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Prime Minister
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DEVELOPING DISTANCE EDUCATION - THE BROADY LECTURE AT THE 14TH
WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISTANCE EDUCATION, OSLO, 12 AUGUST 1988.

Ladies and Gentlemen participants at the Fourteenth World
Conference on distance education.

In the next century the world's population will reach 10 billion.
The challenge of providing education to such a doubled population
is a formidable task. In many countries the present educational
system can hardly keep up with population growth. Even primary
education is not a right enjoyed by everybody in today's world.

At the same time, but in other parts of the world, information is
being sent around the globe literally at the speed of light. We
possess an abundance of knowledge on the one hand, but this
knowledge is often concentrated in particular countries or
institutions.

We are witnessing a revolution of technical possibilities in the
information sector. The challenge in the future will be to
combine resources, knowledge and information techniques, in order
to reach as many people as possible. Flexible approaches are
needed to suit local or regional conditions.

Whereas the possession of wealth has been seen as an indicator of
influence in many societies, access to information may very well
become one such indicator in the future.

We face enormous challenges, not only in providing access to information and education for everybody, not least in the developing countries in order to close the bridge between the North and the South, but also to meet the requirements for adaptation, further education, up-grading courses and learning in the most comprehensive sense, in a world in which the changes are characterized by their magnitude and speed.

It is quite clear that these requirements and challenges cannot be met unless a variety of educational methods are applied. Distance education will become even more important in the next fifty years than it has been in the first fifty years of the ICDE's existence.

I welcome this opportunity to speak on the development of distance education as seen from a political perspective. This lecture is in memory of Knute O. Broady, one of the prominent figures in the early days of distance education in North America. He was one of the founders of the International Council for Correspondence Education, which is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary as the International Council for Distance Education during this conference.

Knute O Broady was of Scandinavian origin, which makes it an even greater pleasure to be able to pay him this tribute. And if I may digress for a moment, it seems that Scandinavians have been pioneers of communication in North America in more than one sense. I have in mind the Norwegian Snowshoe Thompson, who single-handedly maintained postal services over the Rocky Mountains on skis for a number of years in the previous century.

The Norwegian experience is illustrative. With only 4 million people scattered over a relatively wide area, intersected by fjords and mountains, we have had to overcome a number of obstacles to communication. Given our scarce resources, it has been a major political challenge to develop a modern welfare society through joint efforts by the entire community. Everybody has had to take part in these efforts, which called for fundamental values such as a spirit of community, solidarity and

a sense of participation and shared responsibility. These are values that have enjoyed broad support, particularly in the decades of reconstruction following the Second World War.

You will find the imprint of these values if you examine the educational system of Norway.

- We have attached great importance to ensuring that all our local communities as far as possible offer equal educational opportunities.

- We have given priority to the maintenance of a high-quality, decentralized system of primary and secondary education as part of a policy to strengthen and develop local communities.

- We have today a fairly decentralized system of institutions of higher education run by the state in which our concern for local and regional development is an implicit and important factor.

Another distinctive feature of our society is the emergence of a wide variety of voluntary organizations. Whereas Norway has 4 million people, we have 12 million members of voluntary organizations. These organizations are a vital force in the development of our democracy and they provide channels for participation and influence in the workings of society.

The saying that "knowledge is power" is attributed to Francis Bacon 400 years ago, but the observation as such must be much older. NGO activities in this country affirm its validity. Many of the NGOs and broad-based popular movements have been dedicated to educational activities aimed at their members as well as the general public. Their contribution to our modern democratic system has to do not only with their participation in the political sphere as such, but also with what they have achieved in term of educating individuals. The labour movement has played a significant role in this context.

Distance education began in Norway in 1914 with the establishment of our first correspondence school. Since then its importance has

increased substantially. In recent years, annual enrolment has been 150 - 200 000 students, which places Norway among the leading nations as regards the proportion of the population taking advantage of distance education opportunities.

The main role of distance education is to give people access to educational opportunities, regardless of where they live or what their life situation may be. It has become possible to work towards a diploma or to pursue more informal courses and thereby to be able to overcome geographical, social and practical obstacles, and we have moved further towards the realization of the aim of equality of opportunity.

Thus, distance education has become an important part of our educational system, and distance education is today a field of cooperation between correspondence schools, NGOs, trade unions, educational authorities and other public institutions, including the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation.

As far as we know, the Correspondence Schools Act of 1948 was the first of its kind in the world. It established an accreditation system according to which all correspondence courses are approved by the Ministry of Education before they are offered to the public. I am pleased that there seems to be general agreement that the Act has never been used to control the ideological content of courses, but only to ensure adequate quality and educational standards. In 1961, regulations were expanded to include a grant scheme for student pursuing certain courses, and in 1975, this was replaced by a general grant scheme for correspondence students.

Since 1984, the Government has also allocated funds for research and development in distance education institutions. The primary aim has been to assist the institutions in developing expertise in the use of new media and technologies to provide a basis for further development of competence and methods of distance education.

Another means of supporting distance education has been by broadcasting a wide range of educational programmes, usually in cooperation with correspondence schools, publishing companies and various adult education organizations. The State Institution for Distance Education, a small institution offering programmes to special target groups, was set up in 1977.

As you will see from this overview of our experience, distance education has contributed towards the fulfilment of important political objectives in this country. It gives a broad cross-section of the population access to the education or training they need without having to move or give up their job in order to take part in educational activities.

In addition to the utilitarian aspects, we must not forget that learning is a pleasure, that it is something to be enjoyed for its own sake, and that Aristotle was right when he said 2000 years ago that "learning is a natural pleasure which is not confined to philosophers, but is common to all".

Why will distance education be even more necessary in the future? Ten or twenty years ago, it was still possible to believe that distance education would become redundant, and that all our educational needs would be taken care of by traditional means in a steadily growing and developing system of conventional education. This was obviously not true. Those holding this belief were mistaken, but not just because there will always be gaps in any educational system. Distance education has a number of inherent qualities which make it more appropriate than ever in a modern, rapidly changing society.

In modern society, it is no longer sufficient that all citizens get a sound, basic education before taking up an occupation. In the course of a normal working career, the individual will need to update and renew his or her knowledge and skills several times. Frequent updating and retraining is already necessary in just about any occupation you can think of. The rate at which acquired knowledge becomes obsolete is steadily increasing.

Everyone must begin to take into account new processes and new technology and incorporate these into their daily lives. Life-long learning is not only a slogan, it is a necessity.

If society is to develop and prosper as we approach the next millenium, it will be necessary to devise a policy of knowledge. The value of specific, advanced and updated knowledge will increase with the growing sophistication of society and the increasing complexity of national and international relations. The ability of organizations and nations to acquire and develop such knowledge will become a decisive factor determining the level of competitiveness and the potential for economic and social development.

The level of specific advanced knowledge is not the only important consideration. In a democratic society it is equally important to establish a sufficiently evenly distribution of knowledge. A technocratic society dominated by experts is not acceptable and could prove dangerous in the long run. Only a society of well-informed, mature and free citizens can form a basis for true democratic development.

How, then, can we meet this challenge? Clearly, our educational systems will have to develop more flexibility and achieve a greater level of adaptability than they have demonstrated in the past. They will also have to take the pressing needs of continuing education more seriously and devise new means of organizing such education in close contact with business and industry and public services. At the same time, we all recognize the need for cost-effectiveness in the educational system in general.

Distance education is an important element in the development of the educational opportunities and mechanisms needed to cope with the demands of modern society. Its inherent qualities include some of those I have just mentioned: flexibility, adaptability, cost-effectiveness and open access. Distance education has already demonstrated its qualities, not only in Norway, but also

in a large number of countries with a variety of conditions and institutional patterns.

Any government will try to achieve as much as possible with the resources available. Therefore, it is necessary to consider how best to use existing institutions before establishing new ones. As I mentioned earlier, we have a number of institutions in Norway possessing considerable experience and competence in distance education. We also have a valuable tradition of cooperation between such institutions and public authorities and institutions. This tradition provides a firm basis for the future development of distance education in Norway. It will not be necessary to start all over again.

As in other areas, an international perspective is essential in distance education. When correspondence education was introduced in Norway, it was based on thorough studies of the practices followed in other countries. Throughout the history of distance education in Norway, there have been strong links between institutions in this country and those in other parts of the world. And I believe that, just as we have learned from other nations, they have derived impetus and inspiration from Norwegian institutions and policies.

The demands to be met by distance education may vary a great deal from country to country and region to region. This morning I have chosen to look at the role of distance education in a small, developed country. During this conference, many of you will be speaking on behalf of other societies with needs of a different kind or magnitude. Some of you will stress even more than I have done the shortcomings of conventional systems of education, the need for mass distribution of knowledge by appropriate technology, and the scarcity of human and financial resources.

These are fundamental issues for all of us, and we must confront them together as members of a single world population. Traditional methods are no longer sufficient in a world in which there is an urgent need for social and economic development. It is promising to see that many developing countries are now taking

definite steps towards a systematic and creative use of distance education methods, both in informal and in formal education. We know that improving the knowledge and skills of ordinary people and key personnel is a prerequisite for their participation in broader development programmes. Therefore, we need to listen to and learn from the experience many of you have gained in using distance education in the service of national development. We need to join forces in our common struggle for a better future.

