

The Update

A quarterly newsletter for WACC Members and Partners

WACC

CHANGES TO WACC CANADA

At the Meeting of Members of WACC Canada held on 18 December 2018, members voted overwhelmingly in favour of constitutional changes aimed at simplifying WACC governance while retaining its membership structure.

Members voted to make the necessary legal changes in the WACC Canada framework so that membership is not duplicated in two Associations, that a single Board has clear oversight of WACC's operations, and that a working Memorandum of Understanding between the two associations is in place. WACC UK will be the primary legal association while the WACC offices will remain in Canada.

Following two years of discussion, WACC is now moving to elect a new Board of Directors, whose members will serve a four-year term from the end of May 2019 onwards. WACC's regional associations have been invited to nominate candidates.

At the same time, a process has begun to elect a President and Treasurer for the next phase in WACC's life.

NEW STAFF AT WACC

Two new staff appointments aim to strengthen WACC's public profile and communication. **Sara Speicher** began serving as WACC's Deputy General Secretary in January 2019. She will focus on strengthening WACC's public profile, partnerships in Europe, as well as ongoing governance and membership issues.



Formerly WACC's UK Development Manager, Speicher has over 20 years experience in communication and management particularly for international non-profit and UK-based charity organizations.

She holds a BA in Religion from Oberlin College, Ohio, USA, an MA in marketing non-profit organisations from DePaul



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University, Chicago, USA, and an MA in Religious Studies from Lancaster University, United Kingdom.

Over the last 20 years she has worked for leading international organisations such as the World Council of Churches, International Catholic Migration Commission, Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, The Lutheran World Federation, Caritas Internationalis and World AIDS Campaign.

As the WACC UK representative, Sara assisted the Refugees Reporting project of WACC Europe and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe: www.refugeesreporting.eu particularly in the production and launch of its report "Changing the Narrative: Media Representation of Refugees and Migrants in Europe".

WACC has also appointed **Tess Sison** as a part-time communications officer working at its General Secretariat in Toronto.

Sison is an award-winning professional journalist who studied at the University



of the Philippines and at the New York School of Continuing Education before working as a stringer and contributor with a

number of leading newspapers.

She was senior staff writer for the *Anglican Journal* (2003-14), the publication of the Anglican Church of Canada, before becoming its editor (2014-18).

Sison will help strengthen WACC's public profile as well its social media presence.

COMMUNICATION PROJECT RESPONDS TO VENEZUELA-COLOMBIA MIGRANT CRISIS

WACC has partnered with two Colombian civil society organizations to establish a network of citizen journalists who will receive specialized training to improve access to information and intercultural dialogue among Venezuelan migrants and their host communities.

About one million Venezuelan migrants now reside in Colombia, 90% of whom arrived in the country in the last two years, according to the Colombian newspaper, *El País*. The number may rise to four million by 2021 if the crisis in Venezuela worsens.

This unprecedented migration has presented communication and information challenges, including lack of access to relevant information, misinformation, limited access to communication platforms and negative stereotypes that create a culture of distrust and, in some cases, discrimination against migrants.

The project, "Entre Parcer@s y Panas[i]: Network of Venezuelan and Colombian Citizen Journalists Advancing Intercultural Dialogue", will tap reporters from 20 community or university radio stations: six on the Venezuelan side of the border, six on the Colombian side, and eight in Bogotá, one of the main destinations for migrants.

WACC's long-standing partners Grupo COMUNICARTE and Fundación Comunicación Positiva will implement the project in February 2019.

The project is expected to reach about 8.5 million people in Bogotá and 2.5 million people in the border regions. Thanks to a partnership with Instituto

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A NEW VISION FOR THE DIGITAL ERA AND A NEW BOARD



*Rev. Dr Samuel W.
Meshack, WACC
President*

Great news from Regional Assemblies in Latin America, North America, and Africa, who have successfully conducted their Regional Assemblies. My hearty congratulations to all the newly elected Regional Executive Committee members under the leadership of regional presidents Leonardo D. Félix (Latin America), Glory E. Dharmaraj (North America), and Mathilde Kpalla (Africa). May God guide them to give leadership to take WACC to greater heights in working towards the fulfilment of its vision and mission.

