UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

International Colloquium on Diversity and Regulation
&
2nd Annual Meeting of the Orbicom Network

Speech by
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Rabat, Morocco
25 - 26 May 2011
Let me start by thanking the Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle du Maroc (HACA) for taking the initiative to host this important colloquium on Diversity and Regulation in Broadcast Media. At the same time, let me sincerely thank the Orbicom leadership for agreeing to co-host the colloquium. For our part as UNESCO, we were pleased when Dr. Naji approached us about supporting this meeting, particularly because it was inspired by a similar meeting of UNESCO/Orbicom Chairholders in Communication and Orbicom associate members held in May 2012 at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris.

The theme of pluralism, diversity and regulation in broadcast media was itself one of the items discussed at the May UNESCO/Orbicom meeting, which the Orbicom Secretariat followed through with several Chairholders and associate members. The fact that this colloquium is taking place is a testament of our resolve to collaborate in research themes that are of particular importance to media development globally. That the HACA – a Moroccan regulatory body – is a co-organizer of this meeting is evidence of how Orbicom and UNESCO would like to engage policymakers and regulators on the important issues that make for a free, independent and pluralistic media system.

High on such a list of important issues must be our resolve to engage with the representation of women in both content and staffing of broadcasting. Gender is one of UNESCO’s two over-arching priorities, alongside that of Africa. There is, unfortunately, no need to give statistics of the media mountain still to be climbed in regard to reaching lofty heights where men and women are equally visible to those looking up at them – and where those who reach the pinnacle are able, together, to see the entire horizon across all 360 degrees. However, it is worth signaling here a recent UNESCO instrument which can be used by regulators, broadcasters, researchers and others, to make the upwards journey a little easier. A climbing mission can only succeed if you can assess the starting point, and then track the progress made over time. In this regard, our “Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media” is
a ready tool for a body like the HACA to make use of in its ongoing monitoring of the state of broadcasting in Morocco, and to inform its regulation of the industry with regard to gender equality.

A second important issue to address in pluralism and diversity in broadcast regulation is respect for cultural diversity. Thus, the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions emphasised the importance of the recognition of equal dignity and respect for all cultures, including that of persons belonging to minorities, and of the freedom to create, produce, disseminate, distribute and have access to traditional cultural expressions.¹

Recognition of such cultural diversity goes hand in hand with efforts to promote intercultural dialogue. In many instances, however, there is a general feeling of invisibility in the media among members of marginally represented cultural communities. Moreover, limited representations give rise to stereotypes. These reinforce what is often called the process of ‘othering’, whereby the media fix, reduce or simplify people’s identities in ways that militate against the open and equitable social dialogue that is needed to build open and sustainable Knowledge Societies.

As stated in the 2001 UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity, we therefore encourage the production, safeguarding and dissemination of diversified contents in the media and global information networks. This includes promoting the role of public radio and television services in the development of audiovisual productions of good quality. The role of community broadcasting, as especially serving local or minority communities, is another important value which we as UNESCO uphold as part of a pluralistic media landscape. Nurturing public and community broadcasting is, in our view, an important consideration for broadcast regulators such as HACA.

To ensure pluralism and diversity in broadcasting, various types of regulation have been practised worldwide. Understood broadly, regulation is a set of

processes by which various actors in society facilitate media development along specific objectives. Increasingly, media regulation institutionalizes multi-stakeholder involvement as a means towards drawing in diverse interests and wisdoms.

Specific regulatory objectives can be developed to promote pluralism in broadcast sectors (public, private and community) as well as in the ownership of enterprises. Further specific regulatory objectives can be applied to promote diversity in content and staffing. This is especially important in matters such as generational inclusion, linguistic equity, fairness in elections, and programming that is for and by marginalized groups.

Needless to say, regulation can take many forms, including (i) government control; (ii) independent regulation; and (iii) self-regulation.²

UNESCO does not believe in government ‘control’ as a form of media regulation, although a government that represents the citizenry has a clear role in setting the broad policy guidelines for the smooth functioning of media, including for the regulation of broadcast licenses. However, it is also important that the allocation and administration of licenses within this framework is done at arms’ length distance, so as to avoid self-interested political influence. This is why broadcast regulators work best for the public interest when they are appointed independently of government, when they involve the legislature and civil society in the selection processes of their governing bodies, and when their finances are secure. In addition to this sphere of regulation, UNESCO also strongly encourages self-regulation, whereby the media industry as well as media practitioners, operate systems of checks and balances that enable them to discharge their functions in a transparent and socially responsible manner. This is usually through institutionalized mechanisms which ensure that their broadcast operations are independent and accountable only to professional standards.

² Ibid.
Broadcast regulation, therefore, in the UNESCO view, should not be outside of the three parameters of media freedom, pluralism and independence. Indeed, the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions reaffirms that it is respect for the right of freedom of thought, expression and information which best enables cultural expressions and exchanges to flourish within societies.

