

## **The New World Information and Communication Order: Testimony of an Actor**

by Kaarle Nordenstreng, University of Tampere, Finland

([http://www.uta.fi/jour/english/contact/nordenstreng\\_eng.htm](http://www.uta.fi/jour/english/contact/nordenstreng_eng.htm))

Presentation in Round Table at Colloque international / International Colloquium

“30 ans de géopolitique de la communication: acteurs et flux, structures et fractures”

“30 years of communication geopolitics: actors and flows, structures and divides”

Paris, 19 November 2010 (<http://www.nwico-wsis.net/>)



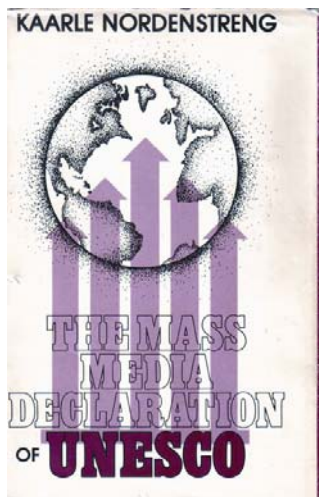
This photo shows me greeting President Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia at a reception he gave in his palace at Carthage for the participants of the Non-Aligned Symposium on Information in March 1976. Next to the President is Mustapha Masmoudi, Minister of Information – the effective host of the Symposium. Among participants I recall also Robert Savio, the Director-General of IPS.

I was there as a 35-year-old academic representing Finland, which had the status of an invited guest at the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). My Ministry for Foreign Affairs had mandated me to attend – as an observer making no presentation.<sup>1</sup> And there was indeed a lot to be observed as it was there that the phrase and concept of NWICO was born, in the form of “a new international order in information” as laid down in the Symposium proceedings. The idea had certainly been in the air from the beginning of the 1970s, both among NAM politicians and progressive media professionals and academics around the world – especially in Latin America but also in Scandinavia. However, it was the Tunis Symposium in March 1976 that finally provided the platform for its articulation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Actually I had already given substantive input to the Symposium by sending to the organizers in advance research materials, notably the UNESCO report *Television Traffic – A One-Way Street?* (Nordenstreng and Varis 1974). This report contains empirical results of a worldwide study on TV programme flows as well as the proceedings of a symposium held on the basis of that study in Tampere in May 1973, including a speech by President Urho Kekkonen of Finland where he questions the conventional Western free flow doctrine and refers to the prevailing situation in the international arena as “communication imperialism” (Ibid., 44).

In the history of ideas – and the real world developments out of which the ideas emerge – this was a period which can be called “decolonization offensive”. It was followed by other historical stages which I have named “Western counterattack” (1976-78), “Truce” (1978-80), “Corporate offensive” (1981-90) and “Globalization” (1991-) These stages were documented and discussed in my keynote presentation at another colloquium in Grenoble earlier this year.<sup>2</sup> However, that paper does not cover in detail the decolonization offensive during the first part of the 1970s – the birthplace of NWICO – which is why I reproduce below the relevant passage from a full account included in these books (Nordenstreng 1984a, 8-11; Nordenstreng et al. 1986, 14-16):



By the early 1970s, the developing countries had accumulated a great deal of political power and economic potential, with the assistance of such organizations as the Movement of Non-Aligned countries and OPEC. All this created a new relation of forces in the world arena, already under pressure from the socialist part of the world, leading to such manifestations as the oil crisis and the UN declaration on the New International Economic Order — all of which worked against the vested interests of the Western world order. Another corollary to this offensive of the “underdog” against the West was a polarization of the Arab-Israeli conflict, reflected, not only in a war between the parties, but also in the UN resolution by which the majority of the international community defined Zionism as a form of racism.

In this situation, it appeared that a new chapter in world history was in the making, and it was not by chance that the phrase “new order” became popular. After all, it implies a radical analysis of the world; the concept of “order” points at a global structure not far from Lenin’s theory of imperialism. Beyond this, it suggests a radical programme to change the world; the notion of “new” may well be interpreted as a call for war against the “old order”. Consequently, the basic pattern was that the West was on the defensive and the developing countries, supported by the socialist countries, were on the offensive.

