Media regulations for new times

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Paper No. 20

SKYWAYS, HIGHWAYS & CORRIDORS: ASIA'S COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

6TH AMIC ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Media Regulations for New Times

**An address by Peter Webb
Chairman
Australian Broadcasting Authority**

**June 19 - 21 1997
Hotel Nikko
Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia**

THANK YOU MR CHAIRMAN FOR THAT INTRODUCTION.

**WHAT A PLEASURE IT IS TO BE SPEAKING AGAIN AT AN ANNUAL AMIC
CONFERENCE.**

**AMIC'S CONSTITUENCY SEEMS TO GROW WITH EACH PASSING YEAR,
AND THIS ONLY REFLECTS ITS CONTINUING AND GROWING
RELEVANCE, PARTICULARLY TO THE YOUNG AND THE BRIGHT, IN
THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION.**

**THE TOPIC OF THIS SESSION IS 'MEDIA REGULATIONS FOR NEW
TIMES'.**

MEDIA REGULATION IS, IN FACT, A TOPIC FOR ALL TIME.

BUT NEW MEDIA TIMES ARE UNDOUBTEDLY WITH US NOW.

**ALL AROUND THE WORLD THERE IS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT
THE OLD MEDIA ORDER IS CHANGING.**

**A NEW MEDIA ORDER IS EMERGING, AND IT REQUIRES OUR
ATTENTION.**

ON ANY ANALYSIS THE NEW ORDER HAS MUCH TO RECOMMEND IT.

**THIS IS UNDERSTANDABLY THE CASE BECAUSE OUR VARIOUS MEDIA
ARE, AS ALWAYS, A REFLECTION OF OUR VARIOUS SELVES.**

AND MOSTLY WE FIND OUR OWN REFLECTIONS PLEASING.

BUT SOMETIMES WE FIND THE REFLECTIONS OF OTHERS NOT SO PLEASING.

FOR A WHOLE RANGE OF REASONS, SOME GOOD AND SOME BAD, MEDIA CONSUMERS USUALLY SETTLE INTO A COMFORTABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH MEDIA OUTLETS.

THIS IS AS TRUE OF WHOLE NATIONS AS IT IS TRUE OF INDIVIDUALS.

FOR INDIVIDUALS, MEDIA PREFERENCES ARE BASED ON PERSONAL FACTORS - AGE, GENDER, SOCIAL POSITION, ETHNICITY, LANGUAGE PREFERENCE, CULTURAL ATTITUDES AND THE LIKE.

FOR NATION STATES THE PREFERENCES ARE DICTATED BY LOCAL CULTURAL IMPERATIVES, FOREIGN AND TRADE POLICIES, THE STAGE OF NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, THE NATURE OF THE COUNTRY'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL FABRIC, STRATEGIC NATIONAL ALIGNMENTS AND EVEN XENOPHOBIA.

ALL OF THESE PREFERENCES AND POLICIES PROVIDE US WITH PLENTIFUL OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEBATING THEIR RIGHTS AND WRONGS.

BUT IT'S NOT SO MUCH NATIONAL POLICY ABOUT ISSUES CONTAINED WITHIN NATIONAL BORDERS THAT I WISH TO DISCUSS TODAY.

IT'S NATIONAL POLICY ABOUT BORDERLESS ISSUES THAT IS THE REAL EMERGING CHALLENGE FOR THESE NEW TIMES.

WHICH BORDERLESS ISSUES DO I HAVE IN MIND?

FIRST AND FOREMOST AMONG THEM IS THE PHENOMENON OF THE INTERNET, AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR AVOIDING NATIONAL CLASSIFICATION OR CENSORSHIP POLICIES.

MOST COUNTRIES OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION - INDEED, MOST COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD - HAVE SYSTEMS WHICH CENSOR AND CLASSIFY THE TRADITIONAL FORMS OF MEDIA - BOOKS AND MAGAZINES, FILMS, VIDEOS, AND TELEVISION PROGRAMS.

IN AUSTRALIA EVEN ONE OF THE NEWER FORMS OF MEDIA - COMPUTER GAMES - HAS BEEN JUDGED WORTHY OF CLASSIFICATION AND CENSORSHIP.

THE MOTIVES FOR HAVING SYSTEMS OF CENSORSHIP AND CLASSIFICATION IN PLACE ARE MULTIVARIOUS.

CENSORSHIP OF THE MEDIA FOR ADULTS IS NOT A FEATURE OF ALL SUCH SYSTEMS, MANY COUNTRIES TAKING THE VIEW THAT IT SHOULD NOT BE THE FUNCTION OF THE STATE TO PREVENT ADULT CITIZENS READING AND VIEWING WHAT THEY LIKE.

WHAT MOST OF THESE SYSTEMS DO HAVE IN COMMON, HOWEVER, IS THE POLICY OBJECTIVE OF PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM UNSUPERVISED EXPOSURE TO MATERIAL WHICH IS UNSUITABLE FOR THEM.

AND THIS POLICY FEATURE IS BASED UPON OUR ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF TWO THINGS:

- 1. FIRSTLY, WE KNOW THAT THE COGNITIVE SKILLS OF CHILDREN DEVELOP THROUGH SEVERAL STAGES OF SOPHISTICATION, INFLUENCED TO SOME EXTENT BY THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THIS GROWTH TAKES PLACE, AND, UNTIL FULLY DEVELOPED, MANY FEATURES OF THAT ENVIRONMENT WILL NEED EXPLANATION, IN ORDER FOR THOSE CHILDREN TO BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND AND ASSIMILATE THEM.**
- 2. SECONDLY, ALTHOUGH IT IS THE PROPER ROLE OF PARENTS, GUARDIANS AND TEACHERS ALL TO PLAY A PART IN THE PROCESS OF SUPPLYING CHILDREN WITH AN EXPLANATORY CONTEXT FOR MATERIAL THAT IS FRIGHTENING OR DISTURBING, THE STATE WILL ASSUME THE POWER TO CLASSIFY CERTAIN INFLUENTIAL MEDIA MATERIALS IN ORDER TO ASSIST BOTH PARENTS AND THE PURVEYORS OF THESE MATERIALS ENSURE THAT PROPER SUPERVISORY STEPS ARE TAKEN.**

BY WAY OF EXPLAINING HOW EFFECT IS GIVEN TO THESE POLICY OBJECTIVES, LET ME TAKE YOU THROUGH THE AUSTRALIAN CLASSIFICATION AND CENSORSHIP SYSTEM FOR FILMS.

A NATIONAL CLASSIFICATION CODE CONTAINS CRITERIA WHICH REFLECT CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY STANDARDS, AND WHICH MUST BE APPLIED BY THE RELEVANT AUTHORITY - THE CLASSIFICATION BOARD.

THE CODE REQUIRES THAT CLASSIFICATION DECISIONS ARE TO GIVE EFFECT, AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, TO LISTED PRINCIPLES.

