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Welcome Address

By

Vijay Menon
Welcome Address by the Secretary-General of AMIC. Mr. Vijay Menon, at the inauguration of the WHO-UNESCO-IPDC-AMIC Roundtable on "Health and the Mass Media: A Partnership in the Public Interest", Colombo, 11-13, September, 1985.

Hon. Prime Minister, Distinguished Guests and Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you, on behalf of AMIC, to the inauguration of this Roundtable on Health and the Mass Media: A Partnership in the Public Interest. To the Hon. Prime Minister, I would like to express our collective appreciation of his gracious gesture in accepting our invitation at comparatively short notice and despite the fact that today is a cabinet meeting day.

While health is a matter of fundamental and critical concern, it is not always deemed newsworthy. But just as media persons need good health, so does the cause of health and nutrition require the power and persuasion of the media.

The countries of Asia are engaged in the stupendous task of developing their human resources. Health care, it is recognised, is a necessary precondition for human resource development. This means providing "preventive and curative services that are active, accessible, affordable and acceptable for the population".

The key word is 'acceptance'. It is recognised today that any activity which affects the community, however beneficial, must have the support of the people. Progressive programmes are not always perceived as such and well-intentioned efforts often fail for lack of popular support. We need to employ the skills and the expertise of the communications practitioner and of the commercial marketer to make socially useful goals acceptable, desirable and, therefore, achievable. This calls for collective effort, a compact between the health experts and the media for the benefit of the community of which they are a part.

The need is urgent and critical and brooks no delay. It is believed that malnutrition not related to shortage of food kills 10 to 20 times more children than malnutrition caused by shortage of food. An independent report has confirmed that the real reason why millions of children die unnecessarily each year is the lack of adequate health services and because many parents are uninformed about family planning and child care. There is, therefore, a great deal that a partnership between the health experts and the media can achieve.


This Roundtable has been made possible by the support, material and moral, of the International Programme for Development of Communication (IPDC), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). I would like to acknowledge the personal involvement and interest in this project of Mr. Sarath Amunugama, Director, IPDC; Dr. Jack Ling, Director of Public Information and Health Education of WHO and Dr. Susan van der Vynckt of UNESCO. AMIC's representative in Sri Lanka, Mr. Irvin Weerackody of Phoenix Advertising and Dr. Wesumperuma of the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute have also provided invaluable assistance.
It is singularly appropriate that this Roundtable should be held in Colombo. As a recent article pointed out, Sri Lanka ranks among the world's low-income countries. Yet the overall health status of its citizens has reached levels usually encountered in western welfare states and its literacy rate approaches universality. In short, it is a shining example of what a Third World country can achieve in regard to the health of its citizens.

We at AMIC are happy to have had the opportunity to organise this Roundtable for the benefit of the region. We believe that communication media must serve the community. In keeping with this belief we co-sponsored the first Roundtable in Singapore last year. We have also organised seminars and workshops on Environmental Communication and Social Marketing. All these seminars have underscored the urgent and compelling need for fully and effectively utilising the communication skills and resources of the region for promoting causes of concern to the community.

AMIC's involvement in these activities is made possible by the generous support of the Government of Singapore and the Friederich-Ebert-Stiftung, an independent foundation in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Singapore Roundtable was productive of health education projects in all the participating countries. It is our hope that the Colombo Roundtable and the projects which flow from it will have a similar catalytic effect in this region.

We are most grateful to the Hon. Prime Minister for inaugurating the Roundtable and to our other distinguished guests for giving us the pleasure and the encouragement of their presence.