

“Public Relations:

The Global Profession Addresses the New World Order”

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“I’m honored to present the opening keynote address for this precedent-setting – perhaps even, historic – event.”

Thank you, Amanda, for that very kind introduction. I want to be sure that our colleagues here today know that you are not only president of CERRPMED but also a highly-valued leader of The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management team.

I am, of course, delighted to be with you today as you open the first Inter-Mediterranean Symposium on Public Relations. But even more than “delighted”, I’m honored to present the opening keynote address for this precedent-setting – perhaps even *historic* – event.

You see, I believe that this symposium and the formation of CERRPMED have the great potential to project public relations ...

"as a fundamental strategic lever in building dialogue among people and countries in the Euro-Med area."

(as you have so well articulated it in promoting the symposium.)

“Building dialogue among people and countries” – What a great mission! And how timely! How needed!

But there’s more. You are clearly committed to applying the “generic principles of the public relations profession to this great mission.” I must tell you that, in all my international travel for The Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management that is a very rare commitment.

Yes, most or all of us have applied these generic principles to assignments at companies, governments, non-government organizations and charitable organizations.

But country-to-country dialogue -- sometimes called public diplomacy -- is yet to mature in a world that needs it desperately. And when I reflect on the impressive diversity of cultures and economic and political systems in your founding-member countries, I have new hope that this mission is not unrealistic, not naïve, but visionary and intrepid.

How ambitious to apply the central concept of public relations on this scale! How appropriate it is at this time to advance dialogue, listening and what Richard Edelman has called “engagement”, even with those with

whom you may initially disagree. I'm happy to say that, at long last, my government has now seen the wisdom of such "engagement."

So I wish you every success in this endeavor.

That endeavor is very much related to my topic this morning. You may have noted that I'd like to examine, "Public Relations: The Global Profession Addresses the New World Order".

It is no accident, of course, that I've chosen that theme. I want very much for it to set the stage for the remarks that will follow today and tomorrow as the assembled experts examine in detail the symposium theme: "Public relations as support to economic development of the Euro-Med countries."

"Starting at 40,000 Feet"

I suggest that we start this study at what might be called "the 40,000 foot level".

That would be a quote I heard some years ago from a public relations pioneer, Alan Center. This is what Alan told us: "All professions, must serve

a vital public social purpose. Medicine has health. Law has order. And public relations ... public relations has, as its objective, *harmony*.

Harmony. That very central public relations principle (a “generic principle”, if you will) applied today -- and tomorrow – is greatly “scalable”. It has “legs.” It is equally valid at the elementary level of a commercial transaction as well as in international diplomacy.

More at this 40,000-foot level: And I hope that if you take nothing else away from my remarks today, this will resonate with you for some time:

In our increasingly globalized, inter-connected world, over the long run, economic integration may well trump ideological differences. Let me illustrate this with two quotes which, although they come from opposite ideological poles, should be reconciled in the global common interest:

First, an American diplomat in the mid-1980s:

“Let us make the world so economically-interdependent that war will go out of style.”

And the second quote, etched in white calligraphy at the main exit of the magnificent Blue Mosque in Istanbul (which I visited earlier this year), the words of The Prophet:

"A merchant is the beloved of God."

Can we, in our day-to-day work help connect the cultures – the societies – from which those seminal thoughts have come? Perhaps not directly. Perhaps not every day. But certainly, we can -- over time -- through organizations like CERRPMED and a symposium like MedCom. And this kind of global linkage is vital for world harmony.

In that connection, I offer you this brief excerpt from a new book that I recommend highly. It is by Mideast expert Vali Nasr, professor of international relations at Tufts University and an adjunct senior fellow at The Council of Foreign Relations.

The book, "Force of Fortune" is subtitled: "The Rise of the New Muslim Middle Class and What It Will Mean for Our World".

Here is the excerpt from the book's summary:

“...there is a vital but unseen rising force in the Islamic world – a new business-minded middle class – that is building a vibrant new Muslim world economy... They are building a whole new economy... and their distinctive blending of Islam and capitalism is the key to bringing about lasting reform and to defeating fundamentalism. They are the people ... the West can and must do business with.”

Now, I am not a naïve Pollyanna about the chances for such seminal inter-cultural accommodation. It will require dedication, patience, creativity and compromise. And, like all successful public relations efforts, it must be rooted in reciprocal policy and performance in keeping with the two-way symmetrical model of public relations.

Moreover, it will require many kinds of players. Surely, national government leaders, but also leaders in civil society, the non-profit world, and, as I’ve just noted, in the private sector as well.

One outstanding example of such private sector involvement is the Arab American Business Fellowship. This program, jointly sponsored by The Young Arab Leaders and the U.S.-based Business for Public Diplomacy,

enables high-potential business executives from both regions to explore each other's cultural and business environments.

More specifically, let's examine how public relations professionals fit into this overall picture. I believe that the Global Alliance offers a path for involvement.