THESE PRINCIPLES INCLUDE:

- ADULTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO READ, HEAR AND SEE WHAT THEY WANT**

- **MINORS SHOULD BE PROTECTED FROM MATERIAL LIKELY TO HARM OR DISTURB THEM**
- **EVERYONE SHOULD BE PROTECTED FROM EXPOSURE TO UNSOLICITED MATERIAL THAT THEY FIND OFFENSIVE, AND**
- **ACCOUNT SHOULD BE TAKEN OF COMMUNITY CONCERNS ABOUT:**
 - **DEPICTIONS THAT CONDONE OR INCITE VIOLENCE, PARTICULARLY SEXUAL VIOLENCE, AND**
 - **THE PORTRAYAL OF PERSONS IN A DEMEANING MANNER.**

THE BOARD MUST ALSO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT OTHER STATUTORY CRITERIA, WHICH INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- **THE STANDARDS OF MORALITY, DECENCY AND PROPRIETY GENERALLY ACCEPTED BY REASONABLE ADULTS**
- **THE LITERARY, ARTISTIC OR EDUCATIONAL MERIT (IF ANY) OF THE MATERIAL**
- **THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE MATERIAL, INCLUDING WHETHER IT IS OF A MEDICAL, LEGAL OR SCIENTIFIC CHARACTER, AND**
- **THE PERSONS, OR CLASS OF PERSONS, TO OR AMONGST WHOM IT IS PUBLISHED OR IS INTENDED OR LIKELY TO BE PUBLISHED.**

SO THIS FRAMEWORK SPELLS OUT, AS YOU CAN READILY SEE, THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY'S CONCERNS ABOUT THE POWER OF FILMS TO INFLUENCE COMMUNITY ATTITUDES, PARTICULARLY THE ATTITUDES OF YOUNG PEOPLE.

WITHIN AUSTRALIA FILMS MAY BE ALLOCATED TO ONE OF SEVEN CATEGORIES.

THE FIRST OF THESE IS THE 'GENERAL' OR 'G' CATEGORY.

THIS IS A CATEGORY WHICH IS CONSIDERED SUITABLE FOR ALL VIEWERS, AND PARENTS SHOULD FEEL CONFIDENT THAT CHILDREN CAN WATCH MATERIAL IN THIS CLASSIFICATION WITHOUT SUPERVISION.

MATERIAL CLASSIFIED G WILL NOT BE HARMFUL OR DISTURBING TO CHILDREN, AND, WHETHER OR NOT THE FILM IS INTENDED FOR CHILDREN, THE TREATMENT OF THEMES AND OTHER CLASSIFIABLE ELEMENTS WILL BE CAREFUL AND DISCREET.

THE SECOND CLASSIFICATION CATEGORY IS 'PARENTAL GUIDANCE' OR 'PG'.

AS THE TITLE SUGGESTS, PG SIGNALS TO PARENTS THAT MATERIAL IN THIS CATEGORY CONTAINS DEPICTIONS OR REFERENCES WHICH COULD BE CONFUSING OR UPSETTING TO CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENTAL GUIDANCE.

BUT MATERIAL CLASSIFIED PG WILL NOT BE HARMFUL OR DISTURBING TO CHILDREN.

THE NEXT CATEGORY IS 'M' FOR 'MATURE', AND THIS IS RECOMMENDED FOR MATURE AUDIENCES 15 YEARS AND OVER.

FILMS CLASSIFIED M CONTAIN MATERIAL THAT IS CONSIDERED TO BE POTENTIALLY HARMFUL OR DISTURBING TO THOSE UNDER FIFTEEN YEARS OF AGE.

AND 'MATURE ACCOMPANIED' OR 'MA', THE NEXT CATEGORY, INDICATES THAT CHILDREN UNDER FIFTEEN WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO SEE MA FILMS IN THE CINEMA, OR HIRE THEM ON VIDEO, UNLESS IN THE COMPANY OF A PARENT OR ADULT GUARDIAN.

MA DEALS WITH ISSUES OR CONTAINS DEPICTIONS WHICH REQUIRE A MATURE PERSPECTIVE, AND THIS IS BECAUSE THE IMPACT OF INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS OR A COMBINATION OF ELEMENTS IS CONSIDERED LIKELY TO BE HARMFUL OR DISTURBING TO VIEWERS UNDER FIFTEEN YEARS OF AGE.

TWO OF THE THREE REMAINING CLASSIFICATION CATEGORIES - 'RESTRICTED', OR 'R', AND 'X', WHICH CONTAINS SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIAL - MARK THE POINT AT WHICH CHILD VIEWING (AND A CHILD IS ANYONE UNDER THE AGE OF EIGHTEEN YEARS) MUST STOP.

SO R MATERIAL, WHICH CAN BE SCREENED AT THE CINEMA, IS REGARDED AS UNSUITABLE FOR THOSE UNDER EIGHTEEN YEARS OF AGE.

WHILE IT IS ALSO RECOGNISED THAT SOME OF THIS MATERIAL MAY BE OFFENSIVE TO SOME SECTIONS OF THE ADULT COMMUNITY, THERE ARE NO PROHIBITIONS OF R MATERIAL THAT RELATE TO ADULTS.

X-RATED FILMS ARE AVAILABLE ONLY ON VIDEO - THEY ARE NOT REGARDED AS SUITABLE FOR CINEMATIC RELEASE WITHIN AUSTRALIA - AND THEY CONTAIN ONLY SEXUALLY EXPLICIT MATERIAL.

THEY MAY ONLY BE PURCHASED IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY AND THE NORTHERN TERRITORY.

THE LAST CATEGORY IS CALLED 'RC' OR 'REFUSED CLASSIFICATION'.

ANY FILM OR VIDEO WHICH IS REFUSED CLASSIFICATION CANNOT BE LEGALLY BROUGHT IN AUSTRALIA.

THERE ARE THREE CRITERIA FOR REFUSING TO CLASSIFY A FILM OR VIDEO, AND THEY INCLUDE:

- FILMS THAT DEPICT, EXPRESS OR OTHERWISE DEAL WITH MATTERS OF SEX, DRUG MISUSE OR ADDICTION, CRIME, CRUELTY, VIOLENCE OR REVOLTING OR ABHORRENT PHENOMENA IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY OFFEND AGAINST THE STANDARDS OF MORALITY, DECENCY AND PROPRIETY GENERALLY ACCEPTED BY REASONABLE ADULTS TO THE EXTENT THAT THEY SHOULD BE REFUSED CLASSIFICATION**
- FILMS THAT DEPICT, IN A WAY THAT IS LIKELY TO CAUSE OFFENCE TO A REASONABLE ADULT, A PERSON WHO IS OR WHO LOOKS LIKE A CHILD UNDER SIXTEEN YEARS (WHETHER OR NOT ENGAGED IN SEXUAL ACTIVITY), OR**
- FILMS THAT PROMOTE, INCITE OR INSTRUCT IN MATTERS OF CRIME OR VIOLENCE.**

SO, IN BRIEF, THERE YOU HAVE THE AUSTRALIAN FILM AND VIDEO CLASSIFICATION SCHEME.

AND THAT SCHEME IS ALSO ADOPTED FOR AUSTRALIAN TELEVISION CLASSIFICATION PURPOSES WHEN THOSE FILMS ARE SCREENED ON TV.

THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE AUSTRALIAN SCHEME IS SUFFICIENTLY LIKE THE CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES OF MANY OTHER COUNTRIES FOR ITS SYMBOLS TO BE RECOGNISED AND UNDERSTOOD WITH A MINIMUM OF EXPLANATION.

AND THE REVERSE IS TRUE AS WELL - CITIZENS OF COUNTRIES THAT ARE USED TO SCHEMES OF THIS GRADUATED KIND WILL NORMALLY

HAVE NO DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SCHEME OF A FOREIGN COUNTRY.

HOWEVER, WHAT WE ALL HAVE DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING, WHEN WE MAKE COMPARISONS OF THIS KIND, IS THE DIFFERENCE IN CULTURAL VALUES WE FIND EMBEDDED IN THESE SCHEMES.

AND THE PRESENCE OF THESE VALUES MAKES THE CLASSIFICATION SCHEME OF ONE COUNTRY VIRTUALLY USELESS AS A PRECEDENT IN ANOTHER.

I THINK WE CAN ALL READILY APPRECIATE THIS.

OUR VARIOUS CULTURAL DIFFERENCES ARE SO REAL THAT EVEN WHEN ONE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO REGARD TWO SEEMINGLY SIMILAR CULTURES AS HAVING VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL VALUES, THE COMPARISON IS LIKELY NOT TO STAND UP.

FOR EXAMPLE, IT WOULD BE EASY ENOUGH FOR THE CASUAL OR UNINFORMED OBSERVER TO ASSUME THAT WHAT WOULD BE CULTURALLY ACCEPTABLE IN THE UNITED STATES WOULD BE OK FOR AUSTRALIA.

BUT THIS IS NOT SO.

HOLLYWOOD FILMS MADE FOR AN AMERICAN AUDIENCE CONTAIN TOO MUCH VIOLENCE FOR AUSTRALIAN TASTES, AND THE AMERICAN TELEVISION AUDIENCE IS MORE PRUDISH ABOUT SEXUAL DEPICTIONS THAN ITS AUSTRALIAN COUNTERPART.

THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS THAT NATIONAL CULTURAL VALUES SATURATE OUR DOMESTIC FILM AND TELEVISION CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES, AND THEY ALWAYS WILL.

INDEED, THEY ALWAYS SHOULD.

FOR THERE IS EVERY VALID REASON FOR DOING SO, AND THE OPPORTUNITY AS WELL.

BUT THE INTERNET UNDERMINES ALL THIS GOOD WORK.

WHILE VALID REASONS REMAIN FOR TRYING TO CLASSIFY ONLINE CONTENT IN THE SAME WAY WE CLASSIFY OTHER MEDIA FORMS, THE OPPORTUNITY IS SIMPLY NOT AVAILABLE TO DO THAT IN THE SAME WAY.

BUT THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO ACHIEVING SUBSTANTIALLY THE SAME SOCIAL GOALS.

THAT WAY INVOLVES A DEPARTURE FROM THE APPROACH THAT EMBEDS COMMUNITY VALUES IN A SUBJECTIVE, STATE-MANAGED CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM, AND THE ADOPTION OF AN OBJECTIVE, BUT VALUE-DELETED, SYSTEM THAT IS WITHIN THE POWER ENTIRELY OF INDIVIDUALS ALONE TO MANAGE.

BEFORE WE COUNTENANCE THAT APPROACH HOWEVER, LET US FIRST TAKE A GLANCE AT THE PHENOMENON IN QUESTION.

WHILE ONLINE SERVICES AND THE INTERNET HAVE BEEN FACTS OF LIFE FOR MANY YEARS, IT WAS THE INVENTION OF THE WORLD WIDE WEB BY TIM BERNERS-LEE AND HIS COLLEAGUES AT THE CERN PARTICLE-PHYSICS LABORATORY, IN THE LATE 1980'S, THAT PROPELLED THOSE SERVICES INTO THE VIEW OF MANY.

SINCE THE ADVENT OF THE WEB, GROWTH IN EXPLOITATION OF ONLINE SERVICES AND IN USE OF THEM HAS EXPLODED.

ACCORDING TO THE MINISTRY OF POSTS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS, JAPAN, WELL OVER TEN MILLION HOST COMPUTERS WERE LINKED TO THE INTERNET AS AT JANUARY OF 1996, WITH OVER ONE HUNDRED MILLION USERS THEN ACTIVE.

THE MPT ALSO REPORTED THAT, IN THE YEAR ENDED JANUARY 1996, THE INTERNET-USAGE RATE OF INDONESIA GREW OVER 13%, AND HONG KONG GREW NEARLY 5%, WHILE THE RATE FOR EUROPE, JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES MERELY DOUBLED.

BUT OVER THE THREE YEARS TO JANUARY 1996 GROWTH HAS BEEN EXTREMELY ROBUST IN SOME COUNTRIES: 16.7 TIMES IN SINGAPORE, 11.6 TIMES IN JAPAN, AND NEARLY 10 TIMES IN INDIA.

AND EARLIER THIS YEAR IT WAS REPORTED THAT, BY YEAR'S END, AUSTRALIAN INTERNET USERS WILL NUMBER 1.35 MILLION, MAKING AUSTRALIAN PER CAPITA NET USAGE THE HIGHEST IN THE WORLD.

BUT AUSTRALIA IS LIKELY TO BE OVERTAKEN BY THE RAPID TAKE-UP IN TAIWAN (PRESENTLY 580,000 USERS) AND KOREA (275,000), WHILE IN SINGAPORE THERE WILL BE AN ESTIMATED 265,000 USERS.

ACCORDING TO THIS REPORT, NET USAGE CORRELATED WITH THE BUILD-UP OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS, THE PERSONAL COMPUTER BASE, AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES.

THE REPORT SUGGEST THAT THIS MAKES CHINA THE 'SLEEPING GIANT'.

IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS CHINA WILL SPEND \$US50 BILLION ON ITS TELECOMS INFRASTRUCTURE, AND BY 2002 - ONLY FIVE YEARS FROM NOW - IT WILL BE THE WORLD'S THIRD BIGGEST PC MARKET.

IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH IN THE NUMBER OF TELEPHONE CIRCUITS PER 100 HEAD OF POPULATION BETWEEN 1984 AND 1994 WAS AS FOLLOWS:

- **CHINA GREW 25.7%**
- **THAILAND 18.4 %**
- **INDONESIA 16.7%**
- **INDIA 13%**
- **MALAYSIA 12.9%**
- **BRUNEI DARUSSALAM 12.5% AND**
- **THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA 12.2%**

THE WORLDWIDE AVERAGE OF 5.2% WAS SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER.

IN MOBILE TELEPHONY, MEASURED BY UNITS PER 100 POPULATION, SINGAPORE HAS THE GREATEST NUMBER IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION, BUT, BETWEEN 1990 AND 1994, CHINA AVERAGED 204% AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH, AND THE PHILIPPINES 113%.

IN TERMS OF LIBERALIZATION, COMPETITION AND THE BUILDING OF INFO-COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE, THE MPT REPORTS THAT, AS OF JULY 1995, THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA, HONG KONG, MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE, THE PHILIPPINES AND INDONESIA HAD PRIVATISED THEIR TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIERS.

SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA ARE WORKING TO TURN THEMSELVES INTO GLOBAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND BROADCASTING HUBS, INDONESIA PLANS AN INCREASE IN ITS TELEPHONE CIRCUIT INFRASTRUCTURE OF 5 MILLION CIRCUITS BY THE END OF 1999, AND INDIA HAS FIVE TELEPORTS AROUND THE COUNTRY, INCLUDING ONE IN BANGALORE, WHICH IS KNOWN AS THE SILICON VALLEY OF INDIA.

SO THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IS ALIGHT WITH DYNAMISM IN THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS FIELD, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN INFRASTRUCTURE CAPABLE OF CONNECTING HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE FROM THAT REGION TO THE INTERNET IS UNDERWAY AT A RATE THAT IS TRULY ASTONISHING.

AND NOTHING BETTER TYPIFIES THIS WHOLE-HEARTED EMBRACE OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY THAN THE MALAYSIAN VISION OF A MULTIMEDIA SUPERCORRIDOR HERE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF KUALA LUMPUR.

SO THE REGION IS HARDLY LACKING IN VISION OR VISIONARIES IN ITS APPROACH TO THE NEW COMMUNICATIONS ERA.

AND ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL ECONOMIC REASONS DRIVING THIS VISION CAN BE FOUND IN THE FIELD OF COMMERCE.

THE WELL-RESPECTED RESEARCH FIRM, FORRESTER RESEARCH INCORPORATED, REPORTED EARLY THIS YEAR ON THE POTENTIAL FOR INTERNET-BASED ELECTRONIC COMMERCE.

FORRESTERS REPORTED THAT INTERNET REVENUE WOULD GROW FROM CONSUMER AND BUSINESS ACCESS AND CONSUMER RETAIL SALES TALLING JUST UNDER \$US5 BILLION IN 1996, TO OVER \$US40 BILLION IN THE YEAR 2000.

AT THIS STAGE OF THEIR DEVELOPMENT JAPAN, SINGAPORE AND HONG KONG ARE HIGHLY RATED BY FORRESTERS.

AUSTRALIA AND SOUTH KOREA ARE RATED AS STRAGGLERS, AND MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA ARE CLASSIFIED AS COUNTRIES GENERALLY OPEN TO TRADE BUT WITH LOW TECHNOLOGY PENETRATIONS AND LESS DEVELOPED INFRASTRUCTURES, WHILE CHINA, INDIA, THE PHILIPPINES AND PAKISTAN ARE CLASSIFIED AS COUNTRIES RELATIVELY CLOSED TO INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND THE MOST BEHIND TECHNOLOGICALLY.

EARLIER THIS MONTH THE PRIME MINISTER OF SINGAPORE, MR GOH CHOK TONG, IN WELCOMING GUESTS TO ASIA TELECOM 97, SPOKE OF THE SWEEPING AND REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES THE INFO-COMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY IS UNDERGOING AT THE PRESENT TIME.

'KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS WILL BE ESSENTIAL IN THE INFORMATION ERA', HE SAID.

SINGAPORE'S 'SURVIVAL AND PROSPERITY DEPEND ON OUR ABILITY TO ADAPT TO THE NEW WORLD OF THE 21ST CENTURY AND BE OF SERVICE TO IT', SAID THE PRIME MINISTER, ADDING 'SINGAPOREANS THEREFORE HAVE TO EMBRACE THE NEW TECHNOLOGY OF THE INFORMATION AGE ACTIVELY, AND NOT JUST WELCOME IT PASSIVELY'.

THE PRIME MINISTER ANNOUNCED HIS GOVERNMENT'S FINAL PLANS TO COMPLETE THE TRANSITION TO THE INTELLIGENT ISLAND FIRST ANNOUNCED IN 1992.

BY THE END OF 1998 ALL 800,000 HOUSEHOLDS IN SINGAPORE WILL BE ABLE TO CONNECT TO SINGAPORE ONE - A NETWORK AND SERVICES CONSTITUTING A NATIONAL INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE -

WHICH WILL HANDLE A WIDE-RANGING STREAM OF MULTIMEDIA TRAFFIC (VOICE, DATA, IMAGE, TEXT AND VIDEO) TO THE WORKPLACE, SCHOOLS AND THE HOME.

THE PRIME MINISTER INDICATED THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF THESE CHANGES AS WELL.

HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT 'NEW BALANCES AND MARKERS WILL HAVE TO BE ESTABLISHED TO HELP DEFINE THE NEW VALUES AND NEW REALITIES OF LIFE IN THE INFORMATION ERA. WE CANNOT AVOID OR IGNORE THIS REALITY OF RADICAL CHANGE' HE SAID.

'WE MUST MAKE THE EFFORT TO HARNESS THE NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES TO MAKE LIFE BETTER AND MORE MEANINGFUL FOR OUR PEOPLES, WHETHER WE ARE A DEVELOPED OR DEVELOPING COUNTRY', HE ADDED.

SO WHETHER YOUR COUNTRY IS A SPRINTER OR A STRAGGLER, THE CHALLENGE OF COPING WITH THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS ERA IS WITH YOU, LIKE IT OR NOT.

THIS REALITY HAS ALREADY DAWNED IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD.

MANY COUNTRIES, AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, MANY ORGANISATIONS OF COUNTRIES ARE PREPARING TO DEAL WITH THIS REALITY, WHETHER IT BE ABOUT THE APPLICATION OF LAWS, TAX EVASION, DEFAMATION, PRIVACY, INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS OR PORNOGRAPHY.

BUT THE MOST RELEVANT OF THESE ISSUES TO BROADCASTING REGULATORS IS THAT OF NON-CRIMINAL, BUT CLASSIFIABLE, CONTENT ON THE INTERNET.

LET ME QUICKLY BRING YOU UP-TO-DATE WITH INTERNATIONAL DELIBERATIONS ON THIS ISSUE.

THE ORGANISATION OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT, THE OECD, IS THE LATEST ORGANISATION OF NATIONS TO BE COMPELLED BY PUBLIC CONCERN TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE ONLINE WORLD OF PAEDOPHILIA AND CRIME.

IT HAS TWENTY-NINE MEMBERS IN ALL, AND MEMBERS OF THE OECD FROM THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION OF THE WORLD INCLUDE JAPAN, KOREA, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND AND THE USA.

THE OECD HAS ISSUED A CONSULTATION PAPER ON THE TOPIC OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION CONCERNING CONTENT AND CONDUCT ON THE INTERNET.

THIS PAPER BEGINS WITH AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT 'OECD MEMBER COUNTRIES HAVE BEEN CONFRONTED RECENTLY WITH A NUMBER OF HIGHLY PUBLICISED INCIDENTS INVOLVING THE USE OF THE INTERNET FOR ILLEGAL OR CONTROVERSIAL PURPOSES.'