As a political programme and an intellectual concept, decolonization was well established by the early seventies. But before 1973, the idea of decolonization was not applied in an articulated and authoritative manner to the sphere of information and culture. This occurred at the *Fourth Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Countries in Algiers* (Algeria), attended by 75 members of the Non-

<sup>2</sup> Online at [http://www.uta.fi/jour/english/contact/nordenstreng\\_eng/publications/Grenoble.pdf](http://www.uta.fi/jour/english/contact/nordenstreng_eng/publications/Grenoble.pdf)

Aligned Movement. The political declaration of the Conference made the point that “the activities of imperialism are not confined solely to the political and economic fields, but also cover cultural and social fields”, and demanded “concerted action in the fields of mass communication” as a part of the Action Programme for Economic Cooperation.

The initiative launched in Algiers was carried forward in 1975 at the *Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries in Lima* (Peru), where the attending 81 Foreign Ministers adopted a special resolution on “Cooperation in the Field of Diffusion of Information and Mass Communications Media”. In the same year, a *Pool of Press Agencies of the Non-Aligned Countries* started its operation under the coordination of the Yugoslavian news agency Tanjug.

The real breakthrough of the ideas of “information decolonization” took place in 1976. In March, the *Non-Aligned Symposium of Information in Tunis* (Tunisia), attended by 38 Member States and 13 observers, laid down a political framework for the “emancipation” of the developing countries from the “structures of imperialist power”. The phrase “new international order” was first applied to information there; to be precise, in the report of Committee I. The rapporteur of this Committee, German Carnero Roque from Peru, expressed the spirit of the time in this classic paragraph:

Since information in the world shows a disequilibrium favouring some and ignoring others, it is the duty of the non-aligned countries and the other developing countries to change this situation and obtain the decolonization of information and initiate a new international order in information.

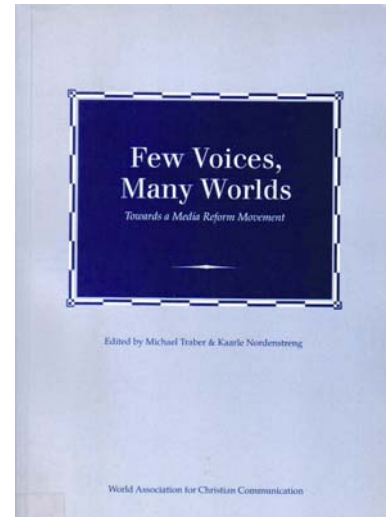
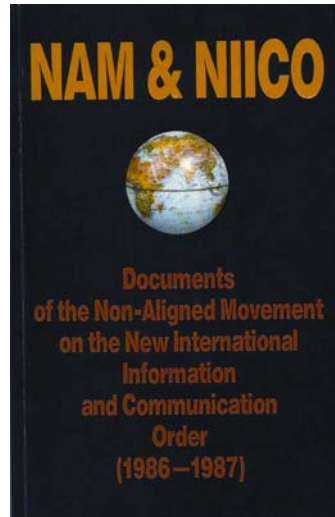
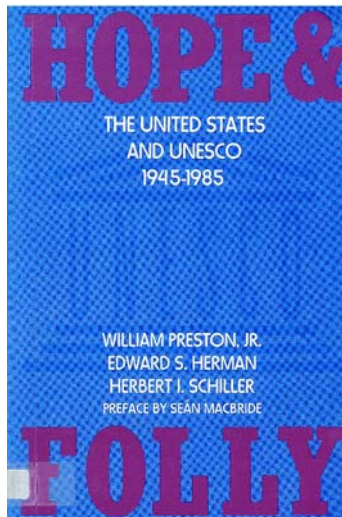
In July 1976, the *Ministerial Conference of Non-Aligned Countries on Decolonization of Information met in New Delhi* (India). The ministers from 59 Non-Aligned countries prepared the Constitution for the Pool and issued a landmark statement, the New Delhi Declaration.

This document not only advocated political pressure against the “imperialist forces” dominating the “free world” information structures and flows but also implied a fundamental philosophical challenge. The New Delhi Declaration rejected the traditional “libertarian theory of the press” in at least three different respects. First, it implied that laissez-faire will lead to monopolization and create neocolonial dependence. Second, it noted how insufficient it is merely to guarantee abstractly the right to freedom of information without ensuring the material means to put that right into practice. Third, the information being moved through the media was given explicit content qualifications: it should be objective and accurate.

