

PANAMA: RADIO AND TELEVISION SUMMIT COMMITS TO A CULTURE OF PEACE AND NON VIOLENCE

Panama City, March 26 – A culture of peace meeting for Latin American radio and television station owners and directors in the Panamanian capital March 23 – 26 was attended by more than 300 communication professionals. The meeting ended with the adoption of the Declaration of Panama.

In his opening speech, the President of Panama, Ernesto Perez Balladares, acknowledged the fundamental importance of the media in society and stressed that beyond commercial interests, journalists served truth first and foremost. He also said that freedom of expression was a “non-negotiable conquest of humankind”.

UNESCO Director-General Federico Mayor stressed the importance of radio and television “in instigating the necessary and urgent change of direction away from present tendencies towards violence to those of dialogue and tolerance.” He added: “It’s time we kept our promises. The agreements, declarations and resolutions adopted during summits and meetings too often have no effect. Men and women expect something other than empty rhetoric from us. We must do what we have promised.”

Taking an active part in the meeting were owners and directors of private, university-based, public and community television and radio stations.

At the end of the work session and in the presence of the Panamanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jorge Eduardo Ritter, the participants unanimously adopted a Panama Declaration, which stipulates that “peace is a prerequisite for lasting development.” It reaffirms that “freedom of expression is of prime importance to democracy, justice and the construction and consolidation of a culture of peace and non-violence”.

The Panama Declaration includes a commitment to the consolidation of democracy, increased investments earmarked for education and basic social policies, international co-operation and protection of the environment, while reducing arms expenditure. The signatories also commit to encourage the populations of Latin America and the Caribbean to support the *Manifesto 2000 for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence* promoted by UNESCO.

Another part of the Declaration guarantees access for peoples, communities and those from indigenous cultures to means of communication. Reaffirming that the existence of a legal framework was the only equitable way to access radio and television frequencies, it urged the development of audio-visual media networks and channels that together uphold the objective of a culture of peace.