IT NOTES THAT 'GOVERNMENTS ARE CHALLENGED TO STRIKE THE RIGHT BALANCE AMONG THE VALUE OF FREE EXPRESSION AND THE FREE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS FOR CITIZENS, THE CONCERN FOR PREVENTING OR LIMITING THE USE OF NETWORKS FOR PURPOSES CONTRARY TO PUBLIC ORDER AND SECURITY, AND THE DESIRABILITY OF ECONOMIC GROWTH BASED ON EMERGING NETWORK TECHNOLOGIES.'

THE INHERENTLY INTERNATIONAL NATURE OF THE NETWORK ENVIRONMENT AND THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL NORMS WHICH EXACERBATE THESE ISSUES IS ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED.

THE OECD IS INTENDING TO PREPARE A REPORT FOR ITS INFORMATION, COMPUTER AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY COMMITTEE IN OCTOBER THIS YEAR, AND AN AD HOC MEETING WILL BE HELD AT OECD HEADQUARTERS IN PARIS IN EARLY JULY.

THE AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING AUTHORITY WILL BE REPRESENTED AT THE JULY MEETING.

AMONG OTHER REASONS THAT IS BECAUSE THE OECD STUDY WILL BE EXAMINING THE DESIRABILITY OF INSTITUTING A PROCESS FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION BY NATIONAL AUTHORITIES.

SO THE OECD HAS SET OUT TO EXAMINE THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE COMMON VALUES WHICH SHOULD BE PROTECTED, PERHAPS THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF A CODE FOR ONLINE CONDUCT.

ALSO IN PARIS, THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION - UNESCO - HAS BEEN CONSIDERING HOW TO HELP ITS MEMBER NATIONS COPE WITH THE SAME CHALLENGING ISSUES.

UNESCO HAS COMMISSIONED THE ABA TO PRODUCE A REPORT ON THE STATUS QUO WITHIN FOUR COUNTRIES - MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE, AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED KINGDOM - IN RELATION TO THEIR REGULATORY APPROACH TO ONLINE CONTENT.

THIS REPORT IS NEARLY FINISHED AND WILL BE PRESENTED TO UNESCO WITHIN THE NEXT COUPLE OF WEEKS - IT WILL THEN BE PUBLISHED IN SOME WAY, AND I WILL ENSURE THAT AMIC AND THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGULATORY COMMUNITY RECEIVES COPIES OF IT.

STILL WITHIN EUROPE, THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION HAS ALSO BEEN QUITE ACTIVELY CONSIDERING THESE ISSUES.

THE COMMISSION IS UNDER PRESSURE FROM THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT WHICH HAS URGED THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMON LAWS FOR MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION DEFINING ILLEGAL CONTENT IN AN EFFORT TO PROSECUTE OFFENDERS ACROSS NATIONAL BORDERS.

SIGNIFICANTLY THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT HAS CALLED FOR A GLOBAL ACCORD.

THE COMMISSION'S WORKING PARTY ON ILLEGAL AND HARMFUL MATERIAL ON THE INTERNET PUBLISHED TWO REPORTS, NAMELY *THE COMMUNICATION ON ILLEGAL AND HARMFUL CONTENT ON THE INTERNET* AND *THE GREEN PAPER ON THE PROTECTION OF MINORS AND HUMAN DIGNITY IN AUDIOVISUAL AND INFORMATION SERVICES*.

FOLLOWING CONSULTATION ON THESE PAPERS THE WORKING PARTY HAS RECENTLY PROPOSED THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS (INCLUDING ACCESS PROVIDERS, HOST SERVICE PROVIDERS AND ANONYMOUS RETAILERS) AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT SELF-REGULATORY BODY, INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF INDUSTRY AND USERS.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION HAS ALSO BEEN EXAMINING THE ISSUE OF CONTENT LABELLING, AND THE EC WORKING PARTY HAS ALSO RECOMMENDED THAT CONTENT PROVIDERS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO RATE OR LABEL THEIR DOCUMENTS.

I WILL HAVE MORE TO SAY ABOUT THIS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT ISSUE IN A FEW MINUTES TIME.

BUT IN ANOTHER RECENT EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT THE EC, ALONG WITH VARIOUS INDUSTRY AND COMMUNITY GROUPS MET IN BRUSSELS IN MARCH IN ORDER TO DISCUSS THE *INCORE* INITIATIVE.

***INCORE* IS PART OF A PROGRAM OF ACTION BY THE INTERNET INDUSTRY IN EUROPE WHICH AIMS TO PROGRESS SOME OF THE KEY ASPECTS OF THE EC WORKING PARTY'S REPORT.**

THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF *INCORE* ARE:

- **TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-REGULATION MEASURES IN EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES**
- **TO DEVELOP RATING SYSTEMS FOR CLASSIFIABLE MATERIAL WHICH WILL MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF INDIVIDUAL USERS AND COMMUNITIES AND RECOGNISE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR MEMBER STATES OF THE EU, BOTH WITHIN EUROPE AND WORLD-WIDE**
- **TO IMPROVE AND EXTEND THE OPERATION OF HOTLINE REPORTING SYSTEMS FOR ILLEGAL (IE, UNCLASSIFIABLE) MATERIAL**

THE BRUSSELS MEETING RESOLVED TO SEEK FUNDING FOR THE INCORE PROPOSAL FROM THE EU, AND THE LATEST REPORTS SUGGEST THAT FUNDING WILL BE FORTHCOMING.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION HAS ALSO ESTABLISHED A WEB SITE ON ILLEGAL AND HARMFUL CONTENT, AND THIS SITE CONTAINS LINKS TO A NUMBER OF E-MAIL HOTLINE SITES, ALONG WITH SITES SET UP BY ORGANISATIONS WHICH AIM TO COMBAT CHILD PORNOGRAPHY AND WHICH WILL ACT ON REPORTS ABOUT SUCH MATERIAL.

WHAT IS CLEAR ABOUT ALL THIS ACTIVITY IS THAT THERE IS A DEVELOPING POLITICAL IMPERATIVE ABOUT FINDING SOLUTIONS TO BOTH CRIMINAL AND NON-CRIMINAL CONTENT ON THE INTERNET.

THE ABA, AS A TRADITIONAL CONTENT REGULATOR OF BROADCASTING CONTENT, DOES NOT ENGAGE IN THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE CRIMINAL LAW.

THE CRIMINAL USE OF ONLINE SERVICES, FOR CHILD PORNOGRAPHY AND PAEDOPHELIA AND THE LIKE, IS PROPERLY A MATTER FOR THE AUTHORITIES WHO POLICE THESE MATTERS IN THE OFFLINE WORLD.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE DETECTION, APPREHENSION AND PROSECUTION OF THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR CRIMINAL ACTS IS PROPERLY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF POLICE FORCES, BOTH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL.

AS A CONTENT REGULATOR, THE ABA IS CONCERNED NOT WITH MATERIAL THAT IS UNCLASSIFIABLE BECAUSE IT IS ILLEGAL, WHETHER ONLINE OR OFFLINE, BUT RATHER WITH THAT OTHER MATERIAL WHICH, IN THE OFFLINE WORLD, IS CLASSIFIED BECAUSE OF ITS CAPACITY TO OFFEND, OR BECAUSE OF ITS UNSUITABILITY FOR CHILDREN.

