



Crossroad Century

Alfonso Molina

**Professor of Technology Strategy
The University of Edinburgh**

**Scientific Director
Fondazione Mondo Digitale**

2002

Speech given at Award Ceremony of the Stockholm Challenge Award, Blue Hall,
Stockholm City Hall, 10 October 2002.

Crossroad Century

Lord Mayor of the City of Stockholm,

Mayors and Political Authorities from many other Cities of the World,

Leaders and managers of finalists projects,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am really pleased to see you all here this evening, in this fifth anniversary edition of the Stockholm Challenge Award. Yes, ladies and gentleman, five wonderful celebrations of innovation, vision, generosity, and **will** to work for a better world, all of them in this most meaningful place –the Blue Hall- that has also witnessed the presence of so many peace-makers.

Looking back, it has been a great privilege and honour for me to participate in the Stockholm Challenge Award throughout its life: first, as a juror in the original European version launched in 1995, then as Chairman of the Jury in the four subsequent global editions. It has **indeed** been my privilege to work with the generous people of the City of Stockholm who have given such an enlightened gift to the world; work with my generous fellow members of the jury who have enthusiastically donated their time and experience and, of course, to share marvellous moments with so many innovative and valuable projects and people.

During all these years, the Spirit of the Challenge has shone like a star in a world uncertain of its own future; revealing the richness and full potential of humanity through so many amazing projects, and signalling the possibilities of realising the dream of a knowledge society for all. The Challenge has shown that it is truly “enlightened self-interest” to learn together, sharing and collaborating in order to build a better world. - A world that realises the noble goal of the UN Millennium Summit of reducing poverty by

half by year 2015! through the generation and exploitation of new technology in a more human and ecological fashion.

The contribution of the Challenge cannot be over-estimated! It has made a most powerful statement in favour of “digital inclusion”, of the elimination of the divide between the “have” and “the have-not.” It has brought together people from all corners of the globe to share their dreams, experiences and difficulties in trying to contribute to a better world. It has given societal pioneers across the planet the international recognition and visibility their altruistic efforts and imagination well deserve. Because, these pioneers are the living testimony that much more than purely selfish and competitive interests is required to make a significant dent on the divide between the “have” and “have-not.”

Ladies and gentleman, I believe that we need **many, many** activities that share the spirit of the Challenge to see us through the 21st century. And yes! it is true that there have been many advances that have benefited many people. But we all have witnessed the problems associated with the decline of solidarity and unfettered pursuit of wealth and power over the last 20 years. We are witnessing the corporate corruption, terrorism, huge increases in military budgets, preparations for war, protectionism of the powerful, etc. We have also witnessed the growth of protest movements and it is now customary in World’s Summits such as the recent Johannesburg Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) to go through the statistics of impending environmental catastrophe, poverty, disease, and other terrible malaise. The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has rightly warned: “A path to prosperity that ravages the environment and leaves a majority of humankind behind in squalor will soon prove to be a dead-end road for everyone.” The same warning has been uttered by Tony Blair: “Poverty and environmental degradation, if unchecked, spell catastrophe for our world, that is clear.”

Indeed, it is clear and the logical conclusion is that we are taking the early steps of a ‘crossroad century’ for humanity and the planet. And the big alternative questions for all of us are:

?? Will this century witness the growth of humanity into adulthood and human and ecological responsibility?

?? Or will the century just grow old and bitterly disappointed by the continuous inability of its most powerful specie to face at the negative consequences of its own actions?

Of course, it is often easier to reach consensus around the need to stop something that has become visibly threatening than to agree on positive goals, strategies, paths and responsibilities to build something new, especially as conflict of interests and power play mediates processes of human development. Yet this is precisely what this “cross-road century” is calling us upon to do in order to build the new society – a knowledge society that truly exploits the achievements in knowledge and technology for the benefit of all peoples and the planet.

I believe that it is the responsibility of all of us to work together to leave the future generations a human and planetary legacy that reflects the best humanity has to offer. And “us” - “together” – means: all organisations, countries, regions, communities and people, including, first, the rich and powerful who exert greater influence and therefore share the greatest responsibility. But a great responsibility also falls on individuals and civil-society organisations who with the combined force of their concerns and efforts as citizens, consumers and simply Earth’s inhabitants, can multiply their influence on government and business at all levels.

In this scope, “together” is simultaneously “top-down” and “bottom-up” processes, simultaneously conflict and agreement, competition and collaboration, protest and celebration, change and conservation, learning and forgetting and, above all, building together the new knowledge society in which sharing the fruits of knowledge, technology, Earth and space, becomes the foundation of justice and peace.

This has been, and it is, the reason, the hope, and the contribution of the Stockholm Challenge and, more broadly, of the Challenge movement spreading through sister experiences in Rome, USA, United Arab Emirates, and potentially India, the Baltics, Latin America and other regions of the world. It is the reason to work for the expansion

of the dream, for a global e-inclusion movement, that builds on the Challenge's achievements and the magnificent ideas and efforts on many other organisations and individuals working for an information society for all - at every level of society. I am pleased

Ladies and Gentleman, the spirit of the Challenge began to shine in the twilight of the last century and continues to do so as humanity takes its shaky first steps into this uncertain century with its threats and realities of war, poverty, ecological disasters, disease, and so on. I believe that, even as things may get worse in the short- medium term, in the long-term, major global trends truly favour the expansion of the spirit of the Challenge in the world. Not the least because the same spirit already lives in the thousands and thousands of organisations and people working to improve the quality of life and work of fellow human beings. For this reason, I believe that a wider movement having a positive impact on the world is both necessary and feasible. But we must work for it! It will not happen of its own. Each and every one of us must become messengers of the Spirit of the Challenge, working to reinforce, or setting alight, the great movement for an information society for all.

Ladies and gentlemen: The future of humanity is also in your hands!!

Thank you very much.