This declaration was endorsed by the highest authority of the Non-Aligned Movement, the *Fifth Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Countries, which met in Colombo* (Sri Lanka) in August 1976, with the participation of 87 members of the Non-Aligned Movement. The Colombo summit legitimized the demands for a new order by these classic words: “A new international order in the fields of information and mass communication is as vital as a new international economic order.”

The rest of history beyond the millennium shift until WSIS in 2003-05 and the latest NAM summits in 2006-09 is covered by the Grenoble colloquium paper. Let me just emphasize what is written there (pp. 18 and 20) about the U.S. departure from UNESCO in 1984: the main reason was not NWICO, the MacBride Report or UNESCO’s Director-General M’Bow, but a strategic reorientation of U.S. foreign policy while the balance of global forces changed with a relative

weakening of the USSR and the NAM.<sup>3</sup> Let me also point out that there was a significant movement of non-governmental organizations in the 1980s in support of NWICO, although their voice was hardly heard above the campaigns of the World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC) and other well-financed Western lobbies. Yet, important footnotes in history were left by the Consultative Club of international and regional organizations of journalists (see the Grenoble paper pp. 5 and 17) as well as the MacBride Round Table on Communication (p. 19).



Reminders of the broad-based but hardly visible pro-NWICO movement are books such as those shown here: a study on the history of U.S. -UNESCO relations and the media coverage of the U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO (Preston et al. 1989)<sup>4</sup>; a documentation of the 1986-87 NAM proceedings on NWICO (*NAM & NIICO* 1988)<sup>5</sup>; and a collection of essays on the media reform movement sponsored by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), which with its journal *Media Development* was an outspoken supporter of NWICO throughout the process, leading it to criticize UNESCO for abandoning the movement (Traber and Nordenstreng 1992).

<sup>3</sup> I have a testimony of this from the former President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, who told in private discussion about the unprecedented and blunt approach of the Reagan administration towards the NAM countries in the North-South meeting in Cancun in 1981.

<sup>4</sup> The preface to this book was written by Sean MacBride in 1987, but he died before it was published in 1989. The delay in its publication was caused by obstacles thrown in its way by UNESCO, which found its critical approach compromising to the new Director-General Federico Mayor.

<sup>5</sup> This publication contained documents during Zimbabwe's presidency of NAM, including the Harare summit of 1986. It was dedicated to two prominent figures in the history of the new order movement who had recently passed away: Sean MacBride and D.R. Mankekar. The title of this booklet – like the Sourcebook (Nordenstreng et al. 1986) – used the term New *International* Information and Communication Order and the acronym NIICO, instead of NWICO based on the word *World*. This corresponds to the terminology used by NAM, which considered NWICO to be somewhat diluted from the original NIIO with its one-to-one correspondence to NIEO, the New International Economic Order (see Nordenstreng 1984b, 34-35).



This photo shows me with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India in her office at the Indian Parliament in New Delhi in October 1983 (a year before she was assassinated). Behind us is her Press Secretary Sharada Prasad whom I had got to know earlier as director of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication. I am here no longer as a Finnish academic but rather as a global political actor – President of the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ), the world’s largest body of media professionals mainly from the socialist East and the developing South. I had just addressed the NAMEDIA conference in Delhi – next to Prime Minister Gandhi, Director-General M’Bow and Ambassador Masmoudi.

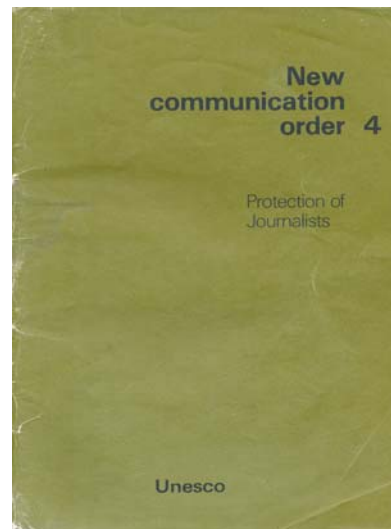
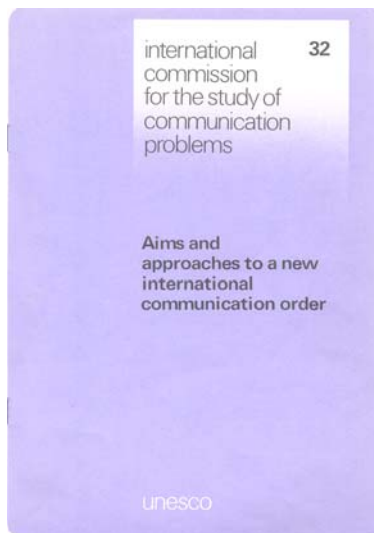
India was at that time President of NAM and Mrs. Gandhi as its chairperson was quite concerned about the imminent danger of a U.S. military intervention in Nicaragua of the Sandinistas. The world situation and the U.S. role had clearly radicalized the leader of a middle-of-the-road NAM country. These were indeed times of political polarization.