I also take this opportunity to thank the past presidents of these regions; José Luis Aguirre Alvis, Shirley Struchen, and Mathilde Kpalla (re-elected) for their dedicated contributions in the smooth running of the Regions as well as to WACC Global.

WACC's newly appointed Deputy General Secretary, Sara Speicher, comes with rich experience, having served many international ecumenical organisations and as WACC UK Development Manager. With General Secretary Philip Lee and Deputy General Secretary Sara Speicher, we have two leaders who have long been part of the WACC family and are firmly committed to its work. Along with a dedicated staff team and WACC members, we all look forward to new energy in 2019 and beyond in advocating communication for all.

As elections for the new Board of Directors are fast approaching, it is pertinent that all the regions hold their assemblies and elect dedicated representative to their Regional Executive Committee and nominate directors for the next four-year period. I know that WACC will thrive with their oversight.

I am happy that WACC's journal Media Development is focusing on the digital era and promoting projects and activities centred on the digital world. It is appropriate that we should explore what progress and social justice mean in this new digital economy, where those who contribute raw data are given a negligible portion of the pie and are denied their rights.

WACC needs to take a proactive step to educate people about the challenges and pitfalls and help them to bring about greater accountability through legislative policies. Such measures for redistributive justice can help turn the world of technology driven inequality into one that is truly participatory and egalitarian.

God's blessings.

CREATING RELATIONSHIPS AND BUILDING TRUST

What price trust in today's world of contradictory digital media? From surveillance to privacy to fake news, isolation and fragmentation seem to dominate debate around the miracle of 24/7 communications.

In public communication, traditional mass media have long held a privileged position of trust. They inform but they also lead opinion. In the past, news and opinion were kept apart, but in recent years, partly owing to a plethora of misinformation and “false news”, opinion journalism has gained ground.

Today, news sites offer columns, news analysis, criticism, reporter's notebooks, memos, journals and appraisals - all forms that depart from the straightforward presentation of facts and that sometimes blur the line between news and opinion.

Trustworthy news sites make a clear distinction between the two. Opinions are very often relevant to a story and essential for the reader or viewer to understand its meaning and consequences. For that reason, quoted opinion is authoritative and attributed to a named source. Journalists who write such “point of view” pieces are expected to express solid views in their areas of expertise and not to make ungrounded assertions or personal attacks.

Other communicators in the public domain also have a role to play and it is heartening to see interventions by the contemporary artist, activist and advocate of political reform in China, Ai Weiwei. In “Human dignity is in danger - In 2019 we must stand as one to survive” (*The Guardian*, 1 January 2019), he wrote: “If we truly believe in values that we can all identify with and aspire to - a recognition of truth, an understanding of science, an appreciation of the self, a respect for life and a faith in society - then we need to eliminate obstacles to understanding, uphold the fundamental definition of humanity, affirm the shared value of human lives and other lives, and acknowledge the symbiotic interdependency of human beings and the environment.”

That's what genuine communication is all about: greater understanding of the challenges that face us and of potential solutions. Whether it is climate change, the global refugee crisis, or the rise of populist politics, dialogue is the only means of discovering shared values and acting accordingly.

That's what WACC is all about.



Philip Lee
General Secretary

Radiofónico Fe y Alegría, a Jesuit broadcasting network, the project hopes to reach an additional potential audience of 4 million in Venezuela.

The project is being supported by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

WACC PRESENCE AT IAMCR 2019

Lorenzo Vargas, who coordinates WACC's Communication for Social Change programme, will attend the 2019 International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) Conference in Madrid, July 7 to 11.

