

# Information Vs Communication: Where is the Power in the Information Society?

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Latin American communicators reflect on this pressing issue and elect a new Regional Executive Committee

“We cannot disassociate information from communication. Neither can we prioritise one over the other. If communication has to do more with the type of society we want than with pure technological aspects, then we need to ensure that we encourage communicational demands among the people”. This is a complex and huge task – declared the Peruvian communicator and academic, Rosa María Alfaro speaking at the XI Regional Assembly of the Latin American Region of WACC (WACC-LA).

Alfaro was addressing more than 60 communicators participating in the seminar ‘Citizens’ Rights in the Information Society’ which preceded the regional assembly held from 6th to 10th November, 2003 in the Methodist University of Sao Paulo (UMESP), in Sao Bernardo do Campo, Brazil. The President of Calandria, Association of Social Communicators in Peru, added that nowadays communication-education-information are the key inter-related elements which make a ‘pedagogy of communication’ essential if the so called Information Society and the new communication and information technologies are to be something more than a mere reproduction of the social exclusion and inequalities affecting millions of people in Latin America. She went on to say that while the question of how these technologies can be made accessible to all is being discussed at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) no similar attention is paid to the issue of how societies ensure that their citizens can approach the TICS from the perspective of ‘holistic social inclusion’. Last century audiovisual technologies grew in such a way as to ‘overflow’ all forecasted growth creating an ‘over-communicated society’ which was nevertheless unable to generate common interests and dialogues.

From their role as spectators, citizens could look at the world without necessarily belonging to it. Today, despite the existence of a process of social appropriation of new technologies, there is a real danger that these new technologies not only fail to solve issues of exclusion and economic inequality but can actually re-enforce and deepen them.

Other speakers and presenters included Dr Walter Altman, president of the Igreja Evangelica de Confesión Luterana de Brazil and former president of the Latin American Council of Churches, CLAI; Damian Lorette, lecturer at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires

and consultant lawyer to the Association of Journalist for the Defence of Independent Journalism; Victor Van Oyen, researcher from ERBOL (Educación Radiofónica de Bolivia) and ALER (Latin American Association of Radio Education), José Marques de Melo, Director of the UNESCO/UMESP Chair in Communication for Regional Development, and Dr Pradip Thomas, Director of WACC's Global Studies Programme.

During the assembly participants discussed and gave their approval to the basic themes and issues arising from the seminar for drafting a WACC-LA work programme for the coming years, within the framework of the five themes of WACC's Global Studies Programme. Communication rights, the presence and representation of women in the media, reflection on theology, communication and culture are three of the areas on which the Latin American Regional Association of WACC will focus in the focus for the next three years.

Also part of the assembly was the election of a new Regional Executive Committee to lead the regional association for the next four years.

#### **The New WACC LA Executive Committee**



Dennis Smith, a Presbyterian Church missionary who has worked for the last 27 years in Guatemala was elected unopposed as President of the regional association. Smith coordinates the Pastoral and Communication Programme of CEDEPCA (Protestant Centre for Pastoral Studies in Central America) and is the president of the Commission for the Verification of Codes of Conduct (COVERCO) in Guatemala, an independent commission that monitors labour conditions in the apparel and agricultural export industries, notably coffee and bananas.

The other members of the new committee are the Brazilian, Luciano Sathler, co-ordinator of the distance learning programme of the UMSP, elected as vice-president; Alma Montoya, of the Colombian NGO 'ComunicArte' which works with community radio stations in Colombia's conflict zones, elected as secretary; Daniel Favaro, Methodist pastor and director of communication of CREAS, the Regional Ecumenical Centre for Assistance and Services and editor of the Argentinean Methodist Church journal, was elected as treasurer while the journalist and pastor Claudia Florentin, coordinator of Communication and Press of the Waldensian Church of Uruguay, was elected as the fifth member of the committee.

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