In the last couple of years, many observers have started talking about a new, global economy which in many ways differs from the international economic system we have had since the Second World War. Japan and the newly industrialized countries in South Asia have become more and more important for international trade, finance and economic growth. Production, finance and marketing are becoming increasingly global. Environmental problems are also rapidly becoming global, as we have seen this summer through the discussions on the ozone layer, the greenhouse effect and the increasing pollution of the world oceans.

In all these issues, the question of promoting better access to knowledge will be an important factor. The international economy is increasingly based on knowledge, innovation and skill. The level of education of a country is rapidly becoming as important for the prosperity of a country as natural resources. To redress the environmental imbalances created by industrial production patterns, poverty and demographic factors, we need more knowledge on how the different ecological systems interact, and we need more public awareness of the need and cost for urgent action.

It is regrettable that the main international organization responsible for educational and scientific cooperation, UNESCO, has been weakened in an era which demands more, not less such cooperation. We trust that UNESCO has passed its low-water mark, and that all efforts can now be consolidated to strengthen the organization. The 24th General Conference of UNESCO in Paris last autumn laid a solid base for new progress. Norway will continue to encourage and support all efforts which can revitalize UNESCO

and international cooperation in the field of education, communication and science. In this connection, let me mention that Norway has been a main supporter of and contributor to the International Programme for Development of Communication. Although the full potentialities of this programme have not been realized because of lack of funds, we still feel that this is an important international effort to promote a better and more balanced flow of information on the issues facing us all.

The revolution in information and communication technology illustrates more clearly than anything else that the world is one. I am convinced that distance education will soon experience another revolution related to the technological one in that it will, in the future, literally speaking transcend national borders.

The old Japanese proverb "There are no national frontiers to learning" will have a renewed meaning. Students will no longer be restricted by educational opportunities within their own country, but will be able to take part in a truly international network of learning opportunities without having to leave their home country for many years.

This will mean that the political authorities will have to consider new kinds of questions and establish knowledge as a common resource for all nations to share. Of course, there will be language barriers and cultural and other problems. But we should welcome these new opportunities for greater international communication and mobility, not only for students but for institutions and for knowledge itself. This is an area in which distance education institutions can lead the way in making our educational systems and our communities in general more integrated and more international in their orientation. From a political point of view, such a development is sorely needed, provided that it does not become a one-way street, but is combined with the development of national competence and leads to the exchange of knowledge and experience in an international community in which there is mutual collaboration.

We appreciate the work that has been done by the International Council for Distance Education since its founding fifty years ago. We are pleased to note that a permanent international secretariat has been established to take care of the growing demand for international activities and programmes. Given the great amount of experience of its member institutions and the vast need for flexible and cost-effective educational activities in all parts of the world, there is no doubt that this organization is facing important challenges.

The Norwegian Government considers the fact that the ICDE chose Norway as the location of its permanent international secretariat to be a sign of confidence in our tradition of distance education and in our country in general. I assure you that we appreciate this confidence, and that we are pleased to host and support this international centre for distance education. We also recognize the importance of the work done in Norway and abroad by the Norwegian Association of Distance Education, which must be one of the reasons behind the international distance education community's decision to make Norway its permanent home. We hope that the secretariat will be able to make an important contribution to the development of international cooperation in this vital and expanding area.

The Norwegian participants in this fourteenth World Conference on Distance Education, and the Norwegian Government as co-organizer and host, will follow the conference with great interest. The experience of the international community will be invaluable in developing our own institutions and systems. One of the major objectives of the ICDE secretariat will be to translate some of the inspiration gained at international events such as this conference into permanent means whereby countries can exchange experience and ideas, thus strengthening international cooperation and collaboration.

In the final analysis what we are dealing with is a more just and more secure world. A world free of poverty in which coming generations can develop their human resources and choose their

own paths of social and economic progress. Today that vision is not yet a reality. But we must never let that vision disappear.

I would like to end by quoting the Norwegian Writer Gunnar Heiberg from a play about women's liberation around the turn of the century. I think it still fits well today applied to our concern for the promotion of knowledge and education on the global level, to the billions of people in developing countries who are less fortunate than we are:

"If you have laid your ear to the ground, even if only once, and if you have heard the sound of millions marching and the cracking of their flags in the wind. First come the visionary elite, then the endless row of deprived and poor people.

"Justice!" is the song of this marching army - and they get - they take justice. If you can hear such a song when you listen, then you will remain on your outpost and freeze, and let the others laugh I have heard such a song".