Regulating for broadcast pluralism and diversity also entails that media development actors – such as regulators and media producers, as well as media consumers – all understand and acquire the necessary skills to deal with these objectives. In this regard, the UNESCO 2009 World Report on *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue* recognised that intercultural dialogue is “largely dependent on intercultural competencies, defined as the complex of abilities needed to interact appropriately with those who are different from oneself.”

I raise this issue because UNESCO is doing some work in building these, as well as other competencies. We are working in relation to all media, including new platforms, but there is also special relevance to broadcasting. This work is in the area of media and information literacy (MIL). Earlier this year, we were heartened to see that the Ministry of Education in Morocco agreed to promote our MIL curriculum for teachers in the country’s teacher training colleges. For its part, a broadcast regulator can also do a lot to promote amongst audiences MIL competencies along with tolerance and intercultural competencies.

We are also working to build a range of competencies with 20 journalism schools across Africa, including one here in Morocco, the Institut Supérieur de l'Information et de la Communication (ISIC), which in 2007 were recognized as *potential centres of excellence and reference in journalism education in Africa*. We strongly encourage ties between such journalism

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schools and broadcast regulators such as HACA, in the interests of reinforcing the competencies in each.

These African schools of journalism have been part of UNESCO’s priority for interventions in the area of journalism education, particularly by building on the acclaimed UNESCO *Model Curricula for Journalism Education* publication, to which several Orbicom members contributed.

UNESCO has this year undertaken an internal review of this African Centres initiative. We are pleased to report signs of real progress towards excellence as defined in terms of competencies in the schools as regards three key areas (i) curricula and institutional capacity, (ii) professional and public service, including external links and recognition, and (iii) capacity for strategic planning.4

Now, taking into account the changing global dynamics of journalism education and our own evolving role, UNESCO wishes to take this initiative to a second phase that will be more inclusive and global in nature. It is our hope that an entity like Orbicom might serve as a primary partner for this second phase.

In our vision, Orbicom could leverage its substantial expertise, status and existing networks to pioneer the further development of journalism education. The aim is to renovate the necessary practical, intellectual and other communications competencies at a time of global change in media, as well as intensified changes taking place in migration, scientific development, cultural interaction and much else. Journalism education can and should respond to specialised global challenges that include learning new literacies relating to climate change, media sustainability, data mining, and – yes – intercultural communication. And Orbicom could take co-credit for advancing this agenda on a global scale.

This is the background for why UNESCO is exploring what could be called the “Global Initiative for Excellence in Journalism Education”. While no

institution would use the label “UNESCO potential centre of excellence/reference” under this phase, the notion of “excellence in journalism education” would be reinvigorated by continuing elaboration and collaboration under a dynamic Orbicom leadership. At the core of this could be a component of collegial discussion and sharing of perspectives among all the members, using the technologies available to them and drawing on their comparative advantages.

We are therefore inviting Orbicom to join us in an important shift from Afro-centric to global excellence. The global remit of this initiative should not, however, exclude special focus on the needs of Africa and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). We are sure that Orbicom, as a network of UNESCO chairs and others, will share this solidarity focus with us.

Under this envisaged initiative, ‘networked’ activities will be encouraged by UNESCO, with possible benefits including:

- The possibility of establishing new UNESCO chairs in different (sub-) fields of journalism;
- Access to other schools of journalism in the network;
- Potential IPDC and other forms of funding;
- Participation in national/regional/international conferences (e.g. World Journalism Education Congress [WJEC]);
- Access to UNESCO-commissioned specialised journalism curricula;
- Participation in research and accessing media development data related to the IPDC-endorsed Knowledge-Driven Media Development initiative; etc.

Although Orbicom does not exclusively focus on journalism education, such an initiative could hold a special appeal for the organisation, such as the possibility of establishing more chairs in journalistic practice, including specialised journalism. It could also be used as an important launch-pad for
recruiting more African members into Orbicom, and thus heightening its global relevance and assisting in integrating African communications and media scholarship into the global debate.

What we are putting to Orbicom then is a very concrete collaborative project between the two organisations. As a start, the schools of journalism that took part in UNESCO’s internal review could be requested to join as founding members of this second phase, and in the process registering as associate members of Orbicom. The specific role of Orbicom in this initiative could be clarified consultatively, perhaps in subsequent and indeed ongoing exchanges between UNESCO and the Orbicom Secretariat.

In conclusion then, I hope that this Rabat colloquium marks a milestone in Orbicom’s relations with broadcast regulators and a valuable injection of ideas into the HACA as well. I hope too that this could be the start of a specific focus for Orbicom to become a founding partner with UNESCO in the “Global Initiative for Excellence in Journalism Education”.

I thank you!