

SPEECH BY LUIS RAMIRO BELTRAN ON RECEIVING
THE McLUHAN-TELEGLOBE CANADA AWARD FROM
HIS EXCELLENCY EDWARD SCHREYER, GOVERNOR
GENERAL OF CANADA

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RIDEAU HALL, OTTAWA

LOGIC WOULD HAVE IT THAT A COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST SHOULD ALWAYS BE ABLE TO EXPRESS HIS FEELINGS WITH PROPRIETY AND EASE. BUT LOGIC STOPS OUTSIDE THE REALM OF THE HEART WHERE GRATITUDE AND JOY FLOURISH AND, WHEN FEELINGS SUCH AS THESE OVERFLOW, THEY DEFY SIMPLE WORDING. NEVERTHELESS, I HOPE TO CONVEY TO YOU MY PLEASURE AND APPRECIATION AS THE FIRST RECIPIENT OF THE MCLUHAN-TELEGLOBE CANADA AWARD.

IT IS TRULY A GREAT HONOR TO RECEIVE THIS AWARD FROM HIS EXCELLENCY, THE GOVERNOR GENERAL OF CANADA. ON MY OWN BEHALF, ON BEHALF OF MY COUNTRY, BOLIVIA, AND ON BEHALF OF LATIN AMERICA, I SHOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS TO HIS EXCELLENCY, AND THROUGH HIM TO THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE OF CANADA, MY HEARTFELT THANKS.

I FULLY APPRECIATE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS AWARD. ON THE ONE HAND, IT PROVIDES A PRICELESS CULMINATION TO MY CAREER. YET, ON THE OTHER HAND, IT PLACES ME UNDER THE OBLIGATION OF ATTEMPTING NEW UNDERTAKINGS. FOR MUCH REMAINS TO BE DONE ON THE LONG ROAD TO DEMOCRATIC COMMUNICATION.

COMMEMORATING, AS IT DOES, THE WORLD COMMUNICATIONS YEAR, THE AWARD PROVIDES A GREAT STIMULUS FOR COMMUNICATORS IN EVERY COUNTRY AND CONFERS A NEW STATUS ON THEIR PROFESSION. THUS - IN ADDITION TO THANKING THE CANADIAN COMMISSION FOR UNESCO, TELEGLOBE, AND UNESCO - I WISH TO CONGRATULATE THEM FOR THEIR INSPIRING INITIATIVE. AND I SHOULD LIKE TO ASK THE DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE 1983 JURY TO ACCEPT MY MOST SINCERE THANKS FOR HAVING SELECTED ME AS THE FIRST WINNER OF THE COMPETITION.

I NEVER THOUGHT MY WORK WOULD RECEIVE ANY REWARD OTHER THAN THE MERE PLEASURE OF DOING IT. NEITHER DID I IMAGINE THAT MY NAME MIGHT SOME DAY BE ASSOCIATED WITH THAT OF MARSHALL MCLUHAN. I WOULD HAVE LIKED TO HAVE MET THIS

DISCONCERTING THINKER WHO, ACCORDING TO HENRY BOYLE, WAS ALSO A VERY PLEASANT HUMAN BEING. EVER WITTY, AT TIMES CONTRADICTORY, AND OFTEN CRYPTIC DESPITE THE SIMPLE LANGUAGE HE USED, THIS CANADIAN PHILOSOPHER OF CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY FASCINATED THE WORLD. HIS UNUSUAL APHORISMS WERE NOT OFTEN UNDERSTOOD AND, WHEN THEY WERE, SOME WERE FIERCELY CONTESTED. BUT NO ONE COULD IGNORE HIM NOR HELP BUT ADMIRE HIS FERTILE MIND AND HIS ORIGINALITY. A CONTROVERSIAL PROPHET OF THE 21ST CENTURY, MCLUHAN WAS APPLAUDED EVEN BY THOSE HE CRITICIZED. WITH HIS GALACTIC SMILE, HE LEFT US, AS ALL GOOD POETS DO, WITH NEW MYTHS AND AUDACIOUS VISIONS. AND, UNLIKE MOST OTHER VISIONARIES OF THIS CENTURY, HE HIMSELF BECAME A MYTH OF THE ENCHANTED ERA OF THE GLOBAL VILLAGE.

