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Preface

I have realized that for some reason the issues of communication as they relate to the Third World and to UNESCO have been more or less played down by the western press and the media in general. It is interesting that this matter has been investigated recently by the National News Council in the US, a body set up by the newspapers themselves to investigate the objectivity of the press. This Council notes that articles and news items about the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems to UNESCO were distorted. What created this distortion was not editorialization in the writing but the selective process in which news reports were used. The first sifting out took place with the reporters' assessment of which developments were worthy of note. The process of excluding controversial material was then reinforced by the tendencies of the gatekeepers at the foreign desk in the newspaper offices at home to discard stories which did not highlight the conflict angle which they wished to highlight. The imbalance which characterized most news coverage in this country provided an inadequate foundation for independent judgment by Americans on the position their newspapers were taking in UNESCO communication issues. Equally troublesome, this imbalance set a poor example for the Third-World journalists and other sceptics on what they should find admirable as a model of prestige and immunity from government control in western journalistic expression.

So I am very glad that you are having this conference here to discuss the issues in a more balanced way. I am particularly glad also that this initiative has been inspired largely by the Lutheran Church. In my work both with regard to disarmament and to Namibia and the Human Rights, I have found that the Lutheran Church has never hesitated to take a courageous lead in these issues and therefore I would like to pay tribute to the leaders of the Lutheran Church for having taken this initiative in this case also.

The point I would like to make particularly at this stage is that there has been a change in the centre of gravity of power in the world from governments to public opinion, to the public sector. This has resulted from many different factors. The first was the increase in standard of education and the degree of literacy in the world. The second factor was the development of the media, electronic media in particular.

The electronic media has enabled news to be transmitted to every corner of the world instantly and in some considerable detail. This is also a new development. With regard to the electronic media, let me emphasize that by far the most important of the electronic media is the radio. Not because the radio is more persuasive but because it reaches areas of the world where there are no television sets. Television so far has been pretty well limited to large urban areas.

There are some 60 or 70 countries that have foreign radio news services. The 30 leading countries broadcast in a hundred different languages at the rate of 15,000 hours a week, which is a colossal output! In a hundred different languages, that means that the man in Laos, in Peru or in Zambia who is working in his village or his fields gets a news service in his own language from 10 to 20 different sources.

I think that in the future, foreign broadcasts in different languages are going to be one of the most potent ways of forming public opinion. And this is a part of the process I have referred to which has led to a change in the centre of gravity of power from governments to public opinion. If you have doubts about it you can take some countries as examples. The major example of this was the Vietnam war where for the first time in the whole history of the world a full-blown war - for the Vietnam war was a full-blown war - was ended in midstream without one side or the other having won it after public opinion in the United States and the rest of the world had said 'No!'. You have had other examples, in Iran recently. You may not like the regime in Iran that has been installed by Khomeini but the important factor to bear in mind is that here was the most powerful, cruel regime in the world which was overthrown by public opinion, by the people of the streets of Tehran. Public opinion overthrew a powerful regime that had the full backing and had been installed by the

United States; public opinion was able to overthrow it in about the space of a month with very little bloodshed. Now we have the same kind of a thing happening in different parts of the world. I think the events in Poland are a result of the same process. The centre of gravity of power has been moving from the Communist Party, from the Government to the people. This process has probably been helped very considerably by the foreign news broadcasts. And I think this is a thing that our friends from the communist world should appreciate, that we have reached the end of an era in which the population can be insulated from what is happening in the rest of the world. I hope that the socialist countries will adjust to this situation, and adjust pretty rapidly. The events of Poland are only the tip of the iceberg.

Now, I thought it was useful to focus attention on the growing conflict which would develop between public opinion - if you like, the non-governmental sector - and the government. Governments are only beginning to realize this change in the centre of gravity of power and they will react very sharply against it. This means that there will be an increasing tendency to dominate the media, both the written media and the electronic media. Governments will more and more want to dominate it in an effort to control it and try to limit its power to inform people. In the western world the governments control the electronic media but have lost control over the written media to the same extent.

This question of concentration of the ownership and control of the media in the hands of multinationals requires urgent attention. There is a tendency of multinationals to insert a sense into the media. I think you have had this for some time in the Federal Republic of Germany but it is becoming more and more noticeable in France, Great Britain and many other countries. You have had this sordid spectacle in England: leading newspapers like The Times, Sunday Times and Daily Times being taken over by an Australian multi-national who already owns a number of newspapers in Australia, in the United States and in other portions of the globe. (I am referring to the purchase of the "The Times" by Murdoch). And what has been very interesting, too, is that despite all the assurances that had been given when The Times was bought by Murdoch, within a matter of a few months the editor was sacked, because Murdoch wanted to pursue a more actively right-wing policy.

You had the same thing taking place with The Observer in England. The Observer was first of all bought by an American oil company. And all kinds of assurances were given that there would be no interference with the policies of the paper. Within a matter of two years this oil field company sold the paper, without even telling the co-directors or the staff of the paper, to the Lonrho Company - the London and Rhodesian Finance Company, which was described by the conservative Prime Minister of Great Britain as the unacceptable face of capitalism. (It is an extremely shady company.) You have another worrying development that is the purchase of publishing houses, and in some cases newspapers, by arms manufacturers. Arms manufacturers naturally want to be able to influence policies of governments so that they can sell more arms. And the concept of a world without arms, the concept of complete and general disarmament is detrimental to arms manufacturers. By beginning to buy different newspapers here and there, arms manufacturers want to promote the sale of arms, want to oppose disarmament.

In addition to the problem of concentration of the ownership and control of the media I would like to just mention two more areas of urgent concern: newsprint shortage in Third-World countries, and efficient and cheap communication infrastructures, especially in Black Africa.

So - these are three small but important areas in which action could be taken. I think that they will require increasing attention. Now, what occurs to me really is the truth of what Albert Schweitzer pointed out many, many years ago: that man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall the consequences of his inventions. This is more obvious in the fields of communication than in other fields. We cannot deal with the issues of this conference properly if we divorce technology from morality because the two are closely linked. And this is the area where the role of the Church comes in.

The issues which face the world are largely based on moral questions, and I think we should try to understand it and try to give it a greater emphasis. We are living in a world in which we accept that governments are

based on immorality rather than on morality which is an extraordinary reversal of what the concept used to be. Let me emphasize or give it on the line like this: heads of government, prime ministers or heads of states accepted bribes from various aircraft companies in order to sell their planes. And they were convicted of this; prime ministers, heads of states, generals and lesser important officials throughout the world. Nothing much happened about it. Most of the people continued to enjoy the fruits of the bribes which they received, and I do not think many of them ended up in prison. Another case in point is the problem of torture. In Amnesty International we found that between 40 and 50 governments use torture as a system of government; torture is used as a method of imposing government, of preventing opposition to the government. In different countries

of Latin America maybe 50 or 100 students are taken in every week, tortured, kept in prison for two months and then released back to their relatives, so that they can tell the others what happened to them. The western world backed the torture regime in Rhodesia and the Salazar regime. It backed unbelievable things which happened in Vietnam, it is backing a regime in Kampuchea that massacred at least two million people. The western world installed the Shah of Persia who ran a terrifying dictatorship in Iran for 20 years.

The moral issues do not seem to count, and here surely we have a lesson to learn. One of the first tasks we have to do, is to look for some new moral basis. It could be that the Church should reinstall a moral basis for our societies.