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Welcome Address

By

Vijay Menon
Chief Guest Ms. Betty Khoo, Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you on behalf of AMIC, the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre, to our inaugural seminar for 1987 on Women and the Media in Asia.

Since 1985, we have had a number of seminars on the theme of communication challenges in Asia. These seminars have essentially focussed attention of the concept of the New World Information and Communication Order. Closely allied to this is the concept of the New International Economic Order (NIEO). Mass communication not only serves as a common factor but is critical for the attainment of self-reliance.

Scholars such as Hamelink and Pavlic have pointed out that the full integration of women in development and their full participation in planning and decision-making in the development process are necessary goals in the search for more equitable economic relations. They mention that among the important aspects that need to be examined are 'the role of information-communication means in the lives of women; the role of women in the information-communication profession; and the portrayal of women in the mass media'.

The problem in Asia is certainly very complex, as revealed by statistics of female illiteracy. In South Asia, it is as astonishing as it is disturbing - ranging from 80 to 95 per cent. The picture in South East Asia is distinctly better.

Almost seven years ago, the MacBride Commission drew the attention of the world to this imbalance and the role of media. It said, 'Two thirds of the illiterates in the world are women...Women need free access on equal terms to education, social participation and communication if they are to share rightfully in solving the problems of their societies. But this access is impeded by traditions, by

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prejudices based on social customs or sometimes on religion, by discriminatory laws in certain countries, and also by imposing on women a disproportionate share of the responsibility for care of the home and work on the land...Lack of education is the major barrier to choice of occupation".

"Access to certain profession, to higher paid jobs, and to senior management positions is generally far from equal...The world of communication reflects this inequality...Journalists dealing with serious issues and political events are seldom women, and few women become editors or hold directing positions".

Barbara Murray Eddings put it more eloquently in the book, Women in Broadcasting: "Baby may no longer be in the bedroom neither is she in the boardroom, although she has ceased to be a curiosity in the newsroom".

The MacBride Commission clarified that the media are not the fundamental cause of the subordinate status of women, nor can it be remedied by the media alone. The causes are deeply rooted in social, economic and political structures, as well as in culturally determined attitudes, and solutions must be found in far reaching changes. However, it is within the power of media either to stimulate or to retard change to a significant degree.

It is these problems that will be the subject of our attention during this seminar: access of women to journalism and communication education; the status of women in the media; their skills development needs and the portrayal of women in the media.

We have at this seminar women and men from twelve Asian countries. We trust that this gathering of academics and media practitioners will not only discuss the issues involved but also highlight specific areas for follow up activity whether by way of research or training programmes.

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We are grateful to all of you for making it convenient to participate in this seminar. We would like to acknowledge the support extended by NSK - the Japan Editors and Publishers Association. We would also like to thank the Commonwealth Media Development Fund and the Commonwealth Secretariat for the funding support they have provided. To Ms. Betty Khoo, we offer a special word of appreciation for so gracefully consenting to inaugurate this seminar.