I HAVE LONG ADMIRERD THE PEOPLE OF CANADA, ESPECIALLY SINCE I HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF MEETING LESTER B. PEARSON IN A 1947 FORUM IN NEW YORK. WE, IN THE THIRD WORLD, SHALL NOT FORGET THE LUCIDITY WITH WHICH HE UNDERSTOOD UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND THE FIRMNESS WITH WHICH HE STRUGGLED TO HELP US OVERCOME THAT STRUGGLE CONTINUES TODAY LED BY CANADIAN INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE, WITH WHICH I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF WORKING IN MY REGION FOR YEARS. IT WAS INDEED WHILE IN THE SERVICE OF IDRC THAT I CARRIED OUT SEVERAL OF THE TASKS FOR WHICH I AM NOW BEING REWARDED.

CANADA STANDS OUT TODAY AS A LEADING COUNTRY IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. THE SECOND LARGEST NATION ON EARTH HAS THE HUMILITY TO OPT FOR PEACE, THE INTEGRITY TO DEFEND JUSTICE, AND THE WISDOM TO FURTHER COOPERATION. SURROUNDED BY THE GIANTS THAT STRUGGLE FOR WORLD HEGEMONY AT THE PRICE OF ENDANGERING THE SURVIVAL OF MANKIND, THIS COUNTRY ASSERTS ITS SOVEREIGNTY AND BRAVELY OPPOSES THE ARMS RACE. IN AN INSANE WORLD THAT SPENDS MORE THAN ONE MILLION DOLLARS A MINUTE ON WEAPONS WHILE 800 MILLION PEOPLE BARELY HAVE ENOUGH TO EAT,

THE VOICE OF CANADA CAN BE HEARD CRYING OUT AGAINST THE SPECTER OF NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST. RECENTLY, IN GUELPH, PRIME MINISTER PIERRE TRUDEAU STATED:

A NEW CLIMATE OF EAST-WEST CONFIDENCE CANNOT BE INSTILLED IN A DAY, NOR CAN THE ARMS RACE BE STOPPED OVERNIGHT. BUT INSOFAR AS I, AND OTHER LEADERS WHO SHARE THIS PURPOSE, CAN WORK TOGETHER TO BUILD AUTHENTIC CONFIDENCE, I PLEDGE YOU THAT WE SHALL.

COMMUNICATION SUPPORTS THIS ENDEAVOUR. PRODUCED BY THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD AND DISTRIBUTED BY THE CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION, THE FILM "IF WE LOVE THIS PLANET" AND THE TV SERIES "WAR" PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF CANADA'S COMMITMENT TO THE PRESERVATION OF MANKIND. AND COULD IT NOT BE SAID THAT CANADA'S PRIME MINISTER IS PERFORMING, AT THIS VERY MOMENT, A CRUCIAL COMMUNICATIONS ROLE TO AVOID WORLD CATASTROPHE?

LESS DRAMATIC BUT NO LESS OMINOUS THAN THE EAST-WEST DISAGREEMENT IS THE INCREASING NORTH-SOUTH CONFRONTATION. AND LESS PUBLICIZED THAN THIS CONFRONTATION BUT NO LESS DEPLORABLE ARE THE DISPARITIES PREVAILING WITHIN EVERY COUNTRY OF THE THIRD WORLD. INEQUITIES CAN ONLY CONTRIBUTE TO VIOLENCE AND WAR IN THE PLANET. THERE CAN BE NO PEACE WHERE THERE IS NO JUSTICE.

