

Secondly, she highlighted some indicators of free media: respect for human rights, freedom of expression, freedom of association, tolerance and respect for differences, and independent media. The media is important to democracy because it can provide important and accurate reporting, reflect a diversity of views, offer early warning signs, act as a watchdog and hold government accountable, as well as amplifying the voices of civil society. Thirdly, Sylvester provided some examples from South Asian countries where a great diversity of experiences exists. Some countries may experience ethnic division, the use of the media for propaganda, the presence of gender bias and the expression of sexist views in the media, or the domination of corporate ownership of the media. For example, she referred to the Indigenous-Language Editors in South Asia who decided not to report certain events and to play down casualties so as to ward off reprisals during the communal riots in Gujarat, India. Sylvester acknowledged that Canada has its own problems and may not offer an adequate example for others to follow. However, she pointed out that Canada's good reputation abroad and the respect for Canadian reporters represent significant advantages. Foreign partners are interested in Canada's experience with separation issues, with cultural diversity, and in creating a vibrant civil society.

Richard Harmston, of SAP Canada, offered an overview of the challenges and accomplishments experienced in South Asia. Beginning with human development he stated that the "poverty dialogue" program developed in the region allowed researchers to observe that the poor often feel a sense of insecurity and isolation, due in part to long working hours which results in little time available for participating in family and community life; and they experience distrust in institutions and their ability to respond to their needs. These realizations point to the fact that in order to strengthen democracy in the region, a broad range of issues will have to be addressed, including the fact that the region has often suffered from violent conflicts and is home to two of the nuclear powers, which adds to insecurity. Each country is distinct but certain common challenges to democracy can be highlighted: the "weaponization" of the region, caste and class divisions and the huge gap between the rich and the poor, the inability of governments to deliver on promises and to respond to the population's needs, the centralization of government (in certain cases), the presence of corruption and of pervasive poverty, and the lack of accountability of government. However, important accomplishments also need to be emphasized. Firstly, there has been a movement over the past decade to build a place for more meaningful municipal governments. For example, India changed its constitution to allow for stronger municipal governments and greater participation. This initiative, although it faces its own challenges (such as the risk of decentralizing corruption), could be revolutionary for the region. Secondly, one can observe a maturing of civil society that can provide a counterpoint to government and play a more significant "watchdog role". Harmston concluded by mentioning that it is important to engage South Asian governments on a range of policies in order to enforce positive trends and challenge negative practices. It will be important to support civil society, to build linkages between our own and South Asian civil societies, and to demonstrate solidarity, he said.

During the discussion period, it was pointed out that the media can also be used as hate media, for example in Rwanda, in which case it would be more appropriate to silence the media in order to protect peace and democracy. How the media could truly express diverse views and be neutral when in fact it has owners and political affiliations was also questioned. Sylvester responded that one should look at the wide range of types of media that exist, for example, community radio stations, which are not corporately owned. One should not take a defeatist view