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The Power of cartoons, Patrick Chappatte, 2010

So yeah, I'm a newspaper cartoonist -- political cartoonist. I don't know if you've heard about it -- newspapers? It's a sort of paper-based reader. (Laughter) It's lighter than an iPad, it's a bit cheaper. You know what they say? They say the print media is dying -- who says that? Well, the media. But this is no news, right? You've read about it already.

Ladies and gentlemen, the world has gotten smaller. I know it's a cliche, but look, look how small, how tiny it has gotten. And you know the reason why, of course. This is because of technology -- yeah. (Laughter) Any computer designers in the room? Yeah well, you guys are making my life miserable because track pads used to be round, a nice round shape. That makes a good cartoon. But what are you going to do with a flat track pad, those square things? There's nothing I can do as a cartoonist. Well, I know the world is flat now. That's true. And the Internet has reached every corner of the world, the poorest, the remotest places. Every village in Africa now has a cyber cafe. (Laughter) Don't go asking for a Frappuccino there. So we are bridging the digital divide. The Third World is connected, we are connected. And what happens next? Well, you've got mail. Yeah. Well, the Internet has empowered us. It has empowered you, it has empowered me and it has empowered some other guys as well.

You know, these last two cartoons -- I did them live during a conference in Hanoi. And they were not used to that in communist 2.0 Vietnam. (Laughter) So I was cartooning live on a wide screen -- it was quite a sensation -- and then this guy came to me. He was taking pictures of me and of my sketches, and I thought, "This is great, a Vietnamese fan." And as he came the second day, I thought, "Wow, that's really a cartoon lover." And on the third day, I finally understood, the guy was actually on duty. So by now, there must be a hundred pictures of me smiling with my sketches in the files of the Vietnamese police.

No, but it's true: the Internet has changed the world. It has rocked the music industry; it has changed the way we consume music. For those of you old enough to remember, we used to have to go to the store to steal it. (Laughter) And it has changed the way your future employer will look at your application. So be careful with that Facebook account -- your momma told you, be careful. And technology has set us free -- this is free WiFi. But yeah, it has liberated us from the office desk. This is your life, enjoy it. (Laughter) In short, technology, the internet, they have changed our lifestyle. Tech guru, like this man -- that a German magazine called the philosopher of the 21st century -- they are shaping the way we do things. They are shaping the way we consume. They are shaping our very desires. (Laughter) (Applause) You will not like it. And technology has even changed our relationship to God.

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Now I shouldn't get into this. Religion and political cartoons, as you may have heard, make a difficult couple, ever since that day of 2005, when a bunch of cartoonists in Denmark drew cartoons that had repercussions all over the world -- demonstrations, fatwa, they provoked violence. People died in the violence. This was so sickening; people died because of cartoons. I mean -- I had the feeling at the time that cartoons had been used by both sides, actually. They were used first by a Danish newspaper, which wanted to make a point on Islam. A Danish cartoonist told me he was one of the 24 who received the assignment to draw the prophet -- 12 of them refused. Did you know that? He told me, "Nobody has to tell me what I should draw. This is not how it works." And then, of course, they were used by extremists and politicians on the other side. They wanted to stir up controversy. You know the story. We know that cartoons can be used as weapons. History tells us, they've been used by the Nazis to attack the Jews. And here we are now. In the United Nations, half of the world is pushing to penalize the offense to religion -- they call it the defamation of religion -- while the other half of the world is fighting back in defense of freedom of speech. So the clash of civilizations is here, and cartoons are at the middle of it? This got me thinking. Now you see me thinking at my kitchen table, and since you're in my kitchen, please meet my wife.

In 2006, a few months after, I went Ivory Coast -- Western Africa. Now, talk of a divided place -- the country was cut in two. You had a rebellion in the North, the government in the South -- the capital, Abidjan -- and in the middle, the French army. This looks like a giant hamburger. You don't want to be the ham in the middle. I was there to report on that story in cartoons. I've been doing this for the last 15 years; it's my side job, if you want. So you see the style is different. This is more serious than maybe editorial cartooning. I went to places like Gaza during the war in 2009. So this is really journalism in cartoons. You'll hear more and more about it. This is the future of journalism, I think.

And of course, I went to see the rebels in the north. Those were poor guys fighting for their rights. There was an ethnic side to this conflict as very often in Africa. And I went to see the Dozo. The Dozo, they are the traditional hunters of West Africa. People fear them -- they help the rebellion a lot. They are believed to have magical powers. They can disappear and escape bullets. I went to see a Dozo chief; he told me about his magical powers. He said, "I can chop your head off right away and bring you back to life." I said, "Well, maybe we don't have time for this right now." (Laughter) "Another time."

So back in Abidjan, I was given a chance to lead a workshop with local cartoonists there and I thought, yes, in a context like this, cartoons can really be used as weapons against the other side. I mean, the press in Ivory Coast was bitterly divided -- it was compared to the media in Rwanda before the genocide -- so imagine. And what can a cartoonist do? Sometimes editors would tell their cartoonists to draw what they wanted to see, and the guy has to feed his family, right? So the idea was pretty simple. We brought together cartoonists from all sides in Ivory

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Coast. We took them away from their newspaper for three days. And I asked them to do a project together, tackle the issues affecting their country in cartoons, yes, in cartoons. Show the positive power of cartoons. It's a great tool of communication for bad or for good. And cartoons can cross boundaries, as you have seen. And humor is a good way, I think, to address serious issues. And I'm very proud of what they did. I mean, they didn't agree with each other -- that was not the point. And I didn't ask them to do nice cartoons. The first day, they were even shouting at each other. But they came up with a book, looking back at 13 years of political crisis in Ivory Coast.

So the idea was there. And I've been doing projects like this, in 2009 in Lebanon, this year in Kenya, back in January. In Lebanon, it was not a book. The idea was to have -- the same principal, a divided country -- take cartoonists from all sides and let them do something together. So in Lebanon, we enrolled the newspaper editors, and we got them to publish eight cartoonists from all sides all together on the same page, addressing the issue affecting Lebanon, like religion in politics and everyday life. And it worked. For three days, almost all the newspapers of Beirut published all those cartoonists together -- anti-government, pro-government, Christian, Muslim, of course, English-speaking, well, you name it. So this was a great project. And then in Kenya, what we did was addressing the issue of ethnicity, which is a poison in a lot of places in Africa. And we did video clips -- you can see them if you go to YouTube/Kenyatoons.

So, preaching for freedom of speech is easy here, but as you have seen in contexts of repression or division, again, what can a cartoonist do? He has to keep his job. Well I believe that in any context anywhere, he always has the choice at least not to do a cartoon that will feed hatred. And that's the message I try to convey to them. I think we all always have the choice in the end not to do the bad thing. But we need to support these independent, critical and responsible voices in Africa, in Lebanon, in your local newspaper, in the Apple store. Today, tech companies are the world's largest editors. They decide what is too offensive or too provocative for you to see. So really, it's not about the freedom of cartoonists; it's about your freedoms. And for dictators all over the world, the good news is when cartoonists, journalists and activists shut up.

Thank you.

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