BOTH BETWEEN COUNTRIES AND WITHIN EACH OF THEM, THE GAP SEPARATING THE WEALTHY FEW FROM THE IMPOVERISHED MANY IS GROWING RATHER THAN DECREASING. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, THE DEITIES OF THE EPOCH, HAVE NOT BROUGHT FAIRNESS ALONG WITH THEM. AND FOR MOST HUMAN BEINGS DEVELOPMENT SIMPLY HAS NOT OCCURRED.

THE THIRD WORLD IS, IN FACT, UNDERGOING ITS GRAVEST CRISIS SINCE THE 1930 DEPRESSION. TERMS OF TRADE EXCHANGE HAVE REACHED DISTRESSING LEVELS OF DETERIORATION. MANY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ARE GOING DEEPER INTO DEBT AT HIGHER

INTEREST RATES AND SHORTER REPAYMENT TERMS WHILE SUFFERING THE IMPOSITION OF INCREASED BARRIERS AGAINST THEIR MANUFACTURED GOODS. THE LATIN AMERICAN FOREIGN DEBT, FOR INSTANCE, GREW FROM 67 BILLION DOLLARS IN 1975 TO ALMOST 300 BILLION DOLLARS IN 1982.

SO UNFAIR ARE THE PREVALENT INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ARRANGEMENTS THAT THE WILL TO BUILD A NEW INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER WAS PROCLAIMED IN THE UNITED NATIONS AND IS BEING PURSUED, HOWEVER SLOWLY AND PAINFULLY, BY THE THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES.

DOMESTIC ECONOMIC RELATIONS, ARE NO LESS SKEWED THAN THE INTERNATIONAL ONES IN FAVOR OF THE FEW AND THE MIGHTY. IN LATIN AMERICA, FOR INSTANCE, SOCIETIES ARE STILL RULED IN MOST CASES BY TRADITIONAL ELITES BENT ON PRESERVING THEIR PRIVILEGES AT THE EXPENSE OF MISERY AND OPPRESSION FOR THE PEOPLE. AS FEW AS 10 PER CENT OF PRIVILEGED FAMILIES CONCENTRATE IN THEIR HANDS CLOSE TO 50 PER CENT OF TOTAL INCOME. LIKEWISE, 7 PER CENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL POPULATION OWNS 93 PER CENT OF THE LAND UNDER CULTIVATION, WHILE THE POOREST THIRD OF THAT POPULATION HAS TO DO WITH JUST 1 PER CENT.

NEVER HAS THE ECONOMIC SITUATION OF LATIN AMERICA BEEN AS SERIOUS AS IT IS TODAY. THE GROWTH RATE OF ITS GROSS INTERNAL PRODUCT COLLAPSED FROM AN AVERAGE OF 5.5 PER CENT FOR THE 1950-1980 PERIOD TO MINUS 0.9 PER CENT IN 1982. HAUNTED BY INFLATION, PLAGUED BY HIGH PRICES AND LOW SALARIES, ANGUISHED BY LACK OF EMPLOYMENT FOR ALMOST 40 MILLION HUMAN BEINGS, THE REGION IS UNDERGOING A DANGEROUS INCREASE OF SOCIAL TENSIONS AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY. IN CENTRAL AMERICA ALONE, VIOLENCE HAS TAKEN A DREADFUL TOLL: 100,000 PEOPLE KILLED IN FIVE YEARS.

IT IS BY NOW ALL TOO CLEAR THAT THE CLASSICAL "MODERNIZATION" MODEL IS A COSTLY FAILURE IN THE THIRD WORLD. IT ENTAILS A DEHUMANIZED VISION OF PROGRESS WHICH EQUATES PHYSICAL GROWTH WITH HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, AND BEING BETTER WITH HAVING MORE. FURTHERMORE IT MAKES NO PROVISION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE.