You may know that The Global Alliance is a confederation of national public relations associations, like your organizations, in sixty five countries around the world. Those associations have a combined membership of about 160,000 public relations educators and practitioners. The Global Alliance's fundamental mission is to raise the standards of public relations practice and to advocate for the profession around the world.

Three Inter-Related Messages

So, in the context of the Global Alliance, I bring you three inter-related messages:

- (1.) Global society, in changing fundamentally toward a "New World Order", is creating exciting new opportunities for public relations.

(2.) These changes – basically, new power-sharing partnerships – will affect societal relationships that have long linked people and institutions around the world – affecting virtually all of the organizations we work for.

(3.) To answer, affirmatively, the question “how do we fit into the world?” – that is, this new, evolving world -- public relations professionals will have to commit to a new dimension of professional development and share their experiences and successes. This is beginning to happen.

(1.) On the first of these three basic themes, let’s briefly examine the recent evidence that indeed, the world is quickly developing a “New Normal” – a more transparent, collaborative, “linked” global society.

On this theme, I’ll cite only five of many possible pieces of evidence:

. The old G-8 of leading national economic powers has now evolved into the G-20. *The Financial Times*, marking the G-20 meeting last month, noted this (quote) “watershed in history: for the first time since the

industrial revolution, economic power is no longer concentrated in western hands” (unquote) As the global economy struggles, The G-20 is now undertaking global coordination of economic policy as seminal as re-balancing East-West savings and consumption. It is a clear sign of the times.

. As we all know, in just a few short weeks, the nations of the world will send representatives to Copenhagen to try to develop long-term national commitments to address climate change.

. I recently attended a special meeting at United Nations headquarters in New York that measured progress toward attainment of the U.N.’s 2015 Millennium Development Goals on addressing global poverty, health, education and gender equality. While there has been progress on achieving these goals, the gap between rich and poor countries is still a chasm and cries out for professional communications to help gather and apply the resources needed to achieve the Millennium goals. The final Millennium Summit meeting will be held next year.

. Closer to “home”, in this region, consider the coming impact of the virtual transformation of the European Union. Ireland and The Czech

Republics recent approval of the EU's Lisbon Treaty will give the EU a more powerful foreign policy, its first full-time president, and a strengthened parliament. Hopefully, Turkey will some day be an EU member.

(Incidentally, in the November issue of The Global Alliance's on-line newsletter, we will begin regular reporting from Brussels on EU developments of special interest to public relations professionals.)

. And finally in this cluster, on the impact of social media, I'll only remind you that "twitterers" reported from within the recent post-election demonstrations in Iran. This just illustrates that what happens anywhere in the world can be known momentarily wherever there is a cell phone, I-pod, blackberry or computer. Meaning, everywhere.

Adding up all of this evidence, one must conclude that:

Over time, nations change. Cultures evolve. Societies develop.

Organizations – yours and mine – also change. And we can help make these changes positive, in the organization's interest and the public interest.

(2.) Perhaps that's a good segue to the second basic theme I offer you today: The inescapable fact that virtually all of our organizations are already linked directly or indirectly to the global society. We all know that "Globalization" isn't new. It began on a modest scale thousands of years ago with the earliest trade and migrations. Now, countries, their institutions -- and their citizens -- are linked by:

The global physical environment and climate change, of course. But also:

Trade. Capital Flows. Immigration. Tourism. Education. And Development.

Unfortunately, we are also connected globally by:

Natural disasters. Disease. Drug and human trafficking. Crime. Terrorism. And War.

And, again, overarching all of these linkages, we are connected by the veritable blizzard of new information technologies that make many of these public relations issues and crises more immediate, even instantaneous.

There are, of course, what might be called macro “counterweights”, or back-drafts, to this global connectedness: “de-globalization” – that is, protectionism and the xenophobia born of nationalism and tribalism. I don’t mean to minimize these existential threats to international collaboration. They just make our challenge that much more imperative.

Too, I must admit that I sometimes encounter a “blow back” from mid-level public relations practitioners who are mainly interested in learning about tactics and see global public relations as something quite remote. My advice is always: “You had better care about international public relations because your boss, and your boss’s boss, care about it – that is, about how international forces are affecting your organization.

How Do *We* Fit into the New, Evolving World?

(3.) I’d like to spend the balance of my time here at the podium addressing the third part of my message. And that is an attempt to answer the questions:

How do *we* now fit into the world – that is, how do public relations professionals fit into the new, evolving world? And the corollary question: How will public relations professionals maximize their contribution to

organizational success in the face of the roiling change as we enter the second decade of the 21st century?

My answer, quite simply: We will fit in very nicely.

Of course, there's a caveat to that ultra-simple response.

We will fit into the evolving world by helping to build "win-win", reciprocal relationships. And to do that in the "New Normal" world, we must commit to professional development that earns us the right to assume such responsibility.

