

Communication Rights: Communication for All

The Christian tradition affirms that God invests all of humankind with freedom and dignity, and that God stands especially with the oppressed and marginalized, working through history for their liberation. God desires that all people be enabled to learn from and interpret their own reality.

The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) promotes communication for social change. We believe that communication is a basic human right that defines people's common humanity, strengthens cultures, enables participation, and creates community.

WACC's key concerns are media diversity, equal and affordable access to communication and knowledge, media and gender justice, and the relationship between communication and power. It tackles these through advocacy, education, training, and the creation and sharing of knowledge.

WACC has articulated seven guiding principles:

- Communication is a spiritual exercise
- Communication builds and shapes community
- Communication enhances participation
- Communication promotes freedom and demands accountability
- Communication celebrates cultural diversity
- Communication builds connectedness
- Communication affirms justice and challenges injustice.

See more at: <http://waccglobal.org/who-we-are/our-organization/principles#sthash.L9hz9YQk.dpuf>

In light of the above principles, and believing that communication embodies respect for the dignity, integrity, equality, and freedom of all human beings and their communities, WACC recognizes communication rights as inherent in all other human rights.

Communication rights claim spaces and resources in the public sphere for everyone to be able to engage in transparent, informed and democratic debate. They claim unfettered access to the information and knowledge essential to democracy, empowerment, responsible citizenship, and mutual accountability.

They claim political, social and cultural environments that encourage the free exchange of a diversity of creative ideas, knowledge, and cultural products. Finally, communication rights insist on the need to ensure a diversity of cultural identities that together enhance and enrich the common good.

Communication for All affirms the centrality of communication – including mass, community, and social media – in strengthening human dignity and in promoting democratic values and social justice. In particular, the principle of “communication for all” restores voice and visibility to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in a spirit of genuine solidarity.

Communication promotes freedom and demands accountability in many communities, and the incorporation of emerging communication technologies into daily life multiplies voices while creating spaces where those who have been silenced and made invisible may address grievances. Communities use these technologies, together with more traditional media, as powerful tools with which they can demand accountability and celebrate their particular identities. In both rural and urban communities, information and communication technologies are being used to keep in touch with friends and family, creative self-expression, commerce, accessing global culture, networking, and advocacy.

The existence of information and communication technologies, on its own, does nothing to guarantee that the media serve truth and the common good, nor that everyone will be assured access to media platforms. Left to their own devices, media monopolies, allied with politicians, often engage in deception and manipulation to consolidate and preserve their own power. Such actions are an affront to human dignity and undermine personal freedom.

In today’s world, communication must be lifted up as a fundamental human right and communicators called to practice an ethics of freedom and accountability. Freedom of expression must be respected and community groups assured access to technology and to media platforms. Educational curricula must include media literacy programs. This is especially important in times of rapid social and technological change when traditional cultures need to develop constructive strategies for engaging external cultural influences. Together, such principles assure that a diversity of voices and images remain before the public and that the public can develop healthy criteria for discerning how those voices and images may contribute to the common good.

The media’s role in society includes acting as a watchdog of government and enhancing the free flow of information to the public. This function can be undermined not only by government secrecy, which denies the media access to information on matters of public interest, but also by laws which unduly restrict freedom of expression.

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in which freedom of information falls under the right to freedom of expression. Article 19 states: ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without

interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.'

Communication for all!

Let us mobilise once more. We are able to act! It does not take more than one to tell the truth. It has happened before. You and I can change the world. Remember Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Malala! You and I can promote change together. We should dare to stand up for injustice and dare to protest against it. It is our responsibility and our task as human beings. You can contribute with your gifts, and I with mine - together we are strong. Let's do it now!

Communication for Life is the catch phrase!

Marianne Ejdersten, Vice Chair WACC Europe (elect), WCC Director of Communication (elect)

WACC is also responsible for the Centre for Communication Rights portal – a source of documents and materials about all aspects of communication rights. Visit: www.centreforcommunicationrights.org Facts: www.wacc-global.org and More or Less Equal (Philip Lee/Dafne Sabanes Plou, 2014)