Good morning and welcome all of you. Bonjour tous le monde et bienvenue.

May I begin by expressing our gratitude to Media at McGill University for hosting this event. Thank you for your support.

We are here today to celebrate.

We are here to celebrate a milestone in the pursuit of democracy, equity and social justice. I am not referring to the extraordinary election in a nearby country which has so dominated our television screens, important though that has been. Our celebration is both local and global. It is a celebration of the initiative of tin miners in the Bolivian towns of Tupiza and Nuevos Horizontes. It is a celebration of the work of catholic educationalists in Colombia. It is a celebration of the commitment of peace organizers in San Francisco, California. For what these have in common, is that they were among the first, some 60 years ago, to demonstrate broadcast radio as a means to give voice to the people.

We are here to celebrate the lives of others like them who, in all corners of the globe, in different countries, cultures, times and contexts have used the tools and techniques of sound broadcasting to expand the communication capabilities of people and communities. We are here especially to celebrate a defining moment in this movement of ours. Because a social movement is made when people come together, connect and pursue a common cause. For community broadcasters, such a defining moment was 25 years ago, in this City of Montreal, at a conference organized by a group of Canadian community radio activists. This visionary group, some represented here today, had the audacity
to title their small gathering a World Assembly of Community Radio Broadcasters. Or rather, as this was in Quebec, *L'Assemble Mondiale des Artesans des Radios Communautaires*, or AMARC for short.

And they invited the world to take part. It was an act of remarkable optimism. It rested on the passionate belief, so many of us here today share, that community broadcasting can make a difference.

When this first AMARC was held in 1983, community broadcasting was little known outside the Americas, a handful of European countries and Australia. State broadcasting was the norm in Africa, Asia and much of Europe, and it remained so until the early 1990s. Yet, today AMARC is at the heart of a global social movement, present in more than half the countries of the world, counting thousands of radio stations, involving millions of people and serving audiences in the 100s of millions.

Since that first gathering in Montreal, community broadcasters have come together internationally at many events, in numerous conferences and workshops, and in joint actions and campaigns. But the World Assemblies of AMARC remain the vital meeting point to share, to reflect and to strategise. From Montreal we traveled the world - Vancouver, Managua, Dublin, Oaxtepec, Dakar, Milan, Kathmandu and Amman. In two years time we will hold AMARC 10 at a place that is still yet to be decided.

I first became involved at AMARC 3. It was held in Nicaragua in 1988. It was an extraordinary event which I will not forget and which has shaped my life. A popular revolutionary movement had overthrown a brutal dictatorship and a progressive political party, the FSLN, had gone on to win a democratic election.
Nicaragua was an example to the world. But it was not appreciated by all and the United States, in particular, was covertly funding a group of armed counter-revolutionary bandits.

By holding its constitutional assembly in Central America, AMARC became a truly international gathering. We spent hours listening to the speeches of the revolutionary leaders of Nicaragua. And we spent more hours debating word by word, and line by line, the constitution for a new international organization. AMARC became, then, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters.

Since the first AMARC gathering in Montreal, 25 years ago, we have seen many changes. In Latin America dictatorships and old oligarchies have been removed creating new opportunities for popular communication. Across Africa, a wave of democratization, starting in Mali, Benin and South Africa has brought an opening up of the airwaves. In Europe, paternalistic broadcasting models have been replaced with more plural media systems. And the end of the East-West divide has contributed to the growth of community broadcasting in Central Europe. In Asia, a new found confidence has seen community radio emerge and demonstrate its value not only in economically poor countries like East Timor and Nepal but also in Japan and South Korea. And we are at the beginning of a great new adventure for community radio in India.

There are many challenges ahead – the marketisation of the airwaves, the growth of powerful media concentrations that deter politicians from acting in the public interest on media reform, the emergence of digital technologies, and the fact community radio activists continue to operate in sometimes very dangerous conditions where freedom of expression is not guaranteed. Where to take voice
can carry a very high cost. We should remember those community broadcasters in countries such as Mexico and the Philippines who have given their lives in service to their communities. We celebrate their courage.

These are some of the reasons it is so vital and so clear that we must act together in international solidarity and that we must continue to strengthen our international movement. In community broadcasting we build from the bottom up, organizing at the grassroots, connecting our communities. But we know also that to secure the future for community broadcasting and to defend community broadcasters under threat, we have to be heard at the national and international level, in the channels of opinion and the corridors of power.

That is why AMARC is not just important, it is also necessary, as a focal point for our movement. And that is why we are here today to mark the 25th anniversary of our founding assembly in Montreal and to celebrate the vision of those who made it possible.

Thank you and welcome to our celebration.