

An address at the open session featuring
2003-2004 Centre Sabbatical Award Winner
Dr. Onno Purbo

Ottawa
March 19, 2004

Maureen O'Neil, President
International Development Research Centre (Canada)

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for joining us today to reflect with Dr. Onno Purbo on his experience as a sabbaticant with IDRC, and to hear his recommendations for information and communication Technology programming into the future.

IDRC has a long and rich history of granting senior-level awards to leading researchers from developing countries. These sabbaticants are expected to do two things during the course of their stay: first, to spend time on their own stated area of research and to work with IDRC on further distilling, publishing, and disseminating that experience; and second, to work closely with the Program Area to inform, critique, and advise on its shape and content, thereby helping us to be more responsive to developing-country needs and realities, but also to look forward to challenges that the sabbaticants believe will lie beyond our current program borders.

As most of you know, IDRC also has considerable experience in supporting ICTs for development and applied research in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These projects are currently supported through Pan Asia Networking, Acacia, Connectivity Africa, the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas, Pan Americas, and Bellanet, a multi-donor Secretariat housed at IDRC. What these programs all share, as stated in the Centre's current Corporate Strategy and Program Framework (or CSPF), is an interest in understanding better:

1. how equitable and sustainable access to information and the use of ICTs can benefit all of society, and not just a privileged few;
2. how developments in the information economy can bring about more equity, opportunities, and income to poor communities, with a special emphasis on youth employment and enterprises run by women

There is an old saying that, by their deeds shall ye know them! Well, Dr. Onno Purbo personally exemplifies what we are trying, as an institution, to do. From his presentation you will see very

clearly that he builds broad, sustainable access to the Internet in order that Indonesians become knowledge-producers in the Information Economy.

Using an approach he calls an extension of NeighbourhoodNet, Dr. Purbo works closely with community activists, media, the private sector, and NGOs to diffuse both the ICT infrastructure and the knowledge about its use and application. Through print media, seminars, workshops, cyber-cafes, and downloadable materials, Dr. Purbo and others in a RebelNet movement have been leading a grassroots campaign to make IT infrastructure and knowledge available across the country.

This has included promoting the use of wireless fidelity, or "Wi-Fi", Internet connections that rely on radio waves. Wireless 'neighbourhood' communities are springing up as a result of these technological trends, acting in many cases as informal sector training and networking points for digital pioneers. It was after hearing Onno Purbo's presentation here in 2002 that IDRC recognized a kindred spirit and invited Dr. Purbo to become a sabbaticant – to share his learning and to spread his knowledge within and outside the Centre.

Educated at McMaster and Waterloo universities (where he received his PhD in Electrical Engineering), Dr. Purbo has lectured in the Electrical Engineering Department at the Institute of Technology in Bandung, Indonesia, and is currently a Senior Associate with ICT Watch in Indonesia. He spends most of his time writing articles, papers, and books – to date, over thirty – on practical Internet technology, mostly in the Indonesian language (*Bahasa Indonesia*). He is active in over 100 Indonesian mailing lists in order to educate Indonesians on IT.

Before turning to Dr. Purbo, I have the pleasure of introducing His Excellency Eki Syachrudin (*pronounced Shachrudeen*), the Indonesian ambassador to Canada.