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Author: R.E. Butler

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Launching the Year—Partners in progress

World Communications Year (WCY) is just over six months old—180 days during which many well-known prominent and less prominent members of the world communications community have succeeded in putting communications into the focus of world attention.

Our colleagues in Austrian Television had the privilege to be the first to highlight the Year. During the morning hours of 1 January 1983, they broadcasted a New Year's concert performed by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra to some 700 million television viewers all over the world. The commentator announced: "Today opens World Communications Year: Development of Communications Infrastructures". On this occasion, His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan, a communications enthusiast and radio-amateur himself, was in Vienna as the guest of honour of the international community.

A few days later it was the Pacific Telecommunications Council's turn to hold the opening conference (PTC'83) of World Communications Year in Honolulu, Hawaii (United States), with participation of over 400 people from a wide range of disciplines in over 20 countries. At this conference I opened WCY on behalf of the entire UN System and thanked our partners in progress: governments, manufacturers, financiers, educators, economists, lawyers and telecommunication operating entities and users whose vision and tireless dedication ignited the spark of WCY and continue to nurture it.

Later, I was invited to visit parts of the Caribbean-Central American region to join in celebrations and for related "new ventures", at least for the ITU, at the beginning of the World Communica-

tions Year 1983, including the launching of official World Communications Year activities in Cuba, through the opening ceremony of a national Exhibition entitled "1983 World Communications Year", presided over by the Minister of Communications, Mr. Pedro Guelmes González. The Exhibition presented several aspects of development, i.e., international co-operation, production of components and parts, development of Cuba's communications, nationally produced equipment and the development of international communications. The Exhibition also featured a number of interesting publications of a technical character. Of special interest, too, was the excellent collection of stamps of philatelic interest, dating back to the origin of the postage stamp.

In Panama a special agreement was signed between the Panamanian Government, UNDP and the ITU on the special developmental inputs, complemented by a further agreement between the *Instituto de Telecomunicaciones* (INTEL) and the ITU for assistance in improving radiocommunications in the Canal zone. This will be a "turn-key" type project with ITU contributing to the preparation of specifications for equipments, launching of bids, technical evaluations of offers, contractual provisions after choice of supplier by the Panamanian authorities, right through to acceptance testing for the introduction into service of new radio coast stations.

In Costa Rica a new communications building was opened by the President of Costa Rica, His Excellency Mr. Luis Alberto Monge, following the establishment of a Communications Ministry in Costa Rica, in the presence of several Ministers and members of the diplomatic community.

On 7 April 1983, at Keukenhof, Lisse (Netherlands), Mrs. M. E. J. Lubbers, wife of the Prime Minister, named a new variety of tulip—"TELECOM Tulip"—in commemoration of World Communications Year, while on the Sunday preceding World Telecommunication Day, His Holiness John-Paul II distributed a world-wide pastoral message on the importance of communications in our modern world.

Since these initial and diverse opening events, our WCY Secretariat has been overwhelmed and delighted by the tidal wave of World Communications Year activities. To date, we have 61 WCY National Committees fully established and operational. WCY has also inspired a tremendous number of seminars, research, reviews of legislation and policy relating to communications infrastructures development, pilot projects and concrete action programmes, to name only a few. The WCY Secretariat has endorsed over 60 official WCY conferences and projects. A further highlight (of the first half of the Year) has been the celebration of World Telecommunication Day, 17 May 1983, with a link between the Chairman of the Administrative Council and the Secretary-General of the United Nations via teleconference and a special ceremonial Plenary Session of the Administrative Council to mark the occasion.*

WCY has presented all of us with both our greatest challenge, as well as our greatest opportunity, to make a concerned and lasting impact on the social and economic development of peoples all over the world. To date, 65 Heads of State have accepted my invitation to join a Committee of Honour which promotes the objectives of the Year to undertake an in-depth review and analysis of nations' policies on communications infrastructures and to stimulate their advancement.

There can be no doubt now that WCY has succeeded in putting communications into the focus of national and world attentions. It has created tremendous interest beyond all expectations. We now move to the phase of assisting or assuring appropriate applications for national co-ordination for development.

The profound changes brought about in world communications by the application of electronics and computer science to equipment and networks have created a need for developing new, individual, as well as institutional and community learning and specialized training capacities across social, professional, political and cultural levels. Such learning capacities are required for improving social awareness but, above all, for improving the ability to deal with growing complexity and to overcome the fear that the widespread use of electronics will destroy many jobs, and take most of the skill and interest out of those that remain. There is a paramount need to ensure that the world's telecommunication network develops in a harmonious way and that the basic needs of the developing areas of the globe be met.

The anxiety which seems to weigh heavily on everyone's mind is the question of how to keep the momentum we have created at a high level beyond 1983. WCY would be a virtual failure were its actions to end in 1983. In reality, it is a beginning for reflection and renewal to stimulate development.

WCY is concerned with the objective of bringing about long-term progressive improvements in the development of communications infrastructures, and, indeed, the re-thinking of priorities—investment and operational priorities—and the tools at our disposal. The long-term programmes of communications infrastructures development engendered by WCY have implications for implementation and follow-up reaching far into the future.

R. E. BUTLER

* See page 339.