OF COURSE THE ABA ENCOURAGES AND SUPPORTS ANY INTERNATIONAL DRIVE AGAINST THE USE OF ONLINE SERVICES FOR CRIMINAL PURPOSES, AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FORM OF E-MAIL HOTLINES AND INTERNATIONAL POLICE COOPERATION, HAVE THE ABA'S COMPLETE SUPPORT.

BUT THE ABA DOES WANT TO BECOME ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN WORTHWHILE MEASURES FOR INTERNET REGULATION THAT REPRESENT PRACTICAL AND PROPORTIONATE RESPONSES TO THE MAIN MATTER OF COMMUNITY CONCERN, WHILE OTHERWISE PROTECTING FREEDOM OF SPEECH FOR ADULTS IN RESPECT OF CLASSIFIABLE MATERIAL.

I BELIEVE THAT THIS AMBITION OF THE ABA IS SHARED BY MANY PEOPLE ENGAGED IN PUBLIC POLICY FORMULATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION.

CERTAINLY, THE MISGIVINGS ABOUT THE INTERNET THAT ARE BEING ADDRESSED BY THE OECD, UNESCO AND THE EUROPEAN UNION, ARE SHARED BY MANY IN THIS REGION.

THAT'S WHY THE ASEAN REGULATORY FORUM ON THE INTERNET MET IN SINGAPORE LAST YEAR, ALBEIT INCONCLUSIVELY.

PUBLIC POLICY FORMULATION HAS BEGUN IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD.

I SAY 'HAS BEGUN' BECAUSE POLICY FORMULATION ON THE TOPIC OF ONLINE REGULATION IS NOT LIKELY TO BE COMPLETED FOR SEVERAL YEARS TO COME, AND FLEXIBILITY IN REGULATORY ARRANGEMENTS NEEDS TO BE THE HALLMARK OF THIS WORK.

QUITE APART FROM THE WORK OF VARIOUS GOVERNMENTS, I NOTED THAT, IN APRIL THIS YEAR, THE FIRST ASSOCIATION OF ASIA-PACIFIC INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS WAS FORMED.

THE GROUP - THE ASIA PACIFIC INTERNET ASSOCIATION - WAS FORMED BY SOME OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN THE ASIAN INTERNET INDUSTRY.

ALTHOUGH APIA OBVIOUSLY HAS A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT COMMERCIAL OBJECTIVES TO PURSUE, IT IS NOTABLE THAT AMONG THE FIRST TASKS IT HAS SET ITSELF IS WORK ON CREATING A COMMON 'CODE OF CONDUCT' REGULATING ONLINE CONTENT.

MR JIN HO HUR, PRESIDENT OF THE SEOUL-BASED ISP INET INC. AND FOUNDER OF APIA, IS REPORTEDLY STRONGLY OF THE VIEW THAT GOVERNMENTS OF THE REGION NEED TO DEVELOP A COMMON

UNDERSTANDING ON INTERNET POLICY BECAUSE THE ASIA-PACIFIC ISP INDUSTRY IS VERY CONCERNED ABOUT REGIONAL ARBITRARINESS, VAGUENESS AND A LACK OF DEFINITION IN ITS REGULATORY SCHEMES.

MR JIN HAS CALLED FOR MORE STUDY IN DEPTH OF REGIONAL POLICY, AND NO DOUBT THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE REGION ARE MONITORING INDUSTRY, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS AGAINST THEIR VARIOUS POLICY SETTINGS.

THE ASIA-PACIFIC ISP'S ARE NOT ALONE IN EXPRESSING CONCERNS ABOUT ONLINE REGULATORY ISSUES.

EUROPEAN ISP'S ARE SIMILARLY AGITATED ABOUT THE LACK OF CLARITY IN EUROPEAN ARRANGEMENTS - THEY ARE QUICKENING EFFORTS TO FORGE SELF-REGULATORY BODIES, AND, AS A UNIFIED INDUSTRY FORCE, ARE DEMANDING LEGAL CLARITY FROM GOVERNMENTS.

I BELIEVE THAT ISP'S AROUND THE WORLD WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN THEIR EFFORTS TO CLARIFY THEIR LEGAL POSITION IN RELATION TO BOTH CRIMINAL AND CLASSIFIABLE CONTENT ONLINE.

HOWEVER, THIS CLARIFICATION IS ALMOST CERTAIN TO BRING INCREASED RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ISP'S WITH IT.

ORGANISATIONS OF ISP'S ARE DESTINED TO BE THE INSTRUMENT THROUGH WHICH MUCH GOVERNMENT REGULATORY POLICY WILL BE BROUGHT INTO PLAY.

ISP'S SHOULD NOT BE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THIS LIKELY DEVELOPMENT THOUGH, PROVIDED THAT INTERNATIONAL GOVERNMENT POLICY IS SENSIBLE, PRAGMATIC AND PROPORTIONAL TO THE PROBLEMS IT SEEKS TO ADDRESS.

AFTER ALL, THE PRESENT SITUATION IS HIGHLY UNSATISFACTORY, AS EVENTS IN AMSTERDAM LAST APRIL READILY DEMONSTRATE.

ALL 6,000 WEB SITES HOSTED BY AN AMSTERDAM ISP WERE BLOCKED BY GERMANY'S MAIN ACADEMIC NETWORK DUE TO THE FACT THAT ONE SITE CONTAINED THE LEFT-WING PUBLICATION *RADIKAL*, WHICH IS BANNED IN GERMANY FOR ESPOUSING TERRORISM.

THE INFORMATION IN THE SERVER WAS ILLEGAL IN GERMANY BUT NOT IN HOLLAND.

THE GERMAN PROSECUTOR RELENTED ONLY AFTER HEAVY CRITICISM, ADMITTING THAT MIRROR SITES AROUND THE WORLD MADE THE BLOCK IRRELEVANT.

AFTER THE INCIDENT WAS OVER, THE MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE DUTCH ISP WAS QUOTED AS SAYING 'ISP'S NEED A STABLE LEGAL ENVIRONMENT IN ORDER TO PROSPER. THE LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE FOR THE INTERNET IS THAT WE NEED THE SAME TRANSPARENT LEGAL PROCEDURES THAT EXIST FOR SIMILAR ISSUES OUTSIDE THE INTERNET.'

HE IS, OF COURSE, ABSOLUTELY RIGHT.

WELL AT THIS STAGE OF THE INTERNATIONAL DEBATE, CAN WE DERIVE ANY USEFUL PRINCIPLES UPON WHICH THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF ONLINE REGULATORY POLICY FOR THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION CAN PROCEED?

WELL, FOR NON-CRIMINAL BUT CLASSIFIABLE MATERIAL, I BELIEVE WE CAN.

INDEED, I BELIEVE WE NEED TO.

THE ABSENCE OF SUCH A POLICY STANDS IN THE WAY OF FULLY OPENING UP THE INTERNET AND THE WORLD OF ONLINE SERVICES TO THE PEOPLE OF THE REGION, AND THE NATURAL RETICENCE OF THE PEOPLE WILL NOT BE OVERCOME UNTIL A SATISFACTORY POLICY EMERGES.

