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(ITU) للاتصالات الدولي الاتحاد في والمحفوظات المكتبة قسم أجراه الضوئي بالمسح تصوير نتاج (PDF) الإلكترونية النسخة هذه والمحفوظات المكتبة قسم في المتوفرة الوثائق ضمن أصلية ورقية وثيقة من نقلًا.

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Message of the ITU Secretary-General for World Telecommunication Day

TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

17 May 1995

The theme of this year's World Telecommunications Day calls attention to the important role that telecommunications can play in preserving and enhancing the quality of the human environment – not only the natural environment, but our social and cultural environments as well.

For most of human history, the natural environment was the foundation of economic and social life. From time immemorial, humans hunted and gathered what nature provided. For aeons, we lived in harmony with natural cycles. We then learned to domesticate and cultivate nature's resources. This enabled us to develop social structures that began to reflect human aspirations more than natural exigencies. For the past two hundred years, we have transformed natural resources into manufactured products on a much larger scale than ever before. In the process, we have created an increasingly artificial environment which in many respects stands not only apart from nature, but in opposition to it.

Today, humankind is taking the next step in economic and social evolution – toward a global information economy and society. In the information era which is now beginning, an increasing number of jobs will involve the creation, production or distribution of information products and services. Human and artificial intelligence will be the foundation of wealth. Networks will provide the model for new social structures. And the increasing interplay of distinctive cultural traditions, it is to be hoped, will progressively enrich our understanding, increase our tolerance, and broaden our perspectives.

This transition from an industrial to an information economy is certainly good news to those who are concerned about the natural environment.

In contrast to the industries that dominated the world during the industrial era, the "information industries" are environment-friendly. It has been said that these industries are based on four of the most abundant, least expensive and most widely distributed elements in the world – silicon, the material used to make microelectronic devices; lightwaves and airwaves, the communications media of the future; and human brainpower, the principal source of energy in the information age. From this perspective, the information economy is fundamentally an economy of abundance.

"Information work" is also more friendly to the environment than industrial work. In many developed countries – where more than half the labour force are "information workers" – the use of advanced communication services to communicate with co-workers, whether from the home or around the world, is already an attractive alternative to daily commuting and business travel. In

developing countries, the integration of telecommunications into rural development programmes will make it possible for people to remain in their villages, rather than having to migrate to already-overcrowded cities.

As well as creating new kinds of industries and new kinds of jobs, "information technology" will help make traditional economic activities more environment-friendly. Communications and computers – the technologies at the heart of the information revolution – will save energy and natural resources through more efficient production techniques as well as better monitoring and control of our natural and manmade environments.

If the information revolution will be good for the natural environment, will it also be good for our social and cultural environments? This question is more difficult to answer. For every opportunity created by the information revolution, there is a corresponding threat.

The information industries may lead to information overload. Instead of promoting diversity of expression, they may lead to homogenization of thought. While these industries do not cause pollution in the usual sense, not everyone welcomes the sight of antennas on rooftops, hills and mountains. Visual and information pollution may be issues in the Information Age.

Information work is now the main source of job creation in many economies. However, there is growing concern that information workers may not enjoy the same levels of employment benefits and social security as their industrial predecessors, and that information technology may destroy more jobs than it creates.

From an international perspective, we must ask if it is realistic to speak of a global information economy when the majority of the world's population do not have access to basic telephone service. As we approach the twenty-first century, the growing gap between information haves and have-nots is emerging as a significant global problem.

Today, it is widely recognized that one of the most important challenges facing the international community is to foster the growth of global information networks that facilitate sustainable economic development in harmony with the natural environment, at the same time as they support the progressive realization of the social, cultural and political ideals on which the United Nations system was founded, fifty years ago.

Making a major contribution to the emerging discussion of this global development challenge is a fitting goal for the International Telecommunication Union in this, its one hundred and thirtieth year.


Pekka Tarjanne