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Introductory remarks at the Orbicom International Symposium "Communication, City and Public Spaces", 8-9 May, 2018. University of Lima, Peru.

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Dear symposium participants…

There are many dimensions for considering cities and public space: economic, cultural, technological, architectural, psychological… and also communication-informational. I will approach it with a focus on the communication-informational.

Here is a mantra I will repeat throughout these brief remarks.

If the Sustainable Development Goals are the answer, what is the question?

One question to which the SDGS are the answer is: **why are we here today?**

This question has some immediate answers before they culminate in the SDG answer.

We are here because of UNESCO, the UN's specialized agency that promotes free flow of information and ideas. We are here today because of the generous hosting of this event by the University of Lima.

We are also here because of the Orbicom network of UNESCO Chairs in Communications, co-initiated by Alain Modoux – the father of World Press Freedom Day – and in whose big foot steps we follow. Let me also pay tribute to a former president of Orbicom, Prof Rosental Alves, who initiated this tradition of annual conferences, which now marks its seventh iteration. And I salute the leadership and members of Orbicom who keep the network thriving despite many other commitments .

Now we can go further with my mantra: If the Sustainable Development Goals are the answer, what is the question? Here we can come to another question, which brings us closer to the SDG answer:

"What is the purpose for the existence of the Orbicom network?"

The network is very diverse, and the potential keeps growing, as more and more illustrious academics work with the UNESCO National Commission in their country to get recognition from UNESCO as a UNESCO chair in the field of communication/information. Just last week, on 3 May, which is the global press freedom day, Sheffield University in the UK, announced the success of an application to UNESCO have their Professor Jackie Harrison named as the world's first UNESCO Chair in Media Freedom, Journalism Safety and Issue of Impunity. Prof Harrison is founder of the

Journalists Safety Research Network – and exactly the kind of international scholar suited to the international character of Orbicom.

The enormous diversity within Orbicom members can makes it challenging for the network to find cross-cutting themes, subjects that can span all the silos and specialisations, and bring people together across their range of research interests. Yet, the large number of presentations in this conference shows that it is possible. I sincerely congratulate the Orbicom leadership for this achievement.

The same diversity within Orbicom can sometimes also make for challenges in making connections between the network and the actual work of UNESCO, and here let me re-encourage the network – especially those members who bear the name of a UNESCO chair – to help build more bridges with UNESCO. We owe it to the world to need to keep trying to identify and grow areas of common interests and overlap, understanding why we might see the SDGs as helping us to do this.

Let us therefore again approach the mantra: If the Sustainable Development Goals are the answer, what is the question?

Here, we can pose as a question: **what is the world's greatest achievement and opportunity at this point in recent history**? At a time of substantial changes and risks around the world, the act of all countries agreeing via the UN on the universal SDG objectives in 2015, continues to stand as a truly positive achievement in a confusing, divided and cynical world. Let us reflect a minute on this.

Relevant to this symposium especially is SDG 11, sustainable cities and communities which is a reference point for our discussions.

I trust that many of you also know of Goal 16, where we can find the target 10 which enjoins us all, as part of achieving sustainable development, to achieve "public access to information and fundamental freedoms". This merits some comment:

First, unlike the earlier Millennium Development Goals, issues of communication and information are now formally recognized within the global agenda. The vision is therefore of a world that by target date 2030 should include substantial advances in these areas - alongside others. This is a call to focused action to ensure that in just over a decade, we should strive to make progress in the public's access to information and their fundamental freedoms. Not only should development (such as sustainable cities) not leave any person or country behind, but communication and information and fundamental freedoms should also not be left behind.

Second, it is very significant that SDG target 16.10 couples "public access to information" with "fundamental freedoms". This linkage recognizes both the distinctiveness and the unity between the two. Progress on public access to information will be very limited, if there is no freedom for expression and no freedom of information. And, likewise, our fundamental freedom to impart, seek and receive information will be rather empty if it does not accompany material and institutional changes in the public's access.

Third, we can point out that SDG target 16.10 is not just an end to which we should combine our efforts to achieve, it is also a means to sustainable development. This is why UNESCO organizes what it calls IPDCTalks every 28 September, which is the annual International Day for Universal Access to Information. In these events, dynamic speakers presented case studies about for example, the value of investigative journalism in monitoring cheating on greenhouse gas emissions; the importance of information-driven policies for achieving gender equality; and the impact of community media on

advancing health; the role of communications in managing traffic flows within cities, etc. This is the enabling power of SDG 16.10.

To return to the Sustainable Development Goals as the answer, we can suggest that the question is **"What is the thread that can draw Orbicom and UNESCO to work more closely together?".** I hope we can now more clearly understand the answer: the SDGs are a beacon for inspiration and co-operation. Especially in helping make progress in target 16.10 and its enabling impact on the rest of the SDG agenda. The SDGS can help all of us concert our work for making impact on the world.

The SDGs are also the beacon recognized by the 2015 Outcome document of the 10 year review of the World Summit on the Information Society process. This is a dynamic tracked closely by Orbicom in the history of its evolution. From a UNESCO point of view, which will resonate with your network, it is important that the rapidly emerging Information Society should have the qualitative value-add of becoming Knowledge Societies. These conceptualisations of societal change have to be linked to the historic quest of the SDGs. And the bridge between them is target 16.10 on "Public Access to Information and Fundamental Freedoms" is key.

Ladies and gentlemen

I have asked: If the Sustainable Development Goals are the answer, what is the question?

Let me conclude with a final proposal about the sought for question: in this case, **what is the purpose of the Internet?** For many people today, the Internet is a means for social networking. For businesses, it is a way to make money. For intelligence services, a way to conduct surveillance. For many, it is a learning or teaching tool. Orbicom members no doubt use it for research. In other circles, it is a way to propagate disinformation. And so on.

But the overarching purpose of the Internet should be scoped in terms of helping to achieve sustainable development. This is why UNESCO Member States have adopted the concept of Internet Universality that I hope can enrich the thinking of Orbicom members about this incredible communications facility. For UNESCO, Internet Universality means an Internet that is guided by Human Rights, Openness, Accessibility, and Multistakeholder participation. We summarise these four principles into an easy to remember acronym: ROAM. This powerful and holistic concept helps us develop a strategic orientation, pointing to where and how Orbicom members can orientate their work. At present, UNESCO has concluded an 18 month consultative process to develop appropriate indicators for assessing the state of Internet Universality and ROAM in any given country. The indicators are about to be pre-tested and piloted as I speak, and should be finalized later this year. I encourage participants in this conference to take up these indicators and use them in research.

Dear colleagues

In these short remarks, I have excavated a series of questions that lead to the *SDGs as the answer*. These are:

Why are we here today? - *SDGs*

What is the purpose for the existence of the Orbicom network? - *SDGs*

What is the world's greatest achievement and opportunity at this point in recent history? - *SDGs*

What is the purpose of the Internet? - *SDGs*

What is the thread that can draw Orbicom and UNESCO to work more closely together? - *SDGs*

I have also signalled some of UNESCO's rich thinking on Knowledge Societies and Internet Universality. I strongly encourage you to visit our website regularly to keep abreast of what's happening, and sign up to receive our weekly news headlines. I also urge you to contribute to ourconsultative processes such as the Internet Universality indicators, join our events and conferences, and take part in the open development of UNESCO future programmes and foci.

Thank you for your attention, and may this symposium enlighten us all about how communications-informational issues, especially in SDG 16.10.2, link to cities and public space, and to the vision of SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities.