

Opening Remarks by Arun Mahizhnan

Chairman, AMIC Board of Directors

(AMIC International Conference in Dubai, 10 July 2015)

Marhaba!

In the first ever AMIC conference in 1971, 44 years ago, the keynote speaker was the legendary Wilbur Schramm, the media scholar every other media scholar would have or should have read. It was a fitting start to a new born media organisation that it should be blessed by such an iconic thought leader. AMIC was born through the collaboration of the Government of Singapore and the Frederic Ebert Stiftung, the German political and educational foundation, and it aspired to be the leading Asian media organisation catering to the needs of media scholars and media practitioners in the region.

Though he could not be physically present due to illness, Professor Schramm's speech was read out at the conference. A sign of the times. And his message for the day was that television was a linear medium and using it as a teaching tool in the class room it posed major difficulties. And the example he gave was you could not pause the TV for a while and discuss a point with the class and then resume watching it. You see, the video reorder was unheard of then and video on demand was unthinkable.

The government guest of honour that day spoke of how mass media should be used as a weapon to combat counter-culture and the counter culture the Singaporean politician was worried about was probably the hippie culture. Today, in Singapore and in many other parts of the world we are also deeply concerned about another kind of counter culture. Except that this time this counter culture is using another mass media platform as a weapon to combat establishment culture. I am, of course, referring to the religious radicalization through the internet.

The media world has not just changed in the last 44 years but has been revolutionized and in its own way radicalized. The grasp of this new media world among media scholars and government leaders is nowhere near the reach of the new media, made possible by the information and communication technologies which seem to have become part of the DNA of the human species. Their reach and power have made it possible to use such terms as e-world and e-Asia without a sense of hyperbolic exaggeration. In this conference we have focused on one part of this new world, the biggest part of this e-world, E-Asia. As you will hear throughout this conference, these new technologies have brought with them great opportunities and also, unfortunately, great challenges. As the theme of this conference indicates, the challenges go to the very heart of our existence – the values we cherish and would like to preserve. Over the

next four days we will hear from and interact with scholars and practitioners from many parts of the world on how to deal with this re-ordered world. While we may not arrive at any final conclusions I hope that we would leave this conference with a better understanding of the issues than when we came in. And I also hope Wilbur Schramm whose spirit I invoked at the beginning would be pleased.

This conference is also particularly significant for two other reasons.

Though the name of AMIC starts with “Asian,” its own reach has been rather limited to Southeast Asia, South Asia and East Asia. We never managed to penetrate another part of Asia which the colonialists called the Middle East but we Asians called West Asia. No history of Asia can be written without referring to the critical role of this region on the rest of Asia. So AMIC is hugely happy to be here, and deeply grateful to

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum
President Lance E de Masi
Provost Jihad S. Nader
Dean Ali M. Jaber
Dr Bradley Freeman
Associate Dean Carol Moufarrej

for making this possible. We really hope this is not a one-off speed date but the beginning of a lasting relationship that, Inshallah, will bring us together again and again, not necessarily within the same region but anywhere in Asia. We need much more involvement from the institutions and scholars from these regions in discussing our common concerns.

The other reason why this conference is so special is that it marks the end of one era and the beginning of another in AMIC’s own history. As I mentioned earlier, AMIC was born in Singapore and for the last 44 years brought up in Singapore itself, in terms of its headquarters and secretariat. Though it had many uncles and aunts as Secretaries General and Board members drawn from all over Asia, home has always been Singapore, and its father always a Singaporean as its Chairman. However, as all grown up children must move out, the time came last year for AMIC to move home from Singapore to the Philippines. We are right in the process of formally registering AMIC in the Philippines but the Secretariat in Manila had started work and this conference is its first event, led by our new Secretary General from the Philippines, Ramon Tuazon. He and his team together with the AUD team had worked almost a miracle in putting together this conference. For that, I would like to thank Ramon and team members Rachel Khan, Martin Hadlow and Ivy Alacantara for a wonderful job. But that is not the end. As Steve Jobs liked to say, one more thing.

If you would allow me to personify AMIC as a daughter, then right now I feel like the father who is going to give away the bride to her new family – not only to her new husband in Ramon Tuazon, but also to her new father in law Dr Crispin Maslog. Dr Maslog is currently the

Chairman of the Board of Management in AMIC Manila but is slated to be elected as Chair of AMIC to succeed me, tomorrow after our Annual General Meeting.

And that's not it. One more thing. As luck would have it, Crispin Maslog was there at the birth of AMIC and attended the conference I first mentioned just now. What a wonderful coincidence that he is here, 44 years later, and about to celebrate his 44th anniversary of his 40th birthday, to take over and look after the very organisation whose birth he witnessed. Ladies and gentlemen, may I ask that you give a special round of applause to the everlasting and ever-young Crispin Maslog.

In closing, I want to thank each and every one of you for being here, and I wish you a most fruitful conference!