DIGITALIZATION, CULTURE AND THE NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL EQUALITY

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The concept of “Electronic Government” was not foreseen at the beginning of the seventies. Today this idea beckons to us, with the initiative of important institutions in the People’s Republic of China and of the United Nations.

It was precisely at the beginning of the decade of the seventies when this great nation joined the United Nations and, since then, its intense activity in favour of development and international cooperation has enriched the perspectives of many countries, particularly those least developed.

The issue to be addressed in this conference is one of extraordinary relevance, not only in the Asia-Pacific area, but around the world and, particularly, for the South-South integration.

In the background information for this Third High Level Forum on City Informatization in the Asia-Pacific Region (CIAPR) we find that during the next decade almost 40% of the four billion human beings that inhabit Asia will live in 33
decade almost 40% of the four billion human beings that inhabit Asia, will live in 33 cities with more than five million inhabitants each. During this time, the Asian continent will achieve such an economic vitality, that approximately half of the World’s Gross Product will be generated in that area.

That is why we hold this event in the highest regard and we come with utmost enthusiasm. We thank those responsible for the organization of this forum for providing us with an opportunity to express a few ideas about the technology of digitalization and mass communication that is currently leading us to a more integrated world system --global, as it is now refered to--- and a NEW WORLD CIVILIZATION IN WHICH IT IS NECESSARY TO PRESERVE NATIONAL IDENTITIES, WHERE UNIVERSAL VALUES ARE IN HARMONY WITH OUR OWN INDIGENOUS CULTURE.

Technology has thrown the human race into an ascending spiral that began in the caverns and thrusts it now into outer space. It has, as well, allowed it to explore the internal universe and trace the map of the human genoma. However, BILLIONS OF INDIVIDUALS STRUGGLE STILL WITH FAMINE, SICKNESS, IGNORANCE, POVERTY AND VIOLENCE.

Today, in several countries there is a growing concern regarding the fact that the increasing process of underdevelopment is the foreshadow of a reduction in life expectancy in those countries classified as “developing”, which they are indeed: they are developing an increasing underdevelopment. By the same token, in some of the most advanced nations there are enclosures where flagrant violations of the fundamental human rights are occurring constantly, that is, millions of people being forced to live in penurious conditions beneath the line of poverty.
Historical constants are guiding threads that preserve the very essence of the human being and allow the right to posterity of the people.

Surely, in the quest for a New Order in Information and Communication, it has been planned to provide with an adequate treatment of technology the massive flows of information transmitted by e mail and to make it more accessible and feasible to the neediest countries.

We may consider “digitalization” like a kind of nervous system of the planet. As such, it is the postmodern sign of world connection and development which permutes space for time at the speed of light. With its content it wreacks havoc, not only in our senses, but in the exercise of the mind within the complex technological environment and forces us to new ethical and political questions with a deep humanitarian meaning.

Such a nervous system must obey a healthy brain, with aspirations “not only for a political regime or a judicial structure, but with a life system based on the constant improvement of the economy, society and culture of the people”.

The new cultural paradigm of ciberspace is leading us now to the renewed inception of the human activity under the auspicious sign of science and technology and, even more, to imagine a postorganic anthropology as a result of virtual reality generated like a different universe, parallel, connected to computers, servers and meganets with contents that encompass educational processes, government processing, public opinion, knowledge trafficking, business, trivia, delinquency, sonic images, phonetic alphabetization, semantic manipulation, semiotics and all kinds of presences, never before seen or even imagined.
before seen or even imagined.

In this context, the digitalized electronic government must not fail to consider its positive effects as well as its dangers concerning the social structure. Therefore, it is of the utmost urgency that the control and handling of information is viewed as a philosophical and political issue, so that virtuality will not deviate us from actual reality, the one consisting of physical, biological and historical aspects. Hence, an accurate strategy and public policy on this matter must address the need for an updated legislation, not only on the national, but on the international level.

In this sense, to reduce the digital gap and universalize the access to the internet, it is mandatory that we reach an international agreement of cooperation and supply of knowledge and financing among those countries that enjoy these advances and those that lack this opportunity.

Thus we can avert the danger of integrating the cusp and desintegrating the base.

Specifically, electronic government must bring constituents and government closer, it must explain, transparent and facilitate government actions and processes. But above all, it must provide it with quality information. Thus, the citizens may contribute by expressing their needs, ideas and proposals which may feedback the system. Therefore there shall be no manipulation of consciences which may attempt to distract the real purposes from the authentic development at large.

The construction of an electronic government system to cater to business must be oriented to the creation of a well distributed wealth --well distributed from its genesis-- and to foster well payed employment by means of training the workers, managers
and directors, with an awareness of a relative full employment of all productive resources, as well as the organization of economic concurrence of the factors of production in equitable contract terms, so that the market may truly become stronger. How can it be possible to promote a real market economy when 3 thousand five hundred million human beings earn less than two dollars a day? How is it possible to promote a real market economy when the virtual economy of financial speculation is growing exponentially? With so many technological advances we could easily establish and operate a dignified global salary.

As pertaining the public-private association for the construction of e-government, we consider it to be quite convenient. However, the national State must be in charge of the normativity and direction, which of course implies serious legislation studies to be undertaken.

One of the most sensitive points for electronic government is, undoubtedly, the spaces for information reserve which one must deal with. Not only in the world of business, but also for the official responsibilities, as well as technical aspects in maintenance and handling of data bases. This problem requires that government functioning must have not only high capabilities in the sovereign handling of information technologies, but also an elevated patriotic conscience and social sensibility that allows the efficient and proficient utilization of businesses, within the development of the respective economies.

We must resolve the apparent contradiction between the encryption of information in reserved spaces and that of public access. We must not forget that in the activities of the government, even when they must be transparent, officials have the responsibility
to safeguard strategic interest for public, private and social enterprises, which is an obligation pertaining to domestic security and national economy.

All things considered, the best use that can be given to the instrument of electronic government lies in the scientific education for development, both in the general and the particular, for the adequate technical use of this tool. It cannot be left only to the government officials or business directors of private or public enterprises. Much less so to the leaders of a country or to the trained population who, nonetheless lack a scientific and practical formal education in front of ciberspace.

It is necessary that the information generated by the macronet has secret uses, for which there must also be an adequate education. This will aid in the exercise of freedom in ciberspace, for leisure time spent in front of a computer without a higher purpose bodes cultural dispersion for the population and allows involvement in degenerative processes.

It cannot be tolerated that a system of this nature simply overwhelms the attention of the citizens. Quite to the contrary, it is mandatory that such information increase the mind of the users. Otherwise, the connecting processes will not aid in the permanent improvement of the population.

Population dispersed in a territory with limited capabilities in the economy to develop; with restrictions due to their work obligations, may achieve access to an important improvement in their formal and technical education, with programs such as the “virtual school or university”. It is important to implement continuous training systems, not only to update those who have graduated, but to keep them current in their chosen field of study.
Some of the investment deficits in public health within a nation may be resolved by the use of e-government, particularly when there are geographical obstacles, difficult access to communities, social and economic restrictions. An infrastructure of information systems, applied, for instance, to promote health, connected to hospitals, national and international research centers, multiplies the capabilities of solution, using virtual medicine and administrative systems in an orderly and organized manner.

The use of cibertechnologies for peace and the incorporation of wider groups of population into development, will become, in the end, the most elevated conquest of the leaders who have the responsibility to lead the world into the most advanced stages of civilization, generated from the cities.

Thank you all for your kind attention to this few thoughts you have so generously allowed me to express here.