ELECTRONIC COMMERCE ON A BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS BASIS MIGHT WELL COME TO THE REGION WITHOUT THE EXISTENCE OF SUCH A POLICY, BUT CONSUMER COMMERCE AND EDUCATIONAL EXPLOITATION OF THE NET WILL REMAIN AFFLICTED WHILE EVER THE PROBLEMS ARE SEEN TO PERSIST.

WHAT ARE THE CONCRETE STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN?

WELL THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THE INTERNET INDUSTRY HAS ALREADY TAKEN VERY SIGNIFICANT STEPS TO HELP US ALL - GOVERNMENTS, POLICY-MAKERS AND INDIVIDUAL USERS.

THESE STEPS ARE TECHNOLOGICAL.

FIRST, THE WORLD WIDE WEB CONSORTIUM, OR W3C, AS IT IS KNOWN FOR SHORT, UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF TIM BERNERS-LEE - THE CO-CREATOR OF THE WORLD WIDE WEB - HAS DEVELOPED A SET OF OPEN TECHNICAL STANDARDS FOR CREATING FILTERING SOFTWARE AND RATING SYSTEMS FOR INTERNET CONTENT.

THIS IS CALLED THE PLATFORM FOR INTERNET CONTENT SELECTION, OR PICS.

PICS SPECIFIES HOW TO CREATE RATING LABELS FOR INTERNET CONTENT.

THESE LABELS CAN INDICATE SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF CONTENT, SUCH AS OFFENSIVENESS OF LANGUAGE, EXPLICITNESS OF SEX, AND DEGREE OF VIOLENCE.

PICS DOES NOT DETERMINE THE SUBSTANCE OF THE LABELS - THAT IS LEFT TO OTHERS.

THESE OTHERS INCLUDE RSACi, SAFESURF AND CYBERPATROL.

PICS IS THE BEST TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTION TO THE CHALLENGE OF PROTECTING YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE INTERNET.

IT IS NEUTRAL IN THAT IT ONLY PROVIDES THE TECHNICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RATING SYSTEMS - PICS IS NOT ABOUT CENSORSHIP, AND DOES NOT JUDGE CONTENT IN ANY WAY.

IT ENABLES PARENTS TO MAKE JUDGMENTS ABOUT CONTENT AND TO DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES WHAT THEIR CHILDREN MAY ACCESS.

PICS IS ALSO FLEXIBLE - AN UNLIMITED NUMBER OF RATING SYSTEMS, ADAPTABLE TO ANY CULTURAL OR SOCIAL VALUES, CAN BE CREATED ON THE BASIS OF PICS.

AND PICS IS FAMILY-CENTRED - IT EMPOWERS PARENTS TO PERFORM THEIR PARENTAL ROLE IN THE INTERNET ENVIRONMENT, RATHER THAN RELYING ON GOVERNMENT TO DECIDE WHAT MATERIAL IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.

HOW DOES PICS ACHIEVE ALL THIS?

FIRSTLY, PICS IS EMBEDDED IN MICROSOFT'S BROWSER, THE INTERNET EXPLORER 3.0, AND IT IS ALSO AVAILABLE FROM NETSCAPE.

BETWEEN THEM NETSCAPE AND MICROSOFT HAVE VIRTUALLY 100% OF THE WORLD BROWSER MARKET.

IN OTHER WORDS PICS IS AVAILABLE TO ANYONE WHO OWNS A PERSONAL COMPUTER THAT IS CAPABLE OF ACCESSING THE INTERNET.

SECONDLY, AND VERY IMPORTANTLY, PICS INTER-ACTS WITH A RATING SERVICE TO COMPLETE THE ASSEMBLY OF A VERY POWERFUL TOOL IN THE HANDS OF PARENTS, TEACHERS AND GUARDIANS.

I BELIEVE THAT, FOR THE TIME BEING, AND UNLESS AND UNTIL SOMETHING BETTER COMES ALONG, THE COMBINATION OF PICS AND RSACi, IS THE BEST TOOL PRESENTLY AVAILABLE TO CONCERNED PARENTS.

LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING ABOUT RSACi - THE INTERNET-RATING SYSTEM DEVELOPED BY THE RECREATIONAL SOFTWARE ADVISORY COUNCIL, OR RSAC.

RSAC IS AN INDEPENDENT, NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION, AND ITS MISSION IS TO 'EMPOWER THE PUBLIC, ESPECIALLY PARENTS, TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT ELECTRONIC MEDIA, BY MEANS OF ITS OPEN, OBJECTIVE CONTENT ADVISORY SYSTEM'.

ITS INTERNET RATING SYSTEM, KNOWN AS RSACi, IS APPLIED TO INTERNET CONTENT SO AS TO GIVE IT A RATING.

FOR EXAMPLE, IF THE INTERNET CONTENT IN QUESTION INVOLVED A SCENE IN WHICH A MAN AND A WOMAN WERE SEEN PASSIONATELY KISSING, THE MATERIAL WOULD BE RATED WITH THE SECOND-LEVEL RATING FOR SEX - LEVEL ONE ON A SCALE OF FIVE BETWEEN ZERO AND FOUR.

IF SUCH A SCENE WAS REGARDED AS UNACCEPTABLE, WHETHER FOR REASONS RELATING TO AGE, ETHNICITY, RELIGION OR BECAUSE IT IS COUNTER-CULTURE (USING A MALAYSIAN TERM), THAT SCENE WOULD NOT GAIN ACCESS TO SUCH AN INTERNET USER BECAUSE THE USER WOULD KNOW THAT SETTING THE RSACi SEX RATING AT LEVEL ZERO WOULD BLOCK ACCESS TO IT.

IF SUCH A SCENE WAS REGARDED AS ACCEPTABLE TO A DIFFERENT INTERNET USER, THAT USER MIGHT SET HIS OR HER PC, USING PICS AND RSACi, AT LEVEL ONE, THEREBY PERMITTING ACCESS TO THE MATERIAL.

IN OTHER WORDS IT IS UP TO INTERNET USERS TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN BENCHMARKS FOR THE LEVELS OF VIOLENCE, SEX, NUDITY AND LANGUAGE THEY WOULD FIND ACCEPTABLE OR UNACCEPTABLE ON THE NET.

UNLIKE THE PARTICULAR FILM AND TELEVISION CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES OF INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES, THIS INTERNET RATING SCHEME CAN BE USED BY THE INTERNET USERS OF MANY CULTURES.

THEY CAN DO THIS INDIVIDUALLY, OR, IN SOME COMMUNITIES, THEY MIGHT BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE GUIDANCE OF, SAY, COMMUNITY OR RELIGIOUS LEADERS WHOSE JUDGMENT ON THIS ISSUE THEY TRUST.

THE MOST CONCERNED OF INTERNET USERS COULD DECIDE THAT THEY WISH ONLY TO RECEIVE THE LOWEST RATING MATERIAL, THAT IS, MATERIAL THAT CONTAINS VIRTUALLY NO VIOLENCE, NO SEX, NO NUDITY AND NO BAD LANGUAGE.