But these were also times of serious studies on media and journalism in international spheres – not least the ethics and responsibility of journalists in the international community. UNESCO was an important initiator of academic and professional work in this area, both through its regular secretariat and through the MacBride Commission, which issued nearly one hundred papers as background references to its work.<sup>6</sup> Questions of the freedom and responsibility of journalists as well as the safety of journalists were dealt with in both agendas.

---

<sup>6</sup> Half a dozen of these background documents dealt explicitly with NWICO, with authors such as Mustapha Masmoudi, Cees Hamelink, Breda Pavlic and Bodgan Osolnik, whose document is shown here as an example. The Commission’s background reports (both in English and French) are available online like this <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0003/000340/034012eb.pdf>





An example of regular UNESCO activity in those years is a consultation with relevant organizations on the “improvement of professional standards and status and protection of journalists” in December 1979.<sup>7</sup> This meeting led among others to a publication documenting various initiatives from the 1950s until 1980 to establish practical means for protecting journalists on hazardous missions, and it also reproduced comprehensive viewpoints on the topic commissioned from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the IOJ – the latter prepared by me in collaboration with consultants from IOJ and the International Association of Democratic Lawyers.<sup>8</sup>

Actually I am amazed how much academic and professional work was accomplished in the 1970s and 80s within the NWICO framework – more than was accomplished later within the WSIS framework. Much of this has been forgotten, although the bulk of it has lost none of its relevance in recent decades. Surely the world has changed, with the Internet as a completely new continent in the global information landscape, but we should not fall into the ahistorical trap of only counting on developments after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Moreover, media scholars – including myself – should look in the mirror and ask if we have done enough to promote research on international communication among the younger generation. In this respect the current colloquium and its host project is a very welcome initiative and model for others to follow.

---

<sup>7</sup> The consultation, which I attended as representative of the IOJ, was based on the Mass Media Declaration and a resolution also adopted in the 1978 General Conference inviting “to pay particular attention to the need for the effective protection of journalists and information specialists, so that they can perform their duties in the best possible conditions of accuracy and objectivity”. After this meeting the WPFC and other Western proprietor-based lobbies launched a campaign against the UNESCO-led project to promote the protection of journalists.

<sup>8</sup> The 142-page long publication was issued in the UNESCO series New Communication Order published in the 1980s – online at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0004/000421/042108eb.pdf>

## References

- NAM & NIICO. *Documents of the Non-Aligned Movement of the New International Information and Communication Order (1986-87)* (1988). Prague: International Organization of Journalists.
- Nordenstreng, K. (1984a) *The Mass Media Declaration of UNESCO*. Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Nordenstreng, K. (1984b) 'Defining the New International Information Order' in Gerbner, G. and Siefert, M. (eds), *World Communications: A Handbook*. New York: Longman, pp. 28-36.
- Nordenstreng, K. & Manet, E.G. & Kleinwächter, W. (1986) *New International Information and Communication Order: Sourcebook*. With Foreword by Sean MacBride. Prague: International Organization of Journalists.
- Nordenstreng, K. & Varis, T. (1974) *Television Traffic - A One-way Street? A Survey and Analysis of the International Flow of Television Programme Material*. Paris: UNESCO (Reports and Papers on Mass Communication No. 70). Online at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0000/000075/007560eo.pdf>
- Osolnik, B. (1979) *Aims and Approaches to a New International Communication Order*. Paris: UNESCO (Documents of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems No. 32).
- Preston, W. & Herman, E.S. & Schiller, H.I. (1989) *Hope & Folly. The United States and UNESCO 1945-1985*. With Preface by Sean MacBride. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Traber, M. & Nordenstreng, K. (eds) (1992) *Few Voices, Many Worlds: Towards a Media Reform Movement*. London: World Association for Christian Communication.
- UNESCO (1980) *Protection of Journalists*. Paris (Documents on the New Communication Order No. 4).