



## Word of Welcome

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Prof. Joachim von Braun

PAS President

Good morning, I am pleased to welcome you all to this conference on *Connectivity as a Human Right*. It is organised by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Foundation for Worldwide Cooperation. My special welcome goes to you, President Prodi. You are President of Worldwide Cooperation, former Prime Minister of Italy and President of the European Commission. Thanks to you and your team, especial Alessandro Ovi, for cooperating with us. I also want to highlight the important role for this initiative, in shaping the agenda, of my dear colleague Antonio Battro, member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, and of our Chancellor of the Academy, Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo.

Pope Francis three days ago spoke wisely about the digital world, and I quote: “*The fruit of extraordinary achievements of science and technology*” and he spoke, I quote, “*about apprehensions, when we consider how quickly this has taken place*” in this digital world, and the extremely troubling things on the net, including the spread of extreme pornography, online human trafficking and so on, so he draws attention to a negative side of the internet if used inappropriately. Ladies and Gentlemen, we need awareness raising and education to strengthen the capabilities to use the web, and legislation to control misuse and crime. We need to address connectivity gaps, content and capabilities simultaneously, but Ladies and Gentlemen, connectivity is the basis. Without it, the huge potentials, the positive potentials, cannot be tapped by the poor. At least, I propose, all educational institutions must be connected to begin with.

Eighteen years ago I started a research project with Nobel peace laureate Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh on connecting the poor with information and communications technologies. Our research team accompanied the first 60 rural women who were given mobile phones by the Grameen Bank to serve their communities. They soon became 200,000 women, women who were selling telephone services to their communities. The empowerment impact on these women and the social and the economic impacts on the communities were big. The poor benefited even absolutely more than the not so poor. So access to information regarding agriculture, health, jobs and so on were important.

This of course, Ladies and Gentlemen, was the mobile phone, not the internet, but it had a huge effect. We all know – and that is why this is such an important conference – there are today serious internet access constraints for poor rural woman and millions of others around the world, it means exclusion. Their social and economic rights are impaired by not having access, so it is thus a human rights issue, and that is the new accent of this conference, and it is therefore also a matter for our global Pontifical Academy because the goals of our Academy include, I quote, “*Furthering participation on the benefits of science and technology by the greatest number of people, by the greatest number of people, and achieving a role for science which involves the promotion of justice and development*”.