and podcasting, that had appeared in recent years. It was extraordinary to learn that in 1993, there were barely 50 pages on the Web while now there were billions. Thus, the pace of change was dramatically increasing and yet the digital divide continued to be a major concern. Should the digital divide grow, some societies would risk becoming digitally illiterate.

48. Mr Khan noted that the new technologies enabled users to be both producers and consumers of content. This shift is having a major impact on societies and gave rise to the purpose of WSIS, which was "to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge".

49. Mr Khan outlined UNESCO's approach to WSIS follow-up as a coordinator (such as UNGIS and the WSIS Forum), a lead facilitator (six out of 11 action lines) and as implementer. However, he cautioned that, although more than three years had passed following the Tunis Summit of WSIS, the guidelines for United Nations country teams preparing UNDAFs still do not contain an ICT for development component.

50. Turning now to comments from Member States. There was consistent concern expressed by delegates about the ongoing digital divide, with one calling for United Nations action to ensure special treatment for developing countries and those not connected to the Web. Several speakers emphasized that different speeds in involvement with the Internet could be observed not only between countries but also within countries, underlining in particular the urban/rural divide. Capacity-building to overcome digital divide issues was a common call.

51. Endorsement for UNESCO's involvement in the post-WSIS process was widespread, but some delegates indicated that they were not fully convinced that satisfactory progress had been made. There was concern over what was perceived as "weakness of strategy" and lack of vision and clear priorities. "It had been a slow start", was the point of view of another delegate, but he felt that UNESCO had now really managed to put its stamp on WSIS outcomes.

52. The theme of multilingualism was one which arose time and time again, with many commenting that it was important to not only provide e-teaching or e-learning, but also to reflect cultural and linguistic diversity in cyberspace. Several delegates expressed support for a resolution on the establishment of a cyber network for learning languages, which China had submitted to UNESCO's Executive Board at its 180th session. One speaker suggested the creation of an International Decade of Languages.

53. Open access to scientific information was a subject which found support amongst several speakers, while another delegate mentioned that the key overall issue today was 'Internet neutrality' and that UNESCO must be involved as a leading actor in the governance forums of the future.

54. The Commission explicitly asked however that the Oral Report of the Chairperson take note of the fact that UNESCO's involvement in the debates on Internet Governance, especially at the IGF, should be focused on issues directly related to its mandate, in particular freedom of expression, multilingualism, content development, education, sciences and culture.

55. Media and information literacy is an area of concern to many Member States and, as young people are heavy users of the Internet, it was suggested that UNESCO should take the lead in this educational field.

56. The human element of UNESCO's role in the WSIS follow-up was a constant theme of the debate, with a number of speakers pointing to the importance of a people-oriented information society. "Without UNESCO, we would have an information society of cables, computers and copyright", noted one delegate, "but thanks to UNESCO, a human dimension is there."

Ladies and gentlemen,

57. Before I proceed with a brief summary of Debate 3, I wish to note that the Commission asked to place on record its call for a review of the procedures for examining and adopting draft resolutions (DRs). Several speakers expressed their dissatisfaction with the explanations provided by the UNESCO Secretariat as to why the large screens behind the podium could not be used to project the text of the DRs, thereby enabling delegates to watch the text being changed and make comments accordingly. The Secretary of the General Conference argued that all Commission discussions needed to be in the six official languages of UNESCO and that it would not be possible to project the text in all six on the screens. He also noted that DRs needed to be received by the Secretariat well in advance, and that only minor amendments from the floor could be made. Thanks to the speedy action of the Secretariat, we were able to receive all the DR amendments in written form. However, a number of delegates refuted the explanations provided by the General Conference Secretary, claiming that displaying the DRs on the screens in two languages – English and French – would be sufficient and that more modern and effective working methods were needed to improve the work of the Commission.

DEBATE 3

Item 5.16 International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Multicultural Library Manifesto (35 C/51)

58. The Commission's third debate related to an examination of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Multicultural Library Manifesto.

59. The Assistant Director-General, Mr Khan, informed the Commission that IFAP had examined the document and had recommended that it be placed before the General Conference. The Manifesto had the key objective of encouraging universal access to information as a contributor to sustainable development. Mr Khan noted that the Manifesto recognized the core mission of a library in a culturally diverse environment, which includes providing services that respect the cultural identity of communities without discrimination and offering access to information in different languages.

60. The IFLA Representative, Mr Stuart Hamilton, pointed out that UNESCO backing for the Manifesto would give it great impetus. He noted that the Manifesto is in line with both the principles of UNESCO's Declaration on Cultural Diversity and those of the WSIS Declaration.

61. Full support for the Manifesto was expressed by the Member States who took the floor in the Commission. The overriding view was that the Manifesto could serve as a tool for guiding policies in this area. "A road map for the libraries of the 21st century", as a delegate put it.

62. On the subject of costs, a delegate felt that the wording "free [of charge]" would be appropriate for the Manifesto in order to ensure that everyone is in a position to access the services offered by public libraries.

63. There was a plea from one delegate to take into account the situation of poorer nations where the rising cost of books made it difficult for people to buy them, thus public libraries were very important. Another view was expressed that libraries played an important role for refugees and migrants, as they could use the facilities to stay in touch with their cultural background. Finally, the value of libraries to minority and indigenous language groups was also highlighted.

Ladies and gentlemen,

64. Before ending, I would like to briefly refer to the observation of the distinguished Delegate of Venezuela during the sixth meeting of the Commission devoted to the "Adoption of the report", which referred to an issue not on the agenda of the General Conference, concerning the statement of the Director-General on the media situation in Venezuela that was disseminated on UNESCO's website as press release No. 2009 – 92 of 12 August 2009. Venezuela expressed regret about the Organization's policy not to grant a right of reply to Member States contesting a press release on UNESCO's website.

Ladies and gentlemen,
Distinguished delegates,

65. I have tried in this report to provide you with an overview of the most salient issues that came up during the CI Commission's debates. I hope that I have managed to capture the richness of our discussions and adequately reflect the diversity of opinions expressed. Freedom of expression was certainly viewed by all participants as the overarching element of UNESCO's media development strategy.

66. Before ending, Mr President, I wish to express a thought which reflects the spirit of the discussions among the Speakers who participated in this CI Commission of the 35th UNESCO General Conference. A frank dialogue between individuals, which is possible thanks to full and responsible freedom of expression, constitutes an authentic platform for strengthening dialogue

between civilizations. A dialogue which promotes peace and freedom worldwide. A dialogue which brings about true communication, that is, happiness for all men and people of the world. In the words of Octavio Paz, “Democracy is freedom because without democracy, freedom is but a chimera”.

Thank you, Ladies and gentlemen, for your attention.