INSEPARABLE FROM ITS MILIEU, COMMUNICATION IN THE THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES FOLLOWS CLOSELY THE GENERAL PATTERN OF INEQUITY. IT IS JUST ANOTHER PRIVILEGE OF THE FEW AND WORKS TO PERPETUATE THE STATUS QUO. TAKE LATIN AMERICA FOR INSTANCE.

MASS MEDIA ARE CONCENTRATED IN A FEW LARGE CITIES. THEY ARE CONSIDERABLY WELL DEVELOPED. HOWEVER, THEIR MESSAGES ESSENTIALLY REACH MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS EDUCATED AND WELL-TO-DO MINORITIES, WHILE ALMOST ONE HALF OF THE PEASANTRY DOES NOT HAVE ACCESS EVEN TO RADIO. MEDIA CONTENT IS OFTEN REGARDED AS TRIVIAL, COMMERCIAL AND CONSERVATIVE, AS WELL AS INDIFFERENT TO THE NEEDS OF MASS EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT. OWNERSHIP IS ALMOST TOTALLY PRIVATE AND AT TIMES OLIGOPOLISTIC.

ABOUT 50 PER CENT OF ALL THEATRICAL FILMS AND TELEVISION PROGRAMS ARE DIRECT U.S. IMPORTS. SOME 60 PER CENT OF ALL NEWS TRAFFIC RELATED TO THE REGION IS HANDLED BY AP AND UPI, GIVING THE WORLD A FRAGMENTED AND DISTORTED IMAGE OF LATIN AMERICA. BY FAR, THE MOST DECISIVE FACTOR, HOWEVER, IS ADVERTISING. TWO-THIRDS OF THE REVENUE OF THE LATIN AMERICAN PRESS COME FROM 30 TRANSNATIONAL BUSINESS CORPORATIONS, MOST OF THEM OF U.S. ORIGIN, WHILE THE FIGURE FOR TELEVISION APPROACHES THE 100 PER CENT MARK. THE MAIN DAILIES ASSIGN MORE THAN HALF THEIR SPACE TO ADS. EITHER DIRECTLY OR THROUGH LOCAL SUBSIDIARIES, ADVERTISING BUSINESS IS ABOUT 90 PER CENT CONTROLLED BY AS FEW AS 10 U.S. FIRMS WHOSE YEARLY EXPENDITURES EXCEED 2 BILLION DOLLARS.

COULD SUCH INFLUENCE BE INCONSEQUENTIAL? No. IN FACT, THE SITUATION APPEARS TO BE ONE OF CULTURAL DOMINATION ADDED TO ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEPENDENCE. AND WHAT HAPPENS IN LATIN AMERICA IS NOT VERY DIFFERENT FROM WHAT GOES ON IN THE REST OF THE UNDERDEVELOPED WORLD. MOREOVER, A COMPARABLE PROBLEM EXISTS EVEN IN SOME PARTS OF THE DEVELOPED WORLD AS THE CASE OF CANADA CLEARLY ILLUSTRATES. PEARSON HIMSELF ONCE SPOKE OF "CULTURAL POLLUTION" AS A THREAT TO HIS NATION'S IDENTITY.

SHOULD THE EXISTENCE OF A MOVEMENT FOR REFORMING SUCH A SITUATION COME AS A SURPRISE TO ANYONE? THE MOVEMENT~~s~~ BEGAN ABOUT A QUARTER OF A CENTURY AGO IN LATIN AMERICA, INVOLVING SCHOLARS, POLITICIANS AND MEDIA PRACTITIONERS THEMSELVES. THEY CHALLENGED THE CLASSICAL NOTIONS OF "INFORMATION FREEDOM" AND THE "FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION", WHICH THE WINNERS OF WORLD WAR II HAD PROCLAIMED AS PRINCIPLES FOR THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION. THE CONTENTIONS WERE THAT FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ONLY EXISTED IN FAVOR OF THE RULING MINORITIES AND THAT THE FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION WAS A ONE-WAY PROCESS PRIVILEGING THE INDUSTRIAL NATIONS. CANADIAN EXPERTS ATTENDING A 1969 MEETING IN MONTREAL FULLY SHARED THESE VIEWS AND RECOMMENDED CORRECTIVE ACTIONS.

