"Surely, one of the great questions of our time is whether we can learn to live creatively with both the global and the tribal impulse, embracing the adventure of a broader internationalism even as we drink more deeply from the wellsprings of a particular heritage. The communications revolution means either a growing 'homogenisation' that we know breeds its own hostile reactions, or we can search for a better course. We can hope that the spirit of the 21st century will be a spirit of Creative Encounter.

"[However,] the spirit of Creative Encounter will never become a dominant force in our world without the strong and effective leadership of the information media. How can the press best contribute to a spirit of Creative Encounter -- here in Africa and around the world? One simple requirement towers above all others: the ability to respect that which is truly different, to understand that which we do not embrace. It is not as easy as it sounds. For it means much more than tolerance and forbearance. The word sensitivity is one of the most overused words of our time -- and one of the least honoured. Why? Because sensitivity is too often seen as an emotion which can simply be willed into existence by a generous soul. In truth, cultural sensitivity is something far more rigorous, something that requires a deep intellectual commitment. It requires a readiness to study and to learn across cultural barriers, an ability to see others as they see themselves. Cultural sensitivity is hard work....

"Again, it is the press which should lead the way -- not just newspapers and broadcasting outlets, but also the news service and press agencies which serve them and the organisations which support them. For centuries, the press has cast itself as the champion of understanding and enlightenment. And yet, even as the press has become more international, it has often left a trail of misunderstanding in its wake. Confident that more information is a good thing in and of itself, the press has often focused too much on the quantity of what it can deliver, and too little on the quality of what it presents.
"But if the media have sometimes been part of the problem -- amplifying the threatening aspects of globalisation -- then the media can also be part of the solution. If a careless or superficial press can exacerbate the clash of cultures, then a more sensitive and studious press can accomplish the opposite. The same media which serves to distort or discredit old cultures, can also be used to re-validate them, and to help explain them to others."

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1996 Commonwealth Press Union Conference Keynote Address, ‘The Spirit of Creative Encounter’ (Cape Town, South Africa)

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References

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