PICS AND RSACi ALLOWS THAT USER TO ENSURE THAT NO UNRATED MATERIAL GAINS ACCESS TO THE USER'S PC.

THIS IS THE MOST COMPLETE AND FOOLPROOF WAY TO ENSURE THAT UNSUITABLE INTERNET CONTENT DOES NOT COME INTO YOUR HOME.

BUT TO ENSURE THAT THE VAST AMOUNT OF HIGHLY ACCEPTABLE INTERNET CONTENT OUT THERE CAN GET THROUGH TO YOUR HOME, THE COMBINATION OF PICS AND RSACi NEEDS TO BECOME UBIQUITOUS ON THE NET.

THE RSACi RATING CATEGORIES OF SEX, NUDITY, LANGUAGE AND VIOLENCE ARE BASED, UNLIKE ALL OF OUR NATIONAL CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES FOR THE CINEMA AND TV, UPON OBJECTIVE, DESCRIPTIVE DEFINITIONS OF WHAT THE INTERNET CONTENT IN QUESTION CONTAINS.

IT DOES NOT USE VALUE-LADEN TERMS OR SYMBOLS THAT INDICATE, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THE MATERIAL IN QUESTION MAY BE SUITABLE TO PERSONS OF A PARTICULAR AGE.

THAT IS A VALUE-JUDGMENT WHICH WOULD HAVE VALIDITY ONLY IN THE JURISDICTION WHERE THE JUDGMENT WAS MADE - YOU CAN BE CERTAIN THAT THE VALUES INHERENT IN IT WOULD NOT BE VALID IN THE CULTURE OF ANY OTHER COUNTRY.

RSACi ATTEMPTS TO AVOID THOSE DIFFICULTIES AND, IN MY OPINION, SUCCEEDS IN DOING SO TO AN EXTENT SO FAR UNMATCHED BY ANY OTHER INTERNET RATING SYSTEM.

RSAC SPECIFICALLY RECOGNIZES THAT SOCIETY'S ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION OF VARIOUS KINDS OF VIOLENT, SEXUAL OR LANGUAGE CONTENT CHANGES OVER TIME AND ACROSS CULTURES.

THEREFORE RSAC IS OPEN TO SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THEIR SYSTEM, AND, FROM TIME TO TIME, THE SYSTEM DEFINITIONS, CRITERIA AND QUESTIONS ARE MODIFIED.

JUST BEFORE I LEFT AUSTRALIA FOR THIS CONFERENCE I CHECKED WITH RSAC'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MR STEPHEN BALKAM, ABOUT THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS WITH RSACi.

HE INFORMED ME THAT THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF CHANGES TO RSACi'S METHODOLOGY AND THE RSAC WEB SITE HAS BEEN CHANGED QUITE SUBSTANTIALLY.

RSAC WILL, IN FACT, COMPLETELY REDESIGN ITS WEB SITE SOON, WHICH WILL MAKE IT MUCH EASIER TO NAVIGATE AROUND THE SITE, AND EVEN EASIER TO LABEL SITES WITH RSACi.

IN METHODOLOGICAL TERMS, RSACi NOW REQUIRES ONLY FOUR QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED BY CONTENT RATERS, COMPARED TO THE FORTY-TWO QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY.

THESE CHANGES ARE OBVIOUSLY DESIGNED TO MAKE THE BUSINESS OF CONTENT RATING AS SIMPLE AND QUICK AS POSSIBLE.

CURRENTLY, OVER 30,000 SITES HAVE BEEN RATED WITH RSACi, AND THIS NUMBER IS GROWING AT AROUND 300 PER DAY.

THE LEADING INTERNET NEWS AND INFORMATION SERVICE FOR THE INTERNET AND CORPORATE INTRANETS, POINTCAST INCORPORATED, ANNOUNCED IN APRIL THAT IT WILL USE RSAC'S CONTENT ADVISORY SYSTEM, AND THAT POINTCAST WILL NOT ALLOW ANY SITE TO COME THROUGH POINTCAST UNLESS IT IS RATED WITH RSACi.

ANOTHER MAJOR SITE TO HAVE RECENTLY RATED WITH RSACi IS DISNEY ONLINE, WHICH ALSO REQUIRES ALL LINKS FROM ITS SITE TO BE RATED WITH RSACi.

RSAC IS ALSO FAST GAINING ACCEPTANCE IN EUROPE, AND MR BALKAM HAS THIS YEAR HAD DISCUSSIONS WITH BOTH THE OECD AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION.

HE INFORMS ME THAT IN SEPTEMBER THERE WILL BE A RATINGS SUMMIT IN EUROPE, AND IT HAS BEEN FORESHADOWED THAT THERE SHOULD BE A FOLLOW UP SUMMIT IN A PACIFIC RIM COUNTRY IN FEBRUARY 1998.

SO RSAC HAS A LOT TO OFFER POLICY-MAKERS IN THIS REGION.

RSACi IS OBVIOUSLY CAPABLE OF COPING WITH DIFFERENT CULTURAL STANDARDS, AND THE RSAC ORGANIZATION STANDS READY TO OPEN A DIALOGUE WITH ANY GOVERNMENT, OR ORGANISATION OF GOVERNMENTS, THAT MIGHT WISH TO EXPLORE THE PROSPECT OF PROMOTING HIGHER STANDARDS OF INTERNET BEHAVIOUR BY PROMOTING THE USE OF PICS AND RSACi.

THAT PROMOTION CAN ENLIST THE SUPPORT OF INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS, RATHER THAN USE THE HEAVY-HANDED OPTION OF GOVERNMENT IMPOSITION.

AFTER ALL, THESE MEASURES DO NOT REPRESENT CENSORSHIP - THEY ARE MERELY TOOLS WHICH ANY GOVERNMENT WOULD, IN ANY OTHER CONTEXT, REGARD AS ENTITLEMENTS FOR THE PEOPLE.

ALL GOVERNMENTS TRY TO EMPOWER PARENTS, TEACHERS AND GUARDIANS WITH INFORMATION ABOUT OTHER FORMS OF MEDIA - THAT IS ALL, AND NO MORE, THAT THE COMBINATION OF PICS AND RSACi PURPORTS TO DO.

I THINK THAT ASIA-PACIFIC POLICY-MAKERS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO ENGAGE WITH THESE ISSUES, AND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

AFTER ALL, A REGIONAL FAILURE TO DO SO COULD WELL LEAVE THE INTERNET WORLD WITH A DE FACTO GLOBAL INTERNET RATING SCHEME THAT HAS HAD VERY LITTLE INPUT FROM THE EXTRAORDINARILY DIVERSE CULTURES OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC.

SUCH AN OUTCOME WOULD, IN MY VIEW, BE THE CAUSE OF CONSIDERABLE REGRET.

THANK YOU.

WOMEN IN THE INFORMATION INDUSTRY

Dr. Delia Torrijos
Wang Lay Kim

TOPIC : *Women in the Information Industry*

- * *Gender sensitivity in the communications industry*
- * *Education, training and job access for women communicators*

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