BY THE MIDDLE OF THE 1970'S THE MOVEMENT HAD TURNED COMMUNICATION INTO A CRUCIAL ISSUE FOR PUBLIC DEBATE. INDEED THE DECADE OF THE 70'S WILL BE RECALLED AS THAT IN WHICH, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY, COMMUNICATION BECAME A HOT ARENA IN THE INTERNATIONAL POWER GAME.

IN THE SEARCH FOR IMPROVEMENTS, EVERYTHING CAME UNDER SCRUTINY, TRADITIONAL CONCEPTS AND TECHNIQUES. THE STRUCTURE AND FINANCING OF OPERATIONS. THE ROLES OF THE STATE, PRIVATE ENTERPRISE AND THE PROFESSIONALS. THE ESTABLISHED ORIENTATIONS OF PRODUCTION, TRAINING AND RESEARCH. MODERN TELECOMMUNICATIONS

TECHNOLOGY AND COMPUTERS. COMMUNICATION RIGHTS. THE NATURE OF NEWS. THE USE OF THE GEOSTATIONARY ORBIT.

BEHIND IT ALL IS THE CONVICTION THAT, IN THEORY OR IN PRACTICE, COMMUNICATION IS PRESENTLY NOT DEMOCRATIC. WE FEEL THAT WHAT GOES ON UNDER SUCH LABEL IS OFTEN LITTLE MORE THAN A PERSUASIVE MONOLOGUE BY WHICH A POWERFUL "SOURCE" EXERTS DOMINATION OVER A PASSIVE "RECEIVER". TO BE DEMOCRATIC THE COMMUNICATION TRANSACTION MUST TAKE PLACE UNDER CONDITIONS OF FREE AND EGALITARIAN ACCESS, DIALOGUE AND PARTICIPATION. FURTHERMORE, MOLDING THE BEHAVIOR OF OTHERS SHOULD NOT BE THE PREDOMINANT GOAL OF THIS TRANSACTION AS HUMAN BEINGS COMMUNICATE WITH MULTIPLE PURPOSES ACCORDING TO THEIR DIVERSE NEEDS.

SIMILARLY, WE BELIEVE THAT FREEDOM OF COMMUNICATION CAN TRULY EXIST ONLY WHEN ALL HUMAN BEINGS EFFECTIVELY HAVE AT THEIR DISPOSAL UNRESTRAINED OPTIONS AS SENDERS AND RECEIVERS OF MESSAGES CARRYING INFORMATION AND OPINION, AND WHEN THEY HAVE UNINHIBITED ACCESS TO INFORMATION SOURCES.

WE CONTEND COMMUNICATION SHOULD NOT BE A TOOL FOR THE IRREVERENT MANIPULATION OF HUMAN BEINGS TO SATISFY THE VESTED INTERESTS OF A FEW. NEITHER SHOULD COMMUNICATION BE USED TO PRESERVE AN UNFAIR SOCIAL STRUCTURE; IT SHOULD BE USED TO TRANSFORM IT SO THAT JUSTICE AND PEACE PREVAIL.

ALSO WE CLAIM THAT UNDEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOR IN COMMUNICATION DOING HARM TO HUMAN FREEDOM AND DIGNITY IS CLEARLY A CHARACTERISTIC OF AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES FOLLOWING ONE IDEOLOGY OR ANOTHER AND BEING MILITARY OR CIVILIAN. BUT IT IS JUST AS MUCH A CHARACTERISTIC OF APPARENTLY DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES WHICH DEFEND CONVENTIONAL FREEDOM WHILE VIOLATING HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING THOSE OF COMMUNICATION. COERCION THROUGH ADVERTISING BOYCOTT IS AS CONDEMNABLE A PROCEDURE AS OUTRIGHT GOVERNMENT CENSORSHIP.

