

5th Sub Sahara Spectrum Management Conference

Virtual event

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Opening address

Mario Maniewicz
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Mr John Omo, Secretary General of the African Telecommunications Union,
Representatives from the Information and Communication Technologies
Authority of Mauritius,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening to all of you.

I would like to start by thanking Forum Global for their invitation, and for giving me the opportunity to address you today. It is a real pleasure for me to be opening the 5th Sub Sahara Spectrum Management Conference today as we move into a new study cycle of the ITU Radiocommunication Sector activities. This event will provide a strategic assessment of where the Region stands and where it wants to go in terms of spectrum management and spectrum policies in the coming years.

As you know, at the end of 2019, the last World Radiocommunication Conference brought together over 3'400 participants representing 163 Member States and 129 observer organizations.

The decisions taken at WRC-19 will allow for new technologies and services to be deployed around the world, while protecting existing services.

One of the main outcomes of the conference was the identification of additional frequencies for IMT, or 5G as it is popularly known, in the millimeter wave bands.

WRC-19 also defined a framework for regulating large constellations of non-geostationary orbit satellites and identified additional bands that may be used for high altitude platforms that promise to extend internet coverage to the most remote areas of the globe taking connectivity to the unconnected. Moreover, WRC-19 has modified the conditions applied to RLANs in the 5GHz band that should enable even greater utilization of the technology.

Last but not least, the impressive coordinated action of the African group during WRC-19 ensured the adoption of Resolution 559 that offers a one-time opportunity for countries having degraded resources in the BSS plan to regain a better reference situation.

I am pleased to announce that the 2020 Edition of the Radio Regulations, will be available for download as of this Wednesday, with no delay due to the challenging COVID-19 related circumstances. As you know, this publication incorporates to the international treaty that governs the use of spectrum and satellite orbits the modifications made by the World Radiocommunications Conference in 2019. The Radio Regulations enables the functioning of each radiocommunication service and I strongly encourage all Administrations to use it as the basis for their National legislation framework.

Looking ahead to the WRC-23, there are several agenda items of interest to the Region.

From considering the use of High Altitude Platform stations as IMT Base Stations (HIBS) to considering the identification of the UHF and the C-band to IMT. We will be hearing your perspectives on some of these topics on the days ahead.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If we look into the connectivity status in the African region, the ITU Report Facts and Figures of 2019 shows that only 28.2 percent of individuals are using the internet, as compared to a global average of 53.6 percent.

We all know the difficulties faced by Africa: investment-related, infrastructure-related and digital skills-related ones.

Nevertheless, Africans remain with an unshakable faith in the future. And so they should. A BBC interview with African teenagers showed they are far from short on ambitions. They are well aware of the challenges they face, but also confident that they will meet the moment.

Many are having the opportunity to complete school, something that was not granted so easily to their parents. Young Africans attribute the improvement in their standard of living to one single reason: technology.

The information and communications technology sector has the potential to improve the economic prospect of the continent by shifting the focus from a historical extractive industry to a service-based industry.

Whether to enable young Africans to realize their dreams or whether to improve the economy of Africa, it is the role of each stakeholder of the ICT sector to ensure Africa rises to the challenge.

Dear colleagues,

Before I conclude my opening remarks, I would like to share with you a quote from Yuval Noah Harari. When writing about the world after coronavirus, he stated “The decisions people and governments take in the next few weeks will probably shape the world for years to come.” This statement fully applies to spectrum management.

The measures taken during these COVID-19 times might have a very positive impact in the years ahead, or may otherwise turn out as poor “temporary” measures that become permanent.

The pandemic has made evident the benefits of connectivity and has increased the utility function for telecommunication services. Now more than ever governments are willing to promote the development of the sector.

Nevertheless, spectrum policies cannot be seen as a short-term fix. The provision of telecommunication services requires long-term investments and a predictable and stable regulatory framework.

The radio regulations provides this framework. For over 114 years the ITU has been updating the international treaty that governs the use of radio-frequency spectrum and satellite-orbits.

But to leverage the benefits of global harmonization, national Administrations need to incorporate the international regulations to their national framework. This includes, of course, utilizing spectrum as allocated or identified in previous conferences.

Therefore, instead of adopting ad-hoc strategies to address the need for connectivity, the development of a long-term national spectrum plan will ensure the spectrum is allocated to the services that will best serve the interest of the population not only in the following months, but in the years to come.

Dear friends,

Some believe we grow under adversity. This might well be the case. There is a hope that we will come out of this crisis stronger, more united, and with governments that are more aligned with the priorities and needs of their people.

This Spectrum Management Conference is a great opportunity to discuss and exchange views amongst all stakeholders on the best strategies and policies for accelerating the digital transformation of societies and creating the future we want.

I wish you a successful meeting.

Thank you very much.