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Ignorance in the Information Age - a Deterrent to Human Development

The Annual Conference of the Club of Rome is held in Helsinki, Finland, on October 11 & 12, under the topic: "Limits to Ignorance: The Challenge of Informed Humanity"

Finland has become known as a country that rose from rags to riches in a surprisingly short time. The key to Finland's success has been heavy investment in education and research. For the developing nations of the 21st century, finding access to vital information is an even greater challenge than it was for industrializing Finland. Without an educated and skilled population, developing countries of the present day will fall ever more behind in the world's social and economical development.

Controlling and managing information is not, however, merely a problem for developing countries. Rich countries that call themselves "information societies" are incapable of making full use of the huge mass of scientific and other kinds of information they produce. Relevant information is often drowned in the white noise of disinformation. This does not hinder progress merely within industrialized nations; it also deters us from tackling together the great challenges faced by all of mankind. Before we learn to ethically weigh and prioritize information available to us, it is difficult to start solving global problems caused by lack of knowledge or ignorance - problems such as poverty, lack of democratic rule, cross-cultural conflicts and ecological threats of a grand scale.

The Annual Conference of the Club of Rome, held in Helsinki on October 11 & 12 under the topic "Limits to Ignorance: The Challenge of Informed Humanity", is set out to tackle this twofold problem of ignorance. Addressing these issues will be, among others, the Tanzanian minister of foreign affairs, **Mr. Jakaya Kikwete**; the President of the Club of Rome, **Prince El Hassan bin Talal**; the president of Finland, **Mrs. Tarja Halonen** and her predecessor, **Mr. Martti Ahtisaari**.

During the conference, possible solutions to the problem of ignorance will be sought from a variety of perspectives. Workshops, attended by 150 researchers, decision makers, and representatives of the corporate world, will focus on the responsibilities the civil society, the political elite and the markets have in solving global problems. Other topics discussed will be the challenge posed to the democratic decision-making process by constant information overflow, and the means by which developing countries could most efficiently be brought in to an information-driven, yet sustainable development.

"Since the Club of Rome published its report "Limits to Growth" in 1972, an enormous mass of research data on the future challenges of mankind have been produced. The majority of the problems noted and the solutions proposed in these studies have been generally acknowledged both within the scientific community and in UN summit declarations. In spite of this, we are either unable or unwilling to take steps to change the course of humankind." says professor **Markku Wilenius**, chairman of the Finnish Association for the Club of Rome.

"On the other hand, we have examples of actions that have yielded good results. The use of CFC-gases, which accelerate ozone depletion in the lower atmosphere, has, thanks to effective international treaties and new technologies, radically decreased. The European Union, founded in the aftermath of two world wars that both originated from Europe, has been able to organize itself into a network within which wars are virtually impossible. Big leaps can be made, if we only have enough social and political willpower.", Wilenius adds.

Yet, as long as this willpower doesn't materialize on a global scale, the gap between the rich and the poor, the informed and the ignorant, will keep on growing.

"The poorest part of humanity is trapped in an ever-deepening information deprivation, and is thus sidetracked from development. On the other hand, the well off minority is getting trapped in a deepening ethical deprivation. Our technological superiority lulls us into complacency, and we resign from all ethical responsibilities on the grounds of our own best interests or the complexity of the problems at hand. The challenge we now face, is that we are stepping into an era of a new kind of ignorance, call it the age of 'potential knowing'. And we are facing this age without an ethical backdrop", stresses professor emeritus **Pentti Malaska**, honorary member of the Club of Rome.

The Club of Rome is a global think tank and a non governmental organisation (NGO). It brings together scientists, economists, businessmen, international high civil servants, heads of state and former heads of state. The Club of Rome takes a global, comprehensive perspective on the challenges and problems facing our developing world community.

A press conference is held on the final day of the conference, Tuesday, Oct. 12., 2004 at 1 pm., in the so called grand piano room in the old main building of the University of Helsinki. Registration for the press conference by Oct 10. Interview requests are to be sent by the aforementioned date to: Johanna Kojola,