DIRECTLY RELATED TO IDEAS AS THESE ARE A SERIES OF STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES FOR DEMOCRATIC COMMUNICATION BEING PUT TO PRACTICE IN MANY PARTS OF LATIN AMERICA AS ALTERNATIVE OR SUPPLEMENTARY FORMATS. THE "MIDGET PRESS" OF BRAZIL. BOLIVIA'S AYMARA INDIAN RADIO AND MINER'S UNIONS BROADCASTING. THE RURAL CASSETTE FORUM EXPERIMENTED WITH IN URUGUAY AND GUATEMALA. COLOMBIA'S RADIO SCHOOLS SPREAD ACROSS THE WHOLE REGION. THE WORKERS' FILMS OF NICARAGUA. PERU'S RURAL VIDEOMOBILE EXPERIMENT OR SLUM COMMUNICATION ORGANIZATION. CHILEAN AND VENEZUELAN VIDEOTAPE COMMUNITY GROUPS. DEVELOPMENT ORIENTED COOPERATIVE NEWS AGENCIES SUCH AS ASIN AND ALASEI, AND THE LIKE.

ON ANOTHER DIMENSION OF THE SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS, LATIN AMERICA HAS ALSO PIONEERED IN PROPOSING THE LEGAL ESTABLISHMENT OF OVERALL NATIONAL COMMUNICATION POLICIES BASED ON PLURALISTIC PARTICIPATION AND CONSENSUS. SPONSORED BY UNESCO, AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING FOR THIS PURPOSE TOOK PLACE IN COSTA RICA IN 1976. A DECLARATION INVOLVING DOCTRINARY BASIS FOR DEMOCRATIC COMMUNICATION AND A SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION WERE THE PRODUCT OF IT.

IN THE SAME YEAR, ON THE OTHER HAND, THE MOVEMENT OF THE NON-ALIGNED NATIONS PROCLAIMED ITS CONVICTION THAT A NEW INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION ORDER IS REQUIRED AS AN INDISPENSABLE INSTRUMENT TO ATTAIN THE ALREADY ENVISIONED INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER. READILY SUPPORTED IN MANY PARTS OF THE THIRD WORLD, THIS PROPOSAL SPARKED A BITTER NORTH-SOUTH CONTROVERSY.

EVENTUALLY BODIES AS THE MCBRIDE COMMISSION ON COMMUNICATION ENDORSED THE INITIATIVE. TODAY THE NEW INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION ORDER CANNOT BE TAKEN AS A WHIMSICAL INVENTION OF UNESCO, AS THE GOAL OF A FEW TOTALITARIAN GOVERNMENTS OR AS A SINISTER PLOT OF A RADICAL SECT. IT IS NOW A LEGITIMATE BLUEPRINT FOR

CHANGE, AN IDEAL EMBRACED BY MANY, AN OPEN MOVEMENT FOR GENUINE DEMOCRACY IN INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS. JUST A MONTH AGO, UNESCO'S DIRECTOR GENERAL AMADOU MAHTAR M'BOW REFERRED TO IT AS INEVITABLE, EVOLVING AND IRREVERSIBLE.

ON RECEIVING THE MCLUHAN-TELEGLOBE CANADA AWARD, ALLOW ME, LASTLY, TO HOPE THAT THE COMING YEARS WILL SEE MAJOR ADVANCEMENTS IN THE EVOLUTION OF COMMUNICATION TOWARDS JUSTICE AND PEACE.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF 1984, LET US WHOLEHEARTEDLY WISH THAT MCLUHAN'S DREAM OF THE FRATERNAL "GLOBAL VILLAGE" WILL PREVAIL OVER ORWELL'S NIGHTMARE.