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Welcome Address

by

Vijay Menon
Welcome Address by Vijay Menon, Secretary-General, AMIC

I am glad to welcome all of you to AMIC and to this Seminar on "Alternative Media".

The topic is not new. But to us in the Asia-Pacific, it is a topic of continuing interest and importance. Understandably so. Because the problems that gave rise to the phenomenon of alternative media continue to exist in many parts of our region. The problems of poverty and deprivation, of illiteracy and the lack of opportunity, of ethnic and religious minorities, of marginalized urban dwellers and isolated rural residents -- the many, in short, who are beyond the reach and influence of the conventional mass media.

More than ever before our region and the countries that constitute it are witness to sharp contrasts. Growing prosperity on the one hand and a widening poverty gap on the other. The advent of sophisticated new technologies and new media and the existence of the voiceless, both urban and rural, the swelling ranks of the privileged and the existence of vast numbers of the deprived.

It is this that invests alternative media with their relevance and rationale. There is need for communication that is different in form and content from the established or conventional mass media -- whether print or broadcast or news agency journalism, folk or traditional media, the visual or the performing arts.

There is need, as the background paper has mentioned, to document these efforts, to provide an opportunity to know about them and learn from them, to establish networks to facilitate the exchange of information and experience, and to motivate planners and administrators to support and to utilize alternative media for local and national development.

We are glad that we have among you the many diverse strands that constitute the fabric of alternative media. Your rich and varied experiences and your differing geographical settings, should make our deliberations a truly learning experience.

We are happy to welcome Dr. Pradip Thomas, Asian Regional Coordinator of the WACC, whose support has made it possible for us to hold this seminar. The WACC deserves to be commended for its unwavering support to communication issues of relevance to developing countries.

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At AMIC, we have been interested in the topic of communication and change from our very founding. During these 22 years, we have organised over 200 conferences, seminars and workshops which have directly benefited over 5000 participants, besides many more through our documentation, publication and research activities. We have been aided in our efforts to promote mass communication in the Asia-Pacific by the steadfast support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, an independent foundation in Germany, and the Government of Singapore, by the encouragement and help of institutions such as the WACC, and equally importantly, by the response of individual and organisations represented by all of you.

Twenty years ago, in 1973, AMIC organised a regional conference on "Communication and Rural Change". I would commend to you our founding Secretary-General's message on that occasion: "Communicators interested in bringing about change should not only be prepared to keep up with changes themselves but also be willing to change".

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