I do travel internationally quite often on behalf of clients and The Global Alliance. And as a result, I've come to this conclusion:

The many initiatives in public relations education and practice I have seen in traveling around the world are directly analogous to today's evolving national and international political, economic and cultural systems. The derivative message for CERRPMED, for all members of The Global Alliance, as well as for all public relations professionals – and, indeed, for

all leaders in society-- is this: We can, and we must, all learn from each other.

This is true for one fundamental reason: Public relations principles are adaptable in some manner to virtually any local/national/ or regional culture or political economic system without compromising our professional ethical codes.

Let me give you a counseling firm example. Ketchum now has six offices in China. One of our growth services is counseling Chinese government-owned companies how to be transparent when they seek to become "partially private" by raising capital on various stock exchanges. That, of course, requires a degree of transparency quite foreign to a totally government-owned company.

Yes, over time, nations do change. Cultures do evolve. Societies and their political and economic systems, do develop.

And quite often, public relations professionals can help.

Now, to bring us a bit closer to the current evolution within the global public relations profession, here are just a few examples of many impressive variations in public relations among Global Alliance member associations I have witnessed recently:

. In New Zealand, at Waikato University, public relations is taught in The School of Management . This places public relations directly among management disciplines where it belongs.

. The Public Relations Institute of South Africa has developed an integrated process for public relations education before entry into the profession, leading to ongoing professional development and to certification.

. In the United Kingdom, "Chartered" in the name, "Chartered Public Relations Institute", indicates that this national public relations association has earned royal recognition as a professional association operating ethically in the public interest.

. The Austrian Public Relations Association has established a Corporate Social Responsibility Lab "to strengthen the association's corporate social

responsibility management and its responsibility to claim a major role in CSR for the PR profession.”

. Final example: The German Public Relations Association recently partnered with German universities in conducting a survey that concluded that “the current financial downturn will strengthen the work in the area of internal communications.”

Sharing advanced public relations practice is now a global imperative. And the Global Alliance -- through its website, newsletters, projects and events – provides an excellent venue for such sharing.

GA: Raise Standards, Advocate For PR

This connects with the Global Alliance’s two fundamental and inter-connected objectives – to raise the standards of the profession globally and to advocate for the profession.

First: Let’s address, “raise the profession’s standards.” Among many services for our member associations, we have championed an international Ethics Protocol. We are also identifying standards for

certification of individual professionals, and examining the methods of *teaching* public relations in some 180 colleges and universities in 39 countries. And we intend to serve as a forum for the best thinking on the vital subject of "The Business Case for Public Relations."

But our signature event for raising public relations standards will be held in Stockholm in mid-June when, in partnership with The Swedish Public Relations Association, The Global Alliance will present its Sixth World Public Relations Forum.

This will be an exciting, two-day *interactive* exercise where several hundred delegates from around the world will examine and advance a new communications model that promises to help elevate public relations to the long-sought level of top management.

These discussions will be distilled and focused in the resulting "Stockholm Accords", a manifesto on how we can develop the profession in the years immediately ahead.

My advice: If your 2010 travel budget and responsibilities limit you to travel to just one international communications conference – besides a CERRPMED meeting, of course -- put the June Stockholm World Public

Relations Forum at the top of your list. You can consult the Global Alliance or Swedish Public Relations Association websites for registration information as early as this afternoon.

Now, on the second fundamental Global Alliance objective – advocacy for the profession: Obviously, the more we as public relations professionals contribute to our organizations' success, the more we will be appreciated.

But there's another important aspect to advocating for public relations: That is being publicly visible and relevant on a major societal issue of the day. The Global Alliance has chosen to speak out on such an issue and we urge you to consider being active in promoting it as well.

The issue is Transparency.

And the message, in essence, is this:

What the world needs now is more transparency. Responsible organization transparency. That is, more two-way communication: listening carefully to the public's changing expectations and demands, and then responding collaboratively with responsible policy and performance.

And our corollary message is that public relations professionals are the best trained and most experienced counselors for achieving such transparency and progress.

Now, in advancing that advocacy message for public relations we are neither foolish nor arrogant. We're not suggesting that *all* information should be made public. There is valuable proprietary information – and, in the case of national security, intelligence data – that warrants protection.

But public relations counsel should now rank with legal counsel in helping management make the necessary distinctions between disclosure and non-disclosure.

It's our obligation to develop and deliver clear, honest, useful and *responsive* information to all the stakeholders in our organizations as well as external interested parties who have "standing".

"Descending From 40,000 Feet"

And so, in conclusion, this is the challenge I bring to you this morning:

Help shape the future of public relations. Help raise the standards of the profession and the individual professional so that public relations will deserve that seat at top-management's table.

Our challenge today, and from this day forward, is to recognize the "New World Order", address it, and help our organizations -- and global society -- to benefit from it.

This is the optimum moment for that kind of commitment. Because with the "Global New Normal", the world – and every kind of organization in it – needs, as never before, the counsel we can deliver.

And now, I invite you to descend with me from the "40,000-foot level" and, for the rest of symposium, listen with great interest to the experts who have been assembled to tell us how to accomplish the joint mission of CERRPMED and The Global Alliance.

Thank you.

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