The theme of the conference is "Communication, Technology and Human Dignity: Disputed Rights, Contested Truths".

Lorenzo will make a presentation about the research methodology being used as part of WACC's new migration-related project in Colombia (see page 2). WACC is an institutional member of the IAMCR.

The IAMCR conference gathers scholars, researchers and practitioners in the field of media and communication research.

The IAMCR Congress 2019 will be hosted by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, in Spain.

WACC URGES UN 2030 AGENDA TO ADDRESS COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION POVERTY

WACC has developed a position paper on the Sustainable Development goals entitled "Addressing Communication and Information Poverty in the context of the SDGs."

In it, WACC argues that communication and information poverty must be addressed to achieve the vision of

the United Nations' 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs and 169 targets.

"Millions of people on every continent lack access to communication platforms, are underrepresented or misrepresented in the media, have low levels of media literacy, have restricted access to relevant and accurate information and knowledge, are excluded from participation in decision-making processes, and live in contexts with limited media freedom," WACC notes. "These issues can be encapsulated as communication and information poverty, a form of poverty that contributes to people's sense of powerlessness and inability to make themselves heard."

WACC's paper highlights areas where communication rights and SDGs intersect. For example, it notes that the goal of universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services (SDG 3, Target 3.7) would be hard to achieve "unless women and girls have access to accurate knowledge about reproductive health and are able to participate in decision-making processes about healthcare priorities."

The UN's 2030 agenda highlights some communication and information issues, including universal internet access, the importance of Information and communication technologies as tools for women's empowerment, the need for access to public information legislation and greater protection for journalists, trade unionists and human rights defenders.

While these are "very encouraging," says WACC, "we believe that greater integration of communication and information issues into the SDGs and its targets would have strengthened the vision of Agenda 2030." [WACC's position paper can be found here.](#)

ENGAGING WITH THE DIGITAL

The 4/2018 issue of *Media Development* delves into the ethics of digital communication technologies today.

The editorial underscores the need to address critical questions about ownership and control, regulation, privacy, security and surveillance. It cites the Global Risks Report 2017, which warns that “a new era of restricted freedoms and increased governmental control could undermine social, political and economic stability and increase the risk of geopolitical and social conflict.”

In “Critical media literacy and digital ethics”, Allan Luke and Julian Sefton-Green analyze everyday challenges facing digital youth and examine current educational and political responses. They argue that digital ethics grounded in “what it is to be human and how to live just and sustainable lives in these technologically saturated societies and economies - is the core curriculum issue for schooling.”

In Albania, media and information have become private property rather than a publicly shared asset, writes Klea Bogdani in “Challenges facing Albania’s media landscape”. Journalists face strong pressure from state-sponsored advertisers, and economic and political interests, as well as a lack of contracts and delayed salary payments.

The other articles in this issue are: “Gender and human rights in the digital age” by Jose Peralta; “‘Vulnerability’ as the key concept of a communicative ethics for the 21st century” by Hugo Aznar and Marcia Castillo-Martin; “Digital poison or digital balm” by Phil Haslanger; and “Recuperar la utopia de la democratización de las comunicaciones” by WACC Vice-President José Luis Aguirre Alvis.

**** DIARY DATES****

CSW63 (2019)

The sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women
United Nations Headquarters New
York, 11-22 March 2019

Priority theme: “Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls”.

WACC and CEC Assembly 2019

Including a seminar on “What Makes Us So Angry? Hate speech, fake news, and communication rights”
Helsinki/Stockholm, 10-12 April 2019

Religion Communicators Council Convention

RCC will celebrate its 90th year anniversary and meet jointly with the Associated Church Press (ACP).

WACC will present a panel on the theme “Communicating in the Age of #MeToo”

Chicago, USA, 10-13 April 2019

Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum

WACC will present a panel on the theme “Can Migrants Make Themselves Heard in the Age of National Populism?”

Bonn